

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOB

SERIES: SHATTERED: THE STORY
OF JOB



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Job 42:7-17
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This past week has been another week of chaos and tragedy as coronavirus continues to spread. I know that many of you personally are experiencing increased hardship related to this virus, whether that be lost jobs, illness, or even loved ones who have passed away. For many of us, it feels like the threat of this virus is coming much more real.

In the midst of all of this, I continue to hear people searching for hope. I read a news article earlier this week entitled “Washington and California offer beacons of coronavirus hope.” It was referring to our shelter-in-place orders and how they seem to be flattening the curve here and ultimately preserving lives. Amid this chaos and tragedy, people are searching for any glimpse of hope that they can find.

As we have already noted, today is Palm Sunday, the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as the crowds shouted “hosanna” and welcomed their king. This was a day full of hope. For decades now, the Jewish people were being oppressed, not by a virus, but by the Romans. They were longing for deliverance, for freedom. They were waiting expectantly for a savior, a messiah, who would come to their rescue. They believed that Jesus was that Savior. And they thought that this was the day that he would rise up and rescue them. After decades of oppression, the people were full of hope and optimism.

Imagine what would happen if later this afternoon a news source leaked that the CDC had developed and approved a vaccine for COVID-19 and that it would be available tomorrow. That, by the end of the week, no one else would get sick from this virus. That, by next week, we would all be back at work and even worshipping together a week from now on Easter Sunday. The excitement would be palpable, almost unbearable. This is what Jerusalem felt like as Jesus entered the city on Palm Sunday.

Five days later, that same crowd shouted “crucify him, crucify him.” What changed? What led them from hope and optimism to anger and betrayal? The Jews believed that they had misplaced their hope. As it

became apparent that Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to overthrow the Romans, they believed that he must not be the Messiah.

Their problem, however, was not that they had placed their hope in the wrong person. Instead, they were hoping for the wrong outcome altogether. They wanted political freedom. Jesus came to offer something better.

As we all look for hope amid this pandemic, my prayer this morning is that we could stop to reflect on what exactly we are hoping for. What are we praying for? What is the best possible outcome that we could experience? A vaccine? A cure? Economic recovery? I do hope and pray fervently for all of those outcomes.

But there is something more. There is something more that my heart is longing for. There is something more that Jesus offers us in the midst of this pandemic. Rather than a message about a vaccine for COVID-19, today we are going to hear a different message, a better message. The Gospel message. The Gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in the world. As we will see, the Gospel, this good news, is greater than a vaccine. It is greater than a cure. It is greater than anything else we could imagine. And it is available for us today.

If you have been worshipping with us for the past few weeks, you know that we are in a series in the book of Job. Today, we are wrapping up our study of Job as we look at the last eleven verses of the book. Now you might be wondering, what does the book of Job have to do with the Gospel or with Jesus?

Indeed, Jesus never appears in the book of Job. Job didn't know Jesus. Jesus never showed up to him in a dream or a vision. And yet, the Gospel message can be found throughout Job, and especially here at the end.

The message isn't apparent at first glance, as is true with most of the Old Testament. But it is there. St. Augustine, a church father from the 4th century, famously said that “the new testament is in the old testament concealed,” and “the old testament is in the

new testament revealed.” What he meant by that is that the Old Testament and the New Testament tell the same story, the Gospel story. That story is a bit cloudy in the Old Testament—we can’t connect all the dots. But with the coming of Jesus, the whole thing becomes clear. As we will see today, this is certainly true of the book of Job.

My prayer for us this morning is that we would be filled with the hope as we hear the Gospel afresh from the book of Job.

In case you missed it

If this is your first week joining us, here’s what you need to know about the book of Job.

Job was the wealthiest and most successful man of his time. Not only that, but he was also blameless in character and a devote worshipper of God.

At the beginning of the book, God allows Satan to take everything from Job—his wealth, his family, his honor, even his health. For most of the book, Job sits with his friends, searching for answers as to why God has allowed this to happen. The only thing that makes sense to Job is that God is the bad guy; an unjust judge who cannot be trusted.

For most of the book, God has been silent. Finally, at the end of the book, God speaks. When he speaks, God essentially tells Job that he is still in control and that Job needs to trust him and meet him in his pain. At this point, Job shuts his mouth, and he worships God.

Our passage for today is the last eleven verses of the book, Job 42:7-17. These two paragraphs bring the story to a close in a somewhat surprising end. Three elements, in particular, catch us off guard. And it is in these three unexpected twists that we see the Gospel shine through.

Understanding our need

Job 42:7

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.

The surprising twist here is that God says that Job has “spoken what is right.” That’s strange because Job has literally just repented for the things that he has said

about God. He has just repented for questioning God and accusing him of injustice. But here God says that Job has spoken what is right.

To understand this, we have to consider the book as a whole. From the beginning, Job and his friends have disagreed about why Job is suffering. His friends think he must have sinned, but Job insists that he is not suffering because of his sin. And he is right about that!

From the very first verse of the book, Job is said to be blameless and upright. God himself affirms this at several points (Job 1:8; 2:3). It is Job’s *righteousness* that is the very reason why God brings him up to Satan in the first place. Job is not suffering because of his sin, and here God affirms that again.

In chapter 31, where Job makes his final appeal to God, we get a clear picture into his character. Job says that he has never lied; he has never entertained a lustful thought; he has never neglected the poor; he has never cursed his enemies. Remember, Job didn’t have the Law of Moses. He didn’t have Sermon on the Mount. Blameless is a good description of Job, without a doubt.

And yet, we know he was not sinless. He was not perfect. At one point, Job says he regrets the sins of his youth (Job 13:26). At another point, he complains that God is blowing his sin way out of proportion (Job 7:17-21). In the end, Job questions the very character of God. He is not sinless. True, he is as good as it gets from a human perspective, but in the end, he fell short. He proved that he was in desperate need of God’s grace.

We all are in desperate need of God’s grace. In Romans 3:23, the Apostle Paul tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” *All* means all. It means you, and me, and Job. And if Job falls short of the glory of God, then you and I don’t even make the chart.

The story of Job reminds us that we have a great need for a Savior. We have a great need for a Savior.

Like Job, we are not sinless. Like Job, we have reason to repent in dust and ashes, to confess our sins, and to ask for mercy.

The global pandemic that we are facing has made the world aware of just how fragile we are. It is easy to recognize our weakness in the face of such a tragedy. If there is one byproduct of this pandemic that has been encouraging, it is the way that it has brought the world together. We are all in this together. In some ways,

this feels like wartime. Banks are delaying mortgage payments. Companies of all kinds are manufacturing medical equipment and supplies. Some of you are sewing masks and gowns from your living rooms for our medical professionals—doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers who are putting their lives on the line to help the rest of us. The whole country and even the world is uniting together against our common enemy that is the coronavirus.

But make no mistake. As horrible as the coronavirus is, as much as my heart breaks for the sick and the vulnerable and those who have lost loved ones, our biggest threat is not a virus. Our greatest enemy is not sickness or death in this life. Rather, our greatest enemy is Satan. Our biggest threat is eternal separation from God in hell. Our chief battle is against sin and evil.

Our greatest need is not for a vaccine that will protect us from a virus. Our greatest need is for a Savior who will save us from our sin.

We may succeed in flattening the curve. We may be able to develop a vaccine. I pray that day comes soon. But there is nothing that we can do on our own to improve our spiritual condition. We are not spiritually sick. We are not spiritual “high risk.” We are spiritually dead; dead in our trespasses and sin. We are not racing against the clock to flatten the curve of our spiritual demise. We are born dead. Stillborn. Job, the most righteous person (besides Jesus himself) to ever walk this earth, was born dead. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves from our sin. There is nothing we can do to repair our relationship with God. We need a Savior. We need a Redeemer. We need the grace of God.

The story of Job reminds us that we have a great need for a Savior. If we miss this point, we will miss the Gospel.

A true and better Job

The amazing thing about Job is that he does not just remind us of our need for a Savior. More than that, Job points us to the fact that Jesus is that Savior. Tim Keller has said that Jesus is the “true and better Job.”¹ By this, he means that Job foreshadows the coming of Jesus. He anticipates the coming of Jesus. Job is what we call a *type* of Christ.

