

# A Trip to Job's House: Back from the Superdome

By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** Job 1, 22, 42; John 9; Luke 13

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If you have your Bibles I'd like to invite you to turn with me to the book of Job chapter one. If you are using the Bibles in the pews you'll find this on page 789; Job chapter one and verse 18.

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.<sup>1</sup>

May we pray?

*Heavenly Father, we pray that this day we would hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling us, whether we are Christians or not Christians, to come and find rest in his presence. Lord Jesus, there are many hurting people, some of whom are here today. All of us hurt in some way. Lord, some in ways that are incomprehensible. Would you guide me in what I say that not only what I say but how I say it would be the very word of Christ to your people? Lord, we pray that you would bind all the forces of evil that are getting ready to tear our country and our state apart, families apart, husbands and wives apart. Lord, would you speak the healing word of Jesus as your Holy Spirit takes the written Word and applies that written Word to our hearts, Lord, we pray that the end result of this may be that we are like Job who simply come and confess that you are omnipotent and yet that you are a God of love and that we may worship you for Jesus' sake.*

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<sup>1</sup> Job 1:18-22 (All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

*And I pray, Lord, that none of us will give way to the tyranny of the urgent. I pray that not one single man or woman or child will leave this service to go help move things at the airbase until after the service is concluded. Lord, our greatest need is to sit that the feet of Jesus. Clear our thinking of hysteria. Recharge our emotional, mental, physical batteries. And that only comes in worship. That only comes in communion with you.*

*Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. O Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world have mercy upon us and grant us your peace through him who taught us when we pray to say, "Our Father [who] art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*<sup>2</sup>

I'm going to loot a sermon title this morning from an African American minister whom I heard preach at Peabody High School Auditorium about a decade and a half ago. His name was Jerry D. Black. He is now pastor of the Beulah Missionary Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia and he was here as part of the city wide revival. And you know a man is a good preacher if you can remember parts of his sermon 10 or 15 years later.

Yesterday as my wife and I drove down to the Superdome the words of this sermon kept coming back to me. The sermon was entitled—and I'll give him credit for the title—you'll have to blame me for the content that follows. But his title inspired me and parts of what I heard inspired me and he'll have to blame me, as I say, for the rest of that. The sermon was entitled: "A Trip to Job's House." And so, with apologies to the pastor Jerry D. Black of the Beulah Missionary Baptist Church of Decatur, Georgia, I want to share with you a trip to Job's house.

It was an odd trip from the beginning to the end; odd because some of my fellow pastors with whom I pray, African American pastors, had gone yesterday attempting to do the same thing and were turned away, as were many other people. How in the world did we get into a convoy of vehicles and get to go on a trip to Job's house? I'll only tell you a couple of pieces that I think how that happened.

One, like all of you guilt filled liberal that I am, bleeding heart that I am, looking for conscience salve somewhere by doing something in the face of so great a tragedy—I hope you understand that is said somewhat tongue in cheek—but nevertheless really wanting to do something as I think so many of you do. I thought, "Well, the old saying I've heard: 'If you don't care who gets the credit there's no end to what you might do.'"

And so I looked around for a way to do something in Jesus' name and I realized that the Louisiana Baptists have their disaster relief program. So I contacted them and said that we were willing, we had to church vans and we were willing to drive. So they gave us

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:9-13 (King James Version:, KJV)

our assignment. We got that during prayer meeting Wednesday night. We reported. Ritchie drove one van. I drove the other. And we drove down to Baton Rouge to the Pete Maravich Center which had been converted into a huge triage unit. And there we picked up people—handicapped, elderly people—and transported about 20 people along with some of their wheelchairs and things to the Hymen Center for the Performing Arts in Lafayette. And that Center has been converted into a very large hospital. And so that was our task.

It's interesting that I was kind of handed off from the Louisiana Baptists to an individual there who evidently had no connection with the Baptists, but was seen to be sort of in charge. And I say seemed to be because there is still a lot of chaos. Who is in charge?

And so he gave me a cell phone number and he said, "Look, I need you to call me back when you do this and see if I have somebody else."

So I did that. Ok. On Friday afternoon I got a call from Louisiana Baptist again asking if we could go back and I said that I could, but I couldn't leave Friday afternoon and that I could do it the next morning. So they said, "Well, please call us before you go."

So I did and I got a recording. So I remembered the phone number of this guy—I had put it in my cell phone—and I called him. He gave me another number and I called and left the message on the answering machine.

A few minutes later the cell phone rings and a voice that was so thick with an accent I had great difficulty understanding and he simply told me: "Drive down I-10 to the 209 mile marker and exit there and look for a Texaco station."

