

Opportunity and Obstacles

Job: View From The Ashes

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I would encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Job 49. I know there are those that are guests and visitors with us, and I want to welcome you to a journey though albeit toward the end of one of the best known not only stories, but characters in all of the Bible, this man, by the name of Job. He's not just mentioned in the book that bears his name, in the New Testament, the book of James and the Old Testament, the book of Ezekiel not only testifies to him, but describes him as we've seen him all along. He is synonymous with suffering and pain and anguish, but also faithfulness to the Lord.

Today as we come to chapter 40, let me remind you that the story has taken a turn. No longer are we in what seems like this endless debate with him and his friends of who is right, who is wrong, who's on God's side and who is not. In fact, in chapter 38, God shows up in a very, shall we say, miraculous format. He comes out of a whirlwind. He does not address the three friends. He does not address the crowd that has gathered. He speaks directly to Job and he makes a statement in chapter 38 that he's going to repeat again in chapter 40, and I believe it is important before we read the text today to understand one of the great injustices not only to scripture in totality, but to the book of Job, is when we read a solitary verse or maybe even a solitary passage, and we do not see it in light of the totality of its context. Today again, we're going to see we cannot truly grasp all that Job has for us unless we see it through the lens of chapter 42. See, the beginning of the story Job is great. He's blessed, his family is doing well. Everything seems to be on track and then at the end of chapter 1 everything takes a hard right turn and for the next series of events we see not only his children's loss of life, we not only see his bank account drained, but his own physical health is demised. What we cannot allude to is chapter 42 is there and oftentimes we come into passages like today and we see it in isolation, we need to understand we have the privilege of seeing chapter 42, we understand today what Job could have never realized in chapter 40, and that is important. Today we're going to see God present Job with some opportunities and a very strategic obstacle.

Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 40. It says,

1 Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, 2 Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. 3 Then Job answered the LORD, and said, 4 Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. 5 Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. 6 Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 7 Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

For the sake of time, just reading those 7 verses, I want to walk through what's happening in the scene again. He speaks to him out of the whirlwind. For the first time, Job is going to respond verbally to what the Lord has said to him. Now remember in chapters 38 and 39, there were 77 questions that God asked Job and it begins here in chapter 40 with a very strategic question, verse 2, "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it." What we see God instituting here is his grace. The grace of God. Now let me define grace because oftentimes, I think, we get it confused or mixed up with mercy. I mean, after all we say grace and mercy all the time. Mercy means not getting what you rightfully deserve. Grace is receiving that which you could never earn, much less deserve. And so when the Lord presents himself to Job, he's not coming withholding the punishment from days gone by. In fact, what we're going to see is he's about to give, he's about to bless him with that which he had no part in earning no matter how faithful he was.

But he asked Job a question, "Will you answer? Will you change? Will you alter what I, God, have already instituted?" And what God is bringing out in this story is what you and I struggle with on a daily basis. Job never questioned God's identity, not once. In fact, even as he's dialoguing with his friends, he's defending who God is. He defends that God has the right to do what he wants to do, when he wants to do it, and the way he wants to. But Job struggled with something and we struggle with it too. We struggle with the "how." How, the means by which God does things. In fact, you look back you say why is it that he had to lose his family? Why is it he had to lose his fortune? Why is it that he had to be on the edge of the city? Why is it that the three friends of comfort were not comforting? Most of us today don't question the identity of God, we don't question the all-powerfulness of God, but one of the things we struggle with is, "God, why did you do it the way that you did it? Why the ash heap? Why the friends' betrayal? Why the loss of income? Why this? Why?" It was the "how," not the "who."

But let me pull back for just a moment. Let's look at this from our context because Job in chapter 19 said, "I know my Redeemer lives," and humanity as a whole is seeking redemption. From the sacred world we do it in religion, and there are people today who are acquiring or trying to purchase their redemption through their deeds, their works, their finances, whatever it may be. Even the secular world is interested in redemption. Anytime somebody offers some type of solution that would better humanity or fix our problems, they're couching all that under this umbrella of redemption. How do we solve the problem from what you and I as Bible-believers know as the garden of Eden.

So let's back it up just a bit. Let's talk about grace for a moment. There's not one single person whether you're in person, watching online or listening to the radio, there's not one of us if God had come to us and said, "How are you going to fix the sin problem?" Not one of us would have said, "God, I've got an idea. How about you come and dwell in flesh for 33 1/2 years? Why don't you get offered every temptation known to man, reject them all and why don't you shed your blood on Calvary's cross and three days later when most people have given up hope, why don't you rise from the dead so that those who call on your name will be saved?" You see, we all want redemption, we all desire redemption, we question the "how" that God provides it. And so when God comes to Job in chapter 40 and he asked him this question, really what he's revealing to Job is, "If I did it your way, it would never work out. Aren't you grateful that my plans are better than yours?"

