

Job 15

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn to Job chapter 15. Job 15 to 21. It'll really help me if you've got your Bible in front of you and you can follow along. I'm going to put a bit of work in the text.

I don't know if you ever feel hopeless. Maybe not all of your life but in certain areas. Some people are more close to that than others.

A dark cloud of hopelessness descends upon you. Tough circumstances and you think I don't know why this is happening to me. Maybe it's Alzheimer's. Maybe it's failing health. Maybe it's a business going belly up. Maybe it's family issues. Maybe it's a marriage fracturing.

What hope is there in such apparently hopeless cases? What hope is there for us? Well in chapters 4 to 14 that was round 1 of the dialogue between Job and his friends and now the bell rings for round 2.

Chapters 15 to 21. At the end of round 1, do you remember right at the end of that round and before the bell rang Job has rejected the accusations of wrongdoing.

[1 : 22] He's saying it's not that I've done something wrong that all this has happened to me. He's accused of perverting justice. But Job continues to maintain his innocence.

And if you like watching Punches land, just let me show you some of these blows that Job lands. And look at chapter 12, verse 2. Can you see this? I love these.

He says to his friends, no doubt you are the people. And wisdom will die with you. You really are it, aren't you?

He's saying. And when you die, that's the end of wisdom, isn't it? It's the kind of definition of sarcasm. Look at chapter 12 and verse 17.

He leads counsellors away stripped. And judges, he makes fools. You are giving me counselling. And yet you've been stripped.

[2 : 24] Chapter 13 and verse 4. And as for you, you whitewash with lies. Worthless physicians are you all. Useless doctors, for a lot of you.

Chapter 13 and verse 5. Oh that you would keep silent. And it would be your wisdom. Do you know what would make you so wise? If you just shut up.

And you've stayed shut up. You claim that you're pleading for God, his case. Don't give me that.

Chapter 13 and verse 8. Will you show partiality towards him?

Will you plead the case for God against him? It's pretty strong stuff, isn't it? Powerful punches. And to cap it all. What probably really got under the skin of Job's friends was little comments like chapter 14 and verse 17.

Where he says, my transgression, my sin, my rebellion would be sealed up in a bag. And that's what God would do. God would seal up his sin, his transgression in a bag and none of it would escape.

[3 : 31] Or chapter 14 and verse 12. So a man lies down and rises not again.

Till the heavens are no more, he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. Do you see the hint of the resurrection there? So a man lies down and he rises not again.

Oh yeah. Till the heavens though are no more. And then he will awake or be roused out of his sleep. The hint is there, isn't it? When the heavens are no more, the dead will rise.

But what is it that upsets Job's friends? At the heart of it is this scandal, like we talked about with the children, of innocent suffering. Innocent suffering.

Christopher Ashen, it's really good at the comedy, he talks about the system. And he says Job's friends have a system. And the system was that sinful people suffered.

[4 : 29] And if he was suffering, it was because he was sinful people. And the problem for Job's friends is what Job was claiming and asserting about his innocence. He just didn't understand the

system.

He didn't understand how they understood things to be. So let's try and follow that through. My first point is this, the system is clear. Their system is clear. The default setting for those who believe in God.

Still today, isn't it? If you talk to kind of bog standard religious people. If you lead a good life, you will receive good things. If you lead a bad life, you receive bad things.

That's what kind of religious people believe. That's the system. That's the moral order. It must be the case. Surely chaos would be ensued, wouldn't it? If it was overturned. Now, let's apply this to Job.

And this is what the friends are doing all the way through this second round. They're basically saying, Job, let's make it crystal clear. The wicked suffer. And you are suffering.

[5 : 32] Therefore, you are, well, obviously, you are in the wicked category. And Job keeps saying, chapter 13 and verse 3. For I would speak to the Almighty.

And I desire to argue my case with God. And then verse 18. Behold, I have prepared my case. And I know that I shall be in the right.

It's all ready. I prepared my case before God. And I want to argue it. Well, Eliphaz, who seems to be the oldest and the wisest, always goes first.

And he is pretty annoyed. Chapter 15 and verse 1. He says, should a wise man answer with windy knowledge?

And fill his belly with the east wind. He says, Job, you are full of hot air. You are a windbag.

[6 : 32] In fact, it is far more coarse than that. He is saying, out of your belly comes great wind. Verse 2.

Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge? And fill his belly with the east wind? And then verse 3. Should he argue in unprofitable talk? Job, your words are no good.

But you are doing away with the fear of God. That's the thing they were getting really upset about. And hindering meditation about God. We know, don't we, Job, that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And Job, by the way that you're speaking, you're doing away with it. You're encouraging people to argue with God. And complain that God is allowing, if not causing, innocent suffering.

And I will not allow it. It's arrogant, Job. And here's the bottom line, Job. It's always been the same. Verse 20. The wicked man writhes in pain all his days.

[7 : 38] Look at yourself, Job. That's exactly what you're doing. I think that's a very good description of you, isn't it, Job? Writhes in pain all your days. Look at what you're doing.

So, Job, it spans the reason that you must be classed with the wicked. Because it's the wicked man who writhes in pain all his days. Do you not get it? The system is clear. Secondly, the stakes are high.

The stakes are high. In chapter 16, Job's response, having landed another massive punch in chapter 16 and verse 2. I've heard many such things.

Miserable confidence to the Lord of you. Job's response, though, in chapter 16 is to reach out to God and to call God as his witness. In his case, against God.

So, Job, who is your first witness in your case against God? It is God. I want God to be my witness, he says in verse 19.

[8 : 44] Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven. And he who testifies for me is on high. It's God himself, isn't it?

My friends scorn me. My eyes pour out tears to God. That he would argue the case of a man with God.

I want God to argue the case with himself. I want God to be my witness. And as chapter 17 goes on. Even though that is what he wants to do. To bring his case before God.

You suddenly feel in chapter 17 the hope draining away. Draining away in the face of death.

Death which is coming sooner or later. So, chapter 17 and verse 1. My spirit is broken. My days are extinct. The graveyard is ready for me.

[9 : 46] It's like going to the graveyard. And going to the family grave. And seeing the people that are on the gravestone listed there.

And knowing that there is space for one more person. And knowing that one day it will be your name on that gravestone. That the grave is ready for you.

It's a matter of life and death. And so where is his hope as he slides to the pit of death? That's his question. Look at verse 15. Where then is my hope? Who will see my hope?

Well, Bildad is pretty sharp in his response. Chapter 18. In effect. He says, do you think we're stupid, Job? Do you think we're like cattle?

Why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight? Let me make it absolutely clear to you, Job. Let me show you which road you are on. You are on the road to hell, my friend.

[10:49] That's Bildad's speech. Chapter 20, which is Zophar's round. It's another portrait of hell. Look at chapter 18 and verse 5. Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out.

Job, your light is put out. And the flame of his fire does not shine. The light is dark in his tent.

And his lamp above him is put out. His strong steps are shortened. And his own schemes throw him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet.

And he walks on. It's mesh. Mesh. It's really slippery. A trap seizes him by the heel. A snare lays hold of him. A rope is hidden from him in the ground. A trap for him in the park.

Terror's frightened him on every side. And chase him on his heels. His strength is vanished. And calamity is ready for his stumbling. It consumes the parts of his skin.

[11:45] That's really below the doubt, isn't it? There's Job sitting there. Do you remember what his skin was like? It was all cracked. It's broken into pieces. Chapter 2 tells us, isn't it?

I think that he was scratching himself with bits of broken pottery. And he's saying, do you know what the mark of the wicked is, Job? It's when the parts of their skin are consumed. Look at yourself, Job. He's saying, isn't it?

That his hope is gone. There's a thief that is stealing him.

Verse 16. His roots dry up beneath. And his branches wither above. His memory perishes from the earth.

[12:52] And he has no name in the street. He is thrust from light into darkness. And driven out of the world. And then verse 21.

Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous. Such is the place of him who knows not God.

You're a wicked man, Job. And you don't know God.

It's as simple as that. At the end of chapter 20, Zophar joins in. It's another portrait of Hal. Look at chapter 20, verses 27. And this is his climax of his response to Job.

He talks of the wicked man. And he says the possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of his wrath.

The day of judgment. This is the wicked man's portion from God. The heritage decreed for him by God. It's the day of judgment. We're talking about heaven and hell, Job.

[13:52] And the stakes could not be higher. But thirdly, and this is where Job protests, the system is broken. The system is broken.

And it's broken in two ways. And the first way Job protests is innocence. He says, you say that it's the wicked who suffer. In other words, there's no such thing as innocent suffering.

It's always being punished. People punished for something they've said or done or thought. God knows. We may not know. But that is what is happening.

Now Job is not claiming to be sinlessly perfect. Job knows the need. The need for sacrifice. Do you remember chapter 1? He knows the need for sacrifice to cover over our sin.

We discover in chapter 1. Job is concerned that his children might have cursed God in their hearts. So what does he do? He sacrifices burnt offerings for them to cover their sins. He's not claiming that there aren't sins.

[14:57] People like him don't need those sins to be covered. But what he is claiming. Is that there is no unforgiven sin in his life. For which he's been punished by suffering.

So in other words, this logic. Which says you can always trace suffering back to some wickedness on the part of the sufferer. That logic is broken. The system is broken. The logic does not apply.

Even though his comforters and friends say it is. Okay, says Job. Let me give you another piece of evidence. Chapter 21. And there's echoes, isn't there?

Of Psalm 73 here. Of why do the wicked prosper? So chapter 21 and verse 7. What are the wicked like? Like, well their offspring are established in their presence. And their descendants before their eyes.

Or maybe you need to travel just a little bit more, says Job. Look at verse 29. For you say, where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked live?

[15:59] Have you not asked those who travel the roads? And do you not accept their testimony? Maybe you're just a little bit blinking in your experience of life. Verse 30. That the evil man is spared in the day of calamity.

That he's rescued in the day of wrath. Who declares his way to his face? And who repays him for what he has done? No one dare says that.

It's not worth the risk. Verse 32. When he's carried to the grave which is kept over his tomb. People go to his tomb and they remember him. The clods of the valley are sweet to him.

In other words. This person. This wicked person. Their path to the grave is a pleasant one. He's not a man who dies some horrible death. He dies peacefully in his sleep.

He dies the death that we all want to die. Peacefully dies in our sleep. Just after a pleasant old age. There's no serious illness. No chronic disease.

[16:59] Just one morning. It doesn't get away. It doesn't get up. That's what people want isn't it? Well that's what happens to the wicked. In verse 33 again.

All mankind follows after him. And those who go before him are innumerable. Have you been to those funerals? You see those massive funerals.

That the wicked have. Hundreds and hundreds. And hundreds of people there. How do you fit that into your system? You say that the wicked suffer.

And that the suffering is a proof of wickedness. Well I tell you. Job says the wicked have fantastic lives. They reach old age. And they have amazing funerals.

And people venerate them in their death. Life is not as simple as you make out. And so what are the consequences of this broken system?

[18:00] Well in two words. Fourthly and finally. Glorious liberation. Glorious liberation. The system is broken and it doesn't work.

That's a few ways. Three applications. The glorious liberation works itself out. First of all. That we're liberated from guilt. We're liberated from guilt.

We're liberated from assuming that individual suffering. Is proof of personal guilt. Some of you in this room have suffered.

Much more than I have. Some of you have suffered things. Which have been horrific. In your families. And in your own circumstances. And this truth.

This system being broken. Should liberate you from guilt. From assuming that your suffering. Is proof of personal guilt. Do you remember when Jesus.

[19:06] In John chapter 9. His followers. Point on a person. A man who's been born blind. Jesus points that person out. And their response is this.

They instantly ask. Without blinking an eyelid. They say. Well was it that man who's sinned. Or was it his parents. Did his parents. Do something. That they're being punished for here.

By having a child born blind. And Jesus of course says. No not at all. For neither of those things. But so that the work of God.

Might be displayed in him. And I don't know tonight. If you're suffering in some way. And maybe you're tempted. And there's a voice. That whispers in your ear. That. That somehow.

That God is punishing you. Or somehow. God is against you. Or somehow. God is frowning at you.

[20:02] Or that God is not happy with you. And why do you think. This would be happening in your life. If God was happy with you. He cannot be happy with you. You've stepped out of line. You've not served God.

Wholeheartedly enough. You've not been generous enough. With your time. With your money.

What is the conclusion. That we're to draw from this. None. None of the above. None of the above. And we are to be liberated. From this kind of guilt. Secondly. We are. We are liberated. For glory. We are liberated.

For glory. What I. What I mean by that. I mean that. We are set free. For something. Far more glorious. Than what we presently experience.

We are liberated. For glory. It's all well and good. Me using that phrase. But Job didn't feel that way at all. He felt besieged by God. He didn't feel that he was on a glorious path.

[21:01] To a glorious future. Go back to chapter 19. And verse 11. This is how Job felt. He says.

He has kindled his wrath. Against me. And he counts me. As his. Adversary. God is against me. His troops.

Come on together. And they have cast up their siege ramp. Against me. And encamp around my tent. So let me have a little image there.

Have you been camping? We don't do camping. But when I was little. We did camping. And you. You have your tent. You hear the rain in the morning. You pull up the flap of your tent.

And you see. Don't you. Damp. Dripping trees. But the one thing you didn't expect. Is to be surrounded by tanks. All with their barrels.

[21 : 57] Pointing. At your tent. That's the picture isn't it? What is going on here? Job feels. The little him. Little me.

Is surrounded by God. And his power. And yet. And it is a big yet. Extraordinarily. And counterintuitively.

In the midst of his suffering. Job is granted a sense of solid certainty. About the future. And it's one of the great shafts. Of light. That shines through the dark clouds of Job.

So we know that. Don't we? These rain storms. We've seen over the last few weeks. And you go outside. And the clouds are dark. And heavy. And the clouds look ferocious.

And you think. Well I better get back inside quick. And it's as if the sky is covered with those. Dark clouds. Ferocious clouds. And then suddenly there's a crack in the cloud.

[22 : 57] And a shaft of light comes streaming through. And as Job reflects on that. In chapter 19 and verse 23. He says.

Oh that my words were written. Oh that my words were inscribed in a book. They are Job. And we're reading it. Oh that with an iron pen and lead.

They were engraved in the rock forever. Why? Why is he wanting this permanent record of something? He's saying. Because verse 25. For I know. That my Redeemer lives.

And at the last. He shall stand upon the earth. And after my skin.

Has been thus destroyed. Yet in my flesh. I shall see God. It must be renewed flesh. Wasn't it? Because his old flesh was cracking and broken.

[23 : 59] Yet in my flesh. I shall see God. Whom I shall see for myself. And my eyes shall behold. And not another. I'm not talking about second hand experience. I'm not talking about an ethereal.

Mystical. Super spiritual thing. My eyes. My own eyes. Will see God. For my heart faints within me. And I'm just longing for that day.

Redeemer in verse 25. What does that mean? In its original context. We think. Old Testament wise. We think of. A relative. Who comes to the rescue. A relative.

Who comes to the rescue. So. The obvious example is Boaz. Isn't it? In the book of Ruth. And Boaz. Comes to rescue. His relative. That. That widow. From poverty.

And hopelessness. And so you think of a student. A student who is. Mired in debt. Like most students are. They're in university. They're in their third year.

[24 : 56] And financially. They are facing ruin. They can't find enough hours in the day. To pay off their debts. And they're about to give up university. And then a great uncle hears about it.

And he hears how they've reached the point. Where they're having to give up their studies. And the uncle steps in. And he pays the fees. And he clears the debt. He's a rescuing relative.

And as if God is the great rescuing relative. He sees the predicament that Job is in. He hears his cry. And he realises. Job realises that he is a redeemer who is alive.

Who will raise him at the last. I know. That my redeemer lives. And he is aware that he is liberated for glory.

And that that is his ultimate destination. Does that make everything alright? Does that take all the pain away?

[25 : 57] No more tears? Nothing like that? Of course it doesn't. But it allows you to cope, doesn't it? And it allows you to hope.

And it allows you to get through today. And tomorrow. Liberated for glory. And lastly and finally. Liberated by grace. And I think this is the point worth coming back to. I kind of want to do a bit more work on this. The suffering of the innocent.

The suffering of the innocent. Opens up the possibility of grace. The suffering of the innocent. Opens up the possibility of grace. The reason that God allowed Job to suffer so terribly.

Was to show that beyond any doubt in God's world. It is possible to suffer innocently. Let me say that again.

[26 : 59] The reason that God allowed Job to suffer so terribly. Was to show that beyond any doubt in God's world. It is possible to suffer innocently. Job is not suffering for unforgiven sin. His friends say.

Well you must be. You just want to think harder Job. Search. Search your memory. You've got to work harder. They can't cope with the idea. That God would allow an innocent to suffer. He can't be innocent. He's suffering. Look. It breaks the moral order. It breaks the system. But the glorious liberating point is this. That if Job's anguished experience.

Shows that there is in our world. A category of suffering that is innocent. By God's expressed design. Then there is a category of the innocent suffering.

Of Christ on the cross. It opens the door. To innocent suffering. Being part of God's plan.

[28 : 06] Okay. It doesn't fit the system. But it opens the door. It opens the door. To the brilliance of grace. Not the breakdown of moral order. As the friend is saying. I mean.

Why would God allow. An innocent one to suffer. But not for their own sin. It doesn't fit. They say. But we say that is the gospel. Don't we? That is what grace is all about. That that is the heart of the good news. About the Lord Jesus.

As Peter puts it. In 1 Peter 3.18. Christ suffered for sins. Once and for all. And this is the phrase. Isn't it? The righteous.

In the place of the unrighteous. That he was not suffering for his own sin. He was a righteous one. The righteous one. The perfect human being.

[29 : 02] And he is suffering on the cross. For the unrighteous. For people like us. To bring us to God. God. So the innocent suffering. Of Job.

Is fulfilled. In the innocent suffering. Of Christ on the cross. Which means. That people like. You and I. Can receive grace. Instead of what we deserve.

Of course. Those who are wedded to the system. The religious mindset. In our world. Rejects that. And they say.

No, no, no, no, no. That breaks the moral order. That cannot be right. I'll be judged. For my own sins. Hear that? It's the ultimate foolish statement.

No one is good enough for God. Don't say that. But the other objection. It's immoral. For an innocent. To suffer. For another. Comes the past. And yes.

[30 : 03] The Job teaches us. There is scandal. In innocent suffering. For sure. But it's like. The scandal of grace. It's meant to point us. To Christ. And so.

If you are feeling. Hopeless. Tonight. Here is hope. Here is hope. For the hopeless. That if you will trust. In Job's redeemer.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Then you can be liberated. From your guilt. And liberated for glory. And liberated.

By grace. And that's great news. Let's pray. Father.

Father. We thank you. That tonight. We can say. So much better than Job. That we know. That our redeemer lives. For Jesus Christ.

[31 : 11] Has come. And has died. And has risen from the dead. And one day. He will return. And we thank you.

In his name. Amen. Amen.