

CHALLENGES TO GODLINESS -1



Turn together to the book of Job and we will look at the first twelve verses of chapter 1. Hopefully God willing we will be able to look at the book over the next few weeks. It's a rich and a wonderful book and I trust that it will be of help and encouragement to us all. I want read the verses again, Ross has already read them.

Why should we look at the book and study it together?

The short answer to that is because we live in a suffering world and we need to be able to handle suffering. The world is a beautiful place but it is a place of deep darkness as well. And we are all involved in suffering, if we haven't already been we certainly will be. So what does the Bible say to us about it? About the suffering of the ungodly in general and the godly in particular. Because Job was a good and a godly man but he suffered. Why did God allow that to happen? If God is just and good why does He allow a good man to suffer? That's the real issue; it's the real issue for believers. Because sometimes believers may doubt God's goodness. It's also a good question and good issue for unbelievers to face. Sometimes they turn away from God in bitterness and in anger. So we need to be able to help people who are puzzled if not bewildered by this problem.

The fundamental answer of the book is that we are only human and we are not God. Though the book is about suffering, you should say that it's about the incomprehensibility of God. Perhaps a long word, it simply means we don't understand God. That really is the theme of the book. Our grasp of the mysteries of life is very limited. We are powerless, as we have seen. Only this last week, powerless in the face of nature's forces. And we only see a tiny section of the whole picture. We grasp if you like one or two threads in the divine tapestry.

So we must be very careful before we say too much. We need to be on our guard lest we too readily express opinions about this matter. We need humility; we need to know our place. Perhaps the greatest sin of mankind is arrogance, pride. That is why Satan fell, that is why Adam fell and if that is so then when face to face with life's conundrums. With the power of nature if when we don't really understand those things then how much less are we able to understand the being of God himself? So the fundamental message of the book is *'be careful before you speak.'* Don't pontificate; don't try to answer everything, which you may not be able to answer here in this life. And just suspend judgment and bow before the mighty and the sovereign hand of God.

Having said that however, there are certain shafts of light upon this theme of why the godly are allowed to suffer, which the book does provide for us in which it would be useful and helpful I think for us to look at. Well in these opening twelve verses, 12 to 1. There are two things I just need to call our attention to the first is

1. The Challenge of Job's Godliness

Let's look at the challenge to godliness first of all. We are confronted here with a godly man. His name is Job; he's described as upright and blameless. A man who feared God and shunned evil. Now, when you think of words like that and that kind of character sketch. How do you message up to it, how do I message up to it? If for instance this book were about you or me and this were the opening verse of the book and it was your life or my life. How would you summarize your life? How would I summarize mine? Could we say this man was blameless and upright; one who "feared God and shunned evil" or this women. It's a challenge to us in terms of our character.

What kind of a person am I? How do I see myself, how do other people see me. Most importantly how does God see me?

For some people, the big thing in their lives is cleverness, how intelligent they are. How clever, how shrewd perhaps. For other people it's their appearance, how they look. For others it's popularity, how do we get on with other people. How do people feel about us? For others it may be sporting ability, how tough we are, how skillful we are. Well there are all sorts of ways in which could look at ourselves and other people could look at us. and we judge people by many standards. We judge them by their physical appearance. Their physical strength whether they are physically impressive or whether they are socially amiable and amenable. Whether they are psychologically balanced and so on. We judge in all sorts of ways when we think of others and ourselves. What is God really looking for? How does God see us? Well here is the way God saw this man. He is described for his goodness, for his godliness.

But it's important isn't it to realize what goodness, what godliness really is. And whenever we are asked to define something it's a good idea to look at what is not said. What is godliness? Well what is not mentioned here about Job? Lets begin there. What is not mentioned here about him? There is no mention about his religious background. We are not told where he came from a God fearing family. He may well have, but we are not told that. It is a blessing to come from a God fearing family but that's not mentioned here.

So godliness cannot just be coming from a godly family, from a religious background. It can't be that will make you godly. Now we may come from a Christian home, a God fearing family but that doesn't make us godly. We may come from a family that is not God fearing and yet be godly so that it isn't our family background that makes people good or godly.

There's not mention here either of his religious ritual, although we are told about the way in which he sacrificed on behalf of his children. But we are not told for example whether he abstained from certain food or certain drink. We are not told whether he observed special religious days. We are not told whether he dressed in certain religious cloths. Those things may have some meaning for some people but that's not

godliness, they not godly because of those things, those things aren't mentioned. That's not the secret, if they where they undoubtedly would have been mentioned.

What is mentioned, how is this man's godliness defined? It's defined for us in a number of words. And the first is the word blameless.

