

“Facing Evil” Creeds and Prayers

As we continue to explore what it means to worship in beauty and holiness, we are confronted with the story of Job.

It is less a story of Job than it is a story of God.

We know this is not a historical story as such, because it starts with the flavor of “Once upon a time”.

But just as fairy tales are true to reality even though they are not historical accounts, so too the book of Job is true.

It truly depicts the reality of humanity and of God’s majesty.

Usually, people think of Job as the perfect person

– and we speak of people with the patience of Job.

But the purpose of this story is not to guilt us into being better people,

or to suffer in silence,

but to change our perspective altogether.

It is to refocus our attention on **who God is**

- bigger than all our problems,
- greater than all creation,
- and faithful in his love.

Satan is the Accuser -- and his opponent is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate and Comforter.

But in this story, it is Satan who has the lead role in the first act.

Satan’s purpose is to drive a wedge between Job and God by attacking Job’s faith.

But Satan does not attack head on – that would be too easy to deflect.

Instead, he attacks Job with afflictions.

And these afflictions start a spiritual conversation:

1. Why is this happening to me?
2. What have I done to deserve this?
3. What must I do to make it stop?
4. What kind of God allows this to happen?

The outcome Satan wants is for Job to curse God

– to stop trusting God

– to stop believing in the inherent goodness of God.

The fact is, humanity suffers great evil.

Each day we hear of atrocities, catastrophes, indignities and tragedies of all kinds happening to people all over the world.

The atheists see these things and assume there is no God.

Agnostics don't want a God who allows such things to happen.

We want to believe that only good things happen to good people.

We want to believe that by being good, we deserve good things.

And because we believe the world operates that way,

we cannot accept the circumstance that bad things sometimes happen to good people.

And conversely, that good things happen to bad people.

The story of Job and God offers a different way of seeing.

- In this story, suffering is the evil consequence of life in a world fractured by sin
 - It has nothing to do with what we do – good or bad
 - It is not personal punishment
- It is a signal to place ourselves in the hands of the Lord God.

Worship helps us to remain faithful even during suffering.

- The support of fellow believers,
- Being in the presence of God,
- receiving the merciful grace of God
- all provide healing balm to the afflicted soul.

There are two portions of our liturgy in particular that provide armor against evil.

1. The Creeds
2. The Prayer of the Church

Whether the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Athanasian Creed,

the creeds remind us who God is

and how our life has been purchased by Jesus for the work of the Spirit.

Think about that – no matter what you are going through in life, God thinks you are precious enough to make his own at great cost.

Therefore, the creed reminds us, God will not abandon you in your suffering.

The Creed reminds us that

- God provides for us daily,
- makes us his own eternally at great cost,
- and continues to work in our lives.

The Father who creates us also preserves our life.

In the story of Job, we see God insisting that Job's life is not ended by this affliction.

In our own experience, we see God's hand at work all the time, providing food, shelter, clothing, and all we need day by day.

But we also see instances where tragedy and affliction end in death.

David and Bathsheba lost their son.

Adam and Eve lost their son Abel.

God the Father lost his son Jesus at the hands of sinners.

Many lost their lives in the death camps during the Holocaust.

And many still are victims of violence, disease, and addiction.

Satan still walks to and fro on the earth

- seeking to drive a wedge between humanity and God.
- Seeking to make people curse God rather than trust God to deliver them.

Here we come to the Second Article of the creed

– where we hear how God the Father who lost his only-begotten Son to death on the cross – delivers him from death.

Remember – just as Job represents all of humanity, so Jesus also represents all humanity.

Job escaped death – Jesus did not.

Jesus took all the consequence of human sin

- all the frailty of human faith –
- **he took the full sentence of death for human rebellion against God in all its forms –**
 - beginning with Adam and Eve and including you and me –
- **and died.**

And in his death, death itself was destroyed.

Not simply because he died, but because he died and then rose from the dead.

Listen to how our catechism puts it:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be wholly His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

It is good to remember that no matter how great the suffering here on earth, we are saved by Jesus –

- sometimes for continued life on earth, as was Job's case,
- and sometimes for eternal life in God's realm.

The Holy Spirit that cannot die

continues to live in and among us

so that no matter what Satan may throw at us,

we have strength to persevere in trust.

We cannot do this alone, but only in the company of other believers – there is strength in numbers.

The Creeds keep us grounded in who God is and how we can persevere in faith even when things are crumbling around us.

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The Prayers are how we express our deepest needs to God,

- crying for help,
- wailing in pain,
- calling on God to act.

Prayer is for our sake.

God already knows what we need

- **but we need to give voice to our relationship with God**
- to express our trust and hope and need.

Prayer opens our eyes and ears to God's work

- because when we pray for something, we are alert to how God is acting in response
- including that we are God's hands and feet.

Prayer begins in the church – in the community of faith.

“Lord, teach us to pray” the disciples asked Jesus.

And Jesus answered, “Say ‘*Our* Father in heaven””.

Individual prayer comes from being a member of the community of Jesus' disciples.

So next time Satan tries to get you to curse God,

confess the creed right in his face. He won't stick around.

Then join with other Christians in prayer and worship.

Together, we are the best armed force for hope in our world.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyCDFuJ4Qu0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQxnDwSBulo>