

The Mercy of the Lord and the Steadfastness of Job

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Preacher: Philip Copeland

[0 : 00] He's preached to us. But he's going to be preaching from the book of Job, and we're turning there together now to read in the very final chapter of Job, Job chapter 42. We've been looking through Job with Phil on and off for quite some time, and we've finally come to the end of the story.

And so I'm going to read the whole of this final chapter of the book of Job. If you have the ESV version, which most of us are probably using in the church, you'll see it's headed Job's confession and repentance.

So let me suggest that you scrub out that last word, repentance, and write instead comfort, because that is what this is. If you look down at the little footnote number one, you'll see that at a crucial point, verse 6, you'll see there's an alternative translation there.

comforted as opposed to repent. And we think that's the correct translation, and I'm sure Phil is going to be explaining that.

So let me read, and you'll notice that I will read verse 6 a little differently. Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things, that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

[1 : 23] Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I've uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

Hear and I will speak, I will question you, and you will make it known to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.

Therefore I reject, that is, I reject my previously inadequate knowledge, and I'm comforted upon these dust and ashes.

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, my anger burns against you and against your two friends. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, and I will accept his prayers, not to deal with you according to your folly.

[2 : 42] For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Namathite went, and did what the Lord had told them.

And the Lord accepted Job's prayer. And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much, as he had before.

And then came to him all his brothers and sisters, all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy, and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him.

And each of them gave him a piece of money, and a ring of gold. And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, 1,000 female donkeys.

He also had seven sons, and three daughters. And he called the name of his first daughter, Jemima. And the name of the second, Kezia. And the name of the third, Karenhapuch.

[4 : 04] In all the land, there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And after this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations.

And Job died an old man, and full of days. Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, please do have your Bibles open to Job 42.

If you're a Christian here this evening, then you are someone who should expect suffering in this life. The Bible's so clear about this again and again and again.

As people who follow Jesus, we should not expect to have a life that's marked out by wonderful health, wealth, and prosperity. And friends, the suffering that we read about in the book of Job, we should not think of it as something that just happened a long time ago to that man in a one-off situation.

No, the book of Job actually is describing to us what we should expect from the Christian life. There might be times when Satan will point at us believers and he will ask the Lord to sift us like wheat to bring great times of trial and difficulty upon our lives in order to prove whether or not we are a real, genuine believer.

[5 : 50] Someone who loves the Lord simply because he is the Lord and not because he's the giver of good stuff. And you know, the Lord, when Satan says that to him, the Lord will often say, go on.

He's in your hand. Only spare that person's life. For suffering reveals what's really going on in our hearts. How we respond to pain shows whether we love God simply because he's God or whether we love him because he's the giver of good things.

And as we come to the end of our current series in this book, that's one thing I really want to impress upon all of you, especially if you're a relatively young or new Christian. And I pray that having listened to these sermons on the book, you will not only have been helped to understand it, but hopefully you'll also feel equipped to go back and read this book again and again and again, slowly, patiently, and prayerfully so that you learn more and more and pick up more and more of the rich gems in this book and so that you'll be all the better prepared for when the evil day sweeps over your life.

Listen to a very important verse from the New Testament book of James. And I've mentioned this verse a few times in the series, but let me read it to you now in full. No need to turn to it, I'll just read it to you.

James 5, verse 11. And here James is speaking to Christians, believers who are going through a hard time under pressure, and James wants them to persevere.

[7 : 19] He writes this, Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast.

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 focuses on these two things.

He focuses on Job and his steadfastness, but also on the purpose, the compassion and the mercy of the Lord. And tonight, I'd like us to look at this final chapter really under those two things, two headings.

For that is what we see so clearly in this chapter. Well, firstly then, let's notice the steadfastness of Job, the steadfastness of Job. And as we come to the end of the book, we see that Job is really continuing to do everything that he's done already in the book, persevering as a believer, showing great steadfastness, walking by faith.

Let's read verses one to six again. Job says, I know that you, Lord, can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?

[8 : 32] Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear and I will speak, I will question you, and you will make it known to me. I had heard of you by the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore, I reject, I retract my previous inadequate knowledge of you, and I'm comforted upon dust and ashes.

And really, in these verses, Job is responding to what the Lord has shown him in chapters 38 to 41. You remember that throughout the book, Job has been, this man who suffered terribly, has been crying out to the Lord in prayer, desperately seeking an answer to the question, why?

Why have I suffered in this terrible way? Why have you allowed this to happen to me, Lord? All of these atrocities to sweep over my life. Please, I am desperate for you to come to me and give me the answers that I need.

