

Job 42

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[0 : 00] And we finish the book of Job tonight. We started it a bit over two years ago before lockdown.

! It feels a lot longer. And so I think we're probably going to do Hosea next. I want to try and fly through Hosea. I've got to speak on it somewhere else. And I've got time to prepare more. So if you get the chance to read through the book of Hosea this week, it's a brilliant story. It's also pretty gritty.

Job 42, verses 7 to 17 to 19. What did you make to the ending of the book of Job when I read it? The end of the book of Job.

Is it encouraging? Is it comforting? Is it a bit of an anticlimax? It's a kind of all's well that ends well finish, isn't it?

[1 : 10] The end of Job, as I read it, it's a little bit happily ever after kind of ending. And I think it's a bit of a come down. I think it's a jarring note.

It's been all these dramatic heights of the last few chapters. And maybe you get to the end of the book of Job and you've got a very similar set of questions that you had at the start of the series. Not that you can remember that. And that somehow something seems to have happened for Job. Both in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 42 and in these last verses, which hasn't really happened to us yet. So you get to the end of the book of Job and Job is at peace, isn't he? Mentally, spiritually, physically, Job is restored. But where not?

As I look out tonight, many of you are still wrestling. How can God be right to do what he does? Does the ending of Job feel just a little bit too saccharine, too sugary, too good to be true?

[2 : 25] And I think it is hard to get a handle on what we're to make of this ending. I think it's also hard to get a handle on what we're to make of the whole book, actually.

But I do want to try and give you some help tonight as we finish. Because I don't know if you know that there's a book in the New Testament that reflects on the book of Job as a whole. And it kind of summarizes for us what is going on.

And I think that the summary gives us a very good lens for looking at this last chapter. So can you come with me to the book of James and chapter 5. James chapter 5 and verses 7 to 11.

James chapter 5. It's after the book of Hebrews and before 1 Peter. James chapter 5 and verses 7 to 11. And Job here is an example to us.

Let me read it to you. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

[3 : 39] You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door.

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You've heard of the steadfastness of Job.

And you've seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful to us. He's an example to you and I, Job. He's an example of patience in the face of suffering.

Patience and perseverance. And here's why I think it helps us to read this last part of Job. Because look at verse 11. You've seen what the Lord has brought about.

Another translation is this. You've heard of the steadfastness of Job and you've seen the purpose of the Lord. And so what was God's purpose with Job? What did he finally bring about? And so I want to look at two things as we close this book from James chapter 5 and verse 11.

[4 : 46] Something about Job and something about the Lord. Job's perseverance, his steadfastness. And the Lord's compassion and mercy. It's very simply this evening.

What does it mean to say Job persevered? And what does it mean to say that God in the book of Job and God in relationship to Job is full of compassion and mercy? Perhaps we still think tonight it's the opposite when you read the book.

So first of all, Job's perseverance and patience. In James chapter 5, what kind of perseverance is being commended? It's not just, does it grit your teeth and bear it?

I hope you don't think that. It's not hunker down and hope for the best kind of perseverance. I don't know if actually, ultimately, anyone can endure for long with just simply mental resilience.

Perseverance for what? It's persevering in waiting for God, isn't it? Verse 7, what is the farmer doing in persevering in James 5?

[5 : 57] He's waiting for something, isn't he? What is the farmer waiting for in verse 7 of James chapter 5? He's waiting for the valuable crop. And verse 8, You also, be patient, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. You see, patience in suffering for believers is always held out to us as something to do, not because the only way to get through it is to grin and bear it, but because we're told explicitly again and again and again in the Bible it will not last forever.

And that God is finally, ultimately going to bring something else about. He's going to bring a different state of affairs. It is perseverance because vindication is just outside in the next room. That's why living life in great pain and suffering when there is no prospect of being vindicated is one of the most crushing things that a human soul can bear. But if you are someone who feels you've been wronged terribly and you know it and everything within you is crying out for justice and somebody said to you tonight, as you go out in the hallway is a judge who will be able to put it all right.

