
Job



Monday: Job 18-22
Tuesday: Job 23-31
Wednesday: Job 32-37
Thursday: Job 38-41
Friday: Job 42

Introduction

The book of Job is a brilliantly composed epic poem that wrestles with one of the core questions of the human experience: “Why do good people suffer?”

Here’s the scenario. Job is a great guy. He’s rich, he’s powerful, he’s got a great family, and he is a truly good man. He’s a pillar of society. He’s on top of the world. And, he loves God. One day the accuser proposes to God that Job is only a God-lover because God has showered him with all the creature comforts of life. Take them away, he suggests, and Job would turn on God in a heartbeat.

So, God accepts the challenge and, in one day, Job loses everything. He goes from riches to rags overnight. On top of that, he becomes torturously ill and writhes in agony day and night.

How does something like this happen? Where is justice? Where is the love of God? How could God allow a good man like Job to suffer in this way?

In order to wrestle with this question, Job is surrounded by his three “friends” Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. For several chapters, Job volleys back and forth with these three men.

Here is a summary of the conversation:

Friends: “Job, everyone knows that good people prosper and bad people suffer. You are suffering, so you must be a bad person.”

Job: "I am not a bad person. Show me my wrong."

Friends: "You have to be a bad person; otherwise you would not be suffering."

Job: "Some friends you are. I wish I had never been born."

Friends: "Why don't you just admit you are a sinner, repent, and get on with it?"

Job: "Why don't you just be quiet, admit that there is no justice in the world? And let me crawl in a hole and die. Oh, by the way, I am not a sinner and I wish God cared enough to let me defend myself."

In the end the four men were left in a stalemate, with nothing left to say.

Once the banter had died down the young **Elihu** steps up and says:

"You all have it wrong. You are forgetting one important thing. None of this is about you. Your focus is on yourself and you are trying to fit the truth of God's justice into your puny little box of what you think His justice should be. Take your eyes off of yourself for a minute and contemplate the vastness of God."

Here is the crux of the message of Job. Notice on the chart that God's unchanging glory arcs over the whole scene while the four "wise" men are living under a dark cloud of distorted understanding. Throughout the Old Testament, and well on to today, many people have slipped into a distorted view of God's justice and the message of the Law. Remember that in Deuteronomy Moses set before the people life and death, blessing and curses. If you choose the path of God you choose blessings and life. If you

choose the path of disobedience you choose curses and death. So, Moses urged them, choose life.

While this is obviously true and from the heart of God, it was sorely misunderstood and distorted. The vast majority of people heard these words and reasoned that this was an absolute, one-to-one relationship: If I do good, I prosper; if I do bad, I suffer.

While that may seem to make sense, it is not, in fact, what Deuteronomy said. Deuteronomy was not a promise that obedient people would never suffer pain and that disobedient people would never have a prosperous existence. Deuteronomy is a generalized principle that says that, in the big picture, it is better to love God, because He is the lover and author of your soul. Sometimes pain and suffering are actually part of God's master plan. Jesus echoed the basic message of Job (and Ecclesiastes, for that matter) in Matthew 5:45 where He said, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

The story of Job shows us that sometimes good people do suffer. Why? Well...we'll explore that in the devotionals.

Monday: Where is Justice?

Job 21:14-16

How does Job describe the wicked in this passage?

Food for thought:

Today we are going to climb into Job's perspective on reality. Although it is ultimately incorrect, it is nonetheless a perspective that is shared by many people in the world. Perhaps you have felt this way at times.

Essentially Job is saying that, when you look around at the world there seems to be more injustice than justice. From the time we were students in grade school, we observed that children cheated and got away with it. Children who acted nice and proper in front of the adults were horribly cruel to their peers, and no one seemed to notice or care. As we grew older, the beer-drinking, pot-smoking, promiscuous halfback always scored the winning touchdowns and got a scholarship to college for football. As an adult, we see that large corporations can exploit developing countries, use their employees and spit them out, and then still be considered humanitarian because they throw money at a charity.

There was a movie in the 90's called The Emperor's Club, starring Kevin Kline. Kline was a Roman history teacher in an exclusive prep school where they held an annual "Julius Caesar" contest for the boys. One year a boy cheated to win the contest and it devastated the teacher. Years later, this cheating student called a reunion to reenact this contest, to prove to the teacher that he could do it without cheating. Just as you think it is a movie about redemption in this man's life, the teacher discovers that the man is cheating again. The whole thing was a stunt he pulled to gain votes for his upcoming political campaign. In the end you are left wondering why bad people continue to get away with lying and cheating and then are allowed to govern our country.

Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever felt that you spend all your energy in doing the “right” thing and it gets you nowhere? Perhaps you have been discouraged and wanted to give up. That is how Job felt. Read his words in 19:23-27. Job was so sure that he was a “righteous” man that, even though he knew he was going to die, his righteousness would be vindicated before the future generations and his merciless accusers would reap their just rewards.