So with my trusty wife Sandy at my side, not trusting my own ability to drive for a long haul by myself, we went. And it was really odd because we were the only private people there. It was a military command post. But the United States government has hired commercial busses from all over the United States. It turned out that in our place in line behind me was a big bus from Columbus, Ohio. And I got to chatting with the driver. And it turns out that he has been an Assemblies of God pastor. And he said, "And my co-driver," who happened to be African American, the co-driver was, a black guy and a white guy, he said, "He's a born again Christian." So, anyhow, we had a good time of fellowship as we waited. And that's what I want to tell you. You don't need to be anywhere at 12 o'clock today except in God's house taking communion and then go where you would like to go because you will be in long lines waiting to be told what to do. That was our experience.

So we are lined up and I wondered at a point why were we there? There were a bunch of school busses from Vermillion parish that were escorted with sheriff's deputies before and after. There were all these commercial busses. And there was the Grace van with yours truly and my wife. And we were the only non-hired people in a sense.

So I found out who was in charge and that's what is always important to do. And I identified myself and he was a major from Texas. And when he realized I was a pastor the man seemed to be at the point of tears. And all I'm saying is my wife and I did precious little. I mean what we did was a thimble full. But it was just amazing his reaction. He took a personal interest in us. And he was amazed that we were there. How did we learn to get there? How did we report? That's all so weird. I don't know. This accented voice calling on the cell phone saying, "Go to the 209 mile marker."

So the...we thought we were picking up people at a facility, a shelter, and going to drive those people to Arkansas. We said, "Sure, we'll do that." So I had Sandy. I figured we could make it up to Little Rock and get back here by the day without a hitch.

So the guy, I guess, because I had my wife with me, the major left where he was and walked across the street and said, "I need to tell you where you're going to go." He said, "You're going to the Superdome."

And I said, "Oh, ok." And the reason neither she nor I were afraid—except at one point she got afraid when I did some of my joking—is that we knew we were doing what God wanted us to do. And so we got in this convoy. And there came a point where we left and they drove us...we went the oddest route because you couldn't go the normal route into New Orleans.

So we got to I-310. We exited and went all the way down to highway 90 so we were going opposite direction, then way around in a big loop about, I guess, 35 or so miles, until we get up to Algiers and come in over that bridge. And then...and all along the way there are these military check points. And we're screened through because we're part of this convoy. And so the last check point before we go into the city armed by...protected by National Guard and all the National Guard have their weapons in their hands and the guy said to us two things I remember. One, I said, "We're from Alexandria and we're here to pick people up with the convoy in front of us, here."

And he said, "Good. We don't want any more people in Baton Rouge."

He thought we were taking people to Alexandria.

And then another one said to us as we were going in, "Prepare yourselves."

Well that was when Sandy got a little ill at ease and my starting to quote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."<sup>3</sup> did not go over well. But I want to say that we had nothing to be afraid of. And there was only one street that we drove down where the water was in the street. And I figured if sheriff's regular cars could go through that van, which is up, could go through it fine. And it did.

We got to the...they were using the Hyatt Regency... And by the way, that's illustrating another story that you may have gotten on the news that the first people out were

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

taken...were tourists from the Hyatt Regency. That's where they took everybody from the Superdome to unload them because it is a direct walk. You walk in there. You come down the stairwell and you exit. And that's where we were loading.

Why? Because the street was relatively dry there. The only standing water was from the middle of the street over to the sidewalk. There was standing water. We were surrounded by National Guard and they loaded handicap people on the van and we took them to the New Orleans airport where we waited, I don't know, two hours? It was very hot. And we would periodically turn the van off and eventually we took our people and got some wheelchair...a wheelchair from in there and we had one man's own wheel chair and got them to the triage unit and we left and came back.

So, that little bit of a story as a background to the message if you will bear with me in having told that story.

I don't now why God wanted us there exactly, but as I say, one of my African American friends went with 20 church vans and other pastors and they were all turned away. Some school busses were turned away. I don't know. For some reason we got in there. We were totally safe. People smelled terrible. They told us that they had seen terrible things that they did not want to talk about, but as we took this very long, circuitous route back almost to where we came from then to go into the New Orleans airport at the back door that way, we began to hear things. There were a lot of gang rapes and there were a lot of people on drugs. And most of the people that were in the Superdome were people like in terms of just ordinary people except they were poor and overwhelmingly African American as over against, say, white American.

But other than that they were people like you and wanted to work, manage their money well, raise their children, take care of their grandchildren, have a home. That's who we were dealing with. But without adequate authority, without adequate law enforcement and a clear cut chain of command in place in large numbers people who were high on drugs, crack cocaine addicts, armed together can do horrible things to other people.

So these poor people, elderly people, people in wheel chairs, people from nursing homes; one man was a man who had been in a hospital and on Monday they evacuated from the hospital to the Superdome in his own wheelchair. People like that who were victims of the storm now were victims of the most lawless elements of society who, in normal times, are held in check and suppressed by civil authority. And civil authority is God's gift to us according to Romans 13.

So what about all those poor people, those people who stayed because they didn't have a way out, those people who were in hospitals because they couldn't get out, those people who chose—believing that, once again, New Orleans would dodge the bullet—why did they suffer the way they suffered? I want to take you, this morning, on a trip to Job's house.

