

At the beginning of the book of Job we saw Job’s three day descent into hell.
On the first day, in the heavenly court room, God handed him over to Satan.
On the second day, in rapid succession,
 Job’s oxen and donkeys were stolen by the Sabeans,
 fire from God burned up the sheep and the shepherds,
 the Chaldeans stole his camels,
 and Job’s seven sons and three daughters all died when their house collapsed.
On the third day, with God’s permission, Satan struck Job with loathsome sores,
 and Job’s wife urged him to curse God and die.

In other words, Job has been alienated from everything he held dear.
The theme of “alienation” captures the whole picture:
 Job is alienated from others (his children are dead and his wife has lost hope);
 Job is alienated from the land (his flocks and herds);
 Job is alienated from himself (his body is wracked with pain);
 and all of this because Job is alienated from God.

Job had said that in his prime, the friendship of God was with him (29:1-6).
But now, in his three day descent into hell,
 Job has been cut off from God’s favor.

You can describe alienation in words.
But you cannot solve the problem of alienation simply by talking.

We last time that Job is comforted by the vision of God.
It’s not that just “seeing something” makes him feel better;
 what God *says* is absolutely essential to the process! –
 but Job, the suffering Servant of the LORD,
 now has the *one thing* that he desired above all else:

 “I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
 let me know why you contend against me.” (10:2)

God has explained why he was contending against Job –
 and he has given an answer far better than Job had imagined!

 I sent the Beast and the Dragon to test you –
 to see if you would remain faithful to me.
 Well done, good and faithful servant;
 enter into your rest!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 126.

The Psalm opens with a memory of what it was like when God restored Zion's fortunes –
the same phrase used here in Job 42.
We remember what it was like when God restored and refreshed us!

But then in verse 4, the Psalmist pleads with God “restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negeb!”

All streams in the Negeb are wadis –
most of the year they are dry –
and they only flow with water when the rain comes!

Psalm 126
2 Corinthians 1

As we saw last time, verses 3, 5-6 are the key to understanding Job's response to God.
Job says in verse 3, “I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

Why does Job acknowledge a lack of knowledge?

Because he hadn't realized that he was engaged in
an “unwitting bullfight with a raging Satan!” (Andrew Brinkerhoff)
But now he does!

Many people think that God fails to explain to Job what had happened.

But if you understand the Beast and the Dragon (Behemoth and Leviathan)
in terms of what these images would mean in the ancient world,
then you start to realize that God is telling Job *exactly* what just happened to him!

And then Job says:

Oh, wow!
When I said that God was after me – that may have been technically true –
but it turned out that God was after me *in order to defeat Satan!*

And so Job concludes,

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
therefore I withdraw my case, and I am comforted regarding my dust and ashes.”

The whole point of the friends had been to “comfort” Job –
to help him see how his suffering fit into the pattern of the universe.

Job now says that he is comforted.

Sure, part of it is because he now understands what was happening to him –
but that is not the main point.

After all, *it's still happening!*

Job is still on the ash heap.

His sores still ooze.

His breath still stinks.

His children are still dead.

If *someone else* had come and explained what had happened,
Job would still have no comfort!

Why does Job withdraw his case?
Why is he comforted?

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, *but now my eye sees you.*”
The problem of the book of Job had never been solely an intellectual problem.
We saw that in chapter 3 –
 where Job cried out in anguish!
 Certainly the wisdom debate focused on reasons and arguments,
 but the intellectual solution: “God is God, and you are not” –
 is not exactly *comforting* in and of itself!

The friends had all said, “God is God and you are not!”
 Job replied, Yeah, I already knew that. You’re not helping!
Then God says, “I’m God and you are not!”
 And Job replies, “Oh, right, I didn’t know that as well as I thought I did!”

There is all the difference in the world between my daughter comforting her sister,
 “You’ll be okay – Daddy loves you!”
 and when I say,
 “You’ll be okay – Daddy loves you!”

The words are the same – what’s different is the presence of the One who speaks!
Our comfort is that God has raised Jesus from the dead –
 and by faith, we now behold him, sitting at the right hand of the Father.
And with that comfort we are able to comfort others who are in affliction.