There are so many remarkable parallels between the life of Job and the life of Jesus. And yet, at every place where Job and Jesus share something in common, there is a key way in which Jesus is different than Job—*better* than Job.

Job 42:7-9:

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. 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.” 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.

Here, in these verses, we come across another unexpected twist. God is angry with Job's friends for their foolishness and says that he will forgive them if they offer sacrifices and (and this is the strange part) if Job *prays for his friends*. This is precisely what Job does, and God accepts Job's prayer on behalf of his friends.

Why does God have Job pray for his friends? Why is their forgiveness dependent on Job's prayer for them? Why go through Job at all?

When we read Job on its own, we might think of a few possible reasons. Maybe God wants Job's friends to admit their guilt to Job. Or maybe God wants to help restore the relationship between Job and his friends. There could be something to that.

But, when we read Job on this side of the cross, we see in Job a picture of Jesus. As Job interceded for his friends, so too Jesus intercedes for us.

Paul says this so beautifully in Romans 8:33-34: “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

I have prayed for more sick people these past few weeks than I have in a long time, asking God for healing, praying for mercy, standing in the gap between our gracious God and those who desperately need his help right now.

This is what Jesus does for us. Right now, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding for you and me. He is praying for us, standing between God

and us so that we too might receive grace, mercy, and forgiveness instead of the judgment that we deserve.

It is true that we have a great need for a Savior. But more importantly, we have a great Savior for our need! God has not abandoned us in our need. He has not left us on our own. Instead, he sent his Son, Jesus, to save us in our need. To save us from our need.

Unlike Job, however, Jesus does not merely pray for us as we offer up sacrifices for our sins. Rather, Jesus himself becomes our sacrifice!

Unlike Job, Jesus does not merely intercede for his friends. He also intercedes for his enemies. Think of Jesus words on the cross when he prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). On the verge of death, Jesus intercedes for the very people who are killing him.

That same prayer is a prayer that Jesus prays for you and me. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” For we also were enemies of God. We too are responsible for his death. As the hymn-writer says,

*Behold the man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers*

*It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished²*

On the cross, Jesus’ body was broken for our sin. His blood was shed so that we might be forgiven. Jesus himself bore the wrath of God that we deserved.

And it is because of his work on the cross that we have been reconciled to God! We are no longer his enemies. Now he calls us his friends.

John Newton was born in England in the early 18th century. He had a difficult childhood, losing his mother at the age of six. John attended church as a young boy, but as a teenager, he became highly antagonistic to God. Instead, he filled his life with alcohol and whatever else promised to make him happy. As an adult, Newton became the master of a slave ship. He was about as far from God as you could imagine.

After getting caught in a terrible storm and fearing for his life—a feeling that is all too common right now—

Newton began to realize his need for a Savior, both from his immediate crisis and from his sin. As he began to seek after God, he encountered his grace in a powerful way. Eventually, Newton left the slave trade, became a pastor, and helped bring about abolition in England. He is most well-known, however, as the author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.

On his deathbed, Newton said this: “Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”³

We have a great need for a Savior, but we also have a great Savior for our need! These two truths sit at the heart of the Gospel: our magnitude of our sin, and our magnificence of our Savior.

Finding our hope in Jesus

The final paragraph of the book of Job brings us to yet another surprising twist, perhaps the most unexpected of all. Beginning in v. 10, we read this: (Job 42:10, 12-13, 15-17)

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 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, and 1,000 female donkeys. 13 He had also seven sons and three daughters... And 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.

In the end, Job receives back from the Lord twice the fortune that he had at the beginning. He has more children—seven sons and three beautiful daughters. He grows old and has grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Job goes on to live a rich and full life, once again under the blessing of God.

This ending is surprising, not because we think Job doesn’t deserve God’s blessing, but because the whole book of Job is meant to show us that God does not always bless those who deserve it. The righteous do not always prosper. The wicked do not always suffer. But here, as God showers his blessing on Job, we are reminded that though God is not obligated to bless anyone, he delights

in doing so. God does not bless Job because he has to. He blesses Job because he wants to! Because it brings him great joy. Our God loves to bless.

