

The Fruit of Suffering

Job 42

It shouldn't surprise us, yet it almost always does, when we realize the difference between hearing about something and seeing it with your own eyes. You hear about a new movie everyone's talking about, and then you see it in the theater and it's far better than you imagined (or sometimes far worse). Or you're on vacation and you hear about some beautiful scenic attraction, but then you get there and words can't describe it.

A couple of summers ago we had a family reunion in South Dakota. And of course the main attraction in South Dakota is Mount Rushmore. But on the way to Mount Rushmore, there's the Badlands. And you hear, despite the name, that the Badlands are quite beautiful. (They're 'bad' in the 1980's Michael Jackson sense of the term.) So you decide to divert your course off of I-90, add a couple hours to your trip, and head south toward the Badlands. And you drive, wondering if this is going to be a waste of time; you're not really seeing anything yet. And then all of a sudden the earth opens up into this majestic canyon that sprawls as far as your eye can see. All of these magnificent bluffs and valleys, weaving in and out, and every time you come around a corner there's a fresh sense of awe that washes over you. You have simply never seen anything like it. When the Badlands were but a rumor, you have ideas about them. When you finally see them, you realize that your ideas were small and unworthy of their grandeur.

That's innocent enough if we're talking about a movie or even a canyon. But what if the subject that we have heard about and now all of a sudden see more clearly is *God*? Is there any recourse we find out that our ideas about him have been small and unworthy? Even worse, that our words about him have misconstrued or misrepresented him? This is the question our passage raises and answers this morning as we come to the conclusion of Job and think about the fruit of suffering.

Throughout our overview of Job we have summarized the book in a series of five questions. The first was this: *Do we worship God merely because of what we get out of it?* That was the Accuser's question in ch. 1:9—"Does Job fear God for no reason?"—which launched the whole story as Job, this righteous and upright man, then lost everything for no reason. Satan had accused Job that if God removed his blessing and protection, he would curse him to his face. Instead Job showed us that God is worthy of our worship whether we receive blessing or disaster from his hand.

The second question came in Job's lament in ch. 3: *Is it better to die or never have lived than to face such misery in life?* "Why did I not die at birth?" cried Job (3:11). The answer we saw was that while God does not silence our cries of despair, life and death are in his hands, not ours.

The third question stood at the heart of the debate between Job and his friends, stretching from ch. 4 to 37: *Can the righteous suffer?* "Who that was innocent ever perished?" (4:7). In effort to explain the cause of Job's suffering, his friends assumed that because God rewards the righteous

and punishes the wicked, Job's suffering is evidence of some hidden wickedness. They want him to confess his sin so his trouble will go away, but Job maintains his innocence. The cause of his suffering is not some hidden sin, but a hidden God. Only God can make sense of our suffering, so we must hope in him.

But because God doesn't seem to be operating according to Job's expectations, Job believes that God owes him an explanation of his behavior, or at least a chance to plead his innocence in court. That raised our fourth question: *Is God righteous when the righteous suffer?* But instead of answering that question directly, when he finally speaks in chs. 38-41, God turns the tables on Job and calls him to the stand. "Shall the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?" (40:2). 'If you think I owe you an explanation for how I run this world, then first, why don't you tell me how it's run?' God's answer shows Job that though his conduct was blameless, his understanding of God has been flawed, and that God is the only one wise enough to order his world, including our suffering.

Which brings us to our final question in ch. 42 this morning: *Is there any recourse for those who speak folly?* When we suddenly realize we have been thinking and speaking of our situation as though we are big and God is small, is there any remedy to our folly? Any mercy or forgiveness? As we'll see, the answer to that is Yes, there is; but we'll also see that it's often the road of suffering that reveals our folly, our small thoughts of God, and that opens our eyes to his majesty and mercy.

The passage itself divides cleanly into three sections: Job's response to God's speech (40:1-6); God's response to Job's friends (42:7-9), and God's restoration of Job's family and fortune (42:10-17). We'll start with Job's response to God.

Job's Response to God (42:1-6)

Chapters 38–41 actually contain two speeches by God to Job. We looked at the first one last week, where God interrogated Job in order to demonstrate that he did not have enough information about the world or how it works to question the justice of God's ways. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding" (38:4). Job's response to that first speech was a humbled silence; there was nothing he could say (40:3-5).

But apparently he didn't get the point, so God speaks to him again out of the whirlwind, with a poetic description of two either mythological or heavenly creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, with the point that if no one can tame or stand before them, why do you think you can stand before the God who made them? (40:7–41:34; esp. 41:10-11). Chapter 42 gives us Job's response not just to this second speech, but really both speeches.¹

He begins by *acknowledging* God's majesty. Verse 2: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job gets the message, that God's power and wisdom are unlimited and unstoppable. We cannot contain him, or even dare to explain him, apart from what he reveals about himself to us.

