

Why Are People Good (Job#1)
Job 1:1-11; Genesis 1:6-8, 27-31
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights
February 14, 2016
Pastor Dave Carver



A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

You know that story, right – at least some of it? So let me ask you: is it true? All that stuff about the rebels and the Empire and Luke and Leia and Yoda... Is it true?



Well, I guess that depends on what we mean by “true”, right? Am I asking, “Did it really happen?” Or am I asking, “Does it ever happen?”

Think about the message and content of the Star Wars saga:

- Humans exist in a world in which good and evil are at war, and often it appears as though evil holds the upper hand.
- There is a Force, and it is with you.
- The old masters have a way of life and faith to which young followers are called
- There is life beyond that which we can see

Do you see what I mean? Sometimes there is more to “truth” than simple history. I’m pretty sure that George Lucas made up the story about Darth Vader and Obi Wan Kenobi. But I’m equally certain that it’s true.



Which brings me to the scriptural text for this morning, the opening verses of the book of Job. In spite of the fact that it’s

closer to the middle of the Old Testament, most scholars believe that this is the oldest book in the Bible. It is among the most ancient pieces of writing on the planet, in fact. We know this because of the style of the Hebrew in which the book is written. You know that all languages change and develop. If old William Shakespeare were writing in 2016 instead of 1592, he would not have Juliet say, “O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?” Instead, the troubled lover would say something like “O, Romeo! Why do you have to be called Romeo?” When you read Shakespeare, you know that you are reading something from an earlier age, right? It’s the same with Job. The language and expressions are all in a kind of writing we call “paleo-Hebrew”. This story of an amazingly good and upright man who is beset by all kinds of problems is very, very old.

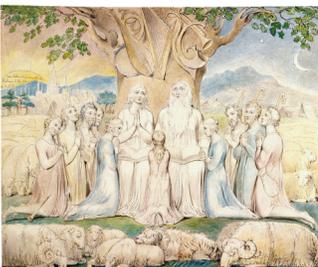
But did the events described in this story actually happen? I don’t have a clue.

Do these things happen? Every single day.

It’s hard to imagine a person alive who is not familiar with the questions raised by Job – questions that we’ll consider throughout this Lenten season.

- Is God really in charge?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- What do I do when someone I love is in pain?
- Is it OK to question God?

In fact, if there is anyone here who has NOT wrestled with these questions, please speak to me immediately following the service, because I have some questions for you!



¹We'll talk more about the structure and intent of Job this coming Wednesday at the Bible Study and pot luck on the 17th. For now, let's dive in to this ancient text and say hello to Job.

The first thing we learn about Job is that he is, by all accounts, an incredible guy. "The greatest man among all the people in the East," in fact. How do we know that? What is the criteria for "greatness"?

For starters, Job is *loaded*. I mean, he is clearly the Bill Gates or Warren Buffet of his age. Did you hear about all those camels and sheep and all the other stuff he's got?

Moreover, he's got ten children. Seven boys and three girls represent the Hebrew numbers of completeness. "Everybody knows" that children are a blessing from the Lord, and look at Job's family! It's perfect.

In addition to these tangible signs of wealth and blessedness, take a look at how Job conducts himself as a father. Right after the narrator tells us that Job is the greatest guy around, we learn that this Mr. Wonderful spends his time praying for his children. Dads, take note of this as you ascribe to greatness: pray for your children!

Job is such a great person, in fact, that he is the topic of conversation at the staff meeting between God and the angels in heaven. God points him out, and says, "Wow! What a wonderful human being! That Job is one of the best!"



²And Satan hears God say this –

¹ *Job and His Family*, William Blake (1805-1810)

² *Satan Before the Lord*, Corrado Giaquinto (1750)

- Wait a second? Why is *Satan* at the board meeting in *heaven*? Great question. We'll get to that one in two weeks.

- So Satan interrupts God and asks the first difficult question in the book of Job: Why is Job good? Satan does not argue with God as to whether or not Job is actually good, but rather he wants to know *why* this great man is so good.

