

Job 23-24v6

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[0 : 00] And that's Job chapter 25, verse 1 to 27, verse 6. It's one of the most stirring profound passages in the book of Job.

! It takes us to something that lies at the core of what it means to be a human being. There's something going on in the passage tonight that as we connect it with other passages in the Bible, we're going to see that it's really, really important for you and I to grasp as human beings. And I hope that as we connect this with other parts of the Bible, we'll see something of the glory of God and the hope that there is for us. And we need to understand the language that's being used in both what Bildad is saying and what Job replies.

So if you've got the passage, basically I just want to try and talk us through it. And let's start with Bildad's comments to Job. So look at Job 25. Bildad the Shuhite answered and he said, Dominion and fear are with God.

He makes peace in his high heaven. Is there any number to his armies? Upon whom does his light not arise? How can then man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?

[1 : 16] Behold, even the moon is not bright. Stars are not pure in his eyes. How much less man who is a maggot. And the son of man who is a worm. And Bildad is mouthing here.

And in the guise of being helpful, he's mouthing something which is really the extreme version of what his other two mates have been saying all the way through the book of Job.

And it's the kind of most extreme version. It's the final round of the bout. And he comes out swinging. And it effectively closes off all the other contributions that these three have been making. And I think you have to say that nothing that has come before in the book of Job is as bad as what we read here. But we might not think it when we first read it. The first thing that we need to see in this passage, if you like, is to do with what it means to be a human being.

And it's to do with how Bildad acts as something which is so wrong it is almost blasphemous and obscene. And how Job counters the truth. That's really what we see tonight. Job is down.

[2 : 20] He is truly down. But as we'll see, he's far from out. So let's just look at what Bildad says. Let's go to Job 25 verse 2. Dominion and fear are with God.

Absolutely. Absolutely, Bildad. You are dead right. He makes peace in his high heaven. Yes, he does.

Absolutely, Bildad. You're spot on. Your theological orthodoxy is right. Is there any number to his armies?

It's a rhetorical question. And the answer is no. No, they can't count it. Bildad, you've got it absolutely right.

You've seen that the Lord is the Lord of hosts. Isn't it? Upon whom does his light not rise? Can his forces be numbered? No. Upon whom does his light not rise?

[3 : 18] Absolutely nobody. He gives light to all. You are correct. How then can man be in the right before God? It's a great question, Bildad.

How can he who was born of a woman be pure? Bildad, you're absolutely right. You've grasped the kind of question of the Bible. Then how can we ourselves as human beings be righteous before God?

Because we know that by nature we go against God in our lives. We've got this fundamental bias, haven't we? Like a bowling ball that goes away from God again and again.

You're absolutely right, Bildad. But. And then it starts to unravel. He says, behold, even the moon is not bright. And the stars are not pure in his eyes.

We want to say to that, where does that come from? Where all of a sudden, Bildad does dominion and all which belong to God.

[4 : 19] He establishes order in the heavens. He gives light to all. How do we get from the unrighteousness of sinners before God. Which you're right there, absolutely bang on.

To the moon not being bright. And the stars not being pure in his eyes. How do we get there? And it completely unravels. Behold, even the moon is not bright.

And the stars are not pure in his eyes. And then verse 6. How much less man. How much less man who is but a maggot. And the son of man.

That's just a Hebrew way of saying. A bloke. A son of man who is a worm. Where did that come from? Where is it that Bildad goes from being unrighteous before God.

To human beings being maggots and worms. So Bildad has got a bit of good theology. But he's not got the whole. And what he hasn't got is a true and a proper view.

[5 : 19] Of what it means to be a human being. And he hasn't got a proper view of what it means to be a human being. Because he hasn't got a true and proper view of creation. And we're going to see that this is so, so relevant to you and I.

So let's go to the first backup passage if you like. Let's go to Genesis chapter 1. Take a finger in Job. Let's go to Genesis 1 and verse 26. And it's the first account of creation.

Adam and Eve. It's the culmination of God's creative work. Human beings, they are the kind of apex, the crowning point of God's creation.