Here are two lessons and a preview:

1. In the end, God will bring about justice; in His time and in His way.
2. We need to cling to Paul’s words (who could have easily felt like Job), in Galatians 6:9, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

A preview: we will see in the next few days that Job’s perspective was a bit skewed. When you start feeling the injustices all around you, ask yourself where those emotions are really coming from. Where is that pain centered? Is your pain about God’s name, or yours?

Tuesday: Where is Wisdom?

Job 28

What example does Job use to demonstrate human ingenuity? (vv. 1-11)

How is wisdom described? (vv. 12-19)

According to Job, is wisdom accessible by human effort? Why? (vv. 20-27)

What then, does wisdom look like for man? (v. 28)

Food for thought:

In the 16th century, Europe experienced a Renaissance, a “rebirth of light.” As culture moved into this new era it looked back on the Middle Ages that was dominated by the Roman Church and called it “The Dark Ages.” This new era, now referred to as the Modern era, was sparked by new scientific discoveries. Copernicus discovered that the Earth revolved around the sun, shattering the church’s geocentric and church-centric cosmology. Guttenberg invented the printing press which allowed non-church, “protesting,” literature to be distributed quickly. The masses became literate and discovered that there was more to the Bible and to life than the local priest had let on.

All of these new discoveries and been achieved through the persistent curiosity of the human mind and the ingenuity of the human imagination. Within 100 years Europe had come to the belief that human reason, as opposed to God’s revelation, was the ultimate source of truth. And so, for the next 400 years Western European culture began to expand, explore, and dominate the Earth. Scientific curiosity led to the Industrial Revolution, mass-production, better medicine, trans-global travel, and trans-global communication. In the 19th century it seemed as if man could do anything he set his mind to do.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we have a chance to reflect on the fruit of man’s reason...the 20th century. Yes, we have invented amazing things; air travel, space travel, telecommunications, cyberspace, vaccinations, etc. But, we have also figured out how to kill everyone on the planet with the push of a button, we kill babies that are only weeks old. We’ve been through two world wars and a number of other devastating conflicts. We’ve learned how to

live on credit and have plunged whole nations into trillions of dollars of debt. We have razed the Earth of much of its natural resources, contaminated fresh water sources, and allowed radioactive waste to fill the ground. As the younger generations move into this century they look at what they have inherited from the modern era and wonder, "If this is what human reason calls the benefit of wisdom, then what is wisdom?"

This is the question Job is asking in ch. 28. He says, "Hey, man can dig deep into the ground to find jewels, but we can never dig deep enough to find God's wisdom. No amount of human reason and ingenuity can ever discover or unlock the mysteries of God." It would do us well to latch on to Job's thoughts here. Too many times, when faced with ethical and critical decisions, we look to the scientists and the politicians to figure out what is best for us. Job reminds us that there is only one place where true wisdom can be found for humanity. It is only in the fear of the Lord that we can tap into wise living. Like a four-year-old child walking next to her father, so are we in the hands of God. We do not understand His ways, nor can we. We must simply trust that His ways are good and He is looking out for our best interest.

May we walk in the faith and fear of the Lord today. Spend time asking God to allow your heart to surrender all your worries and your efforts to manipulate your situation. Let go of your worry, do what you know to be right according to God's ways, and trust that He will direct your paths.

Wednesday: From the Mouth of Babes

A Study of Elihu; the young man with a big insight.

Job 32-37

What was Elihu's attitude toward the older men?

What was his accusation against the three "friends?"

What was his accusation against Job?

What was the basic difference between his advice to Job and that of the three "friends?"

Food for Thought:

Elihu is a wonderful breath of fresh air in a conversation that was quickly getting stale. This young man had been sitting there the whole time listening as these four older, “wiser,” men talked themselves into stalemate of two opposing viewpoints. The three “friends” said that Job was suffering because he was a sinner. Job said that he was not a sinner and that God’s sense of justice was skewed. Job just wished that he could present his case and be vindicated, proving that he was really a righteous man. He didn’t deserve to suffer.

Here are a few observations about Elihu that will be helpful for us today:

1. **He was respectful of age.** Elihu did not blurt out his opinion because he yielded to his elders. This is a value that has been lost in our culture. It would do us well to reconnect to this and show more respect to those who have been around the block a few more times than we.
2. **He was respectful of feelings.** Even though Elihu was very frustrated and believed that his opinion was right and the others were wrong, he did not blast into the conversation with accusing tones and pointing fingers. He began his speech with humility and empathy. It would do us well to remember this in times of conflict in our lives. You will never get anywhere in a conversation if your opening words are, “You are wrong and here’s why...” Those words will simply send up the hearer’s defenses and close their minds to any shred of clear thinking that you may have to contribute. Instead, like Elihu, begin with a validation

of the person to whom you are speaking, admit that you are fallible and do not see the whole picture, and try to establish that your relationship with the person is very important. Then, over the bridge of relationship that you have built, you can deliver your perspective on the situation.

