

Fruitful Wrestling in the Puzzles of Life

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[0:00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible readings this morning, and we're looking today at the book of Job. If you turn, I think, to page 417, if you have a church Bible, that's the beginning of the book of Job.

We're going to read a little in chapter 1 and chapter 2. We're, as you know, doing a little study in the wisdom books of the Bible, or some of them anyway, five books of the Bible, one book a week. That may not be terribly wise for me, but I hope it's going to help us just to open up these books. The aim is not to expand them. You can't do that in one day, but to give some keys so that we can read these better and understand them ourselves.

So it is hard work looking at a book in one day. If you feel that, the alternative is one of the Puritans who spent 39 years preaching through nothing but the book of Job. How about that?

So if one day feels hard work, you're getting off very lightly. As J.I. Packer once said, it was rather unfortunate, especially given most of the book is wrong, to devote your entire ministry to 39 years of the book of Job.

[1:02] Perish the thought. Anyway, we're going to read in chapter 1. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 female donkeys and very many servants.

So that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day. And they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

When the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them. And he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, it may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.

Thus Job did continually. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

[2:07] The Lord said to Satan, from whence have you come? Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it. And the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job?

That there's none like him on all the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You've blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face.

The Lord said to Satan, behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. And there came a messenger to Job and said, the oxen were plying and the donkeys feeding beside them.

[3:11] And the Sabaeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword. And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, the fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, the Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the

servants.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. And while he was yet speaking, there came another and said, your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.

And behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck all four corners of the house. And it fell upon the young people and they're all dead. And I alone have escaped to tell you.

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped.

[4 : 10] And he said, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. And then chapter 2 tells of another terrible day. When Satan comes and afflicts Job even further, verse 7.

He went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And Job took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

And then his wife said to him, do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. But he said to her, you speak as one of the foolish women would speak.

Shall we receive good from God? And shall we not receive evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

[5 : 18] Amen. May God bless us. His word. Well, let's turn to the book of Job and perhaps have Job open at the beginning.

I think that's page 417 in the Blue Church Bibles. Well, we're looking in these weeks at some of the Bible's wisdom books. And our aim obviously is not to expound the whole book.

That's impossible in one session. But we're trying to give some keys to unlock the message so that we can read and understand these books ourselves. Today our focus is on Job.

And this is a book, I think, to teach us about fruitful wrestling in all the puzzles of life. Which often prove very painful, very perplexing, and very trying.

Now the Bible is very clear that even as believers, indeed especially as believers, living in a fallen world, a world under the curse, a world tainted with sin and evil, we will all face many puzzling and painful trials.

[6 : 20] And how we face those trials is crucially important. If we face them with steadfast faith, then they will lead us to great maturity and fruitfulness in God's kingdom.

But if we meet them with self-indulgent feelings, then they will likely lead us to great misery and to fruitlessness for the kingdom. Listen to Apostle James.

His letter is sometimes called the Proverbs of the New Testament because he echoes the wisdom teachers so often. James says this right at the very start of his letter. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet all manner of trials.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, that is, mature, lacking nothing.

And he goes on, if any of you lacks wisdom, that is, to how to understand to do that, let him ask God who gives generously, but let him ask with faith, not with any double-mindedness.

[7 : 24] That is, being willing to learn God's wisdom, God's way, which sometimes is very hard and painful and means you need real patience. And he goes on at the end of his letter in chapter 5 to urge repeatedly patience and humble submission to his readers.

And he says, As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. And you've heard of the steadfastness of Job.

And you've seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. So James says to us that Job was a prophet who teaches us to see the compassionate and merciful purposes of God, just as Job did ultimately.

And about the fruitful response amid great puzzle and perplexity and indeed real pain, a response of steadfast patience. And that's the response, he says, that will bring maturity and blessing at God's hand.

That's what James tells us we're meant to learn from this book of Job. It opens our eyes to the mysterious mercy of God's saving purpose so as to lead us to mature manhood through our steadfast perseverance.

