

What Job Saw in the End

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Date: 03 September 2006

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[0 : 00] Tonight, friends, we're concluding our studies in the book of Job, and in a moment we'll be turning to chapter 42, not quite yet, however. So I wonder if you'd turn with me first to the New Testament letter of James, chapter 5 and verse 11, and if you have one of our big Bibles, it's on page 1013.

James, chapter 5 and verse 11, and you'll see the name of Job is mentioned there in that verse. The best and most illuminating commentary on the Bible is always the Bible.

So whenever there is something in the New Testament which offers comment on a book or a passage or a character from the Old Testament, it is always eye-opening and of course inspired by God for us to read those words.

So let me read James 5 and verse 11, and you'll see that the context of this verse is this paragraph, verses 7 to 11, which is about patience in the midst of suffering.

So verse 11, behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

[1 : 22] Now clearly in that verse, James is highlighting Job's steadfastness. That's a rather old-fashioned word, isn't it? We don't encourage each other these days to be steadfast, brother, do we?

We tend to use words like persevering, so we might care to think about that. But the verse is clearly about Job's perseverance or steadfastness, and it's about the Lord's compassion and mercy.

But if you look at verse 7 here, the first verse of the paragraph, that shows us that the whole section is about the patience and perseverance that all Christian believers are expected to exercise.

Verse 7, be patient, therefore brothers, until the coming of the Lord. So Job's perseverance, Job's patience, was not something that is simply a one-off in the Bible, not a unique and exceptional experience, but one which the Apostle James holds up to us as an example for all Christians to follow.

Part of the normal Christian life, the Christian life that we can expect to live, is not only the experience of the Lord's compassion and mercy, but also the experience of suffering and the steadfastness or perseverance that that suffering will require of us.

[2 : 38] Now, if you're a seasoned campaigner in the Lord's army, and if you've been reading your Bible for many years seriously, you will know perfectly well that following Christ can lay you open to difficulties and sufferings which people who are not Christians are sometimes spared.

If, on the other hand, you're a new Christian, or maybe somebody who's not yet a Christian, I won't ask you to put your hands up if you're not yet a Christian, let me say, if you're in that position, that we're delighted to have you here.

You're coming along, perhaps you've been a number of times, and you're inquiring about the Gospel and about the Christian faith. But if you're in that position, not yet a Christian, it may be a surprise to see that Job's sufferings, at least to some degree, provide a pattern that may be repeated in your life if you come to Christ.

Ouch! That is the truth about it. People who look in at Christianity from the outside may think that relief from suffering, or even exemption from suffering, is part of the deal in becoming a Christian.

They sometimes think that the non-Christian is the one whose roof will leak. while the Christian's roof remains sound. You may think that the non-Christian's children are the ones who will cause trouble, while the Christian's children are paragons of virtue and model citizens.

[4 : 03] It isn't always like that, however. The truth is that believers and non-believers alike suffer setbacks and traumas of all the ordinary kinds, but in addition to that, the believer can be open to levels of suffering that the unbeliever doesn't have to face.

And Job provides a great example of this. The reason that Satan so fiercely attacked Job and harmed his life was precisely that he feared God and shunned evil.

It's because he was a believer that the devil attacked him. That's what we learn in the first two chapters of the book. Satan said to God, they had this strange interview back in chapter 1, and Satan said to God, in effect, the reason that Job is such a model believer is that you've protected him and you've blessed him so greatly.

Look at his life. He's got great wealth. He's got a large family. He's got wonderful blessings. But if those blessings are taken away from him and he suffers, he will curse you to your face.

In other words, Satan is saying to God that Job is a fair-weather believer. Now God knows that Job's belief is not fair-weather belief, and he gives Satan permission to attack and damage Job so that the reality and durability of Job's faith can be proved, demonstrated.

[5 : 27] Now perseverance in fair weather is pretty easy. It's perseverance in a force-ten gale that tests what a person is really made of.

So one of the big lessons of the book of Job is that believers will be attacked by Satan simply because they're believers. But those who, like Job, really do belong to the Lord will hold on to the Lord, hold to him, even in the teeth of the gale.

Suffering and difficulty then is something which all Christians can expect because Satan hates to see Christians trusting God even when the blessings of this life are taken away.

