

Lecture #22

Well, this is our eighth and last lesson in the book of Job. Congratulations for sticking with it . . . you've done something you should be proud of – you've actually studied the book of Job. If you read through the Bible in a year, you've read it before, but few really invest the time to study and analyze the chapters that come between "Once upon a time . . . and he lived happily ever after."

Now that's not to say this is a fairy tale, but it does seem to have that format doesn't it? "Once upon a time – the struggle of good and evil by a hero – and a happy ending."

But we need to remember Who is behind this story – God Himself. This is serious business and we're meant to profit from Job's experiences.

When we want God's attention, we just barge right into the throne room in prayer and start talking, don't we. But how does God get our attention? We're familiar with old story of the soft-spoken Quaker who tamed a mule by hitting him over the head with a two-by-four. To explain this exception to his peaceful nature, he said, "To train a mule, you first have to get his attention."

God is very creative – think of the ways He's communicated in Scriptures – a burning bush, a ladder of angels, a still small voice, a wheel in a wheel, a lofty throne, a solar eclipse, a sheet filled with animals, a trumpet sound. In Job's mind's eye it would be a courtroom – but, no – God spoke to him in a storm or whirlwind.

In this lesson God asks question after question, each designed to remind Job of the kinds of things he cannot do, things that only God can do. Then come some blistering questions, "Would you discredit My justice? Would you condemn Me to justify yourself?"

It's important to recognize God does not charge Job with sins that have brought on his suffering, nor does He respond to the "whys" of the suffering, nor challenge Job's defense of his integrity. Job is called on the carpet not because he justified himself, but because of his willingness to condemn God in order to justify himself.

And, God doesn't swallow him up as Job feared, but comes down to Job's level. You're full of questions, Job, now I have some for you.

God is paying Job the greatest compliment that a teacher can give a student. Instead of giving him all the answers, God only asks questions. Instead of stating conclusions, He presents the facts. He counts on Job to use his intelligence to make the connections, see the meaning and apply his understanding to the next higher, more complex level of learning.

Many find it strange that the Lord should speak so sternly to Job, a man "blameless and upright" and whom God Himself has called the very best man in all the earth (1:8). Perhaps it is not so much Job and his theology that the Lord singles out here to pass judgment on, as it is theology itself . . . the whole bumbling project of human God-talk in all its inadequacy. The remarkable feature of the Lord's speeches to Job is how free they are of theology. Again, He does not explain suffering, He does not spell out the rationale for good and evil, He does not justify Himself . . . He simply points to His creation. It's true the Lord's answer to Job isn't what we'd expect as a theological explanation, but that's not the same as saying God gives Job no answer. He does give an answer and the answer is Himself.

In 38:3 the Lord says, "brace yourself like a man." – That's interesting. How can a mere man brace himself to stand before a Holy God? We know the only way is to cling to the cross. There is no other place but Calvary where a human being can stand still before the whirlwind of God's presence and answer His questioning. If Job is righteous, it's not because of what he's done or because he's a fine specimen of a man, but solely because he is clinging in trust to

God. If anyone is to stand fast today, it's because all his hope is braced by the nails of the cross.

The Lord works with Job in these final chapters by taking the ordinary, everyday objects of His creation and parading them around the circus ring as He reminds Job of His sovereign power and glory. It's the same for us, when God speaks, He rarely tells us anything we have not heard before. Rather He just points us to what is already there, whether in creation or in Scripture. The problems that weigh so heavily upon us turn out to have answers that all along have been right under our noses, staring us in the face.

In the first chapter of Jeremiah God draws the prophet's attention to the branch of an almond tree and ask simply, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" How many times before, maybe even that same day, must Jeremiah have seen and admired the beauty of a flowering almond tree in spring? But now this familiar sight becomes for him the Word of the Lord. I feel like that when I look at my roses in bloom. God is continually saying, "I create beauty every day even in this dark and sinful world. Enjoy it."

Much of the Lord's first discourse concerns the weather. Insurance companies refer to natural disasters as "acts of God." But isn't today's sunshine just as much an act of God as last week's rain? We all talk about the weather, and for some it may be the closest they come to contact with the spiritual. Chatting about weather is one means for a godless society to satisfy its natural yearning to be godly. It's a way of talking about the Lord without the embarrassment of having to mention Him by name.

Chapter 39 is the parade of animals, the second ring of His grand circus. We're kind of reminded of how God paraded all the beasts before Adam so he could marvel at them, give them names and realize the full extent of his dominion.