[8 : 48] And when we do get to grips with the message of Job, we find that there's nothing trite about it at all. It doesn't just reduce trials and sufferings to mere testing of personal faith any more than it allows such things to be just merely a punishment for personal sin.

That's what the friends of Job say. No, no, no. Rather, Job learns something much greater. And we need to learn something much greater. That the curse of sin in this world is far bigger than we think. That the influence of Satan in this world is also far bigger than we realize. But in spite of that, God's sovereignty is also much greater than we imagine. And God's story is far, far greater than just our little story.

And above all, God's salvation is far greater than we ever consider it to be. In other words, the words world, life, faith, all of these things are not just about me or you.

That's what we're denying so often when in the midst of pain and perplexity, we ask that question, Why, Lord? Why me? Because we think we are the center of the world.

[10 : 04] But it's not about me. Not just about us. And that's what Job learns. It's not all about Job. And his suffering, his perplexity cannot be reduced to something just about him.

You can't understand it that way. Whether his life's been faithful, as he contends that it has been, or whether he's been sinful, as his friends try to tell him, is what it's all about. No, no, no.

Job is caught up in something much, much bigger. He's caught up in God's story. And it's about God's sovereignty and God's salvation. And Job is just God's servant.

And moreover, what we learn is that the devil is also just God's servant. As Martin Luther called him, he's God's Satan. And he's only doing God's will.

He is serving God's purposes of mercy and compassion. And so what Job teaches us about when troubles come, painful, perplexing trials, things that will leave us deeply puzzled at God and what he's doing, what he perhaps isn't doing.

[11 : 12] What he teaches us is this. Workmen of God, oh, lose not heart, but learn what God is like. God is other than we think. His ways are far, far above.

Love. And that's what Job saw by the end of the book, through his faithful wrestling with God in such a deep and personal way. And that's what we also need to see.

Now, what I want to do is just pick out some key things that will help us to read this book profitably. I encourage you to read it yourself. If you want to read other things that will help you, I very much recommend Bob Files' little book, How Does God Treat His Friends?

Or either of Christopher Ashe's two books on Job. He has a small book and a very large commentary. But we can only scratch the surface this morning, so I want to touch on these four things that I've put on the outline.

God's servant, God's Satan, God's sovereignty, and God's salvation. And it's no accident that the heart of the book comes chapter 28.

[12 : 13] And on the back, the diagram there in blue tries to show you that, as well as the shape of the whole book. That chapter, if you read it during the offering, asks a great question, doesn't it? Where can wisdom be found?

And you'll see in that chapter, it says, well, wisdom is elusive. You can't mine it out of the ground.

And wisdom is very, very priceless. You can't value it by things like gold and jewels.

And God alone is the one who knows the way to wisdom. Only he can give it. And the climax of that chapter, in the very last verse, says this, Therefore, behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.

And to turn away from evil is understanding. Well, we shouldn't be surprised by that, should we, after reading Proverbs last week. But in this book, that question, which is intensely personal, that question that asks, where can wisdom be found, is given in a very personal answer from God, isn't it?

Right there in chapter 1, where we read earlier on. It's there in chapter 1, verse 8. And it's there in chapter 2, verse 3. Because God says, you want to see wisdom? Look at my servant Job.

[13 : 24] There's wisdom. And that's the first point, the first key to the book. We need to recognize the steadfastness of God's servant. In both his suffering and, indeed, in his speech, as he struggles with God to understand what's going on.

Here's a man to whom, in Jesus' words, what God has hidden from the wise and the understanding of the world, God has revealed the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

To the one who has, says Jesus, remember, more will be given. And blessed are your eyes for what they see. Now, that is exactly Job's testimony at the end of this book.

Now my eyes have seen you. The steadfast servant of the Lord is Job. It's very important that we listen to God's testimony about Job, not just to our opinions, and especially not to the opinions of Job's friends.