Job was blameless and upright

The man was blameless, you can translate that. He was a complete man, he was a balanced man, and he was if you like a consistent man. You can be devote in worship but dishonest at work. Job was a balanced consistent man, he was the same in the worship of God as He was with God's people, and at work. And honesty in work is just as much part of work as devotion is in the house of God a part of worship. He was consistent. It's possible for us to ask God for forgiveness, to be forgiven and yet to refuse to forgive others. That is inconsistent; our Lord told us to be forgiving as we ask for forgiveness. It's possible to say that we love God and yet we despise certain people created in the image of God, that's inconsistent. Job was a consistent man; there is something whole and balanced about his spiritual life and his moral life. He was blameless, he was consistent. And we are told he was upright.

That suggests to us sincerity and integrity and honesty and truthfulness. He was upright, straight; He was a straightforward man. He was without hypocrisy, without pretense. Now those are the two characteristics that are particularly selective for special mention. Clearly these two things, he was blameless and he was upright are not natural qualities. It wasn't that Job had been born like this, were as unfortunately other people had been born without these qualities. These are qualities that God gives to people. They are not native to us. We don't have them by right of birth, they are gifts.

Christ came to put us right and make us good.

That's why Christ came; Christ came to do two things for us; to put us right and to make us good. Those are the two great reasons why He came. And to put us right means to put us right with God. It means to give us new records so to speak by wiping

the old slate clean. And not only by wiping the old slate of our sins clean but giving us His righteousness as well. So we are put right with God. That's what the Bible means by justification; our Lord came to do that.

But He also came to make us good. To actually infuse into us a new heart or a new spirit of a new character so that we become good. The one is an act of God, finished complete. The other is a work of God that goes on day by day in our lives. Christ came to do both those things for us. To put us right and to make us good, so that the qualities here that we are being reminded of here in Job are God given. They are the work of Christ for us and in us and they are not therefore natural to anyone of us. Godliness is a gift of God and it's something that we have to look for and ask for and plead with God that he might give to us. This man is so described. He was "blameless and upright."

Job feared God and shunned evil

Then we are told he was a man who "feared God and shunned evil." Again the two things go together. He feared God and shunned evil, turned away from evil. This is the secret of godliness isn't it? "The fear of God, it's the beginning of wisdom." The fear of God means that we are conscious of God where ever we are and what ever we are doing. It means we are in God's presence not only in a meeting like this but in school or in university or in the factory or in the office or in the hospital or in the school or where ever. We are in the presence of God in the home or whatever we are doing; wherever we are we are in God's presence. We fear God, He can see us, and His eye is upon us. I may have mentioned the fact that the little community that Howell Harris; the great evangelical preacher of the eighteenth century in Wales set up in the place called Trevecka, mid Wales.

I can remember as a young boy actually being in a room where the community lived. Harris had a huge eye painted on the ceiling a huge eye. Imagine this whole ceiling, which had this enormous eye painted deliberately so that the people living in the community were physically reminded God's eye was upon them all the time. He could see them, wherever they were, what ever they were doing He could see them. His

eye was upon them. Now the fear of God means living in that consciousness. So that what we do at work, when we are in our own rooms by ourselves God can see.

Here was a man who feared God; the eye of God was upon him. And we cannot hide anything from God and in the end our hearts are open to him and He's going to give us a record of how it really was with us on the day of judgement. So the greatest reality that we have to face is the reality of God. Although we often don't live as though that were true. But he did, he lived in the fear of God and the result of that was that he turned from evil. It was the flip side if you like of his fearing God. He turned from evil, he was aware of good, the holiness and the purity of God and therefore he turned from all that was against God's will. And his turning from evil was because He feared God. It wasn't simply because he wanted to be good, it was because God was looking upon him and he wanted to be a good man because God had required that of him. He was a man "who feared God and shunned evil."

So there are things in our lives that we actively need to shun. There are certain things that we ought not to be looking at. There are certain films that we should not be viewing; there are certain magazines that we should not be seeing. There are certain attitudes that we ought to be eradicating from our lives. There are certain relationships that need to be put right. We shun evil because we fear God. This was a godly man, that's godliness. Living in the presence, in the eye of the almighty. Those therefore are the two descriptions therefore of Job's godliness. He was "blameless and upright" on the one hand and then "he feared God and shunned evil."