I hope you chuckled in 39:13-18 where God describes the ostrich. This dumb, clumsy, ostrich without a grain of sense in her tiny head, lays her eggs on the ground unmindful that any foot may crush them and Scripture says, "God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense." We have to smile just thinking about sticking her head in a bush thinking "I'm safe because what I can't see won't hurt me." Why would God create a bird with feathers, wings, long legs that can't fly? We don't know . . . some things just exist to bring pleasure to God.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "The world is so full of a number of things, / That we should all be as happy as kings." But we're not as happy as kings, are we? The daily delights of existing life and marvelous creation around us are clouded by evil, sin and suffering. Deep within us, no doubt, there is buried a memory of what it must have been like for Adam to live in the Garden of Eden with all its wonders and without sin. To wake up that very first morning of life and see the brand new world.

In Job 40 vs.1,3,6 we read "The Lord said to Job . . . Job answered the Lord . . . The Lord spoke to Job." A conversation, a dialogue – speaking face to face with God was taking place. Prayer is dialogue with God. The word **religion** means "linking" -- it's just a synonym for relationship/friendship. True religion is friendship with God, the linking of heaven and earth. The lines are always open. (For you who don't know it, God's phone number is Jeremiah 33:3.) As in any conversation, sometimes we talk, sometimes we listen. Certainly we do a lot of talking, but do we listen?

Well, Job had listened to God, now he replied by saying, "I put my hand over my mouth, I spoke once, but I have no answer, twice, but I will say no more." One can kneel, bow, lift hands, fall prostrate, but Job's ultimate submission is to yield his tongue. In pain and confusion he'd cried out to God, yet as soon as the Lord answered him, he instantly grew silent and humble. Where before he was all mouth, now he is all ears.

So the Lord points to the third ring of His grand circus which contains the Behemoth and Leviathan. No one knows what these creatures represent. They may even be symbolic like the ones in Ezekiel. They may be symbols of what is invisible and supernatural.

Some commentators take the description of the Behemoth to represent the hippopotamus or rhinoceros. The hippopotamus has no place among the birds and beasts listed earlier because it has no unique function or special quality that sets it apart in the animal kingdom. The hippo is ugly and useless. It's a maverick beast known for crashing through the jungle, upsetting the harmony of nature, and sinking up to its eyeballs in a muddy riverbed. It's has a powerful body, strong muscles and steel-like bones. God asks Job, "Can you go fishing and catch a hippopotamus? Could you reel him in and bring him under your control." No? Then what makes you think you could control the Creator of that hippopotamus?

Have we ever considered why God creates things that seem ugly and useless? Shouldn't He do away with all creatures which seem to have no obvious purpose? Learning from the hippo may seem a bizarre way to appreciate what appears to be ugly and useless in the realm of God's creation. But without the hippo, we would lose a special example of God's loving grace for an every undeserving creature, especially as we recognize that there is something of the ugly and useless in each of us.

At the other extreme of creation is the Leviathan, often identified as a crocodile. In contrast to the playful trust of the useless hippo, the crocodile is a creature of violent hostility. God uses it to symbolize the forces of evil that exist for one purpose in the universe – to oppose the will of God. In fact, vs. 34 says, "he is king over all the sons of pride." The horny, hostile monster is described as unmatched, unfeeling, untrustworthy, unmanageable, unplayful, undesirable, inhospitable and unethical. What's the difference between a crocodile and an alligator? Some say the crocodile will attack without provocation while the alligator will strike only when provoked.

One of my favorite old movies is "King Solomon's Mines" with Debra Kerr and Stewart Granger. It shows the lushness of Africa with its flocks of ostriches, the hippopotamus, the lion, giraffes and the elephant. The great white hunter makes the remark, "It's not the lion, but the elephant who is king of the jungle."

Maybe, some have suggested, the Leviathan is an elephant. Job 41:9 says, "Any hope of subduing him is false; and the mere sight of him is overpowering." If the Leviathan represents the immenseness of evil, isn't it presumptuous to feel that somehow we can tame the evil that surrounds us? That's the whole point of Job, we are not in control, God is.

The power of the Leviantan is great, but nevertheless, it's a creation with only limited power. What we and Job could not tame, God can. The mere touch from God and the Leviantan is deflated. As Christians we've already experienced firsthand something of God's power to annihilate evil as we recognize how His love on the cross excised the evilness of sin from our lives and drew us close to Him.

