

A Final Appeal

Job 31

Intro: In chapter 31 we come to the last of Job's speeches. "The words of Job are ended." Job believes that he is dying. This is the last thing he wants to say. Last words are meaningful words. They often express the deepest feeling of those about to die.

* Frank Sinatra's last words were, "I'm losing."

* J. Gresham Machen's last words were sent in a telegraph to his friend, John Murray. "So thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."

As we have followed Job through his deep trauma, we've seen him wrestling with three painful realities:

- The agony of his devastating circumstance.
- The accusations of his miserable friends.
- The silence and seeming injustice of God.

Of these three, the greatest pain is the third one - the silence and seeming injustice of God. The greatest heartache is the sense that the God he once loved and served has forsaken him for no reason. In fact, Job charges God with being cruel and uncaring.

Job 30:20 I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;

I stand, and you only look at me.

²¹ You have turned cruel to me;

with the might of your hand you persecute me.

This is what Job has come to believe about God – and, on the one hand, who can blame him? Why **has** God allowed these things to happen? Why hasn't God rushed to help and comfort him? In his former life, Job had believed that God was a refuge for those who trusted in him. But Job **had** trusted in God – and his life was utterly destroyed, by God. And he didn't deserve it! God was persecuting a righteous man, an innocent man. God seems guilty of injustice.

Job's final speech, then, is not merely a defense of his innocence, it is a direct challenge to God. He is, in a sense, putting his defense down on paper, and filing it with the court of heaven. He is seeking to force God to respond.

Belcher, "Job's purpose is to give God no option but to answer him."

This is high drama! Job, in a sense, is putting God in the dock. If God does not respond, Job will treat God's silence as evidence that he, Job, is right. To that end, he details the facts that prove the righteous nature of his life.

This chapter is very helpful because it reveals to us, in wonderful detail what a righteous life looks like. We've been told in chapters 1 and 2, that Job was a blameless man, a man who feared God and shunned evil. But what does that actually mean? What does it look like in real life? If Proverbs 31 is a picture of a virtuous woman, Job 31 is a picture of a righteous man.

I. Job's Defense

A. *What He Didn't Do*

Job clearly gave careful thought and intention to godliness in every area of his life: his personal thought life, his sexual life, his relationship to his servants and the poor, his relationship to his wealth and his attitude toward his enemies. Here is his list of sins he avoided.

Lust: 1-4

Lying: 5-6

Coveting: 7-8

Adultery: 9-12

Injustice to Servants: 13-15

Lack of Generosity to the Poor: 16-20

Violence against the Defenseless: 21-23

Trust in wealth: 24-25

Idolatry of heavenly bodies like the sun and moon: 26-28

Vindictiveness towards enemies: 29-30

Concealing his own sin: 33-34

Abusing the land: 38-40

Job had carefully pursued righteousness in all of these areas.

One of the fascinating things about this chapter is that it reveals how thoroughly Job understood the scope and nature of sin – hundreds of years before God gave the law to Moses. How did Job know that these things were sinful? Because God has written these laws on the consciences of men. Everyone knows these things are sinful – their conscience tells them so. But most men and women chose to ignore their conscience in order to serve their desires.

Job did just the opposite.

31:1 "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?"

A covenant is a legal oath with stipulations and penalties. Job had sworn himself not to gaze at a woman with lust in his heart. When he saw an attractive woman, he made a

covenant not to feed on her beauty or desire her for sexual pleasure. This is a covenant with his heart as much as his eyes – a covenant to control his sexual impulses and desires.

Why does he start his defense with this? Because it is the most easily excused sin of men! Every man looks at attractive women. And they consider their impure thoughts to be as normal as breathing. It's no big deal. But to Job it WAS!

B. His Willingness to be Punished for Guilt.

Job isn't a man trying to escape punishment for his crimes. He will readily accept punishments appropriate to the sin – if he has committed it!

In verse 5 and following, he speaks of the consequences of lying:

:5 "If I have walked with falsehood and my foot hastened to deceit..... :8 Then let me sow and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out."

In verse 9 and following he speaks of adultery.

⁹ "If my heart has been enticed toward a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,
¹⁰ then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her.

Job accepts that there are judicial consequences for sin – and is willing to suffer themIF HE HAS COMMITTED THE CRIME! But he hasn't. He isn't guilty of these things!

C. His Desire to Obey God

The most frustrating and possibly infuriating thing about all this is that his righteous life was driven by his deep love and respect and fear of God. His moral life was a godly life.

The primary reason Job made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully at women is found in verse 2 and 4.

² What would be my portion from God above
and my heritage from the Almighty on high?
⁴ Does not he (God) see my ways and number all my steps?

God knows my secret thoughts! You see this God-consciousness again in verses 13—14 concerning his treatment of his servants.

¹³ " If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,
¹⁴ what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?

That's a really good question. When God asks me, "why are you mistreating your servants" – what will I say? The natural response of sinful men would be: "because they are my servants, they are my employees. I am over them and have the right to abuse them to get what I want or need from them." But Job has an entirely different approach.

¹⁵ "Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
And did not one fashion us in the womb?"

As a wealthy and powerful man, Job could have easily taken advantage of his position and wealth to treat his servants with contempt. What could they do to him? But, in Job's mind that wasn't the issue. The issue is what God could do to him. After all, God was the Creator of both Job and his servants, both Job and his poor neighbor. To abuse those created by God, in his own image, would bring the wrath of God on his own head. Job feared the Lord and therefore shunned evil.