3. **He saw that the issue was a matter of focus.** The reason Job and the three men were in a stalemate was because they were all operating under a false presupposition. Somewhere down the line they had bought into the idea that God will ALWAYS bless the good man and will ALWAYS curse the sinner. This kind of theology completely externalizes a relationship with God and places God into a box. They had limited the idea of God's justice to a very narrow parameter and had, in essence, made man's behavior the dictator of God's behavior. Elihu said, "Time out guys. Who's really in charge here? You guys think that you can predict what God will do. The truth is that you can't. God is going to do what God is going to do...period."
4. **His speech opened the door for Job to hear God.** It is interesting to notice that as soon as Elihu is done speaking it moves right into the words of God and Job has no response. Many times people get locked into distorted thinking and they cannot hear from God. It requires the intervention of a godly person to come and lovingly speak the truth to them before they can be receptive to God's truth.

Here's the take home. Job's problem was that he was more worried about his image as a good guy than he was about the truth of God's nature. Job was so convinced that His suffering was unjustified that he was willing to accuse God of being cruel. Big mistake.

How often do we do that? Unfortunately, for many of us, we spend a lot of time managing our image. We are so focused on doing the right thing and being perceived as being a good person (being vindicated like Job desired) that we neglect the fact that what matters most is cultivating an authentic relationship with God. Ironically, an authentic relationship with God can become an obstacle to maintaining a "righteous" image. When that happens we know we have entered the distorted zone.

As we will explore more tomorrow, the reality of God is that He is not predictable or "safe." God is the Almighty Ruler of the universe. He is the maker and sustainer of all things. He does not call us to conform to a set of rigid, external rules, He calls us to throw ourselves into an obedient, dynamic, relationship with Him as we submit ourselves to follow the cloud and be receptive to His leading...even when it could jeopardize our image.

Thursday: In the Presence of the Almighty

Job 38-41

Today is a day of worship. It would be silly of me to try to write a devotional with my human words when we are reading several chapters directly from the words of God. Instead of writing a devotional for today, I invite you climb into the experience that Job had when he received these words from God. Here are a couple exercises/questions to guide you through the experience.

As you read these chapters keep a list of all the ways that God describes Himself. With each one, stop and take a moment to meditate and reflect on it. Evaluate whether or not you experience God this way.

In Job 40:4-5 Job has an opportunity to respond to God. What is his reply? How does this contrast to his requests of vindication earlier in the book?

Here is a final thought to help you enter into a space of worship. Humility is not something that you can make happen in your life. Humility is what happens when you come into the presence of true greatness. Try to open your mind and heart to the implications of God's words and self-description today. See what happens in your heart as you do. Write down the responses you have.

Friday: From Hearing to Knowing

Job 42:1-6

Rephrase Job's response to God in vv. 2-6.

Food for Thought:

Verse 5 is a wonderful summary of the entire message of the Old Testament that we have studied so far. Job said, *"My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you."* Herein lies the contrast: there is knowledge about God and then there is knowing God. Before Job's encounter with God he had been operating under a great knowledge about God. I'm sure he was raised in a good Sunday School; he probably memorized verses every week. He went to a good Christian college, never missed Sunday services, served on the deacon board, the missions committee, tithed regularly, and even went on a weekend missions trip. If he were to play Bible Trivial Pursuit, he would have always won. He was a pillar in his community. If you were to poll the neighborhood, asking for a description about Job, the unanimous response would have been that Job was a humanitarian, a great father, a great husband, a generous business man, a God-fearer, and an all-around good guy.

Do you know any people like that? Sounds good doesn't it? Jesus met a lot of people like that in His day. They were called Pharisees. They had constructed an excellent system of external behaviors and a doctrinal belief system that allowed them to feel really good about their status of righteousness. They had an air-tight case of being "good." The problem is that they did not know God. Jesus called them white-washed graves. On the outside they looked great, but on the inside they were filled with the stale stench of long dead bones.

Here's the really scary part. It is highly probable that Job and the Pharisees had no idea that they were the walking dead. They are the people who will get to the final day and say to God, "Lord, Lord, we did all

these great things in your name.” Then the Lord will say to them, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

Fortunately for Job, he had a brave young man named Elihu who was willing to speak truth to his elder and expose him to the error of his thinking. This cleared the fog and allowed Job to see clearly the awesome majesty and greatness of God’s unchanging sovereignty. In the end, Job learned that no one is righteous in God’s eyes. No one deserves to draw one breath on this planet. All that we have is a gracious gift from God. All that we do is part of His plan and should be done for His honor and His glory.

May we, today, be like Job and fall on our faces in worship. May our attitudes reflect His as we stop thinking about our agendas and managing our image and focus all of our attention on the Kingdom of God.

We can get pretty self-righteous when our head is filled with knowledge of God and our lives are dictated by proper doctrine. It is only when we come face to face with the awesome reality of the God who is above doctrine that we can truly enter into a dynamic relationship with Him and know Him. We will never understand Him, but we can know him.