Give me my day in court with you. I really want to plead my case. I want you to vindicate me and show that I have been a genuine believer, an innocent sufferer. And I also want to hear why you have blasted me with such loss and despair.

[9 : 48] And in chapter 38 to 41, the Lord graciously comes to Job and speaks to him out of the storm. But as we saw over the last two Sundays, the great surprise is the Lord doesn't answer Job's questions directly.

He does not give a blow-by-blow account of why he did what he did. The Lord never reveals to Job what happened in the heavenly realms in that conversation between Satan and him in chapters 1 and 2.

Job never finds out about that. Instead, what the Lord does is he does something even better. He takes Job on a mind-blowing tour of the cosmos and shows how everything is charged with the grandeur of God.

And in doing so, what the Lord is doing there is he's teaching Job huge truths about the Lord, truths that Job knew partially in a limited sense.

But he's blowing Job's mind and saying, look at how big I am. And in doing so, what the Lord does is he lifts the eyes of Job's heart off of his grim circumstances and he fixes them firmly upon the one who's his only hope, the one who's the answer to all of Job's problems and our problems, the Lord God himself.

[11 : 03] Let me just quickly summarize, really quickly, some of the main things that the Lord said to Job in case you've not been here in chapter 38 to 41. The Lord said, Job, I really am the all-powerful creator of the cosmos.

It's all mine. I've made it all. And so, therefore, I'm also the all-powerful sustainer of all life. I am working out my perfect counsel, my perfect plans and purposes all the time.

And I even use the savagery that you find in the created order to achieve my ends. Let me assure you, Job, I really am the just judge of the world. Even though I've allowed you, a real believer, to suffer, I am still nonetheless just.

And I will see that justice is done on the earth. And Job, please be assured that I am in complete control over evil, over pure evil. Behemoth, Leviathan, these monsters, these beasts that we saw figuratively stand for Satan and death.

The Lord holds them on a leash. He says, Job, I am in complete sovereign control over them. They are your real enemies. But I am in control of them.

[12 : 15] And they cannot go one millimeter outside of the limit that I have set for them. They do my bidding and I use them in my mysterious providence to carry out my will and to achieve my glorious purposes.

And one day, Job, I will put an end to them. I will put them to the sword. That's a quick summary of what the Lord has said to Job in the previous four chapters. And what is Job's response to these speeches of God?

Does Job grumble? Does he bitterly bite back at the Lord because the Lord's not answered his why question? Does he grumble with bitterness because the Lord hasn't given him a very careful philosophical answer addressing the problem of evil?

No. Instead, what Job does is he responds with great humility and with real faith. He submits to everything that the Lord has revealed to him and he acknowledges his place as a creature in God's world.

So look at verse 2. Run your eye over verse 2. He acknowledges that the Lord can do all things. Nothing. No one can ever thwart the Lord from accomplishing his plans and bringing his glorious purposes to an end.

[13 : 26] Not even Leviathan or behemoth. And then in verse 3-6, Job acknowledges again with great humility that his knowledge and his insight has been really limited and partial.

He says, Oh Lord, I confess that I've spoken about things that are too wonderful for me. Too wonderful even to begin to fathom these things. I accept that the secret things belong to you because you are the Lord and I'm not.

I accept that your ways are far and above my understanding. And in verse 6, Job sums up his response by saying that he now rejects his former and adequate knowledge of the Lord and he is comforted as he sits on the ash heap.

And remember, I spoke about this a few weeks ago. You can go back and listen to it about the fact that the Hebrew should really be translated as comforted not as repent. If you want to know more about that, come and speak to me later at the end.

And notice that Job does not respond to the Lord in this way because the Lord has restored him at this point. The Lord has still not restored Job and given him back his good health and wealth.

[14 : 38] No, that will happen later. We'll come to that in a minute when we look at verse 10 to 17. But in verses 1 to 6, when Job makes this great statement of faith and submission, he's still on the ash heap.

Job's skin is covered in horrible, painful boils and his heart is still grieving the loss of all the things that he had. Now, why do I highlight that?

Why do I say that? That Job submits to the Lord well before the Lord restores him. Well, just think back to the beginning of the book and this is key. Back at the beginning of the book, what was Satan's accusation against the Lord?

Well, he said, Job only worshipped you, God, because you've given him lots of great stuff. You've made him the greatest man of the East. He's minted. He's got great children, great family, but if you take all of that away, he will turn on you.

He will curse you to your face. I take it, in other words, Satan is accusing Job of being the rich ruler of the Old Testament that we looked at this morning in Matthew's Gospel, the equivalent.