James tells us that it's the perseverance, the steadfastness of Job that is so instructive to New Testament Christians. Well now with that in mind, let's run back over the story, Job's story, and see how his perseverance comes to the fore.

And let's notice two aspects of it particularly. First, there is Job's perseverance in the battlefield. The backdrop against which Job's life is set is the warfare between Satan and God.

[6 : 40] Not that there is ever any doubt about who will ultimately be victorious. The book of Job, in fact the whole of the scriptures, rejoice in God's total, ultimate victory over Satan.

But Job, and we after him in our generation, live between the creation of this world and the end of this world in the period when Satan is still maliciously active.

He knows that his ultimate doom is sealed. But in the meantime, he claws and tears at Job. Satan is a monster. He's the Leviathan that we met in chapter 41 last week.

And Job's position is not so much that he is on the battlefield. He is the battlefield. Satan is battling for Job's soul.

What he wants more than anything is for Job to give up trusting in the Lord, to turn away from the Lord. And that is why he fills Job's mind with images of despair and death and futility.

[7 : 43] He forces Job, as it were, to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. This is not a book about human suffering in general. This is about the suffering of believers as the enemy of our souls attacks us and tries to get us to turn away from the Lord.

Now you'll remember how on the very first Easter Sunday evening, after Jesus had been raised from the dead, he was journeying out to Emmaus with those two disciples. He joined them. And he explained to those two disciples that the Old Testament scriptures, all of them, all the different branches of the Old Testament, found their fulfillment in him.

Now is the book of Job fulfilled in the person of Jesus? Yes it is, in a supreme way. Think of it, Jesus knew more about the devil's hatred and attacks than anyone before or since.

Think of the whole period of Jesus' life, from Herod's slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem, right through to the wilderness temptations, when Satan goaded him to turn his back upon the Lord God, right through to Gethsemane, and then of course finally at the cross.

Jesus knew what it was to be buffeted and torn at by Satan. Day after day he had to engage in a dark and gruesome warfare. Now it's the same for Christian believers.

[9 : 09] We shan't know the suffering and pain of this warfare in the same degree as Jesus knew it. No one can know it as he did. But we must expect some pretty rough treatment at times from the old adversary who prowls around seeking someone to devour as Peter the Apostle describes it.

So when Christian people wake up in the morning, now just think of that for a moment. Autumn's coming, isn't it? The rain, the gloom, the mornings are darker. Just think of tomorrow morning which as well as being autumnal is Monday.

And you open one eye, don't you? And you look at the curtains to see what it's like outside. If the curtains look blacker and darker than usual, your heart sinks a bit, doesn't it? Now the Christian, as you open your eye and you prepare to make that long journey from lying on the bed to being upright on the bedroom floor, perhaps two things ought to cross our minds every morning, two realities for us to think about.

First, the Lord is with me. He's my Father, He loves me, He delights in me and He calls for my trust and obedience again today. So it's great to be alive and great to be a Christian.

But, secondly, this will be a day of warfare like every other day. The devil never takes a holiday and he'll be after me, pressing me, cajoling me, using all the tricks in his book to get me not to pray, to get me not to read the Bible, to get me not to trust and obey and love the Lord.

[10 : 39] And he will claw at me as he did at Job. He's after me. He wants to get me to give up being a Christian. That's his aim. He wants you and me to give up being Christians.

And sometimes he will fill our minds, as he filled Job's mind, with great tracts of gloom, despair and futility. His aim is that we should give up on the Lord and turn back to the world.

Now if we give up on the Lord, there's only one place we can turn to. That is back to the world. Satan's great aim is not to do spectacular things.

Hollywood and so on love to make big play of his vampires and werewolves and dripping blood and all that sort of stuff. No. His great aim is much more mundane and ordinary and chilling.

It is to get you and me to stop being Christians. It's so common and it goes so largely unnoticed. And one of the means that he will use to achieve this aim is to attack us, to cause us to suffer so that we despair of God and then forsake him.

[11 : 49] But Job persevered in the battlefield. You've heard of the perseverance, the steadfastness of Job. And one reason why this book of Job is in the Bible is to show us that we can follow his example.

We can be like him. With the Lord's help we too can persevere. Then secondly, firstly Job's perseverance in the battlefield. Secondly, Job's perseverance in clinging to God.