You've heard the question, "How do you eat an elephant?" One bite at a time. We eat the Leviathan in the world a little bit each day. It takes a very big God and a very big faith in God to be able to absorb so much evil. The Leviathan seems so gargantuan, but the essence of the gospel is that the love of God is greater than any evil – and not just a little bit greater, but infinitely greater. 1 John 4:4 assures us "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

In 42:3 Job responds, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." Perhaps the best way to comment on Job's final response to the Lord is to quote Psalm 131:

"My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonder for me. I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother."

There is a strange thing that happens at the point when we finally, somehow, manage to give up wrestling with God over complex matters. In submission there is that "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" that Paul spoke about in Philippians 4:7.

We could make a lot out of the fact that Job's final words to God were words of repentance, as if somehow this proves that all along he'd been wrong. On the contrary, it proves his righteousness. For wrong though he may have been in some of his behaviors and attitudes, his very capacity to repent shows that in his heart of hearts (where righteousness is calculated) he was right. Here was a man who was accustomed to walking uprightly with his God, whose entire bent was towards putting things right with God on a moment-by-moment basis.

Job's repentance reveals what had been happening to him throughout his ordeal. His God is getting bigger and bigger. God does not change, but our human perception of Him does. He had moved so close to Job in his suffering that His overshadowing presence actually crowded out the vision of God. Like that poem "Footprints." Where were your companion footprints when I needed you? I was carrying you. It calls for repentance when we recognize how close the Lord Almighty was and is to us in difficulty when we, in our humanness, perceive Him as far away.

Job's S-A-T exam (the Sovereign Almighty Test) is now concluded and Job failed miserably. Job bombed out on all 77 questions. Through this interrogation God has taught Job that He alone created everything and He alone has the right to do with His own what He pleases. He is under no obligation to explain His actions to His creation. He alone is sovereign and unaccountable to anyone. Period. End of paragraph!

Job is so overwhelmed by this revelation of divine holiness and glory that he is now silent before God. Too awestruck and stunned to speak. When was the last time you were overwhelmed by God? Hopefully, today's lesson in Job renewed in us a healthy reverential fear and awe of God as we see His unrivaled holiness and power. It's that which promotes a steadfast faith when we truly recognize that God is God.

Perhaps more than any other Old Testament character, Job through his undeserved suffering becomes a reflection of Jesus Christ. For it's not simply through sacrifice and prayer that Job's friends gain forgiveness, but rather through the entire mystery of Job's suffering which has been invisibly breaking ground for the living God in their hard hearts. Thus those friends who considered Job "stricken by God, smitten by Him and afflicted" in the end receive healing through his wounds. Healing for what? Healing for wounds less visible than Job's, wounds they did not even know they had: the wounds of lovelessness and judgmentalism.

Who knows but that the whole reason for Job's ordeal was that in the end his friends might be saved through his prayers.

I liked the thought Mike Mason had in his commentary on Job. He says, "There is an old Jewish legend that runs like this: When the children of Israel were about to leave Egypt, Satan rushed to God protesting, 'Master of the Universe, think! Only yesterday these men and women were infidels, idol-worshippers, and You plan to perform miracles on their behalf? Will You really part the waters of the Red Sea for them? And give them Your law? How can You trust them?'" In order to get rid of Satan, God pointed out Job and said, "Have you considered my servant Job? Go and test him first; we'll talk later." And while Satan was busy torturing his

victim, God freed His people from bondage. That may be fanciful, but God always has a reason.

Some people scoff at the happy-ever-after ending of Job. But it's an attribute of God – lavish generosity. It's just the way He is. Naturally the Lord's liberality does not always take the form of material riches. That's been one of the chief lessons of the last 40 chapters. Technically speaking there is no direct connection between Job's righteousness and the final restoration of his wealth. After all, the story didn't have to end that way. The fact is . . . that it's just a demonstration of God's unmerited grace and generosity. The Lord's giving is just as unpredictable as His taking away.

Then too, it's not as if Job's new wealth just suddenly fell out of the sky. We're told the Lord used Job's friends and family to rally around him and in 42:11 it says each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. Was that how Job was able to purchase new livestock and get back on his feet? Even then it would have been a slow process. How wise it was of the Lord to give Job real wealth in friends and family.

Were you surprised to learn that Job had brothers and sisters? Where were they when Job needed them? Did they desert him when the chips were down? Maybe. But now they're back . . . they've witnessed a man endure the worst and yet praise God and stand true in his faith. What a tremendous testimony it is to everyone around us when we can stand firm in times of trial.

