

The End Comes at the End

Job 42

Intro: This morning we have come to the final chapter of this magnificent book. And we need to ask the question: "What are we supposed to do with this book? What is the lesson of Job for the believer today?"

In his commentary on this chapter, Christopher Ash makes this startling statement.

"The book of Job ought to shape our expectation of the normal Christian life. We may think that is a perverse suggestion since Job is such an extreme book, and yet it is true...We have no reason to expect that (God) will treat us in any radically different way if we belong to Christ." (426)

Man, there is something within me that does not like the sound of that. But it is true.

While the suffering of Job is extreme, the pattern of his life is the normal pattern of all those who belong to Christ – suffering now, glory later. Suffering is part of the plan. We will experience the grief of losing a loved one, a child or a spouse or friend. We will experience deep pain due to the sin of our spouse, or the devastation of financial ruin, or the crippling effects of a disease. This is the pattern of normal Christianity – suffering now, glory later. If you are memorizing Romans 8, you know what Paul says in verse 17.

"If we are sons, then we are heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we also suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Suffering is the normal pattern for God's people, not in spite of their faith in God, but precisely because of it. Job did not suffer, even though he was a believer, he suffered precisely *because* he was a believer. In chapter's 1 and 2 we were shown a conflict between Satan, the Accuser, and the Living God. And Job is thrust into that fight precisely because he believes in God.

This is normal Christianity. God has ordained that that the normal pattern of life for those who belong to Jesus is suffering now, and glory later.

1 Peter 4:12–13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

And that is exactly what we see in the life of Job. In our text this morning we will see the path along which God leads His children home. Repentance. Vindication. Glorification.

I. Repentance

The chapter begins where every Christian life begins, with repentance before the face of God. In verses 3-4 Job acknowledges that he had spoken without knowledge. He uttered things he didn't understand. He didn't know what he was talking about. He was blind and ignorant to the wonderful things that only God knows.

Verse 5 and 6 are critical verses.

⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Job, of course, had been a fervent, devoted believer in God. That is why he is suffering. But he has come face to face with the majesty and glory of God in a new way, and it has powerfully affected and changed him. This is what we see throughout Scripture. People who believe in God, come to see God in a new way and are brought immediately to a place of deep and radical self-loathing and repentance.

Isaiah 6 – "Woe is me for I am undone."

Peter – following the miracle of the catching of fish, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

John Piper once said that he did not pray for God to give his congregation a greater sense of their sin. He prayed instead that God would give them a greater sense of God. Until that happens sin will never be seen to be the vile, awful, horror that it is. Only in the presence of God is our sin rightly understood and truly repented.

What was Job like before chapter 38; before God began speaking? How did Job think of himself? He saw himself as a righteous man. An innocent man. And, compared to other men, he was. But when God appeared, Job suddenly saw himself in full truth and the result was repentance. "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." That's what happens when you have a fresh vision of the reality of the glory of God.

Jonathan Edwards had such an experience. He was reading his Bible and he says he suddenly gained a fresh understanding of the sheer, sovereign glory of God and this is what he said about himself.

"I've had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness than ever I had before my conversion. My wickedness as I am in myself appeared to me perfectly ineffable, swallowing up all thought and imagination like an infinite deluge or a mountain over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to be to me than to heap up infinite upon infinite, and multiply infinite by infinite."

Who talks like that? Those who know God. And those who know this God, trust in Him. And that's what we see in Job. Job has come to realize that God is gloriously God and has purposes that only He knows and only He can accomplish. Though Job still does not know the precise purpose of his suffering, he once again trusts in God – no matter what.

Remember what Job said to his wife when she invited him to curse God and die? He said, "Shall we receive good from the Lord and not receive evil?" (2:10). Receiving evil from the Lord is hard, and Job struggled mightily under the trial. But now, seeing the glory of God in all his perfect Sovereign reign, Job is now able and willing to receive the evil if it be God's will.

Job repentance brings the story, in one sense, full circle. Once again he is worshipping the Lord, trusting the Lord implicitly – though he has no idea why these things have happened to him, though he is still on the ash heap of his misery, he knows that God knows why this has happened to him, and that is enough.

Ash, "Job proves he is a real believer because he bows down to God in a time of pain. When he worships, he has no proof or certainty that he will be blessed. He worships because God is God. He lives by faith, not by sight." (432)

II. Vindication (7-9)

In verse 7-9 the Lord severely rebukes Job's three friends and gloriously vindicates Job! These are the men who had charged Job with great sin though they had no evidence. But notice, God does not rebuke them for speaking falsely about Job, but for speaking falsely about Him!

"You have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has." (7,8)

God at one and the same time rebukes these men and vindicates Job. Job is shown to be in the right and they are shown to be in the wrong. It's not that everything they said about God was wrong, but their words were not spoken from a true knowledge of God but from a religious, legalistic, caricature of God. The Lord's anger burned against these false teachers just as the anger of Jesus burned against the Pharisees and scribes of his day and for the very same reason.

But God, in His mercy, provides a way of forgiveness for these three men. But it is a hard way. It is a humbling way. They will have to go to Job, the one they offended, and ask him to be their priest, ask him to intercede before God on their behalf. The very one they

charged with great sin, has been vindicated by God to be a righteous man, and chosen by God to be the mediator for their sin.

It is a wonderful picture of our Lord Jesus, isn't it? The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The very one who was despised and rejected proves to be the only Mediator between God and men. No one comes to the Father but through him.