Job's godliness expressed in his home

Now how would you expect the godliness of a man like this to be expressed? And we read here that it was expressed first in his home life, his family life and secondly in the community. We are told about his godliness within the family in verses 4 - 5. We read there that his son's, he had seven of them and three daughters. "And his sons would go and feast *in their* houses, each on his *appointed* day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings *according* to the number of them all. For

Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." The place in the end where godliness will really be known is in the home. Here was a man whose godliness surfaced within the family. He was concerned about his children. It was a very close family clearly because they meet regularly in each other's homes, so there was a closeness about the family. And they were a family who enjoyed each other's company. They eat together, they drank together, and there was a conviviality and camaraderie about them. So they were it seems a close happy family.

But there were two dangers, the first was the danger of sin. So it's possible for people to sin with their lips. The second was that they might curse God, they may be irreverent. They may say things about God that they should be saying. Job knew that that was possible, that even though he was a godly man his sons might sin against God. His sons, his daughters might curse God. They might be irreverent, they might be flippant, and they might be foolish in the way they live before God. So knowing that and fearing that he prayed for them. He sanctified them as it were with his prayers and he offered sacrifices on their behalf. He wanted to bring them under the blood of atonement.

So the family of this man was a family that knew something about his godliness. Here was a father that prayed for his children and they knew it. And who wanted his children gathered under the blood of the atonement as he offered sacrifices on their behalf. So they were a privileged family these children they had a godly father. And it's right if we are parents that we be realistic about our children. That we be concerned about them, the possibility of them sinning against God and cursing God. Especially when they had been eating and drinking perhaps. They let their, 'hair down' so to speak. And they are relaxed and they've got a few quantities of alcohol within them maybe. And they start to say things and do things that they shouldn't.

We need to be concerned about our children as he did and to seek to bring them under the sound of the gospel and under the blood of the everlasting covenant. We want them to be forgiven; we want them to be saved. His godliness surfaced at home in that way, but it surfaced also in the community.

Job's godliness expressed in his community

He was a very well known man; we read that, "this man was the greatest of all the people of the East." Later on in the book there in chapter 29 we are told by him about some of the things that he was known for within the community and he speaks there about his being, "eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a father to the poor, He was a man who stood against the wicked and plucked the victim out of his hands of the wicked and so on v15, -17.

He was a good man in the community. A good upright man in the family and a good upright man in the community. It's a good question to ask whether we are known as good godly people in our communities, in our schools are we known to be godly young people? In the office are we known to be godly people, in the factory? Wherever we are, are we known to be godly people? Well he was known for his eminent godliness, his goodness, his graciousness and his kindness. This is the challenge of Job's godliness.

2. The Challenge to Job's Godliness

Satan challenges it

We are told in verses 6-11 about this charge that was brought against God because it was brought against Job. It's the charge that Satan delivers; it's a very serious charge. You remember the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord and Satan has to come among them. He's a servant, an unwilling servant but he's under the Lord's authority and he has to come in with them because He's under God's control. And he comes before the almighty and the Lord says to him, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and walking back and forth on it." Like a restless tiger.

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, one who fears God and shuns evil?" And this is the cynical charge, "Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? `It's not surprising that he should fear you, look what you have done to him, look at the blessings you've bestowed upon him "Have you not made a hedge

around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. Look at it; he's the most prosperous man in the East. It's no wonder he praise you and worships you and fears you. Look at all these blessings you've lavished upon him. "But now stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and surely he will curse you to your face!"

That's the charge; it's a challenge to Job's godliness. It's a very serious charge and it comes from Satan the accuser. It comes of course in response to God's question, to God's challenge. v8 "Have you considered my servant Job." So God has invested a great deal in this man. God has chosen this man, this man is supposed to be a blameless and upright man. One who fears God and shuns evil and so God says to Satan, " Well here he is, look at him, have you considered him? Have you really thought about this man's godliness? Look at him, now what do you make of this man? He's been travelling through the earth. Now what do you make of this man? And you see the challenge is too much. Satan will not give Job any credit; he will not give God any credit. So he wants to debase and belittle and slight both Job and God and so he brings this cynical charge against God. "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

We are reminded I think here of what goes on behind the scenes out of sight. Things that we are often totally unaware of; the cosmic conflict between God and Satan. We have a spiritual malevolent malignant enemy. He has one aim to discredit God, to rob God of His glory. He hates God. That is why godliness urkes Him, that is why godliness disturbs him profoundly. That is why Satan finds a Church that is at peace with it's self and with God He hates it.