Perfect creation to dwell in a perfect place. And it was good and it was good and it was good. You know Genesis 1. And so here we are on the sixth day. And in verse 26 it says, Then God said, Let us, Let us know the plural there.

Let us make man, human beings, in our image again. Our image. After our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish and the sea and over the birds and the heavens and over the livestock and over the earth.

[6 : 26] And over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. They're to rule. They're God's vice regents. And so God created man in his own image.

In the image of God he created him. Male and female. He created them. Now just go over the page. Genesis chapter 2 and verse 4.

And he says, These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. And then we'll go to verse 7.

Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living creature.

So Bildad has got, hasn't he? He's understood something of the power and the awesomeness and the glory and the righteousness of God. But what he hasn't understood is that he thinks man is but a maggot.

[7 : 34] The son of man who is only a worm. And what Bildad is coming out with here is anti-human. And because it is anti-human it is anti-God. And before Bildad is ever making a point to you about Job.

Before Bildad ever is coming to a man who is down and kicking him so hard on the council of despair. Bildad has got God wrong. And before he gets Job wrong he gets God wrong.

Because what he's not God is that God created man in his own image. What he's not God is that God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.

And I think as we look around we see that there are Bildads aplenty living in London. In our world. And there are Bildads aplenty involved in science. There are Bildads aplenty involved in medicine. There are Bildads aplenty involved in psychiatry.

[8 : 35] There are Bildads walking the streets of Ealing in our schools and in our shops. And we may know Bildads because what Bildad had done is he had broken a connection.

He had broken a connection between God and you and me. Between God and humanity. And so when Bildad denies that man is anything more than a maggot or anything more than a worm. Bildad is striking right at the heart of what God was doing in creation.

But God out of his mercy and out of his love as it were became the father of Adam and Eve. And he made Adam and Eve in his own image. Carrying his splendour. Knowing him.

Spending time in fellowship with him. Doing his bidding. Enjoying the creation that he had provided for them abundantly and generously for them in the garden. Loving him back who had loved them

first.

[9 : 42] And when Bildad says you are only a maggot. You are only a worm. Bildad is denying God. And what Bildad is doing is dehumanising. Because he is de-deifying.

He's taking God out of the picture. And that's why there are Bildads all around us in the world today out there. There are Bildads who write books denying God which sell in their hundreds of thousands.

There are Bildads who get professorial chairs in universities all over this country. And there are so many voices out there in our society that pick up the echo of Bildad.

And what they actually want to say is we are no more than worms and maggots. They want to say actually that we are gods with a little tree.

Because if you take God out of the picture. You still have to put something in there. And you end up putting yourself in there. In fact what they've done is the very ground for exalting the dignity of humanity.

[10 : 49] That is the ground they've pulled out from under their own feet. They deny God. And so if you take God out of the picture. And you do what Bildad is doing.

You have a God who is very powerful. But he's not made you in his image. And he's not made you for himself. He's not breathed life into you.

And you have a God who does not regard you as being different from anything else. And if that is what you believe. You've got no ground on which to build an exalted humanity. All you've got left is despair.

And Bildad knows that here. Bildad offers no hope for Job. He offers no way out of his predicament. He offers no good news.

Bildad gives no grounds for doing anything other than well taking your life. He gives Job no future. He gives Job no dignity. He gives Job no humanity. And if you take God out of the picture.

[11 : 56] Or you teach a God who is powerful but not connected with you. Powerful but not the one who made you.

And made you for himself. If you take that picture out. You're left with despair. You're left with despair. You're left with despair. And where people can do the most inhumane things to one another.

Where abortion is okay. Where euthanasia is economically viable.

If you take out of the picture of what we read in Colossians. That the Lord Jesus Christ. By whom all things were made. And for whom all things were made. If you take that God out of the picture.

If you take the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you take the God of the Bible. And you take the God of Genesis out of the picture. Then you've got no basis at all. For you and I being anything other than maggots and worms.

[13 : 04] All we are is rearranged dust. We're just collecting some DNA. That works a little bit differently from the stuff in the garden.