In our text today we see three things:
 the vindication of Job,
 the restoration of Job,
 and the blessing of Job.

1. The Vindication of “My Servant Job” (42:7-9)

a. The Anger of the LORD against the Three Friends (v7)

⁷After 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.

You may recall that Eliphaz the Temanite was the leader of Job’s three friends.
Jeremiah 49 says that Teman was famed for its wisdom.
But the LORD now turns to Eliphaz and says:

 “My anger burns against you and against your two friends.”
We heard in chapter 32 that Elihu’s anger burned against Job – and against Job’s friends.

Elihu was right to be angry at the friends –
but he was wrong to be angry with Job!

And now the LORD's anger burns against Eliphaz and his friends
because they have not spoken rightly about God.

This is somewhat perplexing to many.
After all, the friends are impeccably orthodox!
They have resolutely *defended God* against Job.
Why does God now condemn them?

Well, as we saw during the wisdom debate,
the *problem* is that the friends have been defending God!
The friends fell into the trap that orthodox theologians are especially susceptible to:
the unusual circumstance!

If someone brings a lawsuit against God,
who would you side with?
That's a no-brainer!
God!

Well, that's what the friends did!

They tried to hush Job up:
Job had said that God had put him in the wrong (19:6),
that God was attacking him without cause (9:17).

Eliphaz and his friends were horrified by such impiety!
The God I serve would never do a thing like that!

Be very careful how you defend God!
Because the God you serve *did* multiply Job's wounds without cause!
When someone says, "I don't deserve all that has happened to me" –
don't insist that God would never do that!

But wait!
Wouldn't that mean that God is unjust?
Certainly Eliphaz thought that.
And before all this happened, Job no doubt thought the same thing!
If you expect justice at every moment – or in every instant –
then you will be sadly disappointed.

God *is* just – and he will make all things right *in the end* –
but that doesn't mean that everyone gets what they deserve at every moment.

Eliphaz and his friends have not spoken of God what is right,
“as my servant Job has.”

Why does God call Job, “my servant”?

There are not many people who get called “my servant” in the Bible.
There was “my servant Abraham” (Gen 26:24),
“my servant Moses” (Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2, 7),
“my servant Caleb” (Numbers 14:24),
“my servant David” (2 Samuel 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kings 11)
“my servant Isaiah” (Isaiah 20:3),
and “my servant Israel” (Isaiah 41-53, etc.)

That last one – “my servant Israel” – the suffering Servant of the LORD –
connects especially well with Job.

Job is the innocent servant of the LORD who suffers for no fault of his own.
“It pleased the LORD to crush him” –
that is what Isaiah will say about the suffering servant;
it is what Job has said about Job.

“My servant Job” has become the “suffering servant” –
he suffers all that Israel was supposed to suffer.

And in this way Job is set before us as a picture of Christ.
For our Lord Jesus Christ – the suffering servant – did not come to be served,
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Job has spoken rightly of God.
Speaking rightly of God does not mean saying nice things about him.

Do you remember Job’s hymn in chapter 12?
“With God are wisdom and might...
he leads counselors away stripped, and judges he makes fools...
he leads priests away stripped and overthrows the mighty.
He deprives of speech those who are trusted
and takes away the discernment of the elders....
He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth
and makes them wander in a pathless waste.
They grope in the dark without light,
and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.”
(12:13, 17, 19-20, 24-25)

Speaking rightly of God does not mean
that you put on a smiley face when you worship him.
You don’t have to pretend that everything is okay.
You can speak honestly to God – just remember who he is when you speak to him!

Job spoke truly about God when he said:

“For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again...

But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he?...

But the mountain falls and crumbles away,

and the rock is removed from its place;

the waters wear away the stones;

the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;

so you destroy the hope of man.” (14:7, 10, 18-19)

It’s true:

God is the one who destroys the hopes of man.

If your hope is set on anything else besides God –

then God will destroy your hope!

And so God says to Eliphaz in verse 8:

b. The Atonement and Intercession of Job (v8-9)

⁸ *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.”*

Notice that God says “my servant Job” *three times* in a single verse –

and the third time is a repetition of what God had said in verse 7!

And when God says that he will not deal with them according to their folly,

the word for “folly” used here is normally used to refer to adultery or idolatry.

This word is generally not used for mere silliness or “childish folly” –

it is used in Genesis 34 – the rape of Dinah;

Joshua 7 – the theft of the devoted things by Achan that nearly destroyed Israel;

Judges 19 – the rape of the Levite’s concubine that nearly obliterated Benjamin;

1 Samuel 25 – the fool Nabal (Abigail’s husband) who nearly destroyed himself.

So when God says “not to deal with you according to your folly” –

he means, you have earned the death penalty!

you have come to very brink of destruction.

If Job does not intercede for you, then you are going to die!

In other words,

if you flatter God and say all sorts of nice things about him –

but in so doing you condemn the suffering Servant of the LORD,

then you will be destroyed –

unless, the suffering Servant of the LORD intercedes for you!

Now there’s something especially fun about verses 8-9.

Eliphaz had concluded his final speech in chapter 22

by urging Job to repent and return to the Almighty (22:23),
because then, he claimed God would hear Job,
and in fact, he said, with delicious irony:
“God delivers even the one who is not innocent,
who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.” (22:30)

Now, Eliphaz thought that when Job repented and was restored,
then God would use Job to deliver others.
Little did he know – that *he*, Eliphaz, would be one of those “who is not innocent.”

Now, at the end of the book, God will require Eliphaz
to offer sacrifices through the intercession of Job!
So Eliphaz may not have spoken rightly about God – he was right about something!

Indeed, he was right about Job!!!
Job will indeed become the mediator who delivers others
through the cleanness of his hands!

⁹ *So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.*

At the beginning of the book, Job offered burnt offerings on behalf of his children,
just in case they had sinned.
Now he offers burnt offerings for his friends,
because they had sinned.
And the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

Verse 9 illustrates a vast swath of biblical teaching on prayer.

I just want to point to two of them today:
First, it connects prayer with the sacrifice.
The burnt offering demonstrates that there is nothing that we can do to deal with sin.
The burnt offering – where the whole animal is consumed in the flames –
signals to God that man acknowledges that he deserves death.
Job's prayer – by itself – cannot save them.
Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.
But the connection between the shedding of blood
and the prayers of the servant points us forward to the day
when the Servant will offer his own blood as the basis for his prayers.

But second, verse 9 reminds us of the necessity of the prayers of others.
Sinners need a mediator.
Sinners need an innocent mediator who can lift holy hands before God.
There is nothing that Eliphaz and his friends can do to cleanse themselves.

As Eliphaz had so astutely said:
“God delivers even the one who is not innocent,

who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.” (22:30)

Through the intercession of our innocent mediator,
we now have access to God – not just once (like Job’s friends),
but forever!

2. The Restoration of Job (42:10-11)

a. “When He Had Prayed for His Friends” (v10a)

¹⁰ *And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends.*

I want you to think about this:
“when he had prayed for his friends.”

Just for a moment, imagine what happens if Job stumbles here!
If Job refuses to pray for his friends, then two things happen:
Job’s friends die,
and Job’s fortunes are not restored!
Job must forgive them for their folly – and then promptly intercede on their behalf.

Now, Job has had some choice words for his friends:
“My brothers are treacherous as a torrent-bed...” (6:15)
“No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!” (12:2)
“You whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are all of you” (13:4)
“miserable comforters are you all” (16:2)
“I know your thoughts and your schemes to wrong me...
How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?
There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.” (21:27, 34)

But notice that while Job has spoken severely to his friends –
he simply speaks the truth!
If your friend is not showing friendship, then you can say so!!

But then be ready to restore him –
because his salvation may depend on your willingness to forgive!
And, in fact, your own salvation may depend upon the same!

Jesus himself told us,
“For if you forgive others their trespasses,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
but if you do not forgive others their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt 6:14-15)

If you want to be forgiven, then you *must* forgive others!

So you need to see that the LORD only restores the fortunes of Job
when he has prayed for his tormentors – I mean, his friends.

But how could Job do otherwise?
Back in 6:14, Job had said:

¹⁴ “*He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.*”

The word translated “kindness” is the word *hesed* –
often translated steadfast love, or covenant faithfulness.
This is the sort of “friendship” that Jesus referred to in John 15.
A friend shows covenant loyalty – a friend is faithful in all his dealings.

A friend, as Gregory the Great points out,
is one “who is united to us in a faithful attachment”
in which we mutually aid each other
“toward attaining hereafter the eternal country.” (7.28)

Friendship is always directed toward an end.
Nowadays we tend to think of friendship in terms of “warm personal relations” –
but friendship has to do with loyalty and commitment.

Job had accused his friends of betraying him –
of failing to show loyalty and commitment to him –
but if he himself is to be blameless and upright,
then he must show *hesed* – he must show covenant faithfulness to them,
in spite of their betrayal.

But still, it bears repeating that Job is not restored
until he has prayed for those who had once betrayed him.

And Job does this with confidence because he *knows* that God has vindicated him.
God hasn’t *done* anything to restore him outwardly yet.
Job is justified – he has been openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment.
He had been declared righteous at the beginning of the book –
but only now, at the end of the story, is he publicly vindicated.
(The same will be true for us!
We are justified now – in Christ –
but how can you tell who is justified?
Right now we are justified by faith – but not yet by sight.
Only at the final judgment
will we be openly acknowledged and acquitted before God)

But here is the most beautiful picture of the whole book!

Behold, Job, offering the burnt offering before God – lifting up his prayers to the LORD –
for those who had betrayed him!

But that’s only half of the beauty!

Look more closely!

His sores still ooze.

His breath still stinks.

Job, the derelict on the ash heap – still in his sackcloth and ashes! –

lifts up holy hands to cleanse those unclean traitors who had condemned him!

“Father, forgive them, for they knew not what they did!”

What sort of priest is this?!

He would have been turned away at the city gate of Jerusalem –

and would never have gotten anywhere close to the temple!

But he lifts up clean hands to the heavenly Holy of Holies –

and his prayer is heard!

Where are you in this story?

We marvel at Job –

but we do not identify with him.

He was blameless and innocent – a man who feared God and turned away from evil.

He didn't deserve his suffering at all!

The best you can hope for in this story

is to be one of Job's friends!

After all, we are those who have *not* spoken rightly of God.

We are those who have sinned and who need an atoning sacrifice to cleanse us –

we need innocent hands to be lifted up on our behalf.

We need the suffering Servant of the LORD

to pray for us!

But I say it is “the best you can hope for,”

because we are probably like Job's family and friends.

We really didn't want to have anything to do with Job in his distress –

but we'll show up to offer our sympathy and comfort when all is over!

How many of us would have gone to Job on his ash heap?

How many of us would have sat there for seven days *in silence*?!

At least *they were there*.

They may have said all the wrong things –

and they had to repent because of it!

But they were there with Job!

And so when they needed a mediator to intercede for them –

they were in the right place!

We talked earlier about alienation.

We are so alienated from each other – from creation – from ourselves – from God –
that we think that our individualistic, me-centered life is “normal.”

I’m as guilty as anyone!

I need to do a better job of leading you away from the me-centered life!
out of the city walls to the ash heap

as Hebrews 13:12-14 says,

“So Jesus also suffered outside the gate
in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Therefore let us go to him outside the camp

and bear the reproach he endured.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

How do you do that?

Well, notice Hebrews 13:15 –

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

The first way that we demonstrate our “outside the camp” sort of life
is by the way that we sing and pray!

And then the next verse, Hebrews 13:16 –

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

Those who have been cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ

now offer two sorts of sacrifices:

our sacrifice of praise – the songs and prayers of the saints;
and the sacrifice of *doing good* and *sharing what we have*.

But you can only do this if you are in the right place:

outside the camp – to the dung heap – to Jesus.