Let's turn now to Job chapter 42 and verse 7 which I'll read Job 42 verse 7. After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, really treating him as the leader of the three comforters, he 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 I've referred to this particular verse several times during these sermons because it gives the Lord's clear assessment both of the three comforters and their speeches and also of Job's speeches.

But there is still something surprising don't you think about this assessment of Job's speeches because if you think back to some of the things Job has said again and again he's been saying some pretty terrible things about God.

[13 : 10] He has charged God with being inaccessible. He's charged God with wrongdoing, with not listening to his cries none of which things are true.

So how is it here in 42.7 that God can say that Job has spoken rightly of him? Well the answer may be that God is appraising not only Job's words but Job himself.

Job was so different from his three friends. They have their tidy theological system, their slot machine system. The idea being if you do bad things it's like pressing a certain coin into a slot, out comes sufferings as a result of you doing bad things.

And if on the other hand you do plenty of good stuff then out comes blessing as a result. A very neat and tidy system. But behind these neat formulas the three comforters don't seem to have a real relationship with God.

They have plenty to say about God but they don't speak to him. They have their neat and tidy theological package and it seems to satisfy them.

[14 : 18] Now Job is so different. He longs to bring his pain and suffering and perplexity to God himself. He can't be satisfied with a neat doctrinal system and nothing more.

He wants to know God. He wants to speak to God. He wants to be assured of God's acceptance of him. Nothing less than that will satisfy him. While the friends want a system Job wants God.

As he said back in chapter 23 if only I knew where to find him. And this perseverance in clinging to God is always going to be the mark of real believers and real belief.

Because every Christian will have certain sufferings and certain unresolved questions and some of those questions may be unresolved right through our lives.

For that reason we yearn for God and we ask him to answer our needs and meet our needs. Christians are not fatalists. A fatalist will simply shrug his shoulders at problems and say what will be what will be que sera sera.

[15 : 25] To him there's just some impersonal power out there sorting things out. But the Christian asks what is God doing? The God who made me.

The God who loves me very deeply. The God who is directing the course of my life. What is he doing? I want to speak to him. I want to find him. I want to know his will.

Fatalism is simply impersonal. There's no prayer there. There's no trust or love. But real Christian faith loves God, trusts him through thick and thin, yearns for him and talks to him.

So Job's example teaches us both to persevere in the battlefield which proves to be us, ourselves, and also to persevere in clinging to God through the hard times.

Now James 5 verse 11 says, you have heard of Job's steadfastness and you have seen what the Lord finally brought about. So James is assuming that his readers have read the story of Job.

[16 : 28] You've seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. So let's turn now from Job's perseverance to the Lord's compassion and mercy.

Now somebody might want to say at this point, but how on earth can the Lord be merciful or be said to be merciful to Job or compassionate? Wasn't it God himself who gave Satan permission to attack Job and to rob him of his possessions to kill his children and wreck his health?

Well if that's merciful treatment I'm a Dutchman. Sorry, I shouldn't have said that. There might be some Dutch people here tonight. Somebody from Finland.

Somebody from the North Pole. Anyway, it's a fair point, isn't it? And it's a point that needs to be answered. Let's see if chapter 42 can provide some answers. I think it can and I'd like to mention three of them.

First, it is the Lord's mercy to humble Job. It is the Lord's mercy and compassion to humble Job. In the first six verses of chapter 42, Job's tone has completely changed.

[17 : 39] No longer is he shouting up at God in pain and frustration. In verse 2, he acknowledges God's full sovereignty. I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

In verse 3, he acknowledges his own ignorance. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? He's quoting from what God had said a few chapters before. It's me he's saying.

Therefore, I've uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. And then finally, in verse 6, he says, Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

Now when he says in verse 6, I repent, he's not meaning that his three comforters have been right all along and right in saying that he, Job, has secret sins which he finally has to confess.

No. He maintains his integrity all the way through. But at the end here, he realizes that he has been speaking of things too great for him to understand.

[18 : 47] He's been presuming to know more than he possibly can know. And so finally and humbly, he acknowledges that God has the right to do whatever he chooses.