[15 : 40] Well, in chapter 1, after having been hit by initial suffering, Job didn't curse God at all. He blessed the Lord and turned to him in worship.

Remember, 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.

So at the start of the book, Job shows himself to be a real worshipper. He loves God simply because God is God and not because God is the giver of good stuff. That carries on all the way through the book, even in Job's darkest moments when he's wrestling and when he's angry.

And we saw that. He's got times when he's really angry about what's happened and confused and perplexed. And he does the same here at the end of the book at the conclusion. He shows himself to be a real believer who submits to the Lord's word and is comforted by the Lord's word and accepts the Lord's word.

And by doing this, friends, you know what Job has done? Job has silenced the enemy. Job has silenced the accuser. Job has silenced Satan.

[16 : 57] That's what happens when a real believer remains steadfast under pressure. They prove themselves to be a real worshipper and the accuser is silenced.

And James says we are to follow Job's example in steadfastness. We are to keep on in the faith, keep on worshipping God even if everything is stripped from us.

If we persevere through suffering, if we keep on loving the Lord simply because he is our God, even when we're being battered and bruised by the powers of darkness, even when Leviathan's vile presence is in our lives, then we will prove ourselves to be the real deal and we will silence the accuser.

Friends, there is more at stake in the Christian life than our happiness and it is the glory of God and the silencing of the enemy. And of course, we can never do this in our own strength, can we?

We can never. We can only persevere if, like Job, we constantly turn to the Lord, even in our pain, even in our anger and confusion and call out to him for help.

[18 : 08] Well, that's the first thing to notice from this chapter, the steadfastness of Job. And secondly, let's notice the compassion and the mercy of the Lord from verse 7 to 17.

And really, in this second point of the main sermon, it's a bit of a trick point because I've got three sub-points. So it's a homiletical trick for you there. So there we go. But the Lord shows his compassion and mercy in three ways in these verses.

So here's the first way that the Lord shows his compassion and mercy. He vindicates his suffering servant. Let's read verse 7 to 9 again. And the Lord has spoken these words to Job.

Sorry, after the Lord has spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliaphaz, 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 therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves and my servant Job shall pray for you for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly for you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has.

[19 : 24] The Lord thoroughly vindicates Job he declares him to be in the right he acknowledges Job as one of his people let me just unpack the ways in which the Lord goes about that here in verses 7 and 8 the Lord says emphatically I mean emphatically Job has spoken rightly of me that's one of the reasons why I take it we shouldn't translate verse 6 as repent but comfort for the Lord says Job has spoken rightly whereas the friends have not and of course the implication is that the free friends therefore actually do not know the real God they do not know the Lord certainly not in the way that Job does and notice also that the way in which the Lord refers to Job here also vindicates him did you notice that as I was reading that out the Lord calls Job my servant he says it four times in two verses once in verse 7 and three times in verse 8 rapid my servant my servant my servant the Lord actually used that title back in chapters 1 and 2 to describe Job in the heavenly cabinet scene before Satan and all of the other angelic creatures

Job is my servant well now here on earth at the end the Lord publicly says here look at this man Job he is mine he belongs to me he's one of my people and by the way my servant my servant was no ordinary title in the Bible it's often used to denote a special close intimate relationship of love and obedience with the Lord Moses for example is regularly referred to as my servant and the prophets as well listen to Bob File on this point he says this that nothing could show more clearly that Job has come through to the sunshine not that he had ever ceased to be God's servant but now this is being publicly acknowledged as God had initially acknowledged it to Satan himself he's vindicated another thing that the Lord does to vindicate Job to show that he is a believer is he sets him up as an intercessor did you notice this a kind of high priest for his three friends in verse 8 just run your eye back over verse 8 again now if we had been

Job's friends we would have been absolutely gutted at this point before we would have expected God to come to us taking us aside and says look you three great job well done well done for sticking it to that sinful man over there Job that I've been punishing for his secret unrepentant sin well done now you guys you three please go and pray for him because you are righteous and he is a wicked sinner but in fact it's flipped on its head the very opposite happens and this means that it is Job who is righteous justified vindicated in right relation with the Lord and the friends aren't for only people who are right with God can pray and expect their prayers to be answered so friends in these verses God makes it utterly clear that he accepts Job Job is justified by the just judge of the world and this justification this right relationship with God is what Job has been longing for deeply throughout all of his speeches remember in all of his laments he's been crying out crying out again and again please come Lord and publicly show that I am innocent and a real believer and the Lord in his mercy does that for his servant and friends if we are in Christ if we are united to Jesus by faith if we are real

