

Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Job 40:1-2; 42:1-6

God on Trial: Accusations

Job 40:1-2; 42:1-6 (EHV)

The Lord responded to Job and said: ²Will the one who makes charges against the Almighty dare to correct him? The one who accuses God should make his case!

Job responded to the Lord. He said: ²I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³You asked, "Who is this who spreads darkness over my plans with his ignorant words?" I have made statements about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴You said, "Listen now and I will speak. I will ask you questions, and you will inform me." ⁵My ear heard about you. Now my eyes see you. ⁶So I despise myself. I repent in dust and ashes.

Dear Friends in Christ,

All told, Job had over 10,000 sheep, cattle and donkeys. These animals were his wealth. Maybe your wealth is in the bank, in your 401k, in your house or hidden in a coffee can. Job's was in his animals. Job also had seven sons and three daughters. These were Job's life. He loved them and always wanted them to be right with God. He would offer a sacrifice on their behalf just in case they had sinned.

You know the true story. In one day, Job lost his wealth. Fire from the sky destroyed the sheep, enemies stole the camels and donkeys. After Job heard the terrible financial news about his animals, a final servant came to him. His children, all ten, died when a house collapsed on them. His wealth, gone. His children, taken from him. All in one day.

Job's immediate response is amazing. He still trusts in the Lord his God. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be blessed." (Job 1:21).

Next, Satan is allowed to inflict Job with painful boils from his head to his feet. Job is so miserable that he scratches himself with broken pottery while sitting in the ashes. His wife, who has endured almost as much as Job, suggests that Job should give up on the Lord. "Curse God and die." But Job gives another amazing response by faith in the Lord. "If we accept the good that comes from God, shouldn't we also accept the bad?" (Job 2:10)

Job is amazing! If we were in that situation, how would we have reacted? Job could have been sitting outside with his wife and children, enjoying some fine wine from a large pottery jug, dining on choice meat from his vast flocks. Instead, he is scratching his painful boils with broken pottery while sitting in the ashes. And he did nothing to bring this on himself.

We might have some questions for God. We might have some accusations against God. After all, it was God who allowed Satan to bring such destruction upon Job and his family. God could have protected Job. God could have delivered Job from the evil Satan wanted to inflict upon him. There is nothing in this account that seems fair to us.

Job's three friends agree, sort of. They agree that such terrible things could never happen to anyone who has not himself done something terrible. God is always just and so must be punishing Job, they claim. With many words, they accuse Job of bringing disaster upon his children and himself by his terrible sins.

Job defends himself against these accusations but in his vigorous defense goes too far. He ends up speaking of things he does not understand. The pressure from his friends, the grief of his losses, the pains in his body, the temptations of Satan finally get to Job. He accuses God of wrongdoing, of evil intentions towards Job. "If I have sinned, what harm has it done to you, you who keep watch on mankind? Why have you set me up as your target? How have I become a burden to you? ²¹Why do you not forgive my rebellion? Why do you not take away my guilt?" (Job 7:20-21). Job is now the judge and has put God on trial.

Job's patience has run out. Ours probably does so faster. What does it take for us to put God on trial? Sometimes all it takes is for us to lose a game of Monopoly to accuse God of treating us poorly as we sulk and flip the board when we've landed on Boardwalk with a hotel again. Or it might be the loss of a prized possession or a drop in the stock market or inflation that causes us to accuse God of not caring about our wellbeing. Of course, it could be something more like Job's situation too. A loved one is taken from us way before his or her time. Pain won't leave our body. And over time, we go from wondering if God cares, to accusing him of wrongdoing. What did I do to deserve this from you, O Lord? We put God on trial and fall into Satan's temptation by judging God by our limited, sin-corrupted understanding.

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In chapter 40, the Lord calls upon Job to make his case. Job wants to be the judge, so the Lord challenges him to bring the charges against him face to face. We need to be here tonight to answer God's call to make our case against him. It is one thing to accuse God in our minds. We can always manipulate the facts to make ourselves look right and good. But to stand before the Almighty and accuse him of evil is quite another matter. Job quickly realizes that he has no standing in God's court. There is only one Judge in God's court. Job is not the judge, and neither are any of us. When we realize our foolishness in making any accusations against the Holy God, our only good option is to do what Job does.

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[God] asked, *"Who is this who spreads darkness over my plans with his ignorant words?"*

[Job replied] *"I have made statements about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.*

[God] said, *"Listen now and I will speak. I will ask you questions, and you will inform me."*

[Job replied] *⁵My ear heard about you. Now my eyes see you. ⁶So I despise myself. I repent in dust and ashes.*

We have no case against the Lord. The time for excuses and arguments is over. Confess that we were foolish. Confess that we spoke about things we have no hope of understanding. Repent in dust and ashes. Job had been sitting in literal ashes. Now he repents in dust and ashes. Some Christians will get ashes applied to their foreheads on this day as a symbol of their repentance and the wages we earn for our sin – death. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

On this day, we come before the true Judge repenting in dust and ashes. We have nothing to offer him. We have no righteousness of our own. We have no defense for our sin. We have no excuses. We come tonight before the Almighty Judge of all and repent in dust and ashes for our ignorant and false accusations against him.

The rest of the season of Lent gives us the response of our Almighty Judge. The One who will judge the living and the dead puts himself under the law of God by being born of a woman. The perfect Son of God stands trial before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate. Jesus is falsely accused

but does not defend himself this time. He takes the accusations of blasphemy in our place. He accepts his place as the substitute for sinners and endures the pain of the cross, accused and condemned as a rebel and blasphemer. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Satan can no longer accuse us of sin. Christ has taken our accusations and our sins, and he has done away with them at the cross.

In the next Wednesdays, we will look at how others put God on Trial in the days before Christ's death and resurrection. It is good for us to begin this journey by seeing how we have put God on trial so that we always repent before the true Judge in dust and ashes. But even more, we see and believe and rejoice in how the Lord has forgiven us for our accusations, delivered us from Satan's accusations, and given us eternal salvation by putting his own Son on trial in our place.

Amen.