We read this story, Job chapter one, and verse 18—page 789: “While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house.’”<sup>4</sup> And I think of New Orleans as a place of good food and good drink. It’s a party place. It’s called the big easy because it has always kind of had an easy lifestyle, port city and an interesting city, a multi-cultural city from its founding.

And I think about all of this. Here are Job’s children. And it is easy for us when we read this account in Job chapter one that Job’s children were eating and drinking, that somehow or another it was because they were eating and drinking that they become the victims of this storm. But the text never tells us that, does it?

It simply says: “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in.”<sup>5</sup> Why did it happen? The text never tells us explicitly. It only tells us implicitly.

But I want us to see something here. The most righteous and blameless man on the face of the earth at the time, the most godly man on the face of the earth according to the Word of God himself, Job 1:1: “In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.”<sup>6</sup> This man suffered. This man suffered profoundly and he, himself, is not a guilty man. He is not a man at whom we need to point the finger and say, “It’s ‘cause Job didn’t do a good job as a father. It’s ‘cause Job didn’t have his children in order. It’s because of this or because of that.” It simply happens. That’s what we read.

Well, the tendency is, of course, to finger point and one of the reasons for finger pointing is we want to be able to figure the universe out. We want to put God in a box. We want to put events in a box. And we want to say, “Well, this happens because of this and this and this.” Because if we can figure that out, then somehow or another we can figure out how to be exempt from these tragedies, exempt from these storms, exempt from terrible things happening to us. And we also have a deep seated need to justify ourselves at other people’s expense. It’s gone on from time immemorial.

You can find it in the New Testament. Turn with me, if you will, to John chapter nine, John chapter nine. We always want to figure it out. We always want to be able to say why. And we want to say that the why is because people are not like us; page 1664—John chapter nine, verse one. “As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”<sup>7</sup> It’s always the way.

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was drowned in Hurricane Katrina?”

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<sup>4</sup> Job 1:18

<sup>5</sup> Job 1:18-19

<sup>6</sup> Job 1:1

<sup>7</sup> John 9:1-2

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he saw his daughter raped before his eyes and he was powerless to do anything about it because thugs had him pinned to the floor?”

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he is in a wheelchair having been wheeled in there from a hospital and he is beaten and all of his possessions are stolen?”

“Who sinned, this woman or her parents, that she is raped not once or twice, but over and over again?”

“Who sinned, these people or their parents, that they have to live amongst corpses?” As a man told us yesterday, he was riding in our van and the stench was overwhelming because people simply defecated sometimes in their own clothing and urinated in their own clothing. The stench was overpowering. Thank the Lord that olfactory nerve adjusts after a while.

One of the people on our van was a crazy woman and a man explained to us a little bit about her. “She’s looking for her children,” he said. She came into the Superdome with five children. She’s crazy.

“Who sinned, this woman or her parents, that she doesn’t know where her five children are?”

We are always wanting to ask that question just as Jesus disciples asked him in the gospel of John, “Who sinned, this man or his parents?”<sup>8</sup>

I think Jesus’ answer is profound because Jesus doesn’t always answer every question that we’ve got. The Bible isn’t written to explain everything. The Bible is written to explain enough and to give us enough information that we might know what it is to do in this world to bring glory to God and to do good for others.

And Jesus is incredibly positive. Look at the next verse, verse three: “‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> And he doesn’t mean that people don’t sin. He is simply saying to us, “It’s not because they as individuals had committed some egregious, terrible sin and were singled out for special suffering because of special sin.” But his point is what? The next statement: “This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”<sup>10</sup>

And this is how we have to look at this storm. This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. I wanted to do something even though my works were piddling. It was nothing. And it was a mere weird set of coincidences that I ended up being down there with Sandy. But I wanted to do something. And I wanted to do it in Jesus’ name. That’s all I wanted to do, do something, do something in Jesus’ name.

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<sup>8</sup> John 9:2

<sup>9</sup> John 9:3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

And Jesus is saying of this man's suffering that it is an opportunity for God to be glorified. And then he goes on and he says something to you and me. "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."<sup>11</sup>

And five sermons could be preached on those verses in light of what has happened. Because it is when darkness would fall on the city that the terrible things really increased, lawlessness increased, violence increased, suffering increased.

And I also think of Christ, that if we will not be enlightened by the light of Christ we will be consumed by the darkness of pagan darkness and civilization has a very thin veneer over human nature. And if you take the Bible seriously at all, take it at face value. The Bible teaches that human beings are affected in every aspect by sin. That's what we call total depravity. Not that we are as bad as can be, but no aspect of our nature has escaped the influence of sin. That's what you are dealing with. Remove God's hand of restraint through civil government and lawlessness breaks out even among good people.

I'll talk about that tonight as we think about the security of the believer in Part II.

Lawlessness breaks out when we pull back the restraint of civilization.

A passage in Deuteronomy. The most refined and delicate man, the most refined and delicate woman among you will eat their own children in certain circumstances. That's what God says in the book of Deuteronomy. We'll talk about that tonight.