Christian believers God will vindicate us too at the end of time the last day of history the just judge of the world will look at every single one of his people and he will publicly say this one's mine this one belongs to me this is one of my honoured servants this is one in whom I love if you're a Christian then that is where you are headed you will stand before your maker face to face and he will publicly vindicate you and on that day you will be seen to have been so right for putting all of your faith and trust in him it's hard to think of a greater mark of God's compassion and mercy than this however hard the path we tread to get there now just listen to Melvin Tinker he's a great Bible teacher on this point speaking on these verses he says this Job was vindicated in time but that's not always the way it works out for Christians we may well be misunderstood and misrepresented even by some of our so-called

Christian friends we will have to live with that pain but there will come a day when everything will be out in the open when there will be a clearing of the books and that will be judgment day and then the record will be put straight those lies and half-truths those sneers that we may have had to endure not only because we've owned the name of Jesus but because we've had the guts to put our faith into practice when other Christians faded away all of that will be put right God will see to it that we are in the right and it will be made known so let's not worry about it unduly well that's the first way in which the Lord shows his compassion and mercy the Lord vindicates his suffering servant secondly the Lord convicts and restores sinners I was trying to work out the other day how many this is a bit of a random fact I was trying to work out the other day I believe it was a conversation I had with Matt Wilkinson or maybe someone else but how many chickens I've eaten in my life do you know how many chickens you might have eaten in your life

[25 : 27] I reckon I've eaten over 2,000 chickens throughout my life just chicken all the time but I thought the other day how many times have I read through the book of Job throughout my life it's a bit of a random thought but bear with me but I couldn't tell you certainly over the last few years obviously I've read it more and more and more let me put my hands up and say that every time I've reached the end of Job I have missed a glorious truth I have missed a glorious truth and that is how the Lord deals with the three friends did you notice it I've been so wrapped up in Job and his vindication that I've actually missed the great compassion and the mercy that the Lord shows even to these three fools who've spoken absolute folly the Lord shows great compassion and mercy upon them by convicting them by warning them of their sin and that they're under God's wrath and also by giving them a way to be reconciled to the Lord so just run your eye over verse 7 please the Lord comes to Eliphaz and addresses him as the kind of spokesperson of the three the so-called comforters and the Lord graciously warns these men that they've sinned they've not spoken rightly whereas Job has spoken correctly the Lord convicts them let's just give you a reminder earlier on in the book we had a look at the way in which the friends had sinned and what they said against the Lord you can go back and listen to it online if you've missed it but let me give you a summary quickly the three friends spoke about God as though God was some kind of a distant cold-hearted impersonal system one commentator describes it as their God as being like a vending machine

God you know you come along and you pop in a coin of goodness and out pops a can of blessing you come along you pop in a coin of badness and wickedness and out pops a can of poison and that is how God operates that's his system of this running this world and it's majorly flawed because that is not who the true God is and all the way through the speeches the friends categorically deny that there's such a thing as innocent suffering the idea that Lord would allow a blameless and upright believer to suffer is utterly impossible in the minds of these friends and of course what do they then deny if they deny that fact they deny the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ the very means by which we are saved and of course they also therefore get Job so badly badly wrong for Job too is suffering redemptive suffering well in verses 7 to 8 the Lord convicts these three men of sinning and he's very very gracious as I've said before he sets up a way for them to be reconciled to be forgiven and just let's look at verse 8 again let me read it to you the Lord says to them now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant

Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves and my servant Job will pray for you for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly so if these men want to be right with the Lord then they must come to the one whom God has appointed as mediator and the one whom the Lord has set up as their mediator just so happens to be the one whom they have utterly despised and rejected and scorned the one whom they reckon to have been under God's wrath has now been raised up and vindicated and he is now the one that they must go to if they want to come and be reconciled to the Lord and that is what they do verse 9 Eliphaz and Bildad Zophar did what the Lord had told them and the Lord accepted them he showed them compassion and mercy even these fools they are forgiven can I just say it might be that you're here tonight or maybe you're watching online and you're not yet a Christian maybe you're just investigating things well if that's you then it is really good that you are here but please know that this is what our God is like this is what the God of the Bible is like he's so kind to people who do not deserve it and he has appointed an even greater mediator than Job for all the world to come to in order to receive his forgiveness and reconciliation even those who've spoken things that are totally wrong and made massive errors even those who've tormented the Lord's servants forgiveness is available through the greater mediator the Lord