That God is God. He acknowledges that God is in the position of decision and sovereignty. And he, Job, is a mere mortal. And it's because God loves Job so much, has such compassion and mercy upon him, that he is prepared to humble him like this.

Now friends, we also need to be humbled. We live in a success-orientated culture these days.

You know how we're often hearing of how successful a particular business is or how successful is a particular sports team or a school or even a church. And Christians often pray for success.

We pray for success in exam results or for the results of our children. Success in job offers. Success in financial ventures. But we do need to be careful with that kind of prayer because success can lead to pride and pride can lead to self-confidence and self-confidence can lead to independence of God and independence of God leads finally to hell.

[20 : 10] being humbled by God as Job was can be the making of a Christian and his or her life.

It is out of his mercy and compassion that the Lord God will bring us low so that we should bow before him and trust him. And if something happens in our life which means that the props the things that prop us up and support us or the possessions or the achievements of life or some status or position that we've achieved if all that is then taken away or if a person's health is wrecked as Job's was it can leave that Christian with nothing else to gloat in or to boast about except the Lord himself.

John Bunyan the evangelist the Bedford tinker spent many years 12 or 14 years in prison in the 17th century in Bedford. That must have been a searching and humbling experience for that man of God and yet Bunyan was able to write he that is down need fear no fall he that is low no pride.

Isn't that terrific? God had such love for Job such mercy and compassion that he was prepared to bring him low the only safe position for us to be in.

Then second it's the Lord's mercy to justify Job. Now this comes out in verses 7, 8 and 9 of our chapter so let's see how these three verses speak of Job's justification by God.

[21 : 57] There are three things three little subheadings here. First of all in verse 7 the Lord says that Job is the one who has spoken rightly of him whereas his three friends have not.

That is God justifying Job. Secondly in verses 7 and 8 do you see how the Lord three times speaks of Job as my servant my servant.

Now he never uses that great title of Job's three friends. In fact what characterizes them in the Lord's speech there in the middle of verse 8 is their folly.

Job is my servant. The three comforters in the end are fools. Now that's exactly how the Lord had spoken of Job my servant back in chapters 1 and 2.

Do you remember how he said to Satan have you considered my servant Job? It's a title of great dignity. It's the way the Lord often spoke of Moses in the Old Testament and some of the prophets.

[22 : 58] The servant of the Lord by definition is justified by the Lord and approved of by him. And then third let's notice in verses 7 to 9 who is told to pray for whom?

It's Job who is told by the Lord to pray for his three friends and the three friends are told by the Lord to go off and make a sacrifice. Now if you'd been one of those three friends wouldn't you have been gutted at that point?

You would have expected the Lord to take the three of you to one side and say to the three of you now look because you three men are so wise and righteous and wonderful I want you to pray for this wretched sinner Job and then I'll not deal with him as his folly deserves.

God does quite the opposite and this demonstrates that it is Job who is justified and vindicated in the Lord's sight. And vindication in the Lord's sight is the precise thing that Job has been longing for throughout his time of suffering and it's God's mercy and compassion that vindicates Job.

Now in the same way if you and I are in Christ we belong to Christ we are united with him God will vindicate us at the end and count us as his honoured servants and invite us to share heaven and the great banquet with him to be vindicated by God at the end.

[24 : 28] Isn't that the supreme demonstration of God's mercy? Vindication justification that will come to us not of course because we deserve it but because of God's compassion and mercy.

And then third it's the Lord's mercy and compassion to restore Job's fortunes in the end and that restoration is beautifully described in verses 10 to 17.

It's a lovely description of lavish blessing twice as much as he had before is the way that verse 10 puts it and if you check the numbers of livestock as I've done carefully in verse 12 and you compare them with the inventory of livestock which you find in chapter 1 verse 3 you'll find indeed that the numbers have been exactly doubled.

There's one respect actually in which the numbers are not doubled and that is the children. He started with 10 children and he wasn't given 20 afterwards. Maybe Mrs. Job drew a line at that but he is given also seven sons and three beautiful daughters.

And then there's the celebration as well in verse 11 and this meal that he's able to share with his sisters and brothers is the first celebration since chapter 1 verse 4 and then we have these three beautiful daughters and his further span of life extending to a further 140 years and then his happy contemplation of four more generations in the family before he finally dies an old man and full of days.

