

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

I love the season of Advent. It is brilliantly arranged to advance the theme: “Jesus is coming!” Study the structure of Advent with me for two minutes. Where did we begin Advent? At the end of time, for Jesus’ second coming. The message on the first Sunday in Advent: “Be ready. Jesus will come back soon. It could be any moment now. Are you sure you’re ready? Keep watch. Don’t go to sleep waiting for him.” As we move forward to the second Sunday in Advent, our Scripture lessons transport us backwards in time from Judgment Day to John the Baptist, who proclaims, “The Messiah is almost here! He’s coming to wash you clean (literally “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”). Prepare your hearts by repenting of all your sins.” Well, after two weeks of being told to prepare, we arrive at the third Sunday in Advent, today, wondering, “Is he here yet?” And the third Sunday in Advent tells us, “No, but isn’t it great how God has been preparing our hearts for Jesus’ coming through his Word?” And we reply, “Well, yes, that’s great! But I want the Savior to come back. Is he here yet?” And the third Sunday in Advent says: “No, not yet, but aren’t you happy that your Savior is coming?” “Yes, but it’s really hard to wait.”

That’s why our Scripture lessons for today encourage us to wait patiently and to continue rejoicing while we wait. Two examples may help us. In today’s Gospel

John the Baptizer had to be reminded to wait patiently. And now we’re taking a closer look at Job, an example of patient perseverance. So if we ever get impatient with how long Jesus is taking to come back for his final Advent, or impatient with how long God is taking to heal an illness, or impatient with how long God is taking to end our earthly life and take us to the heavenly home he promised us so long ago, we’re in good company. Others felt impatient too. But they learned to wait patiently and to rejoice in the goodness of God, even in the midst of great sadness. We can learn from them how to say from faith, **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED**, like Job did.

6One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. Are you surprised to find Satan in God’s throne room? Well, according to Scripture, Satan the Accuser regularly appears before God’s throne to accuse us of sin (Revelation 12:10). Satan isn’t really his name. It’s more like a title. Satan means “Accuser.” In this section of Job the Holy Spirit actually refers to him in Hebrew as “the Satan,” “the Accuser.”

7The LORD said to [the] Satan, “Where have you come from? You don’t belong here, but I’ll give you a chance to reply anyway.” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.” The Satan’s reply reminds me of how the apostle

Peter described the devil: “*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). The Satan wanted to devour Job that day because Job believed in the Lord and showed it. By the way he lived, Job’s life proclaimed: **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED.**

Listen to the Lord describe Job. ⁸*Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job?”* My servant. What an honor to be called a servant of God! Are you a servant of God with Job? We are so fully forgiven in Christ—let’s try to be like Job. The Lord said: “*There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.*” The Hebrew word for “blameless” basically means “whole” or “complete.” “*There is no one on earth like Job; he is complete.*” Job was like some of the mature Christians you know. Their hearts are right with God and open to people. They are genuine and straightforward. They are completely honest in their dealings with others—you can trust them to keep their word. There’s no duplicity or hypocrisy in them. It’s difficult to shame them because they don’t do much that’s shameful. Even when they have to tell you you’re wrong, they are kind about it. This is what Job was like. | Some people think the Lord is bragging as he describes Job. But really he’s using Job as an example to remind the Satan’s of

his wickedness: “You were like Job once, but you rebelled. Now look at you.”

Well! The Satan’s not going to take God’s rebuke sitting down. Out comes some rebellious repartee. ⁹*“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied.* This question could have been translated, “Does Job fear God relying completely on God’s grace?” The Satan is casting aspersions on Job’s motivation, trying to make God himself look bad for being good. “He’s not pure in heart, God. You had to buy his faithfulness. ¹⁰*Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.*” If it sounds like the Satan is getting in some digs on the Lord, you’re hearing correctly. In fact, if you really want to understand the book of Job, you have to see it as a contest between the Lord and the Satan. Yes, the book focuses our thoughts on how this effected Job and how Job dealt with great loss. But the overall message is that the Lord wins, and eventually his people do too. This means that the Satan loses, even though he can make us miserable along the way ...but only as miserable as the Lord permits, which we are reminded of next.

