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The Battle for Us Jesus Overcomes Satan When the Devil Attacks Us

Since he failed to overcome Jesus, Satan turns his attention to Jesus' followers. As Jesus carried his cross to undo what Satan had done, so we often carry crosses of trouble and temptation laid on us by the devil and his forces. While the Lord sometimes delivers us from this evil, he uses the crosses we do carry to bring us closer to Jesus and strengthen our resolve to follow him. Our crosses become more precious to us than the crowns Satan offers since they connect us to Christ by faith.

Sermon Job 1:1-2

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. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

Introduction – Crucifixion was a method of torture and execution in the ancient world. It's still considered to be the most painful and disgraceful method of capital punishment ever invented. In Jesus' day people were terrified by the thought of the cross. In the Gospel for today Jesus told Peter that he was going to die. Peter rebuked him. If Jesus had told Peter he was going to die on a cross, Peter would have exploded in protest. And then Jesus said this: **Those who want to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

The Christian cross is a trouble or a tragedy or a temptation that Satan lays on believers to challenge and destroy their faith. When he lays a cross on us, Satan always offers an alternative; let's call it a crown. "If you give up on Jesus, if you walk away from Jesus, I'll take the cross away and give you something better"—which, of course, he never does. So carrying the cross and rejecting the crown is critical in our lives with God. Jesus said, **Whoever wants to save his life will lose it:** Whoever grabs Satan's crown will lose his life with God. And he said again: **Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.** Whoever carries the cross and stays with me with have the life God has to give.

Sometimes the cross is a temptation that won't go away like an addiction to cheating or alcohol. The cross might be a problem we live with all our lives, like poverty or depression. And sometimes the cross is a tragedy like a fatal accident or cancer. Crosses come in various shapes and sizes. We all carry crosses in some way. The cross comes with the Christian life.

His name was Job. He lived in the land of Uz and he was the greatest man among all the peoples of the East. Job was a faithful believer in God and he was very blessed by God. One day three messengers arrived breathlessly at his door, one after another, and brought the terrible news that Job had lost everything: his property, his employees, and his children. From that moment Job was carrying a cross.

Jesus has called us to take up our crosses and follow him. In Job's story we can see that

Jesus Equips Us to Carry Our Crosses

The Bible tells us that Job was **blameless and upright; that he feared God and shunned evil**. Satan noticed and got it into his head that Job was good to God only because God was good to Job and so Satan challenged God. God accepted the challenge and allowed Satan to lay a cross on Job. Like we heard in the First Reading, in one day Job lost everything he had (cf. Job 1:13-19).

First things first. There is no bad in God. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that God is perfectly good. God doesn't send temptations or troubles or tragedies into anyone's life. On the other hand, there is no good in Satan. Satan is the agent behind addictions and poverty and disease and every other evil we can think of. What God does is allow Satan to use his evil in certain controlled ways, sometimes to punish, like to execute a drug lord or a mass murderer. And sometimes God allows Satan to bring evil to our lives but never to punish. The crosses we carry mean to bring us closer to Jesus. Paul explained that in the Second Reading: **We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Paul was writing about his own cross when he wrote, Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me...For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

The truth is that the crosses we carry are good, not bad. But they're still tough and difficult and confusing and hard to understand. Job felt the awful weight of his cross. But when we see how God worked with Job, we also see how Jesus equips us to carry our crosses.

When tragedy struck, Job reached back to truths he had known since childhood. **Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.** Over the years of his life God had planted in Job's faith a set of unchanging truths that Job could rely on. Jesus has done the same for us. Think of the Bible passages and the prayers and the hymns we know by heart. When the cross arrives and when it gets heavy, those words are there: For God so loved the world...Now I lay me down to sleep...My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. We still feel the cross' weight bearing down on us, but those truths about Jesus relieve the pressure and lighten the load.

Heard this before? "He has the patience of Job." Truth is Job wasn't all that patient, not as time passed. Three of his friends came by to commiserate with him and Job exploded with bitterness. They tried to convince him that God was punishing him but Job became defensive. They tried to defend God, but Job accused God. Job was ready to walk away from God but God wasn't ready to walk away from Job. Even when the aches in his heart and the pains in his body were almost too heavy to bear, the Lord kept Job's faith alive, Job held to a hope that we remember and believe: **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.**

It happens to believers sometimes—and maybe it's happened to you—that the cross gets to be so heavy that faith begins to bend and hope starts to melt. God seems unfair, pain seems like punishment, questions become complaints, and folded hands turn into angry fists. But even when despair creeps in on doubt, Jesus is still with us, maybe quietly, maybe only in a whisper, but he is still there. St. Paul wrote, **God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.** The cross can get heavy but we never carry it alone.

Thank God for Elihu! Elihu was Job's fourth friend, his youngest friend. As it turned out, he was also Job's best friend because he was God's friend and he spoke words that came from God. He challenged Job: **Pay attention, Job, and listen to me; be silent and I will teach you wisdom.** He took Job through the paces: God allows the cross to rescue us from spiritual danger; God calls us to commit our lives to him and wait for him with patience; God's ways are unsearchable and cannot be challenged. What Elihu did was take Job back to God's truth. And that's what Jesus does for us. When the cross becomes heavy Jesus opens the Scriptures to us. The Bible says that God owes us nothing; our sins condemn us. The Bible also says that God loves us and gives us everything in Christ. The Bible says that God forgives our sins and opens heaven, that he gives us faith, hope, love, joy, courage, confidence, and strength to carry any cross. Jesus said in today's Gospel **Deny yourselves**—abandon

your own thoughts—**and follow me**: believe my thoughts and you find my thoughts in my Word and my sacraments.

When the cross comes our way, the inevitable question, the question almost every Christian asks is this: Why me? Why are you allowing this cross to weigh down on me? That was Job's question, too. Job's three friends had answers but they were the wrong answers. Elihu pointed Job to God's words, but there was no answer there.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of a storm. He said: Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. That was the first of over 50 questions the Lord fired to Job. The last two were like all the others: **Does the hawk take flight at your wisdom? Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high?** God's point was clear: You do not have a right, little Job, to question or challenge or debate with me. I am God and you are not. This is a truth we all need to know. The Lord said through Isaiah: **My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** St. Paul asked: **Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?** Who? Not I, not you, not anyone.

Take up your cross and follow me. That's what Jesus says. The cross is part of life for Christians. The one who carried his cross to free us from threat of sin calls us to carry our cross to protect us from the threats of Satan. Jesus doesn't always explain our crosses, but he always loves us as we carry them. He doesn't always share a reason, but he always shares a promise. We do not try to explore the Savior's brain but we rely on the Savior's heart. Job learned to do that and the Lord restored all that he had lost. **And we are convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

This I believe; yea rather, of this I make my boast,
That God is my dear Father, the friend who loves me most.
And that whate're betide me, my Savior is at hand,
Through story seas to guide me
And bring me safe to land. Amen.

The sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.