

1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2:1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 3 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." 4 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." 6 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The book of Job is going to be our focus today, and for the next two Sundays. Even Biblically illiterate people have usually heard the expression, "the patience of Job." Interestingly enough, once you read the book of Job, you don't much think of him so much as a patient man.

But it is the classic book in the Bible to deal with the issue of suffering, and the question, **"Why do good people suffer?"** One rabbi suggested the easy answer to that question is, **"They don't; there are no good people."** But, Job provides a deeper treatment of that most difficult question. We'll not get to the final answer today. (You'll have to come back two more Sundays for that.) Today's scripture -- from the first two chapters -- deals mostly with the introduction to the action.

"Satan" is today usually thought of as being the "Tempter." The classic view of the Sa-tan held by Jews in the time of the book of Job was the image of the Accuser, which today might be likened to the role of a Prosecuting Attorney. As I'll mention later, such was the case made in other portions of the First Testament. I believe that we can see that the Sa-tan acted this same way in the New Testament, as well.

I would encourage you sometime in your Bible studies to take all the references to Satan, which you have read with an eye toward TEMPTER, and re-read them, with the notion of ACCUSER and see just how differently you can be aware of Satan's activities.

In today's introduction to the story of Job, God and Satan are involved in a discussion about Job. If we focus on just the "set up" of the story, we will tend to see both God and Satan in the roles of riverboat gamblers. To do such a *literalist* reading is really indefensible. It makes a silliness out of the very serious and critically important message of this book of the Bible.

The story does, however, tell us some very important things about Satan:

a.) With Satan, there is a big emphasis on LAW and ORDER (musical cue.)

There is no concern on Satan's part about Job's family, his happiness, his goodness. **It's all about**

-- Can I find any flaw?

-- Is there anything wrong in this person?

-- Can I find any kind of dirt in his closet?

Satan acts and sound like an *investigative journalist*, whose success is determined by finding dirt, irrespective of how minimalist the dirt is, or irrespective of the damage done to people's lives.

Satan acts like a Prosecuting Attorney out on a vendetta of destruction, all in the name of LAW and ORDER (musical cue.)

NOTE: this is a characteristic of Satan, we are talking about. And, yet, in some religious people's discussion about God, they seem to make God seem satanic, don't they? – talking about how God is going to send everyone to hell, if they have even just one little flaw ... unless, of course, the person "claims a get-out-of-jail card."

Remember, we learn here that SATAN, not God, is the one about LAW and ORDER (musical cue.)

b.) Satan's favorite ploy is the thrust of accusation, couched in the

terms of IF and THEN .

It works like this: **IF** Job is really a good guy, **THEN** he will not fail if we do this to him.

If you look in Zechariah (3:1-2), we see Satan doing the same thing: **IF** Joshua is really a good guy, **THEN** he would not have dirty clothes. {And God tells Satan to SHUT UP!}

If you look in the Gospels, we see Satan doing the same thing: : **IF** you think you are the Son of God, Jesus, **THEN** turn this stone into bread; jump off this temple top and let the angels lift you up.

If you look much later in the Gospels (where Satan has returned at "an opportune time") we see Satan doing the same thing: **IF** you really are the Son of God, Jesus, **THEN** come down off that cross.

Whenever you hear a voice putting you into a corner, particularly when the voice comes from what seems like a religious source (a church or a voice inside your head) and keeps putting you down, saying: **IF** you think you are good or loved, **THEN** prove it by doing such and such. That's Satan. Remember that God does not speak in such conditional language. God says, **"you ARE a beloved child of mine, precious and beautiful to behold."**

God is always about UNCONDITIONAL LOVE and **Satan is always accusing, trying to make you prove.**

Finally, we learn from this introduction in Satan 101, that **c.) Satan emphasizes that it's more important to be RIGHT than to maintain UNITY.**

He doesn't care about how torn up is the carnage in his wake; Satan only wants to prove a point: Job is not really as good as God thinks. Who cares about the destruction to his family and life, if I can prove my point.