Look at chapter 1, verse 1. He's telling us, isn't it, that here is wisdom, exactly in the words of 28, verse 28. Here's a man who fears the Lord and turns from evil.

[14:33] A man living a humble, penitent life of faith before God. A wise man. A righteous man. He's my servant Job, says God in verse 8.

God is proud of Job. He's a blameless man who again and again fears God and turns away from evil in everything he does. It's the same thing again in chapter 2, verse 3.

After all this litany of disaster that's come upon him. And Satan, by the way, doesn't dispute that with God. All he says is, well, you need to look at his motivation for being so good.

It's Job's friends who dispute Job's righteousness and his goodness. But not Satan. And then in chapter 2, he's afflicted unimaginably, even more than before.

His whole body covered in sores. And yet, look at chapter 1, verse 22. In all that Job did, he did not sin or charge God with wrong. In chapter 2, verse 9, even provoked by his wife.

[15:35] No. The Lord gave, the Lord took away. Shall we receive good from him and not evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips. His suffering was appalling.

It was terrible. And his friends saw that in verse 13 of chapter 2. And yet he remains God's steadfast servant.

God's words about Job are vindicated before Satan. And Job is righteous through all his suffering. And he remains righteous, even through all his speeches and all his struggles with God, all through the rest of the book.

Between chapters 3 and 37, we have Job's struggles to express himself to God. And we have then all the advice and the so-called comfort that he gets from his friends.

And then from Elihu, this fourth character. And Job's words make no mistake. Job's words are dark and difficult and angry and agonized. If you look at chapter 3, Job's first lament, you'll see they're dark.

[16:42] He curses the day of his birth. He says some terrible things. He accuses God of being his tormentor. As you read through Job, you'll find him shouting, agonizing at God. In chapter 9, verse 24, he says, if it's not God doing all these things to me, then who can it be?

Of course, that's a key question, isn't it? Because Job doesn't know what we know from chapter 1 and 2. He doesn't know about Satan's mission. Yet Job says some terrible things.

And yet, nonetheless, God says, Job is my steadfast servant, even in everything he says. Not only is God justified in his words about Job, but God justifies Job's words about God.

Turn to the very last chapter, chapter 42, page 447. And you see it very clearly here from God's own mouth. Verse 7. It's Job's friends that God condemns for their words.

You have not spoken what is right, as Job my servant has, says God. The same again in verse 8. He repeats it. Now, that can't just refer to Job's humble words of prayer in chapters 1 and 2.

[17:54] It refers to all Job's words, all through this book. But you might say, well, surely God rebukes Job. Surely God does say to Job, it was sinful talk.

And doesn't Job repent? Look at verse 6. That's what it says. Well, if you look at the footnote there in our Bibles, you'll see the second part of verse 6 suggests a different translation.

And in fact, most translations get this whole verse very wrong, I think. Dale Ralph Davis has very convincingly shown that verse 6 should read as we've put it on the sheet there.

It does not say, I despise myself. It's not a reflexive verb at all. What Job says is, therefore, I reject. And in the context of verse 5, what it means is, he rejects the view of God that he has previously held.

What he knew of God, only by hearing secondhand from others. And what he now knows is that that was an inadequate understanding of God because what he says is, now my eyes see you properly.

[19:03] So I reject my previous understanding of you, my small view of God, and now, therefore, second half of verse 6, I am comforted. That verb is translated comforted in every other place in the book of Job.

I'm comforted, not in dust and ashes, but upon the dust and ashes where I'm sitting and have been since chapter 2. Job is saying, what I previously knew, only in part, I've now seen so much more

fully through what you've revealed to me, through my suffering and restings and these words at the end that you've addressed to me.

And what a comfort that is, at last, to know you truly. In the very place of his dereliction, in the place of darkness and desolation and utter forsakenness by God, God brings comfort to his steadfast servant who has learned so personally through his humiliation, has learned the purpose of God is far greater and more marvelous than he could have ever known before.