And then there's this gratitude. Look at how Job responds in verse 3. It says, "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." You see, Job sets the tone here because later we're going to meet a man in the Bible by the name of Isaiah. Very similar situation. Then in the New Testament, we're going to meet a man by the name of John on the island of Patmos, the famed apostle, and one of the things that we discover is that when we realize the grace that God has offered us, our response, our gratitude looks very similar to what Job went forth with. What did he do? He claimed that he was the problem and he didn't speak very many words.

Let's think about Isaiah for just a moment, Isaiah 6. It says, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up." Now that first verse may sound odd to you, what does it matter that King Uzziah died? Well, research shows us that most likely Isaiah was a distant relative of King Uzziah. You say, "Why is that important?" What do they do to the relatives of the king when they're out of office? They kill them all. In the year that King Uzziah, in other words, Isaiah is saying, "The fact that I'm still breathing is the grace of God."

What did he say? "I saw the Lord high and lifted up." Remember what his response was? Eerily similar to Job's, "I'm a man of unclean lips around a group of people with unclean lips. We are not worthy to be in your presence." And that angelic being took that coal off the altar of God, placed it on his tongue. We see the same thing in the end of the book of Revelation, a man by the name of John on the island of Patmos. According to verse 10 of chapter 1, he's there for his faithfulness to the Lord, the persecution that was happening in those days. He saw Jesus like he'd never seen him before. You remember how he responded? He fell on his face as if he was dead. Now don't get me wrong, I'm all for celebrating the goodness of God. I'm all for rejoicing on who he is, but when you understand that you have life today you don't deserve and you have life in eternity that you surely can never earn, yes, at times we celebrate but oftentimes we fall on our face and say, "I am not worthy. I have no words." That's exactly what Job did.

So beginning here in verse 6, God does something amazing. He then shares with him his great plans that he has for him. By the way, this follows the pattern. Remember in Isaiah after he has this conversation with the Lord, remember what the Lord said? The Lord

said, "Who will go for us and who will I send?" He says, "Me." He doesn't even ask what the qualifications are. He doesn't ask what the details are. He said, "In light of the fact that I'm still breathing, I'll do anything you ask." Remember the Apostle John on Patmos? He falls as if dead. What does the Lord say? "I need you to write. I need you to take everything I'm going to show you and I need you to send it to the churches that are in Asia. I need the world to know what you're about to see."

Do you see a pattern? And when God reveals his grace to us, and we respond appropriately, we discover that he has great plans for us. Listen to verse 7, "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" Now I want you to focus on verse 8. There is no point in the story of Job that he did what he's accused of because God's not accusing him. Let me tell you what he's saying and I'm going to put it in southernese: don't be a fool like your friends. Don't do what they've done. Don't condemn me. By the way, when you get to the next couple of chapters, he tells the friends to repent although he never tells Job.

He says gird up your loins like a man. That's one of those statements that kind of loses its flavor in our context because we don't dress like Job did or like they do in the Middle East today. As men, we don't wear tunics that hug the ground that keep you cool by day and warm by night, but in that context to gird up or to pull up one's clothing it means to take that which restricts you, to take that which constrains you, to pull it over your knees so that you can move better, gain more flexibility, if necessary, compete in an athletic or even a warfare environment. This is the second time that God has told Job this. He said it in chapter 8. He said it here in chapter 40. He says, "I need you to get ready for something, something that I've prepared for you." You see, Job had no idea that chapter 42 was coming. He had no clue. He thought the ash heap was the rest of his existence. He thought the tombstones of his children was the end of their story.

He had no idea. Let me translate that into the New Testament. In the book of Ephesians 3, beginning in verse 20, we have this interestingly odd statement. It says there, "unto him," being the Lord, "that is able to do exceeding abundantly more." Now can we all just concur anytime you put two adverbs together you've got a serious situation? He, the Lord, can do exceedingly abundantly more. Now that's how it begins. Let me share with you how it ends, according to him who dwells within you, that's the Holy Spirit. That incredible passage says that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly more because we have come to a point in our life where we've trusted Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells within us, he empowers us within, and we are capable of experiencing and seeing, shall I say, chapter 42 in our lives.