Jesus Christ and anyone who comes to him in faith and repentance they will be forgiven and saved from the wrath to come so that is the second way in which we see the Lord's mercy and compassion in these verses the Lord convicts and restores sinners here is the third way the Lord blesses his suffering servant and this is our final point this evening the Lord blesses his suffering servant in verses 10 to 16 the Lord showers and I mean showers blessings upon Job back in chapter 1 we were told that Job was the greatest man of the east so wealthy he would have topped the wealthiest man of the year award for his region and the Lord blesses his suffering servant so much at the end of the book that he is literally twice the man that he used to be verse 10 says that it's the case verse 11 the Lord gives Job renewed celebration and just notice please the change of Job's position he was once on the ash heap surrounded by tormentors here in verse 11 he's at home he's surrounded by loved ones and it's not torment it's feasting it's celebration all of his aching and all of his tears they've all gone and in verse 12 he's given a colossal amount of livestock verse 13

God gives him a new and bigger family verse 14 we're told about his daughters for some reason I don't know why but they're renowned for their great beauty across the land and in verse 16 God gives Job a long life 140 years double the normal three score years and ten the Lord showers blessings upon his servant it's a remarkable ending but what are we to make of it what are we to make of it well just note that the blessings that the Lord pours out on Job they are not a reward for worship it's not that God says well done old chap you've persevered jolly well now you can have the sweets that I've promised you because you've earned them these are not meritorious blessings not at all in fact the doubling of Job's wealth points to grace kindness of the Lord God is pouring out undeserved blessings here as Christopher Ash says we must never see the sufferings of Job as an undermining the grace of God

[32 : 41] God is no man's debtor but the most important thing about the blessings that Job receives here is that it happens at the end James understands this perfectly well remember that verse I read out earlier from his epistle let me listen read it to you again listen to what he says be patient therefore brothers until the coming of the Lord you've heard of the steadfastness of Job and have seen the purpose of the Lord how the Lord is compassionate and merciful friends the purpose of the Lord to show mercy and compassion will be seen finally only when the Lord Jesus returns in glory you see Job 42 anticipates the return of our saviour and king the end comes at the end the normal Christian life is marked by persevering through spiritual warfare and waiting and difficulty and being loved and being humbled by

God and being justified by God all in the here and now but it is also a big part of the Christian life is clinging on for the end and expecting blessing at the end often we do get blessed now of course we get all sorts of blessing here and now but the blessings we get now are just a tiny little foretaste of the blessings to be poured out at the end and the blessings God will pour out on the believer in the end friends they will be as real as the blessings that were poured out upon Job listen again to Christopher Ash he says this Job knew real prosperity real joy and celebration real fruitfulness and real beauty the blessings of the new heaven and the earth new earth will be rock solid real we look forward to beauty that makes the most beautiful women in the world now seem dull we look forward to fruitfulness that will make the most abundant family in the world now seem barren by comparison we look forward to prosperity that will make the richest man in the world now seem so poor and we look forward to celebration that will make the best party in the world now seem like a quiet glass of apple juice by comparison friends by

God's grace this is what lies ahead for every one of us in Christ those who like Job persevere we will spend eternity with the Lord in the new heavens and the new earth and we will know nothing except God's blessings and it will never end it will go on and on and on and friends it is all a complete undeserved gift of God's kindness his mercy and compassion and one day all of our suffering will be over all of your suffering will be over all of our struggle will be over because we will see him and on that day our enemy will be well and completely done away with we will be vindicated and we will receive blessing upon blessing upon blessing forever and ever and all of it will happen by God's grace but until that day and it's coming every second that goes by is another second that we get closer to that great day until that day let's keep on turning to the

Lord and asking him to give us the same steadfast faith that Job had let's follow in his footsteps as he followed in the footsteps of Christ down the long and hard road to glory well amen let's be quiet for a moment let's bow our heads and then I'll pray for us oh heavenly father how great thou art you are worthy of the worship of all of our hearts worthy of all of our love all of our homage for you have made us and you have redeemed us brought us into covenant relationship with yourself and you've called us to a great destiny of everlasting glory you did all of this by your grace alone you achieved all of this because you did not spare your own precious son who came and shed his blood on the cross to save us we pray that as we wait eagerly for his great return you would help us heavenly father and give us the same steadfastness that your suffering servant

Job had so that we will persevere by faith until the day when Christ comes to publicly vindicate and fully bless us forever and ever and help us to help each other help us to support one another especially when we face the evil day the time when Leviathan draws near and we are sifted like wheat help us as a church to always be looking out for each other so that we will not fall away but we'll keep going to that great day and we pray these things in Jesus precious name Amen