This was a great test for these men. Were they true believers in God or false pretenders? Their willingness to humble themselves would be the litmus test of their faith.

But it was a test for Job as well. These were his friends and they had betrayed him horribly. They had not only failed to comfort him; they had viciously attacked him. And now they want Job to do them this favor?? To intercede for them?? To ask God to forgive them?? Here they come, with their tails between their legs. And Job has them in a tight spot. If he will not pray for them, they will not be forgiven. But, of course, neither will he.

You see, this is a test for Job as well. The authenticity of his faith is also on the line. His willingness to forgive these men was the litmus test of whether he truly was submitted to the will of God and truly grasped the significance of his own forgiveness by God.

It's the same for us, isn't it? Forgiving those who sin against us isn't just a good thing to do – it's the litmus test of our faith. It's the evidence of whether or not we are actually trusting our lives to the Lord and receiving his grace for our own sin.

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This is a critical moment in the book! Job has a decision to make! He is still sitting on the ash heap. Will he trust the Lord there? Will he obey the Lord even in his suffering? Will he show grace to those who have wronged him – simply because he is deeply cognizant of God and grateful for his grace?? The Apostle Paul says that the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. This is the text for Job. Will Job's faith bear the fruit of love – even on the ash heap? That's the test. And Job passes the test. His faith is proved genuine. He prayed for his friends, right there on the ash heap, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

I want you to imagine that scene. Think of the love and grace and humility of this suffering man, there on the ash heap, as he lifts his scarred head and hands and asks the Lord to forgive these men who had hurt him so greatly. It's a picture of profound love. It's a picture of another suffering servant, praying for His enemies in the midst of his great affliction. As he laid down his life on the cross, bearing our sin, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And the Lord accepted his prayer.

In this last great act of faith and obedience, Jesus conquered death, and Job does the same.

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends.

As Job prayed in love and faith and obedience, on the ash heap – the Lord restored his fortunes.

III. Restoration

Having been vindicated, Job is now robed with a glory that surpasses anything he had known before. All the livestock and wealth that Job lost is returned double: double the sheep, camels and oxen and donkeys. His age is even significant – he lived for another 140 years, double the three score and ten God gives to his children in Psalm 90:10.

He is blessed with 10 children – 7 sons and three daughters. Why 10 and not 20? I don't know for sure. But the numbers are full of biblical significance.

10 is the number of fullness.

7 sons – the number of perfection.

Three daughters – the number belonging to God.

It's fascinating to me how much attention is paid to the daughters. This is particularly fascinating for a time which honored men and revered sons. But we are asked to pay attention specifically to the daughters. Though daughters were disdained in the world, these girls are given a triple blessing.

- They are named – signifying status and honor.
- They are given great, unrivalled beauty. "In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters."
- They receive an inheritance with the brothers. An unheard of blessing.

These daughters are given status, and beauty and their father's riches. Doesn't this sound like someone you know? Doesn't this sound like the church of our Lord Jesus? We are despised in the world, but these are precisely the things we are promised.

A new name signifying our status as the beloved children of God.
 Unsurpassed beauty and glory – unlike anything this world will ever know.
 Heirs with Christ of all the riches of heaven.

Job walked the valley of the shadow of death – but in the end he entered the land of God’s riches and his children were rewarded with his blessing. Everything lost was restored and more.

IV. Lessons

1. God has a Plan. Look at what God accomplished through the trials of Job.
 - a. God glorified himself in proving the Satan to be liar.
 - b. God lovingly purified the faith of Job and his friends.
 - c. God revealed himself and his ways for the blessing of countless saints since. Job is one of the oldest stories in the Bible. His life has instructed God’s saints since the time of Abraham!
 - d. God prophetically revealed Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant who defeated the Satan by his obedience and now successfully intercedes for all those who come to God through Him.
 - e. In the end, God was magnified as a gloriously good God. Job was vindicated and ushered into a time of glory.

2. Suffering has a Purpose. God seems to accomplish His greatest work for his children, through suffering. Suffering purges our idols, forces us to rely on God in a new way, removes the impurities of our faith, and deepen our joy.

Malcolm Muggeridge, a famous Christian journalist who died in 1990, said this, “Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness.”¹

3. The blessings come at the end. I’m convinced that Job’s final blessedness is meant to be for us a foreshadowing of a new heaven and earth. Like Job, we will experience times of great pain and heartache. There will be tragedies and long-lasting trials. And we need to remember, in our time of greatest pain, this isn’t the end of the story. The end is at the end and it is indescribably good.

Ash, "The end comes at the end. The normal Christian life is warfare and waiting and being loved and humbled by God and being justified by God, all in the here and now. But it is in the expectation of blessing at the end."

So, what shall we do with this book? Well, God has revealed himself to you – and now we face a test of our own. Will we trust this God though we do not understand his way in our life? I'm not saying will we submit or simply resign ourselves? But will we actually trust – in the middle of our pain and all we don't understand? Will we trust in a way that our faith bears the fruit of love and peace and grace and even joy? Job came to trust the Lord while still on the ash heap. He was never told why these things had happened. But he'd seen enough of the Lord to trust Him.

Have you? Has God done enough to prove His love, to show that He has a purpose, to manifest His power, to prove His faithfulness? What more can He say than to you He has said?

Then trust Him. Right now. In truth.

Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

¹ Malcolm Muggeridge, in *Homemade*, July, 1990