I strategically purposefully left out the middle portion of those verses, "unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more," listen, "than we could ever ask or think according to the power that is within us." So let's make that personal for just a moment. What if some of you have been asking God for a long time that he "has not delivered"? You know what you're doing? You're sitting in chapter 40, and you've been sitting there all the way since chapter 2. And sometimes you think it's never going to be

different, it's never going to change, it's never going to end. I've got news for you, chapter 42 might just right be around the corner in your life.

Let's make that more corporate for just a moment. What is your heartbeat? What is your desire for the "church," for the family of faith, maybe specifically for us as a congregation? What do you desire more than anything? Now, I want you think about what your "personal request" is and what your corporate request is, and I want you to hear that passage again. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than what you just placed on your thought for yourself and for the church according to the Spirit and the power that is within us. Do you know what the beautiful thing about the book of Job is? He had no idea, no idea that God was going to double all of his authority. He had no idea God was going to double his responsibility. If you had gone to Job in chapter 40 and said, "Alright Job, you can have anything you want," do you know what he probably would have said? "I just want my body healed and my kids back. If you'll just give me that, I'll be good." And God said, "Oh, Job, that's why I'm able to do exceedingly abundantly more than you can ask because I've got news for you, I'm about to take everything you had and I'm about to double it. I'm going to give you 150 years. I'm going to allow you to see four generations of faithfulness behind you."

You see, in chapter 40, Job couldn't see it, and oftentimes today we can't see it either because we're on the cusp, we're on the edge, we're at that point in our lives where we're exhausted, we're worn out, we're tired, we're tired of it and we say how much more the ash heap, how much more the criticism, how much more of this can I feasibly take? And God shows up and says, "Do you know what? I need you to gird up your loins." And you're like, "I'm too tired to do that. I'm exhausted, God." He says, "No, no, gird them up." He had to tell him twice, "Gird up your loins now like a man."

What are the opportunities? Job had no idea what lie before him but beginning in verse 15 he shares an interesting obstacle. He says,

15 Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox.

For the next chapter and a half, there are these two entities that are mentioned, behemoth in chapter 40 and leviathan in chapter 41. And I'm not here to dismiss and/or disparage, but there's a lot of rhetoric, there's a lot of communication out there equating these two giant animal entities, possibly even connected to what you and I collectively secularly know as that great dinosaur age, and I'm not here to disannul that, but I do want to make some interesting observations. 1. Why would the Lord bring up two animals that are very difficult to identify and separate them from a whole bunch of animals that he talked about in chapter 39? That didn't seem, why would you disconnect the two? Secondly, I want you to look at the last verse of chapter 41. Look what it says about leviathan, this multi-headed sea creature. It says he is the king of the children of pride. Hm, that doesn't sound like a normal animal to me. In fact, I know we have an animal we call the king of the jungle, but he's not the king over us. In fact, last time I checked, when you go back to Genesis 1 when God established everything he said, "Let humanity have dominion over

everything that creeps, every beast of the field, every fish of the sea." And yet there's this animal that supposedly is the king over all children of pride? Then back it up into chapter 40, verse 19. It says, "He," this is behemoth, "He is the chief of the ways of God: he that made him can make his sword only to approach unto him." Isn't that interesting God says the only one who can take behemoth out is me.

Now I know that time does not allow a very thorough discussion of this, but I think you've got pretty good biblical evidence that God shows up to Job in a miraculous way. He says, "Job, you have no idea what lies before you. You have no idea the plans I have for you. You can't even ask, you can't even think how great they are." By the way, there's this entity out there that wants to thwart it. We today refer to him as Satan, the devil, the old red dragon, whatever you want to name him, because think back to chapter 1 and 2, what did Satan accuse Job of? He said, "The only reason that he worships you, God, is because of all the things you blessed him with." He's about to be double-fold, blessed, don't you think the accusations are going to increase? He said, "God, the only reason he's faithful to you is because he has a healthy family." Now we'll get there in the next week or two, but when we get to chapter 42 guess what? He's going to have 10 more children in his home. "The only reason that he still worships you is because his life is prosperous." He's about to live 115 more years of prosperity. Don't you think the attacks aren't only going to happen, but actually increase? In other words, he says, "Job, the only obstacle that you're going to have in the days ahead is trusting me for round 2. Because it'll happen again. It may not look like it's looked like, but the enemy is going to come back, and new levels mean new devils, and there's going to be a time where you're going to be accused again and you've been faithful. Now I need you to gird up your loins. I need you to be faithful in days ahead."