I am sometimes amazed when I see such SAME KIND OF SATANIC behavior go on INSIDE THE CHURCH.

Sometimes I see people who are (using a phrase a pastor of mine taught me) ***constantly stirring the pot.***

We've all heard about people who are sinful by **being offensive.**

We learn from Satan, in today's lesson, how sinful/how satanic it is ***to always be TAKING OFFENSE.***

I am sometimes amazed by how some people – always claiming the cloak of righteousness – who are taking offense at someone, something, and go off in a self-righteous huff, leaving a swath of brokenness in their wake. They think they are being righteous; they don't realize just how SATANIC their behavior is.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, as well as many others, about the absolutely important image of the Church being the BODY of CHRIST.

The CHURCH is not just a club; a do-good organization. The Church is THE BODY OF CHRIST in the world. And, even though every Church is populated by sinful people, we ought to ask Jesus to help us look and act more like the Body of Christ.

I get literally sick sometimes about how much SATANIC DAMAGE that self-righteous people do to the Body of Christ.

A recently published book, entitled ***unChristian***, based on exhaustive research of thousands upon thousands of people not in the Church, is VERY eye opening. People outside the church today, particularly younger folks, are not just apathetic toward the Church; **they don't like it.**

Their research shows that

“The primary reason outsiders feel hostile toward Christians ... is not because of any specific theological perspective. What they react negatively to is our ‘swagger,’ how we go about things and the sense of self-importance we project.

“One crucial insight kept popping up in [their] exploration. In studying thousands of outsiders’ impressions, it is clear that Christians are primarily perceived for **what [they] stand against. [Christians] have become famous for what [they] oppose, rather than who [they] are for.**

“In [their] national surveys with young people, [they] found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are anti-homosexual (an image held by 91 percent of young outsiders), judgmental (87%), and hypocritical (85%).”

“Outsiders told us that the underlying concern of Christians seems **more about being right than about listening.** There is an undercurrent of arrogance that outsiders perceive.

“One 35 year old believer from California put it this way: ‘Christians have become political, judgmental, intolerant, weak, religious, angry, and without balance. ... Where is the living God, the Holy Spirit, an amazing Jesus, the love, the compassion, the holiness?...’

“How can people love God, who they can’t see, if those of us who claim to represent him don’t respond to outsiders with love?”

Now, I’m not suggesting that we stand for nothing. I don’t want to return to the “golden age of Christendom” to which I see many people pining, epitomized by President Eisenhower’s famous comment (almost 60 years ago): **“American democracy depends on a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”**¹

But, I am very afraid that the SATANIC SELF-RIGHTEOUS that gets lived out in little groups of two and three within the Church, and then **multiplied by the power of Satan**, until there are so many people who don’t know God’s love through Jesus, because they only can see **angry, pants-in-a-knot, uptight, offended** people.

The next time somebody rubs you the wrong way, offends you with their language or conduct, **before you GO OFF getting all bent out of shape and complaining about THEIR conduct,**

(a) remember how SATANIC that makes you,

¹ From book *Bad Religion*, by Ross Douthat. (Dec. 22, 1952, in speech given in NYC, at Waldorf-Astoria Hotel)

- (b) think about the damage you are doing to Christ's Body**, and
- (c) please go talk to God about it, not to somebody else.**

The good news is this. The Body of Christ is filled with a whole bunch of sinners. But God loves us.

Satan wants to accuse you, wants to test you, wants to break your relationships – telling you to not love people unless they live up to your expectations. But God keeps loving us all, and will keep loving us into submission.

Don't allow yourself to think you have been appointed a Prosecuting Attorney for God **(MUSICAL CUE)**. Just remember that neither YOU nor ANYBODY ELSE can be separated from the love of God in Christ. There's NOTHING you can do to make God love you any more or less. THIS is our UNITY. This is our HOPE.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.