And so Job is steadfast even in his words of wrestling and searching, in all the raw emotion, in all the angst, even in the anger that he expresses. Because, you see, while his friends just observed his suffering from the outside and spoke to him about God, Job was experiencing that suffering from the inside.

And he was speaking, not about God, but to God. And even though his words might have been expressed wrongly at times, God says he spoke rightly.

[20 : 46] One writer puts it this way, however foolishly he may have said it, Job was looking for a God big enough to comprehend his experience. On the other hand, however wisely they may have put it into words, his friends were upholding a God small enough to conform to their theories.

So Job's words, however bold, however dreadful, however unguarded they may have been at times, God said those words were what is right.

Because, as James tells us, they led him to see God's purpose, which is full of mercy and compassion. Now my eyes have seen you so much more clearly, Job says at the end.

And James says, Job is a model for us of steadfastness under trial amid the perplexity, the puzzles of life in a fallen world, when it may seem very really that God has abandoned us.

You see, in that situation, pious platitudes like Job's friends give him are just no use, are they? They don't help. They wanted a God who is just a tidy system where everything is explainable.

[22 : 00] But the true God is not a tidy system. He is a tiring sovereign. And it was grasping that so much more fully at last that brought comfort to Job.

And I think that is a comfort for us, isn't it? To know that God can cope with our tears, with our questions, even with our shouting, even with our accusations, even with our unguarded lashing out, questioning God in our prayers.

If, if, like Job, those things come from real faith, seeking understanding from God, from hearts that do fear him and turn from evil.

And however much you don't understand, you can't understand, you do still trust him with humble, penitent faith. And it's that steadfast faith, you see, that silences the adversary.

And that's the second thing, the silencing of God's Satan. Despite his savagery, despite his subtlety. We see Satan's savagery, his ferocity, in the first two chapters.

[23 : 08] But, we see him silenced there, don't we, by Job's quiet dignity and his steadfast faith as he blesses God's name and doesn't curse him as Satan says he would. And Job's adversary, that's what the Satan means, he's silenced.

But that is not the end of Satan's role in this book. Many people have thought that. In fact, one writer says this, Satan is irrelevant to the main discussion.

No, no, no. Yes, his savagery may not be so evident, but his subtlety is certainly present right through the whole book. Years ago, William Stowe made that so clear to so many of us.

And indeed, I think that was what set Bob File on his quest to research this whole business of Satan and evil in the book of Job. That was what Bob's PhD was about. And Satan's dark shadow can be discerned all through this book as soon as you've got eyes to see.

And that's the whole point, isn't it, of chapters 1 and 2, to give us eyes to see that, to see what Job doesn't see. It's Satan's malevolence that lies behind Job's friends.

[24 : 15] And instead of comfort, they give them torment and misery. You see it first in the silence in chapter 2 at the end, which isn't, as Bob says, silent sympathy, but it's silent bankruptcy.

It's born because they have nothing to say. That is often the experience, isn't it, of people who are, who are suffering deeply. They find that, that they're left isolated in the silence because people just don't know what to say.

It's better, friends, to say anything almost than absolutely nothing to somebody in that circumstance. But then Satan is certainly behind the litany of words that comes after us.

Maybe Job wished that they had stayed silent, actually, once they start to speak. And as you read through, you find these cycles from the three friends. First of all, Eliphaz, he begins in chapter 4, the

man of spiritual experience.

Oh, I had a word brought to me stealthily, he says, from God for you, Job. The sort of person that says, oh, the Lord's put a word on my heart for you, brother. That sort of extraordinarily irritating person.

[25 : 19] And then there's Bildad, the traditionalist, and he says, oh, Job, you need to look back to how things have always been in the past. You know, the sort of person who says, oh, I have seen it all before. I know the answer to that. Yes, I can tell you.