Let me give you some interesting information. Whom we know as the devil or Satan has never once changed his tactic since day one. In fact, you go back to Genesis 3, do you remember what Satan used on humanity? It's a very simple statement. It's a question actually, "Yea, hath God said." His tactic is to get us to question what God said did he really mean/ And in our lives individually, in our lives corporately, let me tell you what's coming in the days ahead. You say I'm trusting him for chapter 42. You know what Satan is going to say? "How many more months can you go? How many more years can you go? How uncomfortable can you get? Boy the heat's turning up, you want to stay on the stove, brother?" In other words, his tactics never change because the days are coming where you've recognized the faithfulness of God in days past but as the heat gets turned up, as the accusations become more as that which is uncomfortable becomes even more uncomfortable, you're going to question, is God still going to be faithful? Is God still going to do what he claimed he's going to do? Did he really mean what he said? Can I truly trust him? Here's the beautiful part about chapter 42: there is never another incident where Job questioned what God was doing in his life or even the opposition thereof. One of the beauties of life and age and maturity and wisdom is this, we have hindsight, we can see that God has been faithful in days past and even though we don't know what lies ahead, we trust and believe he is going to be faithful no matter what it looks like and no matter how it is laid out.

Today, we named an individual issue, we named possibly even a corporate issue, but let me close with this, "Yea, hath God said." You know, in 2 Corinthians 11 he says, "I marvel that you've removed yourself from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." The Lord said in Romans 10, "Whoever called on the name of the Lord will be saved." You know what some of you have heard in your ears for years? "Yea, hath God said. Is it really that simple? Is it really that? Is that really what is? Surely you've got to do something to earn it? Surely, you've got to give something to deserve it. Surely, you've got to do this, you've got to stop that." The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," and the devil says, "No, there's got to be a different way." What did Adam and Eve say? "Oh, there must be," and they went for that forbidden fruit. They walked that path and how did it turn out for them? Let their lives be a lesson for us we should trust not only how he brought redemption to them in days past, how he's brought it to us today present, and what he desires to do in days future. "Yea, hath God said," is the only thing that can keep us from chapter 42.

Let's pray with their heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you are that individual today, maybe you're that person that the Spirit of God took the word of God and said, "Man, you've never believed, you've never trusted, you've never repented of your sins and given your life to Christ Jesus." Maybe today is the day you may be seated in this place, you may be watching online, you may be listening on the radio, or maybe you're that individual the Bible says "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," not whoever joins a church, not whoever does this, or stops that, jumps through a hoop or passes a test but whoever trusts the blood of Christ alone. If you're that person day, let me encourage you to cry out. It doesn't have to be a simple repetition of mine or somebody else's words. It's not about the words that are used, it's about the heart that is on display before the Lord. Maybe today, your heart cry will go something like this. "God, today, I admit, I confess, Lord, I've sinned. And God, I've been places I shouldn't have been. God, I've done things I shouldn't have done. I've said things I should have never spoken. And God, you alone know the thoughts I've had that should never have crossed my mind. Your word says the wages of sin is death and, God, I deserve it, but it also says that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, by mercy you'll keep me from hell, but by grace you'll allow me into your heaven. God, I believe it because your word says it. God, today, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf, he died a sacrificial death on my behalf, and God, I believe, as we've heard amply today, that he rose from the grave three days later, making it possible, making it feasible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. And God, today I don't have the answers to all the issues and the problems and the struggles of the world in my vicinity, much less on the other side of this world, but there is one thing I know, that the only one who can solve my sin problem is Jesus Christ. So the best way I know, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today. In a moment I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing, and I just want to invite you to step out and step forward. We have a whole team of individuals, we have a room set aside, we just want to hear your story. We want to celebrate with you. We just want to

pray with you and pray for you whether it be a decision for salvation, following in believers' baptism, becoming a part of this great church, or just something you say, "You know what? I'm at my wits end. I just need somebody to pray with me and pray for me." Whatever it is, we invite you as I pray.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you. Thank you that, yes, you're a God of mercy but as we studied today, you're a God of grace. The very breath that is in our lungs, the opportunity for forgiveness, salvation, eternity, forever with you. God, we cannot and never will comprehend the fact that you're willing in spite of us to offer, to provide, and to give. And so, God, today and may we quit listening to the voices that would speak otherwise, all those voices that in summary say, "Yea, hath God said," and may we simply just follow what you've called us to be and do. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.