If there is a Church that is thriving, that is beginning to make in roads into his territory he hates it, he will do anything to destroy it. He attacks God; he attacks God's people. So the challenge to Job's godliness and God's goodness is a cynical serious charge. He's attacking the goodness of God, the power of God. He's attacking God's people; by attacking God's people he's attacking God. If he can discredit God, by discrediting God's people he'll do it. So here's the big charge. And this conflict is going on all the time. It's a real conflict; he is as I say unaware of it very often, but the Bible gives us insights into it, glimpses into it. Here is one of them, Ephesians chapter 6 is another

Satan is under God's control and authority

But there are encouraging things for us to remember here. The first is that Satan is under God's control and under God's authority. "There was a day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came among them." Here is this slinking wretch; he's there too. He has to be there because God has summoned him there. He's under God's control; he's under God's authority. "You have to come before Satan and you have to stand before me as the almighty. We need to remember that, Satan is not in control of the universe; Satan is not in control of the world. I mean by that the universe. God is in control; God is in control of His universe. God is in charge of everything that is happening.

He is the one who is in all authority over all power in heaven and on earth. So here is an evil spirit under the authority of God. The angels, the good angels, the unfallen angels, they serve God willingly. But this wretch, but this Satan hates God and he has to serve God unwillingly but under God's authority. He's been given a great deal of latitude and a great deal of freedom but he's under God's authority. This is so clear is it not in the rest of the scripture. I'm reminded of those words there in the book of Jude which we have some very fascinating insights into this whole matter and the conflict between good and evil put to us in Jude verse 6 "And the angels who did not keep their proper dominion, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. " So God has reserved in everlasting chains, they are all on chains under darkness these evil spirits, "for the judgement of the great day."

And he is intent on destroying God's name by destroying God's people. And in a way that we don't not understand God gave him permission to afflict Job. "And Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power only do not lay a hand on his *person*." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. v12. That is a most mysterious verse. "All that he has is in your power. Now we don't understand that, we accept it, we acknowledge it, we believe it. Everything he has is in your power, only touch not, "only does not lay a hand on his *person*." It's a very mysterious verse, but equally mysterious is that verse that you will find in the 22 Chapter of the Gospel of Luke. In

connection with our Lord's trial and then His eventual crucifixion. You remember how in verse 53 of Luke 22 we read that our Lord said, "When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Our Lord as it were handing Himself over to "the power of darkness." He's in control, He's sovereign in it all, but He's handing Himself over to "the power of darkness." The reality of evil but in the middle of it all and above it all the sovereignty of God. God gave Satan permission to afflict Job. That's the area in which the mystery lies.

What I think is important for us to grasp here is that God and godliness are on trial. You and I God's people, God's cause, God's Church. And God Himself is on trial. Lets ask the question why did Job live the way that he did? Why was he a "blameless and a upright man?" Why did he "fear God and shun evil?" Why, was it because God had blessed him with all these material endowments? Was that the reason? Was Satan actually telling the truth here? Is it because God had blessed Job with health, with strength, with prosperity that He was fearing God? Is that the reason why people fear God? Do people love because He blesses them with gifts? Do people love God because He makes them healthy?

We what if they should become sick? Do people love God because He blesses them with material possessions? Well what if they should lose them? What then? What then? Is the only reason why people love God because they want to keep on the right side of Him? Because they believe somehow or other He's going to bless them? Is it a kind of pagan view of God? God's there to give us what we want and providing He gives us what we want we fear Him. We serve Him, is that our view of God? That's the Satanic charge, that's Satan's charge. That's Satanic, if any things Satanic, that's Satanic. "Does Job fear God for nothing" exactly.

Is this the reason why people fear God? Is this the reason people become Christians? Because in becoming Christians and fearing God, God is going to bless them with gifts. So we are really looking all the time to be blessed with gifts and to be made happy and prosperous. and that's the only reason why we fear God. Is that true? That's the whole point of this book, why did Job fear God? Why do we fear God? Here's what the

enemy of our souls said here, true. Is it true of us? What if what happened to Job happened to you and me? What if God gave to Satan authority to touch all that we have? Let alone our health for the moment. Suppose God gave to Satan authority to touch all that we have? What are we going to do then about our faith in God and fearing God?

That's the great charge, that's the great challenge to godliness. And your familiar with the wonderful, magnificent response that Job gave to this charge. You remember, we haven't got time to look at the rest of this chapter this evening. But you remember how one after another a messenger returned to him telling him about a natural catastrophe. There where these things happening to him, one after another. First of all his oxen and his donkeys and taken away. And in a raid his servants are killed and you remember his sons and his family are killed. And you remember that all his possessions are lost and the man is left without a thing. And you remember his response, "and he arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell to the ground and worshipped and said, "Naked I came from my mothers womb and naked will I return there. "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Those are wonderful words.