[26 : 06] Now what are we to make of this restoration? Let's notice two things. First, the Lord restored Job's relationship to himself first and then he blessed him materially.

Now the order there is very important. It's not that God restores Job's fortunes first and then Job says, well, you're a good and kind God after all so I'll start worshipping you and trusting you again.

No, he worships and trusts God and bows down to God while he's still in great pain and has nothing. When there's no sign whatever of the restoration of family or possessions or health.

Now the lesson here is that the real believer, like Job, worships and trusts the Lord in the absence, even the total absence of material and physical blessings.

When there isn't a whiff of them on the breeze, when health is broken, when painful bereavements happen, when everything goes wrong. Paul the apostle's way of speaking of it is to say that we walk by faith, not by sight.

[27 : 15] So there's the first thing. The Lord restored Job's relationship to him first and then he blessed him. Now second, and perhaps even more importantly, the blessings come at the very end.

James chapter 5 verse 7 helps us to get the timetable right on this. James writes in the context of his comments about Job's perseverance, he writes, be patient then brothers until the Lord's coming.

until the Lord's coming. And then in verse 11 he writes, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. So the full blessing that Christians look forward to is reserved until the Lord Jesus comes again.

Now we need this New Testament perspective on the story of Job to keep us from making a mistake. The mistake of thinking that physical and material blessing will necessarily be heaped on us in this life, in this life, after a period of pain.

Now it may be, it may be, some Christians are greatly blessed in this life after times of great suffering. But we would skew the whole biblical timetable if we insisted that blessing must always follow pain in this life.

[28 : 31] It may, but it may well not. Because the truth is that many Christians end their days in suffering and pain. Some in prison, some in poverty, some after years of rotten health.

Some Christians see their children die and yet they're not given a second batch in the way that Job was. So we mustn't believe those churches or teachings that suggest that material blessing and prosperity will always be given to faithful Christians.

No. We must allow James' cosmic timetable to give us a right perspective on Job chapter 42. Otherwise, we are likely to be very disappointed in the later years of our life.

So, Job's blessings picture the blessings to be lavished upon Christians after the Lord Jesus returns. Let me quote in this context from a commentary on the book of Job.

Job's blessings of the new heavens and new earth will be rock solid real. We look forward to beauty that makes the most beautiful woman in the world seem dull.

[29 : 44] We look forward to fruitfulness that will make the most abundant family in the world seem barren. We look forward to prosperity that will make Bill Gates seem poor.

and we look forward to celebration that will make the best party in the world seem like a quiet glass of apple juice. So, friends, as we end our study of Job, let's allow his experiences as every man or every believer to teach us what to expect as normal in the Christian life.

Let me outline briefly these five things, very briefly. This is normal for the Christian life. First, battle. Each believer is a battlefield and we mustn't be surprised to find ourselves battling with suffering, difficulty and perplexity.

Second, clinging to God. Let's pray as we battle. Pray with determination, with longing and yearning as we wait for God to act.

Thirdly, humbling. It is a mercy of God, a compassion of God that he will at times bring us low so that we should lean on him alone and not put our trust in his blessings.

[31 : 03] Fourth, justification. Because of all that Christ has done for us, we can know that we are justified now and will belong to God forever.

And then fifth, blessing in the end. after the Lord Jesus returns. The blessings then will be so great that we shan't be able to contain them. Whatever happens to us now or over these next few decades while we're here on earth, heaven will be worth waiting for.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray to our great God. God's Lord, our dear Father, we want to thank you again so much that the Bible delivers us from some false view of suffering, that the Bible never teaches us that you promise exemption from pain for believers.

But we see Job's life as an example and a pattern for the Christian life, fulfilled supremely in the experience of Jesus, but fulfilled in all kinds of ways in our experience as well.

And we look forward to these great final blessings. things, but in the meantime, dear Father, help us to be as Job was, to cling to you, especially when the hard times come, indeed to keep rejoicing in you when the hard times are with us, to trust you, to yearn for you, and still to be working for you as glad laborers in the harvest field, even in times of difficulty.

[32 : 49] We pray that you'll preserve us and we pray that that steadfastness that Job showed and the Lord Jesus supremely showed will be repeated in some measure in our own lives and that we will know your compassion and mercy in so many ways and we ask it for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen.