

Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Job 42:1-17  
“Here Ends the Lesson”

You just never know, when you wake up, how a day is going to go or how a simple decision can create a whole host of unusual occurrence. A story coming out of Zimbabwe tells of a bus driver who stopped at an illegal bar for a drink while he was transporting 20 mental patients from one hospital to another. While he was having his drink, the patients all escaped. Not wanting to have his incompetence found out, he simply went to a nearby bus stop and offered free rides.

He then delivered the passengers to the mental hospital, and told the staff that his passengers were very excitable, and prone to bizarre fantasies. Believe it or not, the driver’s deception was not discovered for three days. Then I read about Alexander Robinson of Mobile, Alabama, who after having had his sight restored, said to his wife, “you sure have gotten fat in four years.” Then there is the poor American tourist in South America.

He had the misfortune to be attacked by killer bees as he stood on the bank of the Amazon River. To escape the onslaught, he dove into the nearby river and was immediately devoured by a school of piranhas. (The Federalist Papers) You just never know, do you. Is this going to be a good day or a bad one. Will this be a good decision or a bad one? As we come to the end of our journey through Job something still does not feel right.

After all that Job has endured. After he was cursed by his wife, ridiculed by unruly youths, chastised by his friends, and ultimately corrected by God, he is restored to even greater wealth and prominence. Finally, we read that his brothers and sister came (where have they been through all this) to comfort Job and break bread with him. It has a sort of fairy tale ending to it, doesn’t it? “And Job lived happily ever after”, for 140 years total life span.

Is this how your story goes? What is a normal, average day, for a believer in Christ? Is there such a thing? Job is a book of extremes. Extreme highs, and horrifying lows. Perhaps Job is a bit of a fairy tale, but it raises some unsettling thoughts for us. Like, does God treat us like he treated Job? Even those who claim a faith in Christ? The simple conclusion is that there is no reason to think that we will be treated any differently.

God’s purposes for us, and for the world, will not be thwarted, and if necessary, we may get swept up in the hard moments of those unfolding plans, and we may never know what purpose lay behind them. Our struggles and challenges, do not often get resolved in such a triumphant way as Job’s. Our losses are not compensated by an even greater increase. So, as Job rides off into the sunset, you may want to shout, “Hey wait a minute!” I’ve got more questions.

Now, I cannot answer all of our misgivings about this story of Job, or about its ending, but thankfully there is some lessons for us to glean. We might want to start with a verse from the letter of James which reads, “Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” (James 5:11)

Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Many times, in our lives, and certainly through this series, I have heard the common phrase “the patience of Job”. Patience can also be expressed as perseverance, or steadfastness. What the story of Job reveals about this quality of patience, is that we are not viewing this character trait correctly. We meet a friend, who quietly, and meekly sometimes, just lets things roll over them. They are coping with a challenging experience and we say, “You must have the patience of Job”.

However, patience or perseverance, is a much richer word than just passively letting things happen to us. Two aspects of perseverance occur in Job. One is perseverance in warfare. The other is perseverance in waiting. The book of Job is very honest about these meanings, and we may balk at studying Job, but you have to admit the book is blunt and honest. What emerges in this story is that Job is a believer fighting a battle.

God has been challenged by the Satan, the Leviathan, and the behemoth, and they are at war. What we discover is that Job is not standing on the battlefield, he is the battlefield. The battle for Job’s soul is fought out as he struggles against the monsters tearing at his life. It is a dark and sinister warfare. The Satan fills Job’s mind with: despair, darkness, death, and futility. Job is residing deep in the valley of the “shadow of death”.

Job is suffering because he is a believer. His faith instigated all this. God centered him out, saying in essence, “See, here is a true believer”. This is not about human suffering in general, but this is about supernatural suffering. Job is not assailed by humans, but by dark forces; all because he believes in God. As we saw earlier in our journey, this dark suffering was fulfilled in Jesus who suffered as a blameless, perfect believer.

The Gospel reveals that Jesus was assailed by Satan with even more ferocity than he did on Job. Time and time again, Satan tears at Jesus’ soul, wanting him to falter. Every morning, Jesus awoke to spiritual warfare. Job foreshadows that the suffering of Jesus, and every believer or disciple, follows in that same path. Luke 22:31, 23 reads, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you (plural, meaning all the followers). That he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you (singular) that your faith may not fail.

Notice, that Jesus never prayed that the disciples would not be sifted, or that Satan could not attack them. Rather he prayed and expected that his followers could remain steadfast and persevere even in the midst of these assaults. The hard truth is, that we should also expect this experience if we seek to follow Christ. Every morning we ought to arise with the foreknowledge that we are the battlefield, and Satan is very busy.

Every believer walking around is a target. Satan still test us to see if our faith is real. 1 Peter 4:12 reads, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ’s suffering, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.”

This is one inescapable facet of the Christian life, we are battlefields. But perseverance means also waiting. It means prayerful waiting. In 42:7 God says to Eliphaz, “You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” Does this strike you as surprising?

Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

It is not surprising that Job's friends are said to be wrong, but God says Job is right. How can this be? Time and time again, Job has said some terrible things about God, accusing God of wrongdoing. This is very serious, and Elihu calls Job out on this behaviour. So, how can God say that Job has spoken right about him? It may be, God is referring to Job's humble repentance to the speeches of God. This makes sense.