He's standing at the door and just waiting until after the service you go and you tell him of everything and he will hear your case and he will put things in order.

[7 : 38] Can you wait? It's much harder than when we have to wait years. It's harder still when we have to wait decades and we face the prospect of decades.

But James is saying to you and I as he reflects on the book of Job, it does not mean that there is no judge. No, there is. And his coming is near. And if the book of Job teaches us anything, it teaches us this, that Job longed for the coming of the judge.

He longed for it. He lived for it. He screamed for it. He wept for it. He prayed for it. He pled for it. And in the face of everything that his friends said to him, he refused to back down while he persevered for it.

And that is what Job was patient for. That is what he persevered for. Not for answers. Remember that.

If you remember nothing else about the series of Job, Job does not get all the answers that he was after. But he got to meet the righteous judge of heaven and earth.

[8 : 58] So think of the contrast between Job and his friends. One of the greatest differences is that they had what? The friends, do you remember them, they had absolutely no capacity for perseverance.

They wanted, they thought they had, they tried to give answers to all your pain and to all your suffering.

God rewards good people and he punishes sinful people. So come on Job, admit and confess your sin, do something about what has caused all this and you can move on and get on with your life. And God will reward you and God will put you back to how you were. Do you remember? the friends had a really tidy theological scheme.

It was a tidy system, it was well swept, it was well defined, it was entirely satisfying to them. Here's how Christopher Ash puts it, isn't this right? Well swept, well defined, and entirely satisfying to them.

[10 : 04] But they have no relationship with the God behind their formulas. There's no wonder, no longing, no awe, no yearning, no praying to meet and speak and hear and see the God of their formulas.

They are content with the rules that their systems must have invented. And so take this away from Job. Job persisted with his relationship with God.

And so what have we learned in the book of Job? We have learned about what a relationship with God looks like. And a relationship with God is hot and angry and tearful and broken. and confused and agonized. And sometimes a real relationship with God sails very, very, very close to the wind.

It's remarkable, isn't it, I think that God can say what he says in chapter 42, verse 8. We have seen Job say things about God that are actually not right.

[11:20] Job has appeared to justify himself and appeared to accuse God of wrongdoing. And God has told him that is the one thing you may not do. And I think God says this here in verse 8 partly because Job has repented.

Job has come to the point where he realizes I spoke out of turn. And so he's spoken rightly of God. but even beyond that, behind that, I think God is saying to Job and saying, Job, you were right all along to want me.

You were right all along to want me and to want me to speak to you and to bring your complaint to me and to ask me to deal with it and to meet with you.

And that was fundamentally and beautifully relationally right. And throughout all of this, Job's heart was right. Do you know what I mean? His heart was right throughout and that rightness of heart throughout leads to the repentance of his lips at the end of Job 42, 1 to 6.

And so the friends, they wanted a system, didn't they? But Job wanted God. Can you take that away with you this evening and this week and for the rest of your life?

[12:42] I want you, God. As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.

That's authentic spirituality. God of my life to you I call. Afflicted at your feet I fall.

When the great waters floods prevail, leave not my trembling heart to fail. Friend of the friendless and the faint, where should I lodge my deep complaint?

Where but with you whose open door invites the helpless and the poor. And so in your pain, have you stopped speaking to God?

It's very, very easy sometimes to take your pain to anyone but God. Because we think that somehow he's unworthy of it or he's the cause of it or he doesn't care.

[13:50] there's no one more real to wrestle with than God in all our pain. And so can you see spiritual growth is complex?

Let's never trade the complexities of spiritual growth for anything else. Spiritual growth is relational. It's painful.

And so like nearly all growth and change, it is painful. And like all change and growth, it takes perseverance.

perseverance. And so here is a single diagnostic question for persevering relationship with God. Here's the question, what is God doing with me at this particular point in life? What is God doing with me at this particular point in life?