That's all we are. Where molecules and the atoms. Where chemicals. Where processes. Where nothing. Where things. Of course. No one really lives like that.

Do they? The most hardened atheist doesn't live like that. And the most hardened atheist. Their child runs out onto the road. And is knocked over and killed.

The most hardened atheist. Doesn't look on the road and say. Well that's just DNA. No atheist lives consistently. Don't forget that. Let's go to another passage.

Let's go to another passage. Number two. And I want you to notice the way that David speaks. Though I know that David is not in Job. But turn with me to Psalm 8. We sang it and we read it earlier. Here's a man who knows better than Bildad.

[14 : 05] Psalm 8. Psalm 8. He knows that dominion and awe belong to God like Bildad.

And here's a man who's writing a psalm about the amazing sovereignty of God in the heights of the heaven. And this is somebody who knows fine well how wonderful and how majestic and great and righteous God is.

But this is a man who sees what Genesis was saying. Here's a man that sees what human beings really are. So he says, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Out of the mouths of babies and infants you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. And when I look at your hands, the work of your fingers, I love that. He didn't even need his hands.

He just needed his fingers to create. We think of that, don't we, with needlework. With just your fingers.

[15:09] You're working. That's how God created the world. This is brilliant. He doesn't even need his hands. When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you've set in place.

What is man that you are mindful of him? And the son of man that you care for him? Do you see, David anticipates the kind of thing that Bildad was saying. You do all this.

And what are we? You are the great, awesome, majestic, creative God. And so what is little old me? This world is so big and so fast. What are we? But he's got an answer. What is man that you're mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

He's not a maggot, Bilas. He's not a worm. You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and the angels. And you've crowned him with glory and honour.

And here, of course, the psalmist then begins to work through Genesis 1 and 2, doesn't he? About how God made him ruler over the works of your hands. And you put everything under man's feet.

[16:12] He used to rule creation. And all sheep and oxen and the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven and the fish of the sea and whatever passes along the paths of the sea. Because, oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

And so what Bilas then is he's trying to rob Job of any dignity. And that's not just a nice thing to do. That is not just something which is pastorally insensitive. It's not something that's just bad for your personal esteem. It is something that is profoundly sinful.

It is profoundly sinful. Because as Bildad pushes the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ out of the picture. And he pushes the creating God out of the picture. Then what Bildad does effectively is to destroy what God has made.

The one whom God made a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. Do you know what that means? If you imagine a line here.

[17:19] That's the creator line. And down there is the creation line. If you put this kind of line that goes from creator down to creation.

Bildad puts us way down there with the maggots and the worms. And God puts us right at that line. Right at that line. By creator.

We are as close as you can get to being God. Without being God. Do you see the significance of human beings?

And so the teaching of this is that your significance as a human being does not come from how successful you are in the world's terms. Your significance as a human being does not come from how fit you are.

And how healthy you are. Your significance does not come from how fast you can run. Your significance does not come from how much money you can earn.

[18:27] Your significance does not come from your image on social media. Your significance does not come from your feelings.

And from your apparent success. Your true dignity does not come from the things that you've accomplished and the CV that you can write. And our dignity does not come from the fact that we've simply affirmed that we are human.

As if that house somehow confers dignity. No, our dignity comes from the fact that God made us in his image. And God breathed his life into us. That's what I hope some of you are thinking.

Where are you going with this? Why are you teaching us this? I'm teaching this because it's only when you know the true dignity of human beings as made in the image of God.

As having the breath of God breathed into their nostrils. It's only when you begin to see the glorious dignity of human beings. And what we are meant to be. That you begin to see the tragedy and the curse of sin.

[19:34] And if you don't have the height of humanity. You will not be able to understand to plumb the depths of sin. And I think I've probably done a bad job on this. So the world has no basis for talking about sin.

What do our friends talk about? They talk about bad choices. And they talk about preferences. And they talk about terrible consequences, don't they?

But you cannot talk about sin. And you cannot say what sin really does to people. And you cannot talk about the degradation of humanity that sin brings.