But is there more going on here. Is God just talking about what Job said, or about who Job is as a person? It unfolds like this. Job's friends have presented a neat and tidy theological system. It is a system they are quite confident in, and it gives them some measure of comfort. But they have no relationship with the God behind their system. There is no awe, wonder, no longing, no yearning and no prayer in their religious thinking.

They are simply content with the rules of the system that they have invented for themselves. Now some of the things they said were true. Such as Eliphaz who said of God in 5:13, "God catches the wise in their own craftiness." In other words, a clever person will be called to account by God. Sure, they say some correct things, but they speak ill of God because they have no relationship with God.

But Job speaks rightly. One of the predominant themes in Job is that Job wants to bring his struggle to God directly. Job is not satisfied with a religious system, but he wants God. This is likely what God means by Job speaking rightly of Him. The rightness of Job's heart is what leads Job to humble repentance at the end of the book, in response to God's speeches. Job's friends had no desire to go to prayer with Job's concerns. They were content to fit it into their system.

There is a powerful lesson for all of us in this type of perseverance. Like Job, we too can become crushed by life's experiences, and even resort to saying things to God that we shouldn't, but God sees past all that and looks at our hearts. The Christian life will be full of unresolved waiting and yearning for God. True believers are never fatalists. We are to never to just throw up our hands and say "que sera, sera. Whatever will be. The future is not ours to see."

Instead, we ought to wrestle with God, as Jacob did. Not to prevail over God, because we cannot, but rather to cling closely to the rock of our salvation. We are to persevere in warfare and in waiting, struggle and prayer. James says one other thing in his letter that we need to somehow reconcile with Job. In James 5:11 James writes, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful". We might heartily agree, but what about Job?

Satan was allowed to go and destroy all of Job's possessions, and kill his family, and strike his health. Furthermore, we read that this was all under the sovereignty of God. How does that fit with seeing God as merciful and compassionate? Earlier we considered the analogy of Satan like a fierce dog biting us, but still being restrained on God's leash. The book of Job does not deny this analogy.

But in our society, even if a person's dog bites us, and is on a leash, the owner holding the leash is still responsible. So, what does that mean for God mercy and compassion. James says that his compassion and mercy are linked to his purposes. The end goal, towards what God has been working. In Job we see this unpacked before our very eyes.

Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

God loves Job enough to humble him. When God speaks, Job says very little, and is simply in awe. His words of repentance are not an admission that his friends were right; that he had some secret sin. Job had maintained his integrity throughout, but he realizes as God speaks, that he has been presumptuous. He has spoken of things he does not understand, and so he bows down in worship. Job recognizes his place before almighty God, and that's never a bad thing.

Now if we were to go around believing we are nothing but worms in relation to our fellow human beings, we are likely destroying ourselves psychologically. It would be an inferiority complex, or something much more serious. But in the presence of God, it is very healthy to grasp how insignificant we really are and how great God is. In the presence of God, Job has discovered his place. He is a creature at the mercy of an all powerful and sovereign God.

It is an act of love for God to humble Job, and bring him back to where he should be. This is the same for us. Sometimes we pray for success, or resources, that end up swelling our pride, which leads to self-confidence and ultimately independence from God. The most deeply and compassionate thing God can do, is humble us and bring us back to our place. Maybe when we hit a very low point in our lives, it is God restoring us to our rightful place.

The other way God shows mercy, and compassion, is by justification. God acknowledges Job as one of his people. This was something Job was longing for. This relationship with God is the basis for Job having spoken right about God, whereas the friends had not. God also calls Job his servant. This is a title of dignity. God uses the title for Moses and the prophets. It speaks of a covenant relationship with God.

And in a surprising turn of events, God tells the friends of Job, that Job will pray for them. If we had been one of the friends this may have stunned us. We might have thought of ourselves as being the righteous one who should do the praying. Yet, Job is to be the intercessor, the bearer of sacrifices. It signifies that Job is in a right relationship with God, and therefore prepared for this intercessory role.

In these ways, God makes it clear that he accepts Job. He belongs to God, and that is what Job has wanted all along. This is the mercy God bestows on Job and this is the mercy he bestows on us, no matter how hard the path has been to get there.

So, it comes down to the fact that God blesses Job. God first restores Job's relationships, then his resources. We read about a feast that is the first celebration mentioned since 1:4. Joy comes back into Job's life. Notice please, that Job doesn't wait until all his relationships and resources are restored to worship God. Instead, Job worships God with no expectation of any material blessings. What he received, is a gift of grace. God owes Job nothing.

We need to see this. Blessings are never a reward for worship. God never hears us singing or praying and thinks, "well isn't that grand, I'll send them a new car." It is also important to note that the true blessing comes at the end. James wrote this same thing. "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord...you have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:7, 11)

Sunday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The Christian life is warfare and waiting, and being loved and humbled by God and being justified by God, all in the here and now. But there is the expectation of a great blessing at the end. A blessing far greater than all the camels and beautiful daughters Job received. We will feast at a celebration that no one can even imagine. God's interactions with us are intimately personal, and he longs to bring us to himself for now and forever.