Job fears the Lord both in terms of love and a deep respect bordering on terror. He states that clearly in verse 23. Why did he commit himself to showing mercy to the fatherless and grace to his enemies?

²³ For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.

And THAT is the devastating irony of this whole thing! Job diligently pursued obedience in every area of his life because he "was in terror of calamity from God". And what did he receive for all his efforts?? Calamity from God.

II. Job's Appeal

This is Job's final appeal. He has laid out the evidence of his life as grounds for his defense. He can honestly say that he is a righteous man in his dealings with fellow men. He doesn't claim to be sinless, but if he has sinned he has not hidden it (vs 33). He has lived faithfully and obediently in covenant relationship with God. Therefore, he should not be suffering God's judgement! That is his argument. And he is absolutely confident that if God, the Heavenly Judge, would just take up his case, and look at the evidence, Job would be declared to be innocent.

⁶ (Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!)

In verse 35 and 36 Job signs his name to his defense and officially places it before the divine court.

³⁵ Oh, that I had one to hear me!

(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)

Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!

This is incredibly bold. Job has, in a sense, put God on the dock. "Let the Almighty answer me!" It is time for God to speak up and testify to Job's innocence. And if He will not – then Job will proudly take God's silence as vindication.

Ash, "Job has run out of patience....He says, at last, 'I lay down my final case for the defense. I append my signature and I challenge the Almighty, no less, to answer me! If I am guilty then I challenge him to punish me as I deserve. And if he does not, then I will be declared righteous by default, for if an opponent is silenced and remains silent, he is defeated in court.'" (319)

And now, "the words of Job are ended". Job is finished speaking: he's done arguing with his foolish friends and done with trying to get God to respond to him. He's made his case, pressed his charge and now the ball is in God's court. If he has sinned – he is willing to pay the consequences.

But he is not willing to silently accept the false accusations of his friends.

He is not willing to meekly accept the penalty for crimes he hasn't done.

He is not willing to be treated as a great sinner when he **knows** that he isn't one!

III. The Application

What are we to make of this text?

First of all, we need to realize that Job's emphasis on his righteousness is perfectly biblical. It's critical to see that Job is not a hypocrite when it comes to his life. He really was the most godly man in the world of his day. God told Satan, "There is no one else like him." Job's life is a vivid display of what godliness and righteousness look like.

Secondly, Job's life is a reminder of the necessity of holiness for those who profess to believe in God. His righteous life is noteworthy because it is the evidence of his devotion to, and faith in God. He was serious about righteousness because he was serious about knowing and pleasing God.

DeYoung, "We must always remember that in seeking after holiness we are not so much seeking after a thing as we are seeking a person....To run hard after holiness is just another way of running hard after God." (Hole in our Holiness, 123)

The necessity of a holy life is a New Testament theme as well.

- Jesus says, "If you love me you will keep my commandments."
- The writer of Hebrews tells to "strive for holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

- The apostle John says “whoever says that he knows God but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). “Everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him” (2:29).

R.C. Sproul, “Righteousness is the goal of Christian discipleship. In the Christian world today such a statement may sound radical. Many people have spoken to me about being ethical, moral, spiritual or even pious. But nobody seems to want to talk about being righteous.”¹

And yet, John clearly says that the **evidence** of being born anew in Christ is “practicing righteousness.”

If someone accused you of being a Christian – would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would there be enough evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control to prove the charge? Would there be evidence of a life of humility and repentance and love for Christ Jesus?

J.C. Ryle, “It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ — unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect ...in our lives. Evidence, evidence, evidence will be the one thing needed when the great white throne is set, the books are opened, (and) the dead are arraigned before the bar of God.....The question will not be how we talked and what we professed — but how we lived and what we did.”

That’s sobering, don’t you think? Of course, I’m not saying that we are justified by our works or saved by our obedience. We are undoubtedly and gloriously saved by faith alone in the atoning work and imputed obedience of Christ alone. But the faith that saves cannot and will not be “alone”. The same Holy Spirit that works the miracle of regeneration will work the miracle of sanctification – and if there is no evidence of sanctification, then there is no evidence of regeneration. Faith without works is dead. Job’s righteous life was proof of a living faith in God. And our lives should be the same.

Finally, while Job’s faith and the righteousness that flowed from it are a great example to us – his life is not only an example. As we’ve said before, Job’s life is a foreshadowing of one who was yet to come.

- His unique obedience points forward to the perfect obedience of Christ.

¹ (R. C. Sproul *The Holiness of God*; quoted from Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 36)

- His physical and emotional suffering, *as an innocent man*, prophetically points to the suffering of Christ.

But here is one great difference. Job was not willing to silently suffer the punishment due a great sinner when he knew that he wasn't one. He was not willing to be falsely accused. He was not willing to bear the penalty for crimes he had not done – but Jesus was. Jesus was willing to suffer the excruciating torments of the damned though he was perfectly and completely without any sin. Though he was God Himself in flesh and without any sin, he was willing to go to the cross, in our place, bearing ours.

And in the end, that is our final appeal. We are saved by faith, and faith must bear the fruit of righteousness in our life. But when we stand before the court of God in heaven, our final appeal will not be our righteousness, but His. We will thank the Lord for the victories he won in our life, but our confidence will be in the victory He won with His. We will praise the Lord for the temptations we overcame for his glory. But our hope will be all the temptations He overcame for our sake. Jesus is our final appeal. As Machen so well said, "So thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."

1 John 3:3 "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."