Equally infuriating. And then there's Zophar. He's the simple gospel man. It's all black and white. It's all plain and straight and easy. Yes, yes, Job, you can't possibly fathom Almighty God, but I can certainly fathom exactly what's going on here.

You've sinned and you need to repent. Simple as that. And an endless cycle of these pious words. Loads and loads of signed texts. Absolutely no sympathetic tears.

And that should alert us, you see, because what we're being shown here in these verses is a classic demonstration of Satan's use of the Bible. Texts are quoted which are true in themselves, but they're used and they're abused.

They're applied without any context, without any wisdom. Satan loves to use the Bible. Remember, the temptation of Jesus in Matthew chapter 4. He loves it. But what is the common factor in all of this in Job's comforters?

[26 : 28] Well, what Satan loves to do, you see, is to make the Bible all about you and all about me. It invites us to think about our circumstances, our suffering, whatever it is, as being explainable only with reference to me and my life and my story.

It's how God relates to me. I'm at the center of the story. And Satan loves to tell you that. The Bible's all about you. It's all about your life. And we love to hear that because we love to hear about me and my life.

And that's what marks all the theology that the friends offer to Job. It's all explained in reference to him, what he's done or what he hasn't done. There's no sense in any of it of the bigger picture. There's no sense of the vast fallenness of sin and the reality of what that means for our lives, even as faithful people, to be caught in the crossfire of a world that is under the curse and often inexplicable.

There's no sense at all of the real ferocity of Satan and of the subtlety of his part behind the story of what's going on in the world.

[27 : 37] No, you see, for the friends, it's all about you, Job. And it's all me-centered theology about God and me and my life and what he's saying to me today. Me and my relationship to God.

And so, obviously, you see, that means if Job is suffering, then it must be to do with him. Either he's done wrong and is being punished by God, as the friends say, or he's right, as Job says, and then God must be doing wrong and so the friends can't possibly believe that.

So it's quite simple, Job. You're in the wrong. But you see, Job does have a problem because he knows that he is faithful and it seems to him as though God is against him.

That's what's so distressing for him. It's not simple. You see, in the friends' view, there can't possibly be a place for a text like John 9, verse 3, can there, in the Bible where Jesus says he's a man who was born blind and it wasn't anything to do with his sin or his parents' sin.

What was it about? That God should be glorified. They can't understand that. Or John 11 where a man like Lazarus dies and goes to the grave not for his own sin but so God can be glorified in him.

[28 : 54] Nor could they have a place in their Bibles for a cross on which the perfect Son of God can die in the perfect good and merciful will of God for the greater glory of God and the blessing of man and the silencing of the adversary forever and ever.

But you see, if you read the Bible the way they read it, Satan's way, a story just about me and about how God relates to me, then you quite literally lose the plot of the Bible.

That was the Jews' great mistake as Paul the Apostle tells us. They didn't see that it was God's greater story, not just their story, a far bigger story of God bringing glory and salvation to all the nations, not just to this little people Israel.

They didn't see the story of God's mercy and compassion in the Scriptures. They missed the story, they kept the texts, they kept the rules but they lost the Redeemer.

And so Paul says the law that would have led them to righteousness didn't lead them there at all because it didn't lead them to the true purpose, to the end, to the Messiah and they left us with

dead legalism instead of a love for the Lord, the Savior.

[30 : 13] And that's Job's friends losing the plot completely. But one by one Job's friends are silenced and the subtle arrows of Satan behind all of their torments are silenced because like the Sadducees in Jesus' days, they didn't know the Scriptures or the real power of God.

But there are further shadows of the evil one all through this book. In fact, in his wrestlings, Job gets some glimpses of this.

In his first lament in chapter 3, he plums the darkness and he talks about those who are ready to rouse Leviathan, the dark, ferocious beast who embodies the powers of evil.

In chapter 7, he talks about the sea and the sea monsters, all images of evil and chaos in the Bible and he says to God, do you think I'm like one of those? Is that why you're against me? In chapter 26, he speaks about the fleeing serpent.