[15:00] What is God doing with me at this particular point in life? What is God doing with me at the God who is my maker and friend who is as close to me in Jesus as he possibly can be the side of heaven by his spirit?

What is he doing with me in my pain? If only I could find him and speak to him. And so this past two years of the church, this church and every other church in this country, has been through some pretty big upheavals?

And I found this question one of the most helpful to ask in the midst of the pandemic as we come to the end of it, God willing. What is God doing with me? What is God doing with his church in the UK? And I think that kind of question opens you up to God more than to your pain and allows you to take your perplexity to him and not let go while we wait for God to show himself and to come to us?

Well, that's Job's perseverance and waiting. What about the Lord's compassion and mercy? Four things I want you to see. And I think there are four examples to us, aren't they?

[16:15] That's how James views Job as an example. So can you see anyways in 42 verses 7 to 17? God is compassionate and merciful. He's compassionate by vindicating Job.

He declares Job to be in the right to be justified. That is after all in the face of his friends' words, it is that which Job longed for more than anything, wasn't it?

You and I don't know in this life if we will always get the kind of vindication we long for. But don't Job, and James speak to us with one really clear voice tonight.

They tell us that the judge is at the door. The judge is at the door. And Job is vindicated after repenting in Job 42, 1 to 6.

He is vindicated not because he got everything right along the way, but because he never ever let go of God. Not for one minute. He did not rest until he got to see God face to face.

[17 : 26] he was vindicated because his heart relationship to God was right. And for every single one of his children who are in Christ, one day at the end, God will vindicate us.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into my rest. Isn't God compassionate and merciful, secondly, in forgiving Eliphaz and his two friends?

these three, they've done untold damage. I imagine in Job's heart and mind, they've compounded his sorrows and pain.

And yet, they receive the sin from God as all sinners who recognize their sin can receive a sacrifice for sin and full forgiveness and complete pardon.

It's remarkable, isn't it? that if Job was unable to grasp the size and the glory and the majesty and the power of God and he said things about God that were untrue, how much more had they done that?

[18 : 29] And so here is a God who can walk the depths of the oceans, remember, and he can patrol the boundary lines between life and death, who made and governs the most, utterly most extreme points of the universe, the horizons of east and west, the storehouses behind the skies of rain and hail and snow, who can command the lightning with his voice, that same God is able from within himself to hear his tiny little feeble creatures exalt themselves beyond their feeble status.

He can see them puff out their chests and inflate their minds with the knowledge they think they have but actually don't have. And he can watch them gather around a broken, hurting man and he can eavesdrop and he can hear them saying appalling things about himself.

They're worried aren't they about a tsunami on the coast of Japan and America this weekend and there's a satellite photo where you can see the kind of explosion or whatever it is in the sea.

It's an amazing thing. They can pinpoint the kind of source of this. and yet God in all his glory sees he hears these words from these men.

He eavesdrops on their conversation. He hears them saying appalling things about himself and still from within himself he is moved with compassion to forgive. Here's the third thing.

[20 : 05] Isn't God compassionate and merciful in humbling Job? Look at chapter 42 verse 6. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

And I think that's an act of mercy, of great mercy. What have we said all along? We've said all along that Job is a book about a long journey towards the right kind of ignorance.

I want to read you from Christopher Ash for the last time. It's a brilliant commentary. I should have used it more. It's a lengthy quotation but it's very good. It says this, when Job says he repents he does not mean the friends have been right all along.

Job has secret sins and finally has to admit them and repent. He maintains his integrity at the end as he has all along. But Job realises he's been presumptuous.

He's spoken of things he does not understand and he's overreached himself and now in the presence of the living God he bows down in silent worship. That is a good thing. For Job to be brought low so that he despises himself and exalts God is not a bad thing.

[21 : 19] We understand that for us to go around thinking we are worms in relation to our fellow human beings is a destructive thing. That kind of inferiority complex. Pathological low self esteem is not to be encouraged.