But we want to finger point. Turn with me, if you will, to Luke chapter 13. We want to finger point. Not always because we are self righteous, but because we want to make sure that we've got our insurance policy paid in full. We want to make sure that we can get ourselves exempt from these kinds of things happening.

Luke chapter 13—page 1619. Pray for me. Luke 13, verse one—page 1619.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."<sup>12</sup>

There is a man made disaster being talked about in verse two. But now we have a non-man made disaster. We have what insurance companies like to call an act of God.

Verse four: "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John 9:4-5

<sup>12</sup> Luke 13:1-3

<sup>13</sup> Luke 13:4



And you could say, “Well, it’s not really, you know...it’s how it was built and we’re going to find a way to sue and blame the builder or the guy that cut up the stones or the person that made the mortar. We’ll always find the deepest pockets.”

Verse four: “Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”<sup>14</sup>

That’s a warning to us. It is a warning to us when we take note of the fact that this very day if the storm had not come, southern decadence week would be being celebrated in New Orleans?

What is southern decadence? It is what it says. It’s when people throw off all restraint and give themselves over to every conceivable and many inconceivable forms of total depravity.

Or we could say, “Look at the Mississippi Gulf coast.” The great gambling industry of the Mississippi Gulf coast was wiped out and we could say, “See there? Those wicked Biloxi people...” We could point fingers, couldn’t we? And we could say, “It’s because of their gambling industry, because gambling always takes from stupid people and poor people and gives money to smart people and rich people.” It’s how it works.

See, commercial gambling is not like you’re sitting down in the backroom with five friends and playing poker and all of you are pretty equally smart or stupid, pretty equally skilled or unskilled, pretty equally deceptive or non deceptive. And, you know, one guy wins one week and another guy wins the next week.

You've got to understand something. When you go into a casino you’re not going to win. I mean do you understand that? Commercial gambling is commercial gambling because the odds are built in mathematically to make sure that the people who come there lose more than they win. Will you win? Well, once in a while. But I can assure you that your winnings are not going to offset your losings. How do you think those people operate building these opulent palaces for gambling and having enough money left over to bribe politicians’ palms in order to get these things into existence to start with?

And that’s how it happens, you know. That’s how it happens. Bribery.

So we could say, “It’s because Mississippi politicians are crooked and because of their wicked gambling industry. God got them. Or because of New Orleans with its free lifestyle and its crooked politicians and this corrupt state of Louisiana that is maybe as corrupt as Mississippi.” But we have a...we have an image as being more corrupt but who is to say? Clever politicians don’t get caught.

So who is to say? I remember when I first moved here 30 years ago to be your pastor my wife and I were overwhelmed at the open political corruption. It was open. And I told

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 13:4-5

my daddy about it and that same next year the congressman that I personally knew who had been an acquaintance of my father's, John Generet—and if you remember it, he was caught in an FBI sting operation and his wife posed naked. This US Congressman's wife posed naked for photos that were shot—I never saw them—I think in *Playboy* magazine.

So I thought of my moralistic South Carolina where I was born and bred and I thought, “Wow, Huey Long and Edwin Edwards, wow, they ain't got nothing on South Carolina.”

It's easy for us to point fingers. If you're a Republican you point fingers at Democrats. If you're a Democrat you point fingers at Republicans. If you are the mayor you point fingers at the state and federal government. If you are the state government you point fingers at the city government of New Orleans and the federal government. If you are the federal government you point fingers at the state and municipal government. If you are white you point fingers at blacks and if you're blacks you point fingers at whites.

And let me tell you, that is going on. That is going on. And the fact of the matter is: Don't give me your skubalon that puts all the blame one place or another and exempts anybody. Bottom line is: We've got a problem.

Government is not big enough to solve every problem. It isn't. Is George Bush incompetent? Absolutely. Do you think you can do a better job than he can? You're a fool. Is Kathleen Blanco incompetent? Absolutely. You think you can do a better job? You're a fool. Is Mayor Nagin incompetent? Absolutely. You think you can do a better job? You're a fool.

The bottom line is when you face so monumental a thing you got to remember you are dealing with human incompetency. Guess what? I am. You are. It's the nature of human beings. And our government is deliberately inefficient. It was planned that way by the founders. You have checks and balances. You have three branches of government, not one. You have the legislative, which is the most important in the US Constitution; the executive is small potatoes in the Constitution compared to the legislative branch. And there is the judiciary after the executive.

And then you have, in our Constitution, separation of powers in terms of state and federal government. We are not designed to be a centralized federal authority. That's not Constitutional. It's not in keeping with the American system of government.

So there is inefficiency. And when things get so big the system breaks down.

Now, there is an alternative to that. You can have Adolf Hitler, Joe Stalin, Mao Tse Tung in power and give them absolute dictatorial power because dictatorships are fare more effective and efficient at times than representative government. I'm just saying they are things.

But the tendency to point fingers is there. It's there. Let me tell you. The worst of that is yet to come.