Again, evil forces dwelling in the sea and in the deep which he knows that God has power over and sweeps aside and yet he still doesn't grasp fully the true extent of God's absolute sovereignty even over darkest evil.

[31 : 35] that Satan really is God's Satan serving his purposes and that God is so great that all the real and most terrible evil in this world exists only to serve the greater glory of God and the blessing of his people.

And so that's the third thing that we need to grasp about Job and it's the story of God's sovereignty in all its vast scope, in all its secrets. Job's three friends are silenced and then comes the great poem in chapter 28 and then Job gives his final defense and at the end of chapter 31 he says, here's my signature on it.

Now God, let him answer me. He knows he's been true all along but he knows that he still doesn't understand enough to explain the mystery, the puzzle of what's going on.

He needs God to speak to tell him more. And then comes this new figure, Elihu and we have four speeches from him and he's angry at Job's friends because they haven't given Job an answer and he's angry at Job too because he says that Job has justified himself and has blamed God as if God is wrong.

And the truth is that people differ over Elihu's role. Bob and Ralph Davis they're very negative about him. They see him as a distraction who doesn't have anything to add just like another one of the three comforters.

[33 : 05] Palmer Robertson on the other hand and Christopher Ashe especially see him very positively. Christopher actually sees Elihu as God's prophet speaking nothing but truth to Job.

So I'm a bit confused and I'm in the middle of all of that. But for today's purposes let's just say that perhaps Elihu does help to move Job along towards the path of understanding because he does say to Job that God has not been silent.

That God actually has been speaking to him even in his circumstances. He says that God doesn't just always speak conventionally but sometimes he does speak through painful and difficult experiences.

Pain sometimes is God's megaphone as C.S. Lewis puts it to speak to us. So although I don't think that Elihu's criticism of Job's words is right Elihu says that Job in his words adds rebellion to sin I don't think that's right.

God says Job spoke right. But I do think he's right in part because he says well God is speaking and you need to go on listening Job listen to God and Job does need to keep on listening because Job although he has spoken right about God he hasn't yet been able to say enough about him.

[34 : 30] His God is still too small he needs to know more. And that's always our problem isn't it? Our God is always too small we never yet have come to a full understanding of his greatness but I think Job knows that he's crying out for that he wants God to answer him.

And the truth is much bigger than Job has yet understood and God's servant can be fruitful and just and suffer and God can still be just in allowing that suffering on his servant.

And that is what Job has to understand. How can that be so? Well only because of the great story of God's sovereignty that lies behind all earthly history.

You see God is not just a static system. That's what the friends wanted him to be. God is an active sovereign. He's a personal God. He's weaving a real story right through time and history.

And God has personal enemies. There are forces of evil. There are powers and authorities in the heavenly realms who are at work against God and against his purposes for this world.

[35 : 44] That's what chapters 1 and 2 show us. The powers and authorities in the heavenly realms that Paul tells us about. And God is sovereign even over these, even over the very powers of evil.

But man is not. And the true story of this world is that God is doing battle with the cosmic forces of evil for man and in man.

man. And that is the greater mystery that really explains Job's life. And that is what Job at last is being helped to see by God himself.

Why he's suffering as he is. And so at last in the last few chapters from 38 to the end God speaks plainly in words to Job having been thus far only speaking to him indirectly through his suffering. And God speaks, chapter 38 verse 1, out of the storm, out of the whirlwind of Job's experience. Now a very great deal depends on the tone that you think God uses here when he's speaking to Job.

[36 : 55] So many people take it as a harsh rebuke. But I just don't think that's right. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus speaking to his steadfast servant like that?

Somebody who has gone through all this pain and agony and the torment of the enemies? Think how gentle the Lord Jesus was with his disciples in their ignorance.

Think how gentle he was even when people were taken in sin. And God has said Job has been right through all of this. So I don't think God is being harsh with Job at all here.