And the effect of what happens when we turn away from God. When we deny the one in whose image we've been made. When we live the lie that we are made in the image of something else. Or maybe actually nothing else. If you don't have the dense bit. If you don't think like David in Psalm 8. Then sin isn't terrible. And sin isn't destructive. Sin is not the most violent, disgusting thing in the universe.

[20 : 43] Sin is just your choice. Just a bad choice. And how dare you call it sin? And how does Job react to all this? How does Job react to that which is not just effective.

But misses out on the glory of humanity? How does Job reply? Well let's go to that. Well he sees it as it is. Verses 1-4 are some of the most sarcastic words in the Bible.

In Job 26. They are scathing and cynical and sarcastic. And there's a time when those kind of words should be used.

He says how have you helped him who has no power? How have you saved the arm that has no strength? How have you counseled him who has no wisdom?

And plentifully declared sound knowledge. It's cutting.

[21 : 53] And then there's this question. Which shows the most devastating insight on the part of Job. Look at verse 4. With whose help have you uttered these words? And whose breath has come out from you?

It comes I think with a sarcastic and a biting tone. A builder speaks such wisdom. It sounds as if it must have come from God. But the bite and the irony is we know better, don't we?

Because we know from Job chapter 1 and 2 that actually what Bildad is saying is coming from the devil. Do you remember Satan, the one who had come into the heavenly courts and he wanted to see, will this guy Job desert God?

And Bildad is the one who proclaims God loftily while denying him. And Bildad is the devil's mouthpiece. And Job knows exactly who helped him utter those words.

And exactly the spirit who spoke from Bildad's mouth. But of course Job also knows the full greatness and the mystery of God. And it's interesting when Job describes God in creation in verses 5 to 14 of chapter 26, he does it darkly.

[23 : 06] This is not sunshine creation, is it? This is dark creation. This is bleak creation. This is Job saying, I'm on the ash heap, scraping the sores of my skin.

Everything has been taken from me for no reason. I do not understand what on earth God is doing. And when I think of God creating, I look out and it's a cold and bleak landscape.

And all the surfaces are hard and cold to touch. And the edges are sharp and cut. And hurt. But God has made me. And so he ends this description of creation, this dark description of creation, of a God who spreads out the northern sky over empty space.

Who suspends the earth over nothing. Who wraps up the water in heavy clouds. This is the one who covers the face of the full moon.

He spreads his clouds over it. This is the one who causes the pillars of heaven, verse 11, to tremble. And they are astounded at his rebuke. And then he churns up the sea.

[24 : 15] And he stills it. And he shatters Rahab. This kind of gliding serpent, in verse 13, of a sea monster, Leviathan, that we'll read of.

And if these are whispers of his work, like this, what could the full thunder of his power be like? And when he describes God in these dark terms, in these strange terms, he gets to the point, and we discover that Job knows Genesis too.

And that Job knows the God of Genesis. And Job continues his discourse into chapter 7. And he says, As God lives, who's taken away my right, and the Almighty who has made my soul bitter.

As long as my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils. This God who has taken away my right, he's denied me justice, he's made me taste bitterness of sorrow.

As long as I have life within me, and there it is. Did you see it in verse 3? As long as I have life within me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils.

[25 : 36] The breath of God is in my nostrils. It's Genesis 1 all over again, isn't it? Genesis 2. My lips, because of that, will not speak falsehood.

My tongue will not utter deceit. I will never admit your right. I'll never admit your right.

Until I die, I'll maintain my integrity. I'll retain it as long as I live. And so here is a man whose life has gone black and bleak. And he's speaking to a man who is well, and if he's one of Job's friends, he's probably wealthy.

He's healthy and wealthy, but he's not right. And then there's Job who's in the ash sheet, speaking to Bildad. He's strong and well. And Job says to him, I've got the breath of God in my nostrils, and I am not a maggot, and I'm not a worm, and I am not a nothing.

And I may be down here in the ash sheet, but I've got the breath of God in my nostrils, I've got the life of God within me, and I was made for him, I was made by him. And that's why Job is hope. And that's why Job, though he is low and he is down, he is not out.

[26 : 55] And that's why Job can carry on. Do you see how he speaks in verses 5 and 6? I love it. Far be it for me to say that you are right. Till I die, I will not put away my integrity from me.

I'll hold fast to my righteousness, and I will not let it go. My heart does not reproach me for any of my days. He's not saying, I've never done anything wrong in my life, but he is saying again and again, I've not done anything wrong to bring on this suffering.

I've not done something stupid to get me into this mess. And he's saying, I will not agree with you, Bildad. I will not agree with your view of humanity, because I cannot agree with your view of God. And I will not deny my God, and I will not refuse God, and I will not turn my back on God, and I will not blaspheme the name of God. And I will not come out with this obscenity about God that is implied in your description that man is a maggot or a worm.

My lips will not speak out falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit, because God has put breath in my nostrils. You are wrong, Bildad. You are wrong. That means if you come to church tonight, and you feel low, because the people around you seem successful, and they're doing very well, and they don't seem to have any problems.

[28 : 23] And if you come to church tonight, and you're wracked by that continual habit of comparing yourself with other people, and it's always unfavourable. And if you've come to church tonight, and you feel defeated by circumstances, and you dread this week, and in fact you don't want this week to come, and the words that people have said to you, the insults that people have said to you, maybe parents, maybe spouse, maybe friends, and you cannot get them out of your mind, let me say to you tonight, you can lay it aside, and tonight, with God's help, you can let go of that.

And it's not because you've got to back yourself up, and you've got to affirm yourself, and look yourself in the mirror, and say, I matter. It's not that you've got to look for the resources, to keep you going as a human being, it's because of this.

It's because you have the breath of God in your nostrils. And you don't have to affirm yourself. And you don't have to try and feel good about yourself.

And then you can live again. You can look away from yourself, and look up, and there is a God who made you, and you matter because you matter to him, and you are not a maggot, and you are not a worm. And God made you and put his breath on you.

And you can walk tall, not because you've got promotion, not because you're better than other people, not because you feel you've done well today, but because God made you, and God put breath in your nostrils.

[29 : 49] And the language that is used by Job is so very helpful, isn't it? Look at verse 6 of chapter 37. He says, and he doesn't say, I will maintain my positive outlook in life, and I will maintain a sunny disposition against all norms.

He says, I will maintain my righteousness. You see, it's a sin. Bildad's counsel of despair, Bildad's dehumanising is sin. And the dehumanising message of our culture that goes out again, and again, and again, and again, it is sin.

And to hold on to what you've been made to be is righteous. I want to stay close by going to one more passage, alright? Two, three minutes. Because there is one passage in the Bible, isn't there? If you'll go with me to Isaiah chapter 53. There is one passage in the Bible, Isaiah chapter 53, which if you like is a beautiful portrait of our humanity spoiled by sin.

The picture of the Bible is of men and women as a masterpiece. A beautiful portrait of men and women made in the image of God that has been spoiled by sin.

[31 : 10] It's been marred. But there's one passage which is Isaiah 53, which is like a knife that's been taken and is ripped through that portrait.

Let's read. We'll read from chapter 52, verse 13.

It says, Look at my servant. He'll act wisely. He should be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you. Here it is. His appearance was so marred beyond human

semblance and its form beyond that of the children of mankind, the Son of Man.

Do you see that? Do you see that? that at the cross the Lord Jesus Christ takes our sin upon him. Takes our broken and battered humanity upon him. And as he is crucified and as he is murdered he fulfills, doesn't he, that passage.

[32 : 42] What we see in Job there is a dehumanising element to the cross. There is a marring beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.

He is despised, chapter 53, verse 3, and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not.

You are not a worm. You are not a maggot. You are made by God. And God has sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And at the cross he is marred beyond human semblance. He is one from whom people turned their faces aside. And he came so that you could be redeemed.

He came so that you could be brought back into a relationship with God. And you could live as you were made to live. To know him. And to love him.

[33 : 59] Forever and ever. Let's pray. Amen.