What's Jesus word to that to us in that? Before you go pointing fingers start looking at yourself. That's a word to me. I've got deficiency, areas of sin in my life I've got to look at, I've got to take seriously. And he warns us and he says, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."<sup>15</sup>

Do you think that's the last destructive thing to happen to America? Absolutely not. What does New Orleans illustrate to us? It illustrates what will happen to any American city in the face of a colossal disaster. And let me tell you: The difference between September the 11<sup>th</sup> and the hurricane are enormous because government is still in place in the city of New York when it happens. Civil authority is still in place. The ability to get people to a relatively isolated area is still in place.

Was it a terrible disaster? Yes. But you could still get people. You never lost control of the city. But in this you lose control of the city.

And I'm simply saying, I'm not minimizing the one disaster at the expense of the other. I'm simply saying there is no comparison. The point is that if you had a disaster that hit New York City or Los Angeles or Chicago or San Francisco or Houston or Dallas that in a comparable way disabled the ability of police to function, city government to function, you will see the same thing because human beings are alike. You are like those people in New Orleans whether you like to think of yourself that way or not.

If you are rich you are like poor people. If you are white you are like black people. It's just there are superficial differences.

And so Jesus' words to us are profound and poignant and searching. "Unless you repent," he says, "You will all likewise perish."<sup>16</sup>

But the greatest finger pointer in the Bible is found in the book of Job. Turn with me, if you will, to Job chapter 22. The greatest finger pointer in the Bible is in the book of Job, Job chapter 22. In his zeal to have easy answers, in his zeal to have cliché aphorisms to respond to every circumstance, glib responses that make it easy to figure things out, this man becomes angrier and angrier. The book of Job is a book of lies. The first two chapters aren't lies. God speaking out of the whirlwind are not lies. The final section, the epilogue is not a lie. But the middle part of the book is full of people lying and thinking that they got it all figured out when they don't have it figured out. And this book in this chapter is more riddled with lies than any other portion.

You say, "Well, how is that the Word of God?"

It is because God has given us an infallible guide in holy Scripture. And the Bible is inerrant. And without error God the Holy Spirit has given us an accurate picture of how you and I respond in the face of tragedy to somebody else.

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<sup>15</sup> Paraphrase of Luke 13:5

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

So what happens is in Job 22:1—page 815—Eliphaz the Temanite starts spewing lies. Why does he spew lies? Because we want to win our arguments. That’s why. When we get into a dispute with somebody we want to be able to one up them. We want to prove they are wrong and we are right because we find our own biases are so deeply embedded in our thinking that it is hard for us to suspend them for a moment and examine if perhaps we were a little bit wrong in how we saw things. And Eliphaz is so committed to the idea that all this trouble is Job’s fault, it’s Job’s fault that his children were killed. It’s Job’s fault. That finally he starts spewing out his venomous lying in chapter 22, verse four—page 815.

“Is it for your piety that he rebukes you,” he asks Job, “and brings charges against you?”<sup>17</sup> Verse five: “Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?”<sup>18</sup>

This is the thing you need to go say to people in shelters. “It’s ‘cause you all had southern decadence down there and *Mardi Gras* and you encouraged young ladies to flip up their tops and expose their bare breasts in order to get beads thrown at *Mardi Gras*. That’s why this is happening to you. It’s because you all had that gambling industry.”

“Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?”<sup>19</sup>

You got to understand something. The vast majority of people that lived in New Orleans didn’t profit from all of that. They were just people like you trying to eke out a living and raise their kids. And, in many cases, they didn’t have the means to get out of the city. They are just like you and me except I’ve got credit cards and money and a vehicle. And I’ve got relatives in other places. And many of those people’s families are confined to their neighborhoods and they didn’t have credit cards and cash and it wasn’t yet pay-day.

“Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?”<sup>20</sup> he says. “You demanded security from your brothers for no reason.”<sup>21</sup> That’s a lie. “You stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked.”<sup>22</sup> That’s a lie.

But we’ll lie about other people and exaggerate and make up stories in order to make ourselves feel better and feel like we really understand the ways of God and we really understand the universe. And that’s what Eliphaz shows us, our enormous capacity to finger point and, through exaggeration, to lie about other people.

But verse seven: “You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, though you were a powerful man, owning land—an honored man, living on it.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Job 22:4

<sup>18</sup> Job 22:5

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Job 22:6

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Job 22:7-8

Verse nine:

You sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, why it is so dark that you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you.<sup>24</sup>

Yeah, that's in the Bible, but it is Satanic, demonic lies accurately recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to warn us about glib censorious responses. And Jesus' words come haunting back into our souls where he says, "You, too. Me, too. You're going to repent. Worse things are coming, my friends. Worse things are coming. Destruction is decreed. Worse things are coming. This isn't over. This isn't over. More is coming. Get right with God," says Jesus. "You've got to repent. You've got to repent."

But Eliphaz doesn't want to repent. Eliphaz goes to Job with good intentions. But Eliphaz ends up in this his frustration cursing Job, lying about Job, blaming Job.

