

## God on Trial: Accusations

**Job 40:1,2; 42:1-6** The LORD said to Job: <sup>2</sup> "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" Then Job replied to the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup> You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. <sup>4</sup> "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' <sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Dear people of God:

Accusations are powerful. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? It's incredibly painful, isn't it? Accusations are so powerful that even if they aren't true, they can ruin reputations or damage relationships. Accusations can bring down world leaders. They can destroy trust in a marriage.

A man named Job knew the infuriating power of accusations. You've probably heard of Job. His suffering is legendary. He lost all his oxen, donkeys, sheep, and camels—and even the servants watching those animals. More than ten thousand casualties. All his wealth was wiped out at once: his income, his life savings, his retirement fund—all gone! But that wasn't the worst of it. That same day while his seven sons and three daughters were eating together, the house they were in collapsed, and they all were killed. In one day he lost nearly everything and everyone he held dear!

If you were in his place, what would you do? What would you say? Job tore his robe and shaved his head in mourning. Then he fell to the ground *in worship* and uttered these well-known words of faith: "*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised*" (Job 1:21). He was devastated. Yet Scripture says, "*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing*" (Job 1:22).

But Job's ordeal wasn't over. Next, he was afflicted with painful boils from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. You may know from experience how chronic pain can mess with your mind. It's unlikely that Job could sleep. It would hurt to sit. His only relief, if you can call it that, was to take a piece of pottery and scrape open the boils as he sat in the ashes. His wife's advice? "*Curse God and die!*" (Job 2:9). But he didn't. Instead, he said, "*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*" (Job 2:10).

Maybe you know what it's like to get hit by one thing after another. Financial problems, loss of loved ones, health issues, difficult relationships—sometimes they come like relentless waves that won't let you catch your breath and that threaten to pull you under.

At least friends can help, right? Several of Job's friends did come to visit him. At first, they just sat with him in silence, which is sometimes the best thing a friend can do. In this case, it was the *only* good thing they did. Things went downhill as soon as they opened their mouths. They tried to rationalize Job's suffering, and the only explanation that made sense to them was that Job must have done something to deserve this. "Job, this wouldn't happen to a righteous person. What sin are you hiding?" Their attempt at consolation quickly turned to accusation.

Maybe their accusations resonated with what was already lurking in Job's mind because he finally cried out to God, "*If I have sinned, what have I done to you, you who see everything we do? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?*" (Job 7:20). Giving in to despair, Job put God on trial and accused him of being unjust, uncaring—a cosmic bully set on making Job's life miserable. Job had finally crossed the line.

This is one of the devil's favorite tricks. His name means "accuser," after all. He uses hardship as grounds for accusing us. "Why is God doing this to you?" he whispers. That question can drive us to despair, or it can lead us to turn the accusation back around. "Wait . . . why *are* you doing this to me, God?" Either way, the devil's goal is to separate us from our Lord.

Over the next several weeks, we'll see how people put God on trial for reasons far less justifiable than Job's. We'll hear how Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate, and the angry crowds all accused the Son of God in the flesh. But before we do, on this Ash Wednesday we must consider how we have done the same—how we too have put God on trial.

We might not say it out loud. However, accusations are there beneath the questions: “Lord, why would you take my loved one from me at this time?” “Lord, why does this relationship have to be so hard?” “Lord, am I not good enough for you?” “Lord, what did I do to deserve this?” “Lord, why have I been sick for so long?”—one thing after another. “I’m tired. I’m worn out. Why me?”

We might not fully form the phrases or even the thoughts, but the accusations are there—in our impatience and frustration, in our complaining and criticism. At some point, we too cross the line. Our lament turns to anger. Our questions become charges. “God, this isn’t fair!” As if we were calling on God to take the stand to explain himself.

Well, he does speak. But what does he say? Listen to what God said to Job. After allowing Job and his friends to do all the talking for 38 chapters, God confronts his suffering servant: “*Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!*” (Job 40:2). “I’ll ask the questions!” He goes on, “Where were you when I made the universe? Were you there when I put boundaries on the seas and hung the stars in their places? Who brings the rain and the snow and the lightning? Job, you have gone too far!”

Job was brought to his senses: “*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. I . . . repent in dust and ashes*” (Job 42:3,6). The Lord put Job in his place—and that’s a good thing! Because it was a place of repentance.

When we accuse God, we’ve got it backward. We sinful humans deserve to be put on trial by God. And his question is not just “What makes you think you know better than me?” but “Why should I not destroy you forever?”

God calls us to repentance too. He does it through Christian friends, parents, teachers, preachers, and through his Word. He does so because he does not want us to lose our faith and so lose our hope of salvation. Tonight, through his words to Job, we hear his call—and we repent in dust and ashes.

And through Job’s words, God reminds us of our forgiveness. Throughout Job’s ordeal, though he sinned in accusing God, he never lost faith in God. In the very middle of this book, Job cried out words that have become etched in the poetry of our Easter celebration: “*I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God*” (Job 19:25,26). Job clung to the hope of a Redeemer. We know the Redeemer’s name: Jesus.

This Lenten season, we will once again see our Redeemer up close as he stands on trial before sinners. We’ll see him betrayed by one of his closest followers and arrested by a mob. We’ll watch him stand on trial accused by false witnesses and charged with blasphemy. His accusers will spit in his face and strike him with their fists. They’ll dress him up like a king so that they can laugh at him and humiliate him. From the courtroom their vicious cries will ring out, calling for his death. And he will just stand there and take it all! Unlike Job, Jesus will not break. He will not sin. He will not cry out in anger or accuse God of injustice. Even though Jesus is truly righteous, he will not complain about all that he suffers, because that is why he came: to take the accusations of sin—to undo the accusations of Satan against sinners. We’ll watch Jesus carry his cross to Calvary and give his life on it for all our sins against God.

When you suffer—when the pain doesn’t go away, when you can’t understand why things are happening the way they are—the accusations will come. Satan will whisper in your ear that it is your fault, that it’s because of something you did. Remember the account of Job, not so much the man but the God who sustained him. You may recall how it all began. The Lord gave Satan permission to afflict Job. God was in complete control. He didn’t let Satan take Job’s life and he didn’t let him take his faith. In fact, God brought blessings to Job—and to us who read about him.

Most of all, when you’re tempted to accuse God, remember how God took on flesh in order to take your accusations on himself. Since all the accusations of a world’s worth of sin fell on him, not one accusation of sin can fall on you. He is your Redeemer. And he lives. He is right there beside you. He who endured suffering for you knows how to sustain you when you suffer. He who tells the sea where to stop and holds Satan on a chain has the power to use the worst for the best.

There is no need to despair. No need to accuse. We don’t even need to understand—because we know that God does. May the name of the Lord be praised! Amen.