

I think most people wonder what goes on in Washington DC. That's not even meant to be a joke. We've watched the House and Senate chambers. People sitting and listening as colleagues make speeches. Voting. But most figure there's another level of Washington DC not seen on television. Upper level meetings where the real work of Washington is done. We'd never see these. We'd be asked to leave if we showed up. Only really important people, the power players in control attend. Being secretive gives them power to be able to control things.

Maybe not surprisingly there's a higher spiritual level too. It's the highest of high level meetings. It convenes in heaven and there's really only one power player, God. His angels observe and then carry out what God wants them to carry out. Just like you or me showing up in upper level Washington meetings would not be accepted, so it would be if Satan showed up in God's heaven. God and Satan are enemies. But that's just what happened one day. Maybe most surprising was that God not only let him stay, but engaged him in conversation.

What took place at that high level meeting in heaven when Satan and God came to an agreement of sorts had direct effects on one individual human being. The first lesson shows us what happened to Job and how he reacted. It's a lesson for us as we hear Job say...

**May the name of the Lord be praised
Through the tests of faith
Through the strengthening of faith**

There was a significant disagreement between God and Satan regarding Job. God commended Job. **"There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."** That's high praise from God. Satan asked, **"Does Job fear God for nothing?"** Satan figured Job was being coddled. Take away his possessions, money, nice family and Job would be like most people. He'd get mad at God and curse him to his face. This distinction in how both saw Job is extremely important. Remember though, God always viewed Job as his child, as a forgiven human being in a special relationship with him.

The bet was simple. Satan would torture Job for a while. God would allow Satan to do that. The more Satan took from Job the more he hoped Job would curse God. If that happened Satan would win. A lot was on the line. The stakes were no less than spiritual supremacy. If Satan won he would essentially be stronger than God. Remember, God viewed Job as his child. God knew Job and his personality. God was confident Job would continue to be his child even through the tests of faith. He gave limited power to Satan to issue the tests, but essentially the tests were being allowed by God.

The tests were heartbreaking. In one day Job lost oxen and donkeys, camels and sheep, and servants. As a rich man, Job's assets were tied up in material goods. Losing his animals and servants was like having his bank account cleaned out. It was everything he had basically. Still nothing compared to the news the last messenger brought Job. He hadn't even caught his breath from all the other losses when the worst news of all crushed him. **"While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead."** That would be devastating news for anyone. But for someone who just lost his entire life's fortune in the moments before it was worse. Satan was attacking Job. But the tests of faith were really coming from God.

You face testing. But when you feel the cold breath of Satan hunting and stalking you, God permitted that. Satan is past the protective barrier only because God allowed him inside. God gave Satan the limited access he has to test you. And its terrible testing at times taking very important things away from you. It can seem unbearable. Satan eagerly watches your reaction. Do you flinch and point the finger at God? Satan wins when that happens. If we get mad that the testing has taken what matters in this world away from us aren't we betraying that to us it was really about the possessions anyway? God took our stuff away and didn't do enough to stop the bad things from happening. It can be no less devastating to know that God is the one behind those tests, giving Satan rope to come and bite you, and allowing Satan to take things away from you.

Remember what was important to keep in mind? How God viewed Job was important. That's what Job needed to remember. God viewed him as his child. That hadn't changed. Well how does God view you? He could see you strictly as a sinner, but he doesn't anymore. He sees you through his Son Jesus. God views you as his child. God calls you blameless and upright because of Christ. Satan might be relentless in pursuing you, but so is God. And God is stronger. Christ defeated Satan. Satan is on a chain and can only go as far as God allows. It's good news to know God has limited Satan. God is still in control and has taken Satan's real power away. He no longer can claim you in death. Christ defeated death, that defeated sin, and that defeats Satan. When God allows the testing of our faith it's for our good because it comes from the only one who is truly good.

For a company to install a completed machine there must first be a lot of testing. Small sections of the machine get built first with testing done. Then the whole machine is built and tested together. Hopefully all the bugs are worked out. Then when the machine is sent out to the client it works flawlessly. God designed and built us. We were intended to be flawless, but through our parents we came with bugs and problems called sin. Thankfully God runs tests to point out the flaws and problems. Then he alone fixes it and strengthens us for the next time. Ultimately he strengthens us and prepares us for perfection in eternal life.

With everything essentially gone, Job was in a bad spot. This was a critical time. Some would call the help line. Some would have others rushing to aid. Some might be put on suicide watch. He could cry out that God had given him too much. He could curse God and get it over with. He could even end it all and take his own life. Job chose none of those. **“At this, Job got up and tore his robes and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship.”** This was a test from God meant to strengthen his faith. Job knew it. He couldn't know that things would get worse, but it didn't matter.

Job worship and praised God in the midst of his worst tragedy. He mourned his losses but God was leading him to stronger faith. Down on his knees he could confess where his true trust was. **“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”** Job showed that his possessions and servants meant nothing to him. Even his children meant nothing to him in comparison with what God meant to him. Even though Job maybe didn't know it before, he knew it now. The test from God showed him he could have everything taken from him and still remain trusting in the Lord.

Yesterday I spoke with a woman who comes close to knowing what Job felt. She lived in Moore in May of this year. Her three children were at Briarwood Elementary School. She was at work when the weather got nasty. Making her way to a school that she would see was demolished after the tornado she found two of her children. For the next hour or so she didn't know where her youngest was. With her school already destroyed she walked to where her house once stood. It too was leveled. She lost all her possessions, her home, and her cars in one day. No one can know that incredible loss unless they've lived it. In times of pain and suffering how do you decide what to do next? With everything gone what's the reason to go on? In some tragedies would dying be easier? This woman knew God was testing her. You know God has tested you. He's tested you to strengthen you. More often than we like complaints exit our lips or we give up. Pain and suffering and loss register as God abandoning us.

God's grace alone turns a broken and hurting person to respond the way Job did. Alone we can do nothing, but we remember what God did for us and what Jesus means to us. We run back to the promises of Christ. Even if everything is taken away still you hold the dearest treasure. God guarantees life after death, joy after misery, strength after weakness. He makes these promises while we were still sinners. Jesus alone did everything for us when we wanted nothing to do with him. The gospel strengthens us and leads us through the tests to bend our knees in worship and praise. The gospel calls us to live sometimes in pain and sometimes in hurt, but never alone. In Jesus, with his strength, with his forgiveness, and with his love we live through the strengthening of our faith.

Remember the promises of God and you'll be strengthened through the suffering. **“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.”** We had nothing of our own when we arrived on this earth and we'll have nothing to take with us when we leave. Everything, everything is a gift from God; a blessing from him. Every test strengthens you. It's all sent by God out of love with eternal good in mind. To some he might give, to the woman yesterday and maybe to you too he takes away. But know God's mercy. No matter what, you live in his grace. In Christ we're already his no matter the test so that we might say, **“May the name of the Lord be praised.”**