Job chapter two—page 790—Job chapter two, verse 11:

When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathise with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.<sup>25</sup>

I want to tell you, if they had just done that they would have been ok. It's when we give our stupid, figuring out, glib comments that we do the work of Satan rather than the work of God.

I want you to consider that in the middle of all of this God has a response and it is found near the end of the book of Job. Turn with me, if you will, to Job chapter 42—page 842—Job 42:7. This is the Lord speaking. "After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite."<sup>26</sup>

Isn't it interesting that four men spoke to Job, but only one of them is singled out individually for a divine rebuke? He was the most censorious and judgmental. In his zeal to make his philosophy fit the circumstances he resorts to lies. So God singles out Eliphaz

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<sup>24</sup> Job 22:9-11

<sup>25</sup> Job 2:11-13

<sup>26</sup> Job 42:7

with his superficial, fraudulent theology, his glib philosophy. The Lord speaks to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you.”<sup>27</sup>

Does God get angry at you? God sure got angry with New Orleans, sure got angry with the Mississippi Gulf coast. He sure must have been angry with Job, huh? Job’s kids are killed. Great windstorm. But who is God angry with in this book? He is angry at the lay theology that misses the mark, that is too superficial. You know, it has always been hard for people to pay attention in church. People want 10 minute messages that mean very little. They want an inspirational pep talk, the kind of drivel that I was subjected to every Friday at the Rotary Club for a 10 year period. That’s what they want: challenging, encouraging, but not really bringing information to bear so that you can chew on it, reflect on it and change how you think. People want to listen to the reverend Eliphaz of the church of the Temanites because it offers them comfort with quick easy answers. And God wants us to stretch our minds and pay attention because the thing that’s most important in your life ever week happens here on Sunday morning. And if you don’t think that it’s because you’ve been brainwashed by popular sick narcissistic American culture.

“I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”<sup>28</sup>

Wow. All the network commentators, the conservatives and the liberals, they are all here. Their easy answers, their finger pointing, they are all here. And us, as well, when we give our glib answers.

So he tells them to go sacrifice under an older covenant system in verse eight. And then he tells them something in the next sentence, still part of verse eight. “My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”<sup>29</sup>

What if...what if God said to the Presbyterians and the Baptists and the Catholics and the Lutherans and the AOG’s and everybody else, “When you get those poor black folks of New Orleans to pray for you then I’ll deal with you graciously.”

Wow. Now, I didn’t say that’s what the Bible says. I just said, “What if.” What if the only way you’re going to get blessed by God is that you’ve got poor, uneducated African Americans from the big easy praying for you? Now, that’s not true, of course. But it is a kind of frightening thought, isn’t it? Because the fact of the matter is: Most of us don’t know people like that.

My servant Job, that’s the one who had his house knocked down. That’s the one who lost everything in a natural disaster. That’s the one whose children were killed in this horrible

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Job 42:8

storm. He said, “He will pray for you. I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.”<sup>30</sup>

What if Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly and Geraldo Rivera and some of the other commentators...what if they were told that God was going to deal with them according to their own judgments? Wow.

Job does pray for his friends and God does deal with them.

Verse nine: “So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer.”<sup>31</sup>

“After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.”<sup>32</sup>

Why did this happen? Well, it was all a natural phenomenon. The book of Job is all about that. You need to get away from the typical western philosophical grid and think biblically. The western philosophical grid wants things figured out in precise boxes. “This is true. This is not true. This happens this way. This has this way.”

Understand this, and this is a subject for another sermon, but I have preached it before: Everything that happens in our world can be explained as natural phenomenon. No phenomenon occurs that’s not caused by other natural phenomenon. And that’s true in the book of Job. These storms arise and if you had been living there...had that happened in our time with weather satellites we would have seen that it could all be explained. Everything that happens in the book of Job is as explainable by natural cause as the hurricane is explainable by natural cause.

Is it somewhat God and somewhat nature? No, that’s not a biblical answer. It is entirely natural. It is entirely natural.

But the book of Job takes Job...takes us behind the scenes where Job was never permitted to go. The book of Job opens up a curtain in the first two chapters to understand yet a second model for understanding reality. Everything that happens there—we’re coming back to Job 42 in a moment. Turn back to Job one—everything that happens in the book of Job happens as a result of this conflict between the God of the Bible and Satan, everything that happens.

Look at this. Job chapter one, verse nine—page 789. “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Paraphrase of Job 42:8

<sup>31</sup> Job 42:9

<sup>32</sup> Job 42:10

<sup>33</sup> Job 1:9

Verse 10: "Have you not put a hedge around him?"<sup>34</sup> It sounds like New Orleans with its system of levies.

"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. But stretch out your hand [verse 11] and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan [in verse 12], "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."<sup>35</sup>

Everything that happens in the book of Job can be understood under this second paradigm. There is a war going on, dear ones. It is a war between Christ and the devil. And at times it seems that the devil is winning. That's the second paradigm. The Lord and the devil. Who causes the wind storm according to Job chapter one? Satan causes it. Who is behind that hurricane that hit New Orleans? Satan is behind that. What's Satan's purpose in that storm? To do the same stuff that's happened so far and a whole lot more. Because let me tell you: Race relations in America have been on the decline for over a decade and this storm has taken them in a nose dive.