Have you ever wondered that? Most of us, especially those of us who were raised in the church and who grew up believing in “the American Dream” have been taught that being “good” is important. But why?

What's the purpose of being a good person? Why does Job – or any one of us – aspire to goodness? What's in it for us?

Satan says to God, “Of *course* Job is good. You reward him for being good. Job is as good as he is because he knows that you will like him better because of it. And not only is he a little brown-noser who is just trying to impress you, you make it worse because you've built a wall around him. Don't go trotting out Job's goodness, God, as if it is something special, because it's obvious to anyone that you've put him in a little box where nothing bad can happen to him.”

Well, that's an interesting charge, Satan. Let's take a look. Has God put a wall around Job?

The fact of the matter is, yes. Yes God has done that.

To be fair though, that's what God does. Listen to this reading from the first (but not oldest) book in our Bible: Genesis 1:6-9 reads,

Scripture
verses

And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the

midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

Scripture
verses with
highlights

There's a word that shows up there a couple of times: "firmament". In other translations it's "dome" or "vault". Here, in a description of who God is and what God does when God first starts out being God in our experience, we see that God spends God's time bringing order out of chaos. It's in other places throughout the Bible as well: Psalm 104:9 talks about the fact that God has set boundaries or borders for the chaos that is the sea; Isaiah 5:1-7 describes a hedge or protective border that God established around his people.

So, Satan, are you saying that God is a wall-building, hedge-planting, boundary-establishing God? That God intends protection and order and justice? You are right. That's what God does. That's who God is.

And who is Job? Let's look at Genesis again:

Scripture
verses

So God created man in his own image, in the

image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Job, like Adam and Eve, like you and me, is created in the divine image. That is to say, Job is created to be like God. As are you. As am I.

And if taking care of things, ensuring justice, shielding the vulnerable, and bringing order out of chaos is what God does, then perhaps those of us who are made to be like God are called to do them as well.

Blank Slide

I am here to suggest that, contrary to Satan's claim, Job does not do good in order to get God to like him any

better. There is a wall around Job because it is in God's nature to build walls around that which he loves. Nothing that Job does is going to get that wall to be any taller or thicker. And Job is good because that's how he was made. In God's image. We are designed for goodness; moreover, later on in the book when we hear *more* about Job's goodness, one of the things that is mentioned is that he builds walls of protection around those who are poor, suffering, or vulnerable.

But wait – if God is so good, and if Job is so good, then why do really bad things happen to Job?

- Great question. We'll get to that one in three weeks.

For today, let us hold to this truth – in some important way, Satan is correct. He says, “Does Job honor God for nothing? You've built a wall around him!” He's right. Job does not fear God for no reason.

Job fears and honors God, not because he is afraid of what God will do to him if he messes up, but because of who God is and because of what God has done in the world. In other words, Job is good, not to try to get God to like him better, but because Job appreciates who God is. Job is thankful for the world God has made. Job's goodness is a response to God's goodness, not an attempt to appease God or to prevent God from being less than good in the future.

The oldest book in the Bible begins with a list of blessings: Job has received money, children, respect.

What are your blessings this day? In what ways has chaos been held at bay in your life? Where is the wall that is around you? Where has that wall been strong? How have

you know God's goodness and God's protection in your life?

Can you think of ways in which God's light has shone on your path?

Now – think very, very carefully about the answer to this next question: what did you do to deserve that blessing, that wall, that order, that protection, that light, this life? These are all gifts, and you have received them in different ways and at different times.

I would suggest that Lent is a time for us to think **less** about what I do or do not do to somehow deserve the love of God and **more** about how I choose to respond to the blessings and kindnesses and generosity that I have received.

Are there important questions ahead of us? You bet there are. But today, let us begin our Lenten walk in gratitude for what is and what has been; in thanksgiving for who God is and who God has made us to be; and in hope for the days that are to come. Thanks be to God. Amen.