

Text: Job 42

Theme: The Three R's

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Healing Service on 29/07/2018 at 10.30am

As we come to the final chapter of Job, we have seen how Job's perspective on God has been broadened. The stranger God that Job knew had become the God almighty, the all wise one. Consequently, in spite of appearances to the contrary, 'The Stranger' – God – knows best and we are called to trust him. So we look at the section under three headings: **REVELATION, REPENTANCE and RESTORATION.**

1. REVELATION

God hasn't really told Job anything he didn't know before. God hasn't explained himself. Or apologised. Or revealed what went on behind the scenes in chapters 1 and 2. Job hasn't physically seen God. But God has widened Job's vision. And now Job knows God better than he did before (vs 3,5). Hear him as he finally responds to God's questions in chapters 40 and 41 where God unmasked the Behemoth and the Leviathan as the evil one behind Job's woes, but who can only be controlled by God the almighty.

Jobs Response (42:1-6)

Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans. You asked, 'Who is this muddying the water, ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purposes?' I admit it. I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me, made small talk about wonders, way over my head. You told me, 'Listen, and let me do the talking. Let me ask the questions. You give the answers.' I admit I once lived by rumours of you; now I have it all first-hand—from my own eyes and ears! I'm sorry—forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise! I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumour."

Job's response is in three parts. He speaks of something he now knows, of things he did not know, and supremely of one he has now seen. **First, he now knows that God "can do all things" and that "no purpose" of his "can be thwarted" (v. 2).** This is a very strong statement. At one level Job has never doubted this. He has repeatedly called God "the Almighty" and has echoed the confidence of the comforters that the Almighty really is omnipotent. But it seems that he now knows this truth in a deeper and fuller way. We will have to ask why and what this means.

Second, in verse 3 he speaks of something he "did not know." He echoes God's rebuke to him at the start of the first speech: "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge" (cf. 38:2). He has indeed spoken of "what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." The word translated "wonderful" speaks of matters that only God can do (referring to his power) and that only God can understand (referring to his wisdom). These are things "too great and too marvellous for me".

At the end of the first speech, Job admits he himself is "of small account" (Job 40:4); but his statement here is stronger. He admits clearly that he has said things he ought not to have said, he has made accusations he ought not to have made, he has spoken as if he understood things he does not understand. It is only after God's second speech that he admits this clearly; in some way the first speech softened him without moving him to a clear surrender.

2. REPENTANCE

A commentator suggests that verse 5 can be translated as 'Therefore I reject and turn away from lamenting.' Why does Job change his attitude? Because his encounter with the Lord has given him first-hand experience of God, surpassing all the second-hand knowledge he had in the past (v 5): 'My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you'. Such a life-changing experience infuses new faith and hope in Job – he is no longer mourning and lamenting. His statement in verse 6, 'Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes', gives the impression that Job confesses his sin. However, the context doesn't suggest that God treats Job as a sinner who needs to repent. Job's obscuring God's plan without knowledge is no doubt corrected by God (verse 3), (see Job 38:2), but speaking of things without understanding them is not sin. Otherwise, the Lord will not commend him twice as his servant and as the one who has spoken the truth about him (vs 7,8). Furthermore, God designates Job to intercede for his friends, a gesture of vindicating Job.

The Lord's response to Job is instructive. In his affirmation of Job, in spite of the terrible things Job says about God, "we are forcibly reminded that God, for all his rough handling of his servant's rude demands, reads between the lines and listens to the heart"?

And so the accuser's question in 1:9 has been answered: 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' **Job and you and I fear and worship God because he is God – and we are not. He is in control – and we are not. And when everything else is stripped away, he is more precious to us than all we may have or have lost or never had.**

3. RESTORATION

Job 42:7-17

This section deals with Job's vindication and double restoration.

However, not only do we see God's justice at work but also his grace – God's undeserved mercy. Far from God exacting his pound of flesh, as Job's friends deserved, God, by his very action of providing a way for their sin to be dealt with, reveals his kindness. You see, if God had treated them according to strict justice, as they had been arguing God must treat everyone, then they would have been snuffed out in an instant. But he didn't. Sin had to be covered over, and that involves a sacrifice. What is more, **someone is needed to intercede for sinners, someone of good standing, someone whom God will hear, and the only one who filled all the requirements was the one they had been slandering as a liar and a cheat – Job.** There's the irony!

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. 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." 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.

What is more, we also see God's grace shown to Job in the way his former life is not simply restored but surpassed: 'After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as before' (Job 42:10).

Now it is very important that we get this right and that we don't see it as a form of compensation' for all that Job has suffered. Remember how right at the beginning it was

Satan's taunt that the only reason why Job was so religious was because of what he could get out of it, that there was some ulterior motive; that he was in it for what he could get? **By taking everything away from Job, God demonstrated that the taunt was in fact a lie and had no foundation whatsoever. Even when he had nothing to entice him to believe in God, Job still trusted him.** It wasn't a matter of Job thinking, 'Well, if I just hang on to the end there might be some goodies in store.' Job didn't know what the outcome was going to be; in fact, it was more than likely he thought he was going to die. But nevertheless he still trusted God. Why? – the Stranger God knows best.

