

Learning Humility In Suffering

Job 42:1-9

We have finally arrived at the final chapter of the Book of Job.

I want to take 2 weeks to cover this chapter for a variety of reasons, but one natural reason has to do with *the structure of Job chapter 42*.

Verses 1-9 record the final verbal exchange between God and Job while verses 10-17 provide concluding details, but without any dialogue.

You will recall that in chapter 31, Job summoned God to appear and to give an account for why He had allowed such terrible things to happen.

God being God, of course, was under no obligation to respond to Job's summons.

But graciously, God does appear.

And the fact that God replies to Job in such a detailed way is a gracious condescension by the Almighty.

What is missing from God's lengthy reply to Job, however, is something resembling an answer to Job's question.

Job wants to know "Why?"

—Job wants *an explanation* for his dreadful predicament

...but none is given.

Instead of revealing to Job *an answer*, God reveals *Himself* to Job.

And what we learn from this is that *our deepest concerns are satisfied in the experience of God's presence and not in possessing explanations for our problems.*

When Job responds to God in the opening verses of chapter 42 it is clear that Job's perspective has done a 180-degree turn.

(I imagine that God speaking to a person might do that!)

We can divide Job's answer into 3 parts:

- 1) What Job knows
- 2) What Job doesn't know
- 3) What Job's experience of God has led him to

First, *what does Job know?*

Verse 2: **"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."**

Job has learned what the Psalmist declares in Psalm 33:11: **"The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations."**

We often reference God's sovereignty, but we don't always unpack what we mean by that.

To say that *God is sovereign* is to say that *God is in complete control*.

It is to say that nothing can impede, restrict, or limit, the exercise of God's power.

This is something we have no difficulty embracing...until something bad happens...we get sick—or someone we love gets sick.

And then we begin to wonder, as Job did, “Why did you allow this to happen?”

We embrace the notion that God has everything under control, but when our favourite political candidate isn't elected, perhaps some of us wonder if God missed something.

We get the sense that Job had some understanding of the extent of God's power, but his experience of suffering caused him to question what God was up to.

After hearing from God directly, however, Job's need for answers faded.

Job had found his answer in God.

Furthermore, Job's understanding of what God is capable of became elevated.

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

Second, Job tells us about *what he doesn't know*.

Verse 3: **“I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”**

Here we see how Job's experience of God has humbled him.

Having heard directly from God and hearing testimony of what God has done and is still doing, *Job became acutely aware of his limited understanding of things*.

Now, I want to be careful that we don't take this perspective to an extreme position.

As your apprehension of God's “bigness” grows, you may be tempted to throw up your hands and exclaim, “God can't be known! He's too big! He's infinite! He's so powerful; He's so wise; He's so holy—we can't possibly know what He is up to.”

That perspective takes things too far.

That perspective takes things too far—and I will tell you why I think that:

The God of this Universe is a talking God.

God has not hid Himself from us, but He has revealed Himself.

Accordingly, there are things we can know about God and beliefs we can hold with great conviction.

We can know God according to what He has told us about Himself.

But what we find in this Book is that, while *God tells Job a lot about Himself, He does not tell him everything.*

God does not answer Job's question about "Why?" he is suffering.

God does not unfold for Job the purposes of His will.

Nor does God tell Job about His conversations with Satan that we read about in chapters 1 and 2.

God tells Job a lot, but He does not tell him everything.

Job eventually comes to realize: **“I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”**

Thirdly, we observe *what Job’s experience of God leads him to—namely, repentance.*

Job says to God, **“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes”** (42:5,6).

Job makes a distinction between a kind of textbook understanding and an understanding that comes from firsthand experience.

There is a consensus among biblical scholars that Job didn’t literally “see” God as we think of seeing.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated as “see” is often used to describe a person’s apprehension, or understanding, of things.

As Christopher Ash puts it, “(Job) has seen the Lord with a clarity he has not approached before” (Ash, *Job*, 417).

This newfound clarity led Job to the doorstep of transformation.

Job possessed sufficient knowledge to incline him to engage in a variety of religious activities, but it was his firsthand experience of God that drove him speedily towards repentance.

Friends, surely there is a word there for us.

Perhaps, as a young person, you were taught some things about Jesus as you attended Sunday School.

You got older and you began to read the Bible for yourself and you gained an even better understanding of the person and work of Christ.

You’ve made a habit of attending Sunday services and perhaps you even attend small group Bible studies.

Through all of these experiences you have “**heard**” many things taught about God.

But we see in Job the limitations of our knowledge of God if it is not combined with a personal encounter with the presence of God.

We need both.

Knowledge may spark our interest in some level of religious devotion, but a genuine encounter with the Almighty will undoubtedly change us.

And that's God's end game with us.

God's end game isn't that we would simply amass information about Him.

It is not enough for us to *know about God*.

God wants us to *know Him*, and to increasingly become like Jesus, His Son, our Lord.

This process begins with an experience of God that causes us to “**repent**” of all of the ways in which we dishonour God.

And what does God do in response to Job's humble posture?

He vindicates Job!

The Lord speaks to **Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar** in a manner that clearly indicates that they were in the wrong and that Job was in the right.

The Lord turns to Eliphaz and says, **“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”** (42:7).

The Lord then instructs the three men to bring sacrifices of bulls and rams to Job, and then He tells them that Job will pray for them and He will accept Job's prayer (42:8).

On the one hand, it must have felt good for Job to hear the Lord side with him.

The Lord, as we see here, did not play the role of a *diplomat*—He did not say,

“Well, each of you had some good things to say, but each of you made a few errors in your assessment of what happened.”

No—the Lord did not play the role of a *diplomat*, but rather, He exercised His role as *judge*.

And God’s judgment was that Job was in the right and his friends were in the wrong.

It must have felt good for Job to hear the Lord side with him.

But, on the other hand, I wonder if it would have been hard for Job to pray for his companions—who he had earlier described as “**miserable comforters**”.

God gives Job an assignment that he didn’t ask for:

“Pray for your friends.”

“Pray for their forgiveness.”

“Intercede on their behalf and I will forgive them.”

We read in verse 9 that **Eliphaz**, **Bildad**, and **Zophar** brought the sacrifices, and the section closes with the words:

“The Lord accepted Job’s prayer.”

The Book of Job does not follow a predictable storyline.

Job did not suffer because he was a bad person, or because he did some bad things.

Job suffered as a person who had tremendous integrity.

And what we see is Job becoming a more devoted worshipper because of what he endured.

Job’s relationship with God becomes more deeply personal.

Part of me wishes I could tell you that there is a quick and easy road to intimacy with God and greater Christ-likeness.

Part of me wishes it were true, that the way to intimacy with God includes you being *healthy, wealthy, and prosperous*.

But the Bible tells a different story.

The Bible shows us a man (Job) who was closer to God when his health, wealth, and prosperity were taken away.

Charles Spurgeon puts it this way:

“Prosperity is a painted window which shuts out much of the clear light of God...Adversity thus takes away tinge and color and dimness and we see our God far better than before.”

It is in adversity that we learn humility.

It is in adversity that we learn to more fully lean upon Christ.

It is in adversity that we discover that Jesus is enough.

I fully appreciate that suffering is not fun, and I do not expect a single person in this room to go and court pain and hardship.

But I do want you to know that when suffering comes—and it will come—

There is an opportunity for you to engage God on a far more profound level than when you were at ease.

There is an opportunity in suffering for you to get close to God...

And when you are closest to God you will discover that there is nothing in the Universe as comforting and satisfying as Him.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;

Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;

Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?

I triumph still, if Thou abide with me. Amen.