God is worth fearing because He is God

God is worth fearing because He is God; God is worth loving because He is God. If you have Him you have all you need. That's really what Job was saying to Satan; he was giving the lie to Satan's charge. Despite the catastrophe, despite the darkness, despite the ignorance he still trusted God. He glorified God, he loved God. Think of John the Baptist, this bold preacher. How did John the Baptist die? His head was presented to king Herod on a platter. Where was God in all of that? Here's Satan again, "Does John the Baptist fear you for nothing?" James you remember one of the early church was killed with a sword. Stephen stoned to death, where is God in all of this? Do these men fear God for nothing?

What about all the great martyrs throughout the running history of the Church. What about people who we have known perhaps even in our own congregation who have been through the mill and who know something of suffering and affliction and yet they

love God and they fear God. Although their lives have been touched with tragedy. Satan says, "Do these people fear God for nothing?" Touch all that he's got, take it all away and he'll curse you to his face. And Job would not do that and would not do that even though his wife tried to persuade him to do that. In her agony and in her grief. Though he trusted God, he loved God, he feared God even though he had nothing left. Yet says the hymn writer, "Yet how rich is my condition God and heaven are still my home. Satan the wretch behind the scene stands confounded, amazed, bewildered. He can't handle this, He can't cope with this.

He brought this terrible charge against Job and against God. He 's issued this tremendous challenge to godliness and he's been roundly defeated and sent packing. That's exactly what you and I are to do in the middle of our sufferings. We are to do something to the spiritual realm that causes hell to be bewildered and Satan to be confounded. Satan cannot handle a Christian who fears God simply because God is worthy to be feared and worthy to be loved. He hates that because he hates God.

But if the grace of God that enable poor ordinary people like Job to triumphant when everything has been taken away and he's got nothing left but God. In the end you know that is what heaven will be. Heaven will be not just walking the golden streets. Heaven will be seeing our Saviour, heaven will be having Christ. And if you have Christ and Christ has you it's alright. I'm not saying that there is not untold anguish and unspeakable pain; we shall have to look at that as we examine the story of Job.

Because of the way Job reacted to it, the way he responded to it, the way the Lord blessed him through it. The way he learnt lessons from it, that's immensely instructive and helpful for us. But right at the very beginning we are confronted with a fundamental issue. And it's the fundamental issue of why we are to fear and love God. In the end it must be because God is the greatest and most wonderful reality of all.

If I have Jesus the hymn writer wrote, "Jesus only then my sky will have a gem." It's an old fashioned hymn and some of the language in the old fashioned hymns is old fashioned. But the hymn writer had found something and he was talking about something indescribably precious to us. He had found the pearl of greatest price. He had in his possession the salvation of his immortal; soul and body. He knew what it was

to be redeemed by the precious blood of He knew what it was to be a child of God a child of heaven. He knew that, so what ever else he did not have he had that.

It's the apostle Paul standing chained to two Roman soldiers. Looking at the potentates, the rulers of the age sitting there in their pomp and their luxury. Do you remember the story in Acts 26? He's been imprisoned for two years, he's chained to two Roman soldiers, there they are these rulers of the day in all their luxury their pomp everything going well for them. They have got all the money in the world; they have got all the possessions in the world. They are the richest people on earth and they look at this poor little fellow standing between two Roman soldiers.

And Paul says to them, "I would to God that you and everybody that listened to me today, that we were all together such as I am. I wish you had what I've got. He had nothing in human terms; all he had was two chains and two Roman soldiers and two years in a Roman prison. That's all he had but as he saw them with all they had he said, "Oh I wish you had what I've got. I wish you had peace with God, I wish you had the knowledge that your sins where forgiven. I wish you had a Saviour, I wish you knew God as I know Him. He felt sorry for them, they had nothing, multi-millionaires they where, but they had nothing, nothing, poor, poor people and he had everything. He had Christ. He had God and he longed that they should know him.

You remember how he wrote about it to Timothy? "God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Or the passage we where looking at this morning in the Bible Study "The Kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink." Though we enjoy our food and our drink, "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." If you have those things then you have all that God could conceivably bless you with in this life and the life to come. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" And Job was able to shout the omnipotence of grace. There's a lovely book written about Job, it's one of the best books on the book of Job that I've ever read. It's by a man called Green, the book is called `The triumph of Job over Satan.' I think the book would be better entitled, `The Triumph of God's Grace in Job over Satan.'

Are we godly people, do we love and serve God because He is Himself? And if we do then lets, confound Satan, lets bewilder Satan. Lets love God and because God is God,

God is good and God is gracious. And in the end we shall say something to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places that will exalt and glorify God Himself so that all the honour and praise are due to Him and none ourselves.

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