

Consider My Servant Job

Opening Hymn: #307 — “I Will Not Fear”

Ezra...Nehemiah...Esther... JOB ...Psalms...Proverbs...

Nearly all of the book of Job is written in poetry as are the psalms that follow. The book describes the experience of a person [like the books of Ezra/Nehemiah/Esther that precede it]. The book describes the experiences of a man who sustains great sufferings. We believe that such a man really existed. God thought so. Here are his words from Ezekiel:

Ezek. 14:20 [*Amplified*—will be used in all citations] Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in [the land], as I live, says the Lord God ... they would but deliver their own lives by their righteousness.

God here associates Job with two of his other faithful servants: Noah and Daniel. There is one other reference to Job outside of the book which bears his name and it is in the New Testament. We'll consider that one later.

The original Hebrew is so beautiful that men have been moved to eloquence in praising the book:

Thomas Carlyle wrote: “It is one of the grandest things ever written with the pen. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.”

Martin Luther wrote: “Job is suffering more from my version than from the taunts of his friends, and would prefer his dunghill to my translation of his lamentation.”

Outline of the Book

Chapter 1: Job is introduced to us as a God-fearing and wealthy man; Satan insists that Job worships God just for the prosperity that results; Jehovah permits trials to come upon Job to test his faithfulness.

To the end of chapter 2: Three friends arrive to comfort Job in his misery.

Chapters 3-31: The friends and Job take turns debating the reasons for his plight.

Chapters 32-37: A man called Elihu offers his explanation.

Chapters 38-41: Jehovah speaks to Job out of a great whirlwind.

Chapter 42: Job realizes the great majesty of Jehovah for the first time. He repents of the words he has uttered and God restores him to even greater riches than at the beginning.

Just as in the garden of Eden, trouble begins when Satan appears:

Job 1:9 Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job (reverently) fear God for nothing?”

It is this question that the book addresses: Should anyone serve God for nothing in return? The book does NOT answer the question: Why do the righteous suffer ... Why does God permit evil?

How Shall We Proceed?

It is difficult to know just how to proceed with our consideration of the book because prosperity surrounds us. We have comforts and pleasures our grandparents never dreamed of. And we have each other. Can we ever really understand ...

- the loneliness of this man in his universe?
- the hostility of men toward this man?
- the enigma that this man was to himself?

I suspect we cannot! Nonetheless we can look at the events described in the book, not to find some type and antitype, but to highlight what lessons we can learn from. Perhaps when we are finished we will better understand Job's three comforters; and perhaps we may better understand Job's experiences.

The Comforters

Make no mistake about it: these three people were Job's friends.

Job 2:11-13 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz ... Bildad ... and Zophar; for they had made an appointment together to come to grieve with him and to comfort him. And when they looked from afar off and saw him [disfigured] beyond recognition, they lifted up their voices and wept; and they each one tore his robe, and they cast dust over their heads toward the heavens. So they sat down with [Job] on the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief and pain were very great.

The scripture says they were his friends; they travel a great distance; they rend their clothes and humble themselves; and then they sit silently with Job for an entire week. These are all evidences of the great friendship they felt toward this man. What they had to say to him, however, is another matter!

Eliphaz

He was probably the oldest. He begins with a certain eloquence and stamps it with what he considers the best authority:

Job 5:8,13,27 As for me, I would seek God and inquire of Him and to God would I commit my cause; He catches the [so-called] wise in their own trickiness, and the counsel of the schemers is brought to a quick end. This is what **we** have searched out; **it is true**; hear and heed it, and know for yourself [for your good].

"If we have found these things to be true in the past they are certainly true now!" But this hardly satisfies Job. He wants and needs the sympathetic understanding of his friend, but that is not what he gets. As Eliphaz sees Job sweep aside his philosophies, he becomes bitter and resorts to slander:

Job 22:6-9 For you have taken pledges of your brother for nothing, and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have not given water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. But [you, Job] the man with power possessed the land, and the favored and accepted man dwelt in it. You have sent widows away empty-handed, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken.

From an honest difference of opinion Eliphaz has uttered lies against his own friend. The truth of the matter, and Eliphaz surely knew it, is contained in chapter one, verse one:

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who (reverently) feared God and abstained from and shunned evil [because it was wrong].

To what low levels Eliphaz has descended! Paul warned the church about such things:

Gal. 5:14,15 For the whole Law [concerning human relationships] is complied with in the one precept, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another [in partisan strife], be careful that you [and your whole fellowship] are not consumed by one another.

Bildad

He considers himself the wise man. He is harsh from the beginning and his appeal is to the wisdom of ages dead and gone:

Job 8:2,6,8,10 How long will you say these things [Job]? And how long shall the words of your mouth be as a mighty wind? If you are pure and upright, surely He will bestir Himself for you, and make your righteous dwelling prosperous again. For inquire, I pray you, of the former age, and apply yourself to that which their fathers have searched out; shall not [the forefathers] teach you, and tell you, and utter words out of their heart [the deepest part of their nature]?

God's judgments are such as he (Bildad) declares them to be. Who is Job that he should even think of doubting it? This appeal to the wisdom handed down through the ages is much like that of the scribes and Pharisees at the time of our Lord:

Mark 7:8,9 You disregard, and give up, and bid depart from you the commandment of God, and cling to the tradition of men—keeping it carefully and faithfully. And He said to them, You have a fine way of rejecting (thus thwarting and nullifying and doing away with) the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition—your own human regulations!

Zophar

He comes as a friend, but the first words out of his mouth are that of a foe:

Job 11:5,6 But oh, that God would speak, and open His lips against you; And that He would show you the secrets of wisdom! For He is manifold in understanding! Know therefore that God exacts of you less than your guilt and iniquity [deserve]. [verse 8] His wisdom is as high as the heights of Heaven! What can you do? It is deeper than Sheol [the place of the dead]! What can you know?

Zophar condemns Job and even make it appear that there can be no other conclusion. Job thinks this over and his answer is full of irony:

Job 12:2,3 No doubt you are the [only wise] people [in the world], and wisdom will die with you!
But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these [of God's wisdom and might]?

When Zophar speaks a second time, he states once again why he believes Job is suffering:

Job 20:27,29 The heavens shall reveal his iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against him. This is the wicked man's portion from God, and the heritage appointed to him by God.

This is the heart of the position taken by the three friends. From a logical point of view it can be restated this way:

Wicked people suffer;
You are suffering;
Therefore you are wicked.

That such an argument is patently illogical can be shown by stating it this way: Wicked people breathe; you are breathing; therefore you are wicked.

Job is not too miserable to miss the absurdity of this argument and this is his answer:

Job 21:7,13-15 Why do the wicked live, become old, and become mighty in power? They spend their days in prosperity, and peacefully go down to Sheol [the unseen state] in a moment. Yet they say to God, Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have, if we pray to Him?

Clearly the wicked don't serve God for naught because they don't serve God at all!

This was a problem for another of God's servants at a later time:

Jer. 12:1 Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they at ease and thriving who deal very treacherously and deceitfully?

How Do We Judge the Comforters?

It is easy to be harsh when we think of how the comforters talked to their old friend. It is clear they set themselves up AS God and spoke for Him. One thing is clear: these friends hurt Job more deeply than Satan had ever done previously:

Job 19:43 How long will you vex and torment me, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have reproached me; you are not ashamed that you make yourselves strange [harden yourselves against me and deal severely with me].

We find it almost unthinkable that these people could be considered friends at all. But let's think about it!

Suppose YOU were the one who was sitting on that pile of ashes...

- your home had been completely destroyed by an earthquake;
- there was no insurance;
- all your children had just been killed in an automobile accident;
- your savings had been wiped out through bank failure;
- and you yourself had just been stricken with incurable cancer.

Now I come to you. What do I say? How would I respond to your questions?

The visiting friends believed in a God who respected the decency and amenities of their existence. They made what continues to be a classic mistake: they confused what is good ... with he who has goods. But this standard God has rejected:

1 Sam. 16:7 I have rejected him, for the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

The comforters made several other mistakes as well:

1. They permitted personal resentment to warp their view. [As one reads the book we see them change from theologians into very angry men!]
2. They claim heaven is so great and grand, but they fail to heed their own teachings. [If they can't bring themselves to say "I may be wrong" they should at least be able to claim "I am right, and my differing neighbor may be as right as I am."]
3. They allow their theories to override their humanity.

Gal. 5:22,23 But the fruit of the (Holy) Spirit, [the work which His presence within accomplishes]—is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness; (Meekness, humility) gentleness, self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a charge].

In the last analysis, sympathy and compassionate love will always be counted as Godlike.

Job

Job's suffering is far more severe than we can ever imagine. There were martyrs before his time and there have been martyrs since, BUT THEY ALL KNEW GOD WAS ON THEIR SIDE! They died knowing God approved of their faithfulness. But Job is convinced God is working against him:

Job 13:24-26 Why do You hide Your face [as if offended], and alienate me as if I were Your enemy? Will You harass and frighten a [poor, helpless] leaf driven to and fro, and will You pursue the chaff of the dry stubble? For You write bitter things against me [in Your bill of indictment].

Despair has set in, and despair kills faith. Job is beginning to reject the idea of trust in a loving God. He insists not on the love of God, but in his rights! To some extent, it has been the comforters who pushed him into this position. One of the first results of true pain is the breakdown in communications, and we find that's true even with intimates:

Job 6: 14 To him who is about to faint and despair, kindness is due from his friend, lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty.

Kindness may be due, but kindness is not what Job gets! True love does not depend upon the theological position of the one it embraces.

The New Testament reference to Job is contained in ,,,

James 5:10,11 [As] an example of suffering and ill-treatment together with patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord—as His messengers. You know how we call those blessed (happy) who were steadfast—who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job.

The Amplified's use of the word "endurance" reflects the thought of the Greek and is better than "patience," the word used in the King James. Job endured, but he wasn't patient. Here's one of many examples:

Job 13:13 Hold your peace! Let me alone, so I may speak, and let come on me what will.

Job's desire to have an audience with God is answered. In chapter 38, God speaks to him out of the whirlwind.

Jehovah's Answer to Job

Job has asked for a reading of the charges against him. But instead of giving Job the grounds for an intellectual assent, God appeals to his heart. He "answers" with questions, demands, and merciless inquiries. God does not just ask Job to consider his majesty, he strikes at the very heart of Job's position:

Job 40:8 Will you also annul—set aside and render void—My judgment? Will you condemn Me [your God] that you may [appear] righteous and justified?

and...

Job 41:10,11 No one is so fierce [and foolhardy] that he dares to stir up [the crocodile]; who then is he who can stand before Me [the beast's Creator, or dares to contend with Me]? Who has first given to Me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heavens is Mine. [Therefore who can have a claim against God, God who made the unmastered crocodile?]

Paul states this in similar words in:

Rom. 11:35 Who has first given God anything that he might be .paid back or that he could claim a recompense?

And what was the effect on Job when confronted with his own words?

Job 42:5,6 I had heard of You [only] by the hearing of the ear; but now my [spiritual] eye sees You. Therefore I loathe [my words] and abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Summary

Job has had a very traumatic experience and out of it he has learned one very good lesson:

When we cannot know, it is enough to trust!

Someone once wrote that the rewards of righteousness are:

- a sense of work well done;
- a heart at rest with itself;
- the answer of a quiet conscience;

- the love of men and women whom you have served;
- joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

These cannot be taken from you by any force or fraud.

Job has maintained his loyalty to what he knows to be true. He does not carelessly give in to what he cannot accept. Although this means the rejection of his friends, in the end he is the one who is blessed. Through suffering has come insight.

We said that the Book of Job addresses the question, Should an intelligent man worship God even if he gets nothing in return?

What do you suppose Job's answer would be?

Closing hymn: #179 — Endless Song

Aked, Charles F., *The Divine Drama of Job*, Scribners, New York, 1913.

Crook, Margaret B., *The Cruel God*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1959.

Terrien, Samuel, *Job: Poet of Existence*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1957.