I think it's like when he speaks to Elijah out of the storm with a still small voice, a comforting voice, a quiet voice. God here is like a tender father coming to his suffering son, coming down to the ash heap, to the place of misery where poor Job is sitting and suffering and sitting beside him and speaking to him tenderly to help him understand right in the place of misery what's going on.

So in chapter 38 verse 2 I think this is what God's saying. Come on now Job. Who's this? sitting here naked, railing on, making no sense.

[38 : 09] Put your clothes on Job and we'll have a talk. Isn't that how God treats his friends? You've spoken truly Job. There's more, there's so much more.

Don't you realize there'll be things you can't understand, things you can't possibly understand unless I tell you. Things far too marvelous for anyone to grasp on their own.

Were you really there when I created the whole universe and the morning stars sung for joy? Were you? Or indeed in the day when I restrained the sea, the forces of chaos and evil, and made the light shine, verse 13, to banish wickedness?

All this is about God being sovereign over the powers of darkness and of evil. Look at verse 17 of chapter 38. Do you grasp that, Job? Do you understand about the gates of death?

Verse 19, do you know the way to the dwelling of light and the place of darkness? Do you know about that, Job? Verse 21, are you actually infinite in age like me? And it goes on and on, you see, like that.

[39 : 19] God's absolute sovereignty over all the inanimate creation in chapter 38 and in all the animal creation in chapter 39.

And notice when you read chapter 39, it's principally all about predators and prey. The very last verse talks about the eagle killing its prey and sucking up its blood.

What do you make of that, Job? What do we make of that? All God's wonderful, marvelous creation, but still being a place where there's violence and death and evil, but still something that's all held in God's hand to be used for God's glory.

That all through the created order, God is showing Job that there are patterns of innocent suffering, which yet somehow can still be part of God's story of his great sovereignty.

So in chapter 40, verses 3 to 5, Job acknowledges his smallness, doesn't he? I'm of small account. What can I answer? I'm putting my hand right over my mouth, God.

[40 : 32] And God goes on, the first half of chapter 40 and challenges Job again. Job, can you be the judge of the whole universe, do you think? Or verse 40, if you could do that, Job, you'll be the world's savior, won't you?

And even I'll acknowledge it. I don't think you can, can you? In fact, let me tell you what bringing ultimate righteousness to this world really involves.

It involves slaying the behemoth, the great beast, and slaying Leviathan, the terrifying destroyer, great personalities of evil and darkness and death that lie behind all the evil in this world.

Can you do that, Job, do you think? Don't make the mistake when you're reading Job of thinking that these creatures that God describes in this last chapter and a half, that only he as their creator

says that he can destroy.

Don't make the mistake of thinking he's just talking about the hippopotamus and the crocodile. That would hardly be a great climax, would it, to God's revelation to Job about overcoming all evil in the world.

[41 : 41] Job, you can't make a hippo, can you? Not really. No, no, no, no, Job knows fine well that Leviathan, the dragon, is the evil force of darkness that lies behind all evil in the world.

He's already spoken about that back in chapter 3. He knows that as Isaiah says, Leviathan is the fleeing serpent, the twisting serpent, the beast, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan that John sees flung down in the end.

And that's what God is laying before Job here in chapter 40 and 41 with terrifying clarity. He's showing him the powerful, hungry, super beast of evil, untamable by any man.

But he's saying to him, even he is made by God and will be tamed by God. And at last, the one who made him, as chapter 40 verse 19 says, brings near his sword to slay him.

Remember John's vision in Revelation chapter 19? Of the sword coming from the mouth of the rider on the white horse to slay the beast and the false prophet, these same great manifestations of evil?

[42 : 59] That's what God is showing Job here. And at last Job sees that God has power not just over evil, but power to use even the most terrifying evil, like a fierce dog on a leash of its master, to use it only to do his will, to vindicate his name and to vindicate his steadfast servants.