I want to tell you something from interacting with a friend of mine this morning as an African American pastor. Brother so-and-so and a group of black pastors took 20 church vans and they wouldn't let them in. Why did I get in? Because I'm white. They didn't get in because they were black.

Well, that's not true. But that's what they believe. That's not true. I got in because God had a weird purpose in having this mysterious phone call come to me with a man whose accent was so thick I couldn't understand him. And he had to repeat himself. And finally I got it written down accurately: Mile marker 209 on I-10. That's how I got there.

Why didn't they get in? You think New Orleans is chaotic two days ago, wait till you have 70,000 or 100,00 volunteers all trying to do their own thing. You've got to submit to authority.

Why did I get in there? Because I submitted to major Mosier from Texas and I simply, humbly said, "I'm here 'cause I was told to come. What do you want me to do?"

I submitted to authority. It wasn't because I was white. And they weren't turned away because they are black. But let me tell you: Satanic forces are at work in America right now to stir up demagoguery, to point the finger. Let me tell you something. This is a true story. Ritchie and I are headed down to Baton Rouge on Thursday. Ritchie has the radio on and he telephones me on the cell phone and he said, "Baton Rouge is in lock down. There are SWAT teams on the street because the people from New Orleans are rioting in Baton Rouge."

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<sup>34</sup> Job 1:10

<sup>35</sup> Job 1:10-12



So I thought to myself, “Well, I ought to check this out.” So I’ve got a son in Baton Rouge and he’s in that tallest private building, One American Place. So I called Ben who is a lawyer there.

I said, “Ben. We just heard this report.”

He said, “It’s true, dad.”

I said, “It’s true?”

“Yes, sir, dad,” he said. Said, “Security came on the intercom and we were told to stay in our offices. The building is in lock down that they are rioting in the streets. There are shootings and car jackings and there is violence and the SWAT teams are out and we are to stay put.”

And I said, “Oh, my goodness.” So we have to pull off and do some conferring.

And then I get a phone call back from my son and he said, “Daddy, it was all a hoax.” He said, “There was a secretary who wrote up an email and sent it and went...it multiplied just incredibly, kind of like in that Walt Disney movie years ago with the Sorcerer’s Apprentice and Mickey Mouse sweeping, you know, the...anyhow...”

And finally it gets to a boss somewhere and he goes running to the security for the building and he goes, “Look, I just got this email.” Well, if you’re head of security for a 26 story—I believe it’s 26 story—building in Baton Rouge and you’re told there is rioting on the street and that people are shooting and that they are armed and they are taking over the city. What do you do? Well, you do the one thing anybody would do with good sense. You lock down the building. You put your guards on the doors and you get on the intercom and you tell everyday in the building, “Stay put. This is the situation that we have been told.”

It just turned out it was a hoax.

So my son calls me back. He says, “Dad, I’ve been walking around the streets.” This is like 30 minute later. “I’ve been walking around the streets. There is none of this is going on.”

And you may have heard the stories that are going on around here. Terrible things. Let me tell you something. America is a racist country. How do I know that? Because I am a racist. And if you are honest about yourself you will admit it, too. And black folks who are honest will admit it and white folks will admit it. You don’t get out of your emotional self how you are raised. You don’t have to act like a racist. You don’t have to talk like a racist. But you’ve got to understand that what is embedded in you as a child affects you the rest of your life in terms of your *prima facie* initial reaction emotionally. It affects me. Come on. It affects you. Till you admit it affects you, you’ll never do anything about it. It affects America and it affects Louisiana. It affects everywhere.

Look, read the book of Acts. Why did deacons get created? Because there was racial—in that sense cultural—division in the local church. So I’m saying what? Am I trying to accuse you? Not unless I’m accusing me? I’m simply saying that differences between people serve Satan as opportunities to exploit those differences to create a climate of fear.

What are you more likely, as white people, to be afraid of: A stranger coming to your door at night who is white dressed in a business suit or a stranger coming to your door who is dirty, obviously wearing soiled clothing who has come from New Orleans and he is an African American? Come on. Let’s not kid ourselves. What are you more likely to react to with fear?

Am I saying you’re some kind of bad person because you have to deal with this? No. I’m just saying you’ve got to be aware of your prejudices. They are there. They are embedded in you. They are instilled in you as a little kid. Like Rogers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*: You’ve got to be carefully taught to hate and fear people who are not like you. That’s the song, *You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught*.

Satan is in this. Satan wants a race war in America. Satan wants Jessie Jackson to stir up a whole group of people and pit those people against, say, George Bush. Maybe we all need to work together.

When I was in front of the Superdome yesterday I saw black soldiers and white soldiers. I saw them trying to help people and the people that came out of the Superdome were black people and white people, though overwhelmingly black. There were white people there, too.