¹ That Job's quotes God's first speech in his second answer suggests he is responding to both speeches (42:3, cf. 38:2; and 42:4, cf. 38:3; 40:7)

Next Job *confesses* his folly (v. 3). He begins by quoting God's question from ch. 38:2: "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Let me tell you. "Therefore *I* have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." Job acknowledges God's majesty in v. 2, and then confesses his failed attempt to understand God's ways, even to hold God to account. He recognizes that he was simply out of his league. He was like a preschooler with a little Lego experience trying to correct an accomplished architect.

So Job acknowledges God's majesty; he confesses how far short he falls of that majesty; finally he responds to God's majesty in *repentance*. Look with me at v. 4. Again, Job begins by quoting God's speech—this time the opening summons from both speeches: "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me" (cf. 38:3; 40:7). But instead of explaining how the cosmos works, or how to tame God like Leviathan, Job explains what this whole experience of suffering and encountering God has done to him, the fruit of his suffering: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."

Job, the blameless and upright man who feared God and turned away from evil (1:1), now realizes that for all his righteousness, his relationship with God up to this point had been like knowing a rumor. He had heard about God. He had drawn conclusions about God based on what he heard. Most of those conclusions were true. But when he finally saw God with his own eyes *through his suffering*, his mind was blown.

There's a big difference between knowing a rumor about someone, and knowing them in person. We read stories and reports about people every day in the news—celebrities, athletes, politicians. We form lots of opinions about those people based on what we read. It's like having a relationship with a rumor. But how surprised would we be to actually get to know someone like that? To have a real relationship with them? How different would we realize that they are? And how much more when it comes to a relationship with God?

Which makes you wonder about our own relationships with God, doesn't it? If Job, whom God himself praises for his integrity and righteousness, can live such a good life based on such a limited knowledge of God, what about us? To what extent is my relationship with God based on a rumor, rather than a real encounter with our majestic king?

It is possible to have good theology, to do good things, to be well thought of in the church, but to have a shallow relationship with God. That doesn't mean your faith isn't real. (It is possible to go through the motions and not mean it, or have the right answers and not really believe them, but that's not what we're talking about.) It is possible to have a healthy albeit shallow relationship with God, such that God still feels more like a rumor than a person. That doesn't mean your faith isn't real, or even that it's weak. What it probably means is that your faith is *untested*.

Because the road to encountering the divine in Job is not some sort of mystical experience, or sacred liturgy, or disciplined effort, or even a miraculous event. The road to seeing God in Job is suffering.

It was Job's suffering that exposed his folly, his small thoughts of God. Apart from his experience he would have never had that conversation with God. He would have never had occasion to realize how shortsighted he really was. It was his suffering that finally opened his eyes to the majesty of God.

And I can testify in my own life that it is through the absolute saddest experiences we have ever had, specifically the loss of now three unborn children, that I have seen God's love, felt his presence, and understood his promise that a day is coming when death will be swallowed up for ever and God will make all things new. I confess I never really longed for heaven until we experienced loss on earth.

Job had heard of God; now through his suffering he has seen him. And his response finally, after acknowledging and confessing, is repenting. Verse 6: "therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And it's important to understand that Job is not repenting of the so-called mystery sin his friends accused him of; he's repenting of his foolishness. He's repenting of his presumption that God owed him an explanation for why he runs the universe the way he does. He's repenting of having small thoughts of God and big thoughts about himself. And even here, his repentance is worship.

So is there any recourse for this kind of folly? Or for worse—is there any recourse for the folly of his friends? What we see in the next two sections is that suffering not only opens our eyes to God's majesty, but also to his mercy. And it comes in some surprising ways.

God's Response to Job's Friends (42:7-9)

We see God's mercy to Job interwoven in his mercy to Job's friends. But before they receive mercy, God first shows them how desperately they need it. Verse 7: "After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'"

Now it's interesting that God phrases it that way—by contrasting Job's words with his friends'. He says it again at the end of v. 8: "For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." God just got done calling Job to account for speaking "words without knowledge" (38:2; 42:3). So how is he different?

The difference is that Job never said anything untrue about God. He was right to insist upon his own innocence, and he was right to assert that God's hand had brought this suffering on him. His folly was assuming that because that didn't make sense to him, God owed him an explanation.

Job's friends, on the other hand, misrepresented God with their words. They thought they were defending his reputation by condemning Job. They rightly understood that God rewards the righteous and punishes sin (that's a general biblical principle), but they wrongly applied it to Job's situation by assuming his suffering was evidence of hidden sin. By telling Job that God was punishing him for his sin, they spoke wrongly about God. And it did not go unnoticed.

So God rebukes Job's friends. They too have failed to appreciate his majesty. But then he reaches out to them in mercy. He makes a way for forgiveness through the intercession of none other than Job. Verse 8: "Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Is there any recourse when we think or speak foolishly about God? The answer is Yes—God’s mercies are new every morning. And that’s such good news, because our thoughts and words so often fall so short of God’s true majesty. But we also learn something about how God’s mercy works here, with Job’s example.

Notice first that there is a *price*. A holy and majestic God can’t simply ignore sin; sin is an offense against his throne and his person; it must be punished or justice is not served. The friends were right that God punishes wickedness. And so true forgiveness requires a *substitute*; the bulls and rams die in place of Job’s friends. Just like the Passover Lamb died in place of Israel’s firstborn. Just like Jesus, the Lamb of God, died in our place on the cross.

Second, notice that there is a *priest*. A righteous advocate. Someone able to approach God on behalf of the sinner in order to offer an acceptable sacrifice for sins. Just as Job interceded for his children in ch. 1, so now he intercedes with his friends in ch. 42, which shows us not only the mercy of God, but the mercy of Job. But again, it also points us to Christ, who was not only blameless, but sinless. Who was not just *a* priest, but *the* Great High Priest who “entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

There are so many ways in which the story of Job is meant to foreshadow the person of Jesus. Or as Tim Keller is fond of putting it, “Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his numskull friends.”² Doug O’Donnell summarizes the story of Job like this:

- There was a righteous man.
- This man, by God’s set purpose, was handed over to satanic-inflicted sufferings.
- This man in his suffering was mocked and mistreated.
- This man prayed for his enemies, for those who persecuted him.
- This man, after a costly, perfect, substitutionary, blood sacrifice, became a priestly mediator between God and sinners.
- This man was fully and publically vindicated by God.³

Sound familiar? It’s the story of Jesus. Which isn’t to say that Job is Jesus, or even just like Jesus. Job was a human and a sinner, just like us. But through the story of Job, our eyes are opened to see not only God’s majesty but also his mercy, a majesty and mercy that are ultimately displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s mercy to Job and his friends is a foretaste of the mercy of Christ for all sinners—if we will acknowledge his majesty, confess our folly, repent of our sin, and cling to him in faith.

But what about Job’s suffering? What about all that he has lost? I think if we were to ask Job that question at this point in the story, he would reply, ‘What about it?’

² Timothy Keller, @timkellernyc, <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/592357613897195520>.

³³ Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 115.

As far as Job is concerned, the story can end right here. He has dropped his case. It's not that his situation is no longer painful, or his intellectual problem has been solved; they're just no longer as important.⁴ His eyes have been opened to God. He is content amid his suffering, so long as he has God. He's an embodiment of Paul's words in Philippians 3:7: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

But the story *isn't* over. And it's good that it isn't over, because it shows us that while we may not understand what God is doing in the moment, he will be faithful to make right all things in the end. So we see God's majesty and mercy come together in the restoration of Job, vv. 10-17.

The Restoration of Job (42:10-17)

This is Job's ultimate vindication. God cleared his name before his friends, vindicating him of the false charges. He now demonstrates both Job's innocence and God's mercy on a public scale by restoring double what was lost. Verse 10: "And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before."

We see the comfort of his family in v. 11, their presence and sympathy and generosity. Then we see the restoration of his fortune in v. 12, where each of his livestock is literally doubled from what he had back in ch. 1. Then the restoration of his family in vv. 12-15—ten children, like before. Seven sons and three daughters. Which isn't to suggest that children are replaceable; anyone who's lost a child knows that's not the case. The picture rather is of *wholeness*, of a broken life being put back together. And of *grace*, a restored life that flourishes even greater than before.⁵

So the author concludes, "And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days" (42:16-17). The proverbial happy ending. Which might strike us as cliché, or even feel like it undoes the major point of the book, that we don't worship God simply because of what we get out of it, and that God is not obligated to operate on our terms. But if we understand it as *vindication*, we see that this is the proper and fitting conclusion to the story. For the world in Job's day, these are the categories in which vindication would be understood—the restoration of what is lost. We see that kind of language throughout both the Old and New Testaments, crescendoing with the great promise of Revelation 21, that the day is coming when "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

God does not always promise understanding. He doesn't always promise relief. But he does promise his presence. And he does promise to make all things right in the end. Your suffering, whatever it is, however long it has endured, however heavy it is to bear—your suffering is not unknown. Jesus bore it in his body and carried you with him on the cross. And your suffering will not be wasted. God will use it according to his purposes, one of which is to open our eyes to his majesty and mercy. And God *will be faithful* to restore what was lost in the end, to make all things new.

⁴ See O'Donnell, 113.

⁵ The elaboration on Job's daughters in vv. 14-15 seems to highlight this point of greater prosperity and grace.

As 1 Peter puts it, there is

an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:4-9)