It's not only what Joseph says in Genesis 50, that what man means for evil, God purposes for good, but it's what even the devil himself purposes for evil, must serve and can only serve ultimately the true and marvelous sovereign purposes of God.

You see, that's what brings us at last to this final thing that we just must not miss in this book of Job, and that is the shadows of God's great salvation in the shape of his salvation and in the Savior himself.

Throughout Job's agonizing searching, he cries out for a mediator, for someone who might bring him together with God, who might bring an answer to this terrible mystery.

And how God can be in the right, and yet how Job can still be in the right. In chapter 9, he cries out for an arbiter. In chapter 16, he knows that there is an advocate for him in the heavens, a witness testifying for him on high, and he's feeling after this mystery.

[44 : 33] In chapter 19, there are those famous words, aren't there, that are immortalized in Handel's Messiah, where Job says, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last, he will stand upon the earth, or he will dance upon the graves of the earth, you might say, so that even after my skin is destroyed, I will in my flesh see God.

Job is steadfast in his trust in God, his Redeemer, in his hope in God, despite all his puzzling perplexity. He knows he needs God, but he knows he will find God.

He just doesn't understand how or why it's happening as it is. But what he discovers is that he finds God ultimately dealing with Satan in his own life and his experience.

His very life becomes the battleground in which that vindication is won. God is showing his servant Job the very shape of his great salvation and what it must take.

he's showing him his purpose of mercy and compassion. And his experience shows us you see that the battle for ultimate vindication of man and the ultimate vindication of God before all the powers of heaven and for the ultimate blessing of man that that battle takes place in man.

[46 : 05] He smote in man for man the foe as the hymn says. In a man God's steadfast servant who is ultimately honored and exalted through his humbling into the most terrible suffering and experience of death.

isn't that the shape of Job's deliverance? It's so striking in chapter 42. Job humbles himself in worship.

He submits to the sovereign God whose marvelous will, whose mysterious will is beyond him. And God honors Job. He vindicates him before all as a prophet who speaks truly the words of God and as a priest who prays to God on behalf of his friends who were really his enemies so that they'll be saved.

And then he was blessed abundantly his latter days far more than his former days. Aren't these inescapable shadows of the great story of God's great salvation through his great servant our Lord Jesus Christ?

God is saying to us, you see, just what he was revealing to Job. It's not just about Job's story. This is his story. God's story in this world is ultimately about our Lord Jesus Christ.

[47 : 28] And so, as Christopher Ash says, Job points us to the mystery at the heart of the universe. That a blameless believer who walks in fellowship with his creator may suffer terrible, undeserved pain and may go through deep darkness and then at the end be vindicated.

For there is such a thing in the universe as suffering that is not a punishment for the sin of the sufferer. The pain and the perplexity of Job, you see, come to their climax, don't they, at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, you see, Job's experience of perplexity and pain was not because he was not righteous, but because he was. because he did truly belong to his Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christ who was yet to come and the Christ whose sufferings would transcend even the sufferings of Job, so that Job's faith in his ultimate Redeemer would be proved true and not misplaced.

And God granted Job the great privilege that he grants to every one of us also who know the name of that Redeemer, the Lord Jesus. Not only, as Paul says, to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

Job's path, you see, is the path of true faith. It was Jesus' path and the Lord Jesus grants it to all of those who are truly his. But as we walk that path of darkness, he assures us that he who leads us is truly sovereign over every disaster, every darkness, every terror, even the grave itself, behemoth, and even the devil himself, Leviathan, that ancient serpent.

[49 : 31] And so the message of Job to us as a prophet is this, take heart, take heart and to wrestle faithfully through all life's puzzles and pains.

Learn from Job. Learn from his steadfastness. As we close, listen also to the apostle Peter. You yourselves, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Be sober minded, be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him firm in your faith because you know that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood all throughout the world.

And after you've suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Let's pray together.

[50 : 53] Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy tender love towards mankind has sent thy Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience and also be made partakers of his resurrection through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.