¹²*The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands,*

but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Do you see how God puts limits on the Satan? He can bring us only as much trouble as the Lord allows. God puts limits on the Satan because God intends to preserve us in faith to the end. Some people ask, “Why doesn’t the Lord just box up Satan and let us live in peace?” He will, but the time isn’t right yet. And the Lord, who is wiser than we, has decided how to work everything out for our good. He won’t do anything wrong as he governs our lives because he’s not defective like we are. We can trust him; he is trustworthy. But even if people don’t trust God, God still gets to do whatever he wants. Psalm 115:3: *“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.”* If he wants to discipline us for wrongs we have done so that we repent and avoid the same wrongs in the future, he can do that. If he wants to test our faith by taking away a precious possession or a precious person, he can do that. The only people who have a problem with this are those who don’t want to submit to God because they think they know better than God.

As soon as the Satan had permission to take away everything Job considered precious, *12Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD,* to plan how he would wreak misery on Job. You heard how things went down. Four waves of bad news washed over Job in quick succession. The oxen and the donkeys were carried off, and the servants killed. Burning sulfur made roast mutton of the

sheep and the shepherds. The camels were captured and the servants killed. As if this weren’t enough loss, all of Job’s beloved sons and dear daughters died when a freak tornado leveled the home they were gathered in. Some people think the children were overindulging and deserved dying, but they miss the point. Many families are familiar with internal strife and friction. There are long lapses of time where they won’t talk to each other. By contrast Job’s ten children loved each other, prized each other’s company, wanted to be together often. They knew how to forgive each other and treat each other well.

But now they were gone. What a loss for poor Job and his wife! How would you have responded to all this bad news? Would you have felt like a glass jar dropped on concrete? Even if Job felt this way, he knew that the Lord is in control, and he remembered that the Lord had been so very good to him, and he knew that the Lord’s generosity was not based on how good Job had been. Job understood what so few people seem to realize. All the earthly gifts we have from God are temporary. The longest we have any of them is for one lifetime on earth. Vision, hearing, the ability to walk and breath and remember, parents, a spouse if we’re so blessed, children if we’re so blessed, wealth, peaceful relations. All these earthly gifts we have from God are

temporary. The longest we have any of them is for one lifetime on earth. God will take them all back eventually. Some of them he takes back sooner. The only thing we can take with us is our faith in the Lord.

As a spiritual person in the truest sense of the word, a mature believer, Job understood this. That's why he responded to all this bad news just the way the Lord knew he would. *20At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.* It's not wrong to grieve over our losses. If you want to shave your head and wear tattered clothing to express how sad you are, that's okay. If you need to have a good, long cry, that's okay. Don't let anyone talk you out of healthy grieving. If you need to curl up in a ball and sleep for three days to process your grief, do it. Even Jesus wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, and Jesus was about to raise him from the dead. It's okay to grieve for a short while. We just don't want to grieve like the people who have no hope at all (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We have hope because we have an almighty God who loves us and has promised to raise all the dead. And that is why we can rejoice, even at the worst of times.

That's what Job did. *He fell to the ground in worship 21and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart."* No one brings much with them into this life. A body,

yes, but a baby's body can't do much yet. No one can take anything earthly with them when they die, not even their body. See? God will eventually take back every earthly blessing. So Job correctly says, *"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* May these be the words that fall from our lips when we experience a loss: **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED.**

22In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Good! God cannot do wrong. He has every right to do as he pleases, which turns out to be a really good thing, because it pleases him to rescue sinners from hell through faith in Jesus. He really should have punished all of us sinners in hell forever, but it pleased Jesus to pay for all sin and to offer a place in heaven to everyone on earth. This is the same God who sometimes allows our faith to be tested so he can prove our faith pure. And whenever he does this, the Satan loses. God wins; therefore we win. By the end of Job's story, his earthly blessings were restored. Your earthly blessings may be restored after loss too. But even if the Lord doesn't restore them on this side of heaven, he preserves us in faith to the end so that he can give us blessings that are too awesome to be described in human words. So **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED.**