In a sense it's better to say I'm okay, you're okay as the pop psychology book had it. But in the presence of the living God, to bow down low and to grasp how great he is and how small I am is a healthy thing because it is true.

It is a mark of the love of God that he brings Job low for this is where a creature ought to be. That's true for us as well. We often pray for success both for us and for others.

We pray for good exam results, for good job offers. And yet so often success leads to pride and pride to self confidence and self confidence to independence from God and independence from God leads to hell.

The most deeply and compassionate and merciful thing God can do is to humble us and bring us low so that we bow before him and lean on him and trust him. That is the first mark of the compassion of God.

[22 : 25] He loves enough to humble us as he humbled Job under his mighty hand. Perhaps for some of us there has been or there will be a time in life when everything goes wrong.

A time perhaps of pain and failure, even of disaster and misery, and it may be that God in his compassion is bringing us low so that we will lean on him alone. This was for Job a hard truth, but it was nonetheless a mark of the mercy of God that he would bring Job very low.

John Calvin said that all the wisdom we possess consists of knowledge of God, a knowledge of ourselves, and that actually knowledge of one is incomplete without the other. You cannot really know how big God is unless you know how small you are.

And you cannot really know how limited we are unless we know how unlimited God is. And I think the compassion of God to Job is this, he wanted reasons for why God had done what he had done, and God showed him, didn't he, he was too little, too little to come close to being able to understand God's reason.

We are not built to understand all we want to understand about God. Not yet. Not yet. And so here's the final way in which we see God's compassionate and merciful character.

[24 : 01] Do you see the blessing at the end? It's quite a picture, isn't it? It is of lavish prosperity. It is of restoration. And I think there is a lovely note of reality to it all.

Do you notice it's not simplistic? It's not you lost wealth and family and so God says I'll just make you wealthy and give you more kids again. Problem sorted. Now look how Job is still dealing with his pain even as things begin to turn around.

Verse 11. Verse 11 says, then as the years pass by and his heart is calmed again by the love of family and friends, there's abundant physical blessings filling his home and his heart.

And so don't do Job and James when you take them together they say to us that blessing comes at the end. Blessing comes at the end. Be patient until the Lord's coming.

Be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. What are we waiting for?

[25 : 20] See how the farmer, he waits for the lamb to yield its crop. Isn't the point that there is sowing and suffering and waiting and perseverance and hardship now.

But then there will be reaping and harvesting and blessing and life and justice and complete restoration. I think I've said to you before that I was feeling particularly miserable when I went on holiday about how hard I was working and how my life was harder than anyone's in the whole of the world.

And we went to visit some friends of Claire's who were dairy farmers. And it was remarkable. I spent a day with them. I just could not believe how hard they worked.

Day in, day out. Week in, week out. Year in, year out. Sowing, suffering, waiting, perseverance, hardship now, did me the world of good.

And Job received in this life, didn't he, in his life, what we will receive in the next life. First and foremost, Job saw and heard God in person, himself, and that was enough, and that restored him and humbled him.

[26 : 42] Then he received blessing and abundance, and one day, one day, both those things will be ours. Listen to these words from St.

Paul. He says this, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Let me just read that to you again. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. They're astonishing words.

How many tears will you have cried before you die? What is the scale of pain in one of God's children in one lifetime?

Never mind the scale of suffering in all believers in all the earth, throughout all time. Paul says put all the suffering together, and you cannot even compare past suffering with future glory.

[27 : 46] It's not like for like. What will be then will be of a different order to what we know now. What we know now is suffering, what we experience and enter and have revealed in us will be glory.

I don't know about you, I don't really have the categories or the understanding to take that in, but here's what I do know. I want after reading and studying Job to trust the God who knows more

about the things that I can see and feel than I will ever know.
and I want to keep getting smaller and smaller and smaller and him to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And I never ever want to stop asking the question what is God doing right here, right now in my life with each and every sorrow he introduces and every joy in every person in every circumstance.
And I want to ask those questions while I want for more blessing than I can ever begin to comprehend. Let's pray.
Let's pray.