But here, in this blessing, we see another picture of Jesus. As Job's fortune is restored, as he rises from the ashes—literally from the pile of ashes that he has been sitting in throughout the entire book—we are reminded of Jesus' own resurrection. For 40 chapters, Job has been sitting in the ashes, broken, wondering where the Lord has gone. For three days, Jesus lay in the tomb. It looked like God had abandoned him. It looked like evil had won.

But then the ground began to shake. The stone was rolled away, and Jesus rose from the dead!

At that moment, he proved that he was who he said he was. He proved that he was the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

The resurrection was the point of Jesus' vindication. It was the place where his perceived defeat became an undeniable victory. In his resurrection, Jesus defeated death. He defeated sin. In his resurrection, Jesus won.

The resurrection is the confirmation of Jesus' victory over the powers of evil, and it is the reason why we can have hope.

The world is desperate for hope right now. Over the next few weeks, that desperation will grow. All the projections have this thing getting much worse before it gets better. How can we have hope at a time like this?

The only way is by recognizing that our hope does not rest in a vaccine. Our hope does not rest in faster testing or stricter social distancing. Our hope does not rest in anything that we might find in this world. Our hope rests in Jesus alone. Jesus is our hope! He is our only hope.

This virus is evil. It is an intruder in this world. But Jesus has defeated evil. When he rose from the dead, he proved that he is more powerful than death. Jesus is more powerful than sin. He is undoubtedly more powerful than this virus.

I would love to see God end this virus today. I would love to see him heal the sick today. But even if he did, they would get sick again; maybe not with COVID-19, but with something else. Our days in this world are numbered. But our hope in Jesus is not limited to this life only.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reflects on the significance of the resurrection for our hope, both in this life and the life to come. In verse 19-20, he says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Because Jesus has risen from the dead, we have confidence—absolute certainty—that those who have trusted in him will rise from the dead one day as well. Oh death, where is your victory? Oh grave, where is your sting? Jesus has taken it away forever!

In reflecting on the possibility of contracting COVID-19, I recently heard somebody say, "What's the worst that could happen? I feel terrible for a few days, and then I go to glory? That doesn't sound so bad."

In Jesus, we have hope. Jesus is the reason that we don't have to be afraid of the coronavirus or anything else.

God chose to heal Job. He chose to restore his fortune and his family. God doesn't guarantee that he will do the same for us in this life. But the Gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in the world, is that our hope is not in this life only. The story has been written. The battle has been won. Our future is secure.

Conclusion

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the people were full of hope because they thought that their king has come to save them. They were right about that. What they didn't understand is what that king came to save them from and how he was going to do that.

This morning, we also celebrate that our king has come. But let's not make the same mistake as those crowds some 2000 years ago. Let's not assume that Jesus has come to save us from whatever we perceive to be our greatest threat — be that the coronavirus, or a failing marriage, or a difficult work situation or whatever else. If we believe that that is what Jesus came to save us from, then we too will turn our backs on Jesus if our situation does not improve.

Our king has come to save us from our sin. Our king has come to defeat the powers of evil wreaking havoc on this world. Our king has come to deal with the one waging war on our souls.

King Jesus is seated, right now, at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, ruling this world according to his power and his wisdom.

Amid the chaos and the tragedy, let's set our hope on him.

Endnotes

- 1 Tim Keller, "Gospel-Centered Ministry," (speech, Deerfield, IL, May 28, 2007), quoted in Justin Taylor, "Keller-Gospel-Centered Ministry" (*The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/keller-gospel-centered-ministry/>, 2007).
- 2 Stuart Townsend, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us," Thankyou Music, 1995, web.
- 3 John Pollock, "*Amazing Grace: John Newton's Story*" (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 182, quoted in David B. Calhoun, "Amazing Grace, John Newton and His Great Hymn, Deerfield, IL (*CS Lewis Institute*, http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Amazing_Grace_page5, 2013).