The End Comes at the End

The end comes at the end. And this is important because although we have reached the end of the book of Job, in our lives we are not yet at the end. When we wake up in the morning, what do we expect our day to be like? We may, of course, have expectations for a particular day, the prospect of a good party or apprehension about a visit to the dentist. But in general what do we expect of a normal day? **For a Christian, what ought to be our idea of the normal Christian life? This is important because our idea of normality will govern whether we end up delighted or disappointed at the end of the day.**

Job is not about human suffering in general; it is about the suffering endured by a believer because he or she is a believer. Job is being persecuted not by human enemies but by Satan. He endures disaster, tragedy, and sickness because he fears God. Supremely this dark warfare is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the blameless believer. And as we see in the Gospels, Satan focuses his attack on Jesus with an even greater ferocity than upon Job. From Herod's attempt to have him slaughtered as a toddler through the temptations in the wilderness to the agony of the cross, Satan tears at Jesus' soul by temptation, discouragement, loneliness, betrayal, misunderstanding, and agony. Day by day the Lord Jesus awoke to dark warfare.

Indeed, Job is fulfilled in Jesus, and every follower of Jesus is called to follow in the footsteps of Job. Job foreshadows Jesus, and the disciple cannot avoid the shadow. As Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [plural], that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you [singular] that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31, 32).

Jesus did not pray that his disciples would be spared the sifting and that Satan would be forbidden his demand. Rather he expected the demand would be granted, as it had been for Job. And he prays that in this painful sifting, Simon's faith may *not* fail. We ought to expect this.

EPILOGUE - SO WHAT IS THE BOOK OF JOB ALL ABOUT?

Too often we come to the book of Job (as to other parts of the Bible) expecting answers to our questions, and especially to questions about suffering. The main human character certainly suffers, but the book of Job is not fundamentally about suffering. Job suffers *because he is a believer*, and he suffers *as a believer*. And because he is a suffering *believer* the central character and subject of the book of Job is not Job who suffers but about the God with whom he has to deal.

The book of Job is about God. This ought not to surprise us, but it is easy to forget. If we take our eye off the central focus and major instead on suffering, we will be disappointed, for we do not find in Job the answers to the questions we have chosen to pose. Instead we find what Job found when he ultimately had to listen to God: God asks him questions more than Job poses puzzlers to God. And this turns the tables, as they must be turned. **The book of Job is not about Job but about God-his character, sovereignty,**

justice, goodness and, yes, even his love. Above all it is about God the Creator of everything, the One who is God, who made everything, even the wildest corners of the created order. He is the God who made and who entirely controls the Leviathan, the Satan, the beast and monster who seeks to destroy Job. Even this hideous monster is God's monster, God's creature.

And therefore Job is about true worship, about our bowing down in reality and in the darkness to the One who is God, leaving even our most agonized unanswered questions at his feet, for we are creatures, and he alone is the Creator. Because Job is about God and the worship of God, it is also about humility-the humility to admit (as Job 28 shows) that there is so much about this world that we do not understand. Wisdom with a capital W is God's preserve. It is presumptuous of us to act as if we had made the world, which is what we do the moment we suggest that we could run this world better than God. Humility means to do precisely what Job was doing at the beginning and what 28:28 affirms: to bow before God in loving fear and to "turn away from evil."

In New Testament terms it is to repent and believe, to hear and to heed the gospel. **Here is the Gospel in Job: Repentance and faith practiced at the start and repentance and faith affirmed at the end.** But of course Job is also about Job. He is the central human character in the drama, introduced at the start and blessed at the end. He is addressed personally by the Lord, whereas the other human characters are either ignored or rebuked. So Job points us to the mystery at the heart of the universe: a blameless believer who walks in fellowship with his Creator may suffer terrible and undeserved pain, may go through deep darkness and then at the end be vindicated. There is such a thing in the universe as suffering that is not a punishment for the sin of the sufferer.

And therefore Job is passionately and profoundly about Jesus, whom Job foreshadows both in his blamelessness and in his perseverance through undeserved suffering. As the blameless believer par excellence, Jesus fulfils Job. As a priestly figure who offers sacrifices for his children at the start and his friends at the end, Job foreshadows Jesus the great High Priest. The monstrous ferocity of the beast Leviathan reaches its vicious depths in the life and death of Jesus, who in his passion endures deeper depths and a more solemn and awesome darkness even than Job. The drama, the pain, and the perplexity of Job reach their climax at the cross of Jesus Christ. In the darkness and God- forsakenness of those terrible hours of lonely agony, the sufferings of Job are transcended and fulfilled. And as the blameless believer accused and despised by men but finally vindicated by God in the resurrection, Jesus fulfils the drama and longings of Job for justification.

And because Job is about Jesus, it is also, derivatively, about every man and woman in Christ. Every disciple, called to take up the cross and walk in the footsteps of Christ, must expect in some measure to walk also in the footsteps of Job. So in the end we may conclude that Job is in some measure about us. Not primarily about us, for it is above all about God. Not centrally about us, for its central human character foreshadows Jesus Christ. But for each of us as a believer walking through this world in union with Christ, Job is an unavoidable part of the pathway of faith.

So as we return again and again to this book of Job and meditate on its depths, let us pray to be given grace to bow down, especially in the darkness, to the God who is God. It is this God, who is God even of the wild, evil, and seemingly random fringes of life, whom we are called to love and to trust. In the footsteps of the Lord Jesus we too may entrust ourselves "to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).