Whether you realize it or not we've been on a mountain-top experience with God through this book of Job. We have been stretched to think about deep things of God. But the gospel must lived out in the valley of daily affairs. In Job's case he returned to the business of raising sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and child-rearing. He had three daughters and seven sons. The names of his daughters were Jemimah (dove), Keziah (perfume) and Keren-happuch (eye makeup). Peace, fragrance, beauty. These daughters, contrary to the customs of the times, were included in Job's inheritance – a look to the future gospel era when there would be neither slave nor free, male nor female, but all one in Christ. (Gal 3:28). A revolutionary love had swept over Job.

No matter how happy the ending, however, nothing can remove the suffering itself. The losses Job faced would always be with him. A happy ending is better than a miserable one, but it does not transform the suffering he endured into something less than suffering. A survivor of 9/11 has not suffered less because he ultimately settles back into a normal routine of life.

Job never did get all the answers; he never knew anything about the wager between God and Satan. He simply had to trust God that something far greater was at stake than his own personal happiness. But he has stopped hinting that God is unjust; he has come to know God better; and he enjoys the Lord's favor in rich abundance again.

A side note about the wager between God and Satan. Don't leave Job with the idea that God is capricious, He does not play with the lives of His creatures so He can win a bet. Clearly the challenge to Satan was not a game. Nothing in the book tells us why God did this. Nevertheless, the wager with Satan is in certain ways congruent with other biblical themes. God's concern for the salvation of men and women is part of a larger, cosmic struggle between God and Satan in which the outcome is certain while the struggle is horrible. While Job was rebuked for his arrogance, clearly he never turned his back on God. God won the wager.

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu expressed opinions about God in the grandest poetic eloquence. None of them, however, used the word "wonderful" to exalt His works. At the thought of His presence, they quaked with fear. Now we know why. Fear is the logical response to the justice of God; wonder is the response to the grace of God. Again, Fear is the logical response to the justice of God; wonder is the response to the grace of God.

Here again is a picture of the path leading to God's forgiveness. A blood sacrifice. The three counselors had to offer 7 bulls and 7 rams. Acting as a priest, Job was to participate in their sacrifice, praying that God would accept them. The obedience of sacrifice instantly wiped the slate clean on the basis of this blood sacrifice.

Maybe Job's prayer sounded like something like this: O Lord, here are these friends of mine. They've been stubborn, hard-headed, foolish, ignorant men, just as I was Lord. You forgave me, and now I ask you to forgive them as well." That would remind us of Paul's words in Ephesians 5 when he said "Be kind, tenderhearted to one another, forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

What happened to Job, forgiving others, also opens the floodgates of God's blessing to flow into our lives. The best way to get even is to forgive. Everything Job had was doubled. But you say, he only had 10 children, same as before.

Those first ten were deposits in heaven as Barbara Johnson used to call them. So he had ten in heaven and ten on earth. A doubled blessing.

Since we do not know the age of Job when his trials began, neither can we say exactly how old he was when he died. The Septuagint says he lived 210 years in all – that would make him 70 at the onset. After this Job lived 140 years. So if Job was 70 at this time, and tradition says he lived to be 210 years old, that's 70 plus double that amount. He saw four generations of descendants.

Life is not a picnic, although the world around us thinks somehow it ought to be. We're not here just to have a good time. God gives us good times out of His gifts of love and grace, but they are nothing we deserve. We're here to fight a battle as Job was against the powers of darkness. We're here to be engaged in combat with powerful forces seeking to control human history. We must never forget that.

One of the things we learn from Job is about the root of pride. Pride is expressed in terms of bigotry, pompousness, self-righteous legalism, judgmental attitudes and condemnation of others in harsh and sarcastic words.

Pride is the root of all sin and it can express itself in various ways. So, what has job learned?

- 1) God's right to rule his life.
- 2) God's ways are past finding out.
- 3) God wants a teachable spirit
- 4) God can be seen face to face.
- 5) God accepts repentance.

Out of all the questions on Job's mind – God gave him the answer to only two . . . the same very important questions we need to come to grips with --

- 1) Who am I? (point up)
- 2) Who are you? (point to self)

Whew – that's something to think about this week.

What's the ultimate bottom line for us from the book of Job?

Maybe if all hell is breaking loose in your life, it's because you're doing something right.