Satan wants to pit everything. You’ve got to understand the second model. In the book of Job everything can be explained by natural phenomena. Secondly, everything can be explained because of this war between Christ and Satan.

But then we see something else in Job chapter one. We’re almost through. Job chapter two, rather, verse three, Job two, verse three—page 790. “Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’”<sup>36</sup>

Who says that? Let’s read it again. Verse three: “Then the LORD said to Satan.”<sup>37</sup> Who is talking here? The Lord is talking. He is speaking to Satan. And this is what the Lord said: “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you [Satan] incited me [God] against him to ruin him [Job, to ruin him—look at the last prepositional phrase there:] without any reason.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Job 2:3

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Turn with me to Job chapter 42—page 842—verse 11, Job 42:11: “All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble...”<sup>39</sup> who brought on him? The Lord brought on him. “And each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.”<sup>40</sup>

Who brought all that trouble on Job according to Job 42:11? Who did? The Lord did.

Turn with me, lastly, to the book of Amos, chapter three—page 1422—Amos chapter three, verse six—page 1422: “When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?”<sup>41</sup>

Now, I know you’ve got your theological answers here and we’re so western in how we think. We want to divide this up and say, “Well, it’s partly natural. It’s partly demonic and it’s partly the Lord.” That’s not a biblical answer. The biblical answer is: All three things are totally true. This was natural. What happened to Job and his family, the wind-storm that destroyed the house, the robbers that stole his goods, it’s totally natural. You don’t need God or Satan to explain it. You can look at cause and effect. There is this nexus or chain of events, natural phenomena happen because of natural phenomena. This hurricane was a natural phenomenon. You can chart it out. You know what caused it somewhat. That’s true. That’s one model. That’s one paradigm for understanding reality.

We don’t need to look to supernatural things to figure things out. You know why it happens.

But there is a second paradigm. And that second paradigm is just as true, just as valid as the first paradigm and that is: There is war between Christ and Satan. And in that war there are human casualties and Satan hates human beings. Satan wants to see young girls raped. He wants to see old people beaten, even beaten to death. He wants to see people have their water and food stolen from them so that others can horde it or barter it for drugs. He wants that kind of violence. He wants people to be like what I saw at the airport yesterday when a sheriff’s deputy arrested a young man high on crack cocaine, but after 30 minutes of holding him by the side of the car took his knife out and cut that plastic set of handcuffs and let him go.

And I asked the deputy, “Why did you do that.”

He said, “Nobody would take him off my hands and I ain’t going to take him to Vermilion parish.” That’s what he told me.

So he let him go in the New Orleans airport. Wow.

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<sup>39</sup> Job 42:11

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Job 3:6

Why feed another prisoner in Vermillion Parish jail?

Satan is at work. He causes the storm. He manipulates the forces of nature. That's a true and accurate paradigm.

There's a third paradigm. And we must not go to glibly to that third paradigm. And we must not embrace that third paradigm without reflecting on the other two, even though it is overarching and absolutely true. The third paradigm is: Nothing, absolutely nothing happens apart from God's eternal decree. That storm did not arise apart from the Lord God of hosts from before the world began having predestined that it happen including the hedge around the city of New Orleans finally breaking.

I have trouble believing that.

That's what the Bible says.

So rather than trying to explain this as, "Well, this is true, but this can't be true," embrace all three paradigms. They are all three true.

Get over your western need to have it all figured out. All three things are true.

So, lastly, I close with this. Where was God in that? The first thing you got to remember: The hell of the Superdome is nothing like the real hell. The real hell is far beyond that. You can't commit suicide in the real hell and get away. And there really is a hell. And if you have not repented of your sins and cast yourself on God's mercy in Jesus Christ, you are going to go to hell and it will make what happened in the Superdome these past days to be dwarfed.

There really is a hell, but—and this is the heart of the matter—our Lord Jesus Christ who is God loved you enough and loved the people of New Orleans enough to die on the cross for you and me, to take our sin, to take our guilt, to take the consequences, the shame of our sin on himself. In effect, if you really understand the cross, you understand that God went to hell for you. The cross is about Jesus Christ entering into the Superdome and allowing himself to be raped. The cross, to put it in a modern metaphor, is about Jesus allowing himself to be wheeled in a wheel chair into the Superdome as an elderly person and allowing himself to be beaten in the head so his meager belongings could be stolen. That's the cross. The cross is that Jesus hangs on the cross and says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>42</sup> Words, very reminiscent of Job in Job 23: "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"<sup>43</sup>

Where is God in all of this? God took on human nature in Jesus and that means he took on human suffering in Jesus, including the suffering of people in that city. And that is brought to us in a very clear way in the Supper.

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew 27:46

<sup>43</sup> Job 23:3 (KJV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night in which he was betrayed, having given thanks, he took bread and broke it and said, "Take, eat. This is my body." Afterwards they supped. He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. All of you drink it."

I want to invite you. If you are a Christian....