

JOB-----Ray Branton

This week we'll be studying the book of Job. It is full of interesting characters and a gripping story. Since most of the writing is poetic, expect to connect on an emotional level and feel the pain Job is enduring. The story begins curiously, but as the drama unfolds the message comes into focus. Best of all, the ending is a happy one! If possible, take time to read the entire book of Job in one sitting before doing these devotionals. Put yourself in the shoes of each character... you might find yourself in there somewhere!

Day One – God is Sovereign (Part I)

Read Job 1

Are you familiar with “Murphy’s Law?” The “law” states “Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.” Or, think of the line of that familiar song that goes, “Momma said there’d be days like this...”. I think Job could relate and then some. Job 1 is a difficult read. It’s difficult to watch the pain of a righteous man build from one loss to another. In later verses we read that he lost some of his servants and livestock, then more of his servants and livestock and finally, his children, all ten of them... at one time. Oh me!

Verses 16, 17 and 18 all begin with “While he was still speaking...” (NIV). Now, just roll that around a minute. You’ve just received the first round of bad news and before you can even consider it, as the servant is finishing his last syllable, you get another round and then another round of bad news. That’s a couple of body blows and a Haymaker. If Job were a boxer, he’d be on the canvas, face down, in a pool of blood.

Now, take a look at verse 8.

Whoa! That’s right, God Himself brought Job to Satan’s attention and really, outright challenged Satan. It’s a little “between the lines” but it’s there. It’s as if Job is God’s champion and God is challenging the Deceiver to take his best shot. God baited the crafty serpent with an offer He knew Satan would not turn down. But, this isn’t about Satan (keep this in mind all week).

Job doesn’t disappoint. He doesn’t sin. He doesn’t blame God. He fell down and worshipped. And, God knew all that would happen. As we study Job this week, you’ll find a lot of pain and suffering but above all of that heartache, you’ll find the sovereign God, never leaving, never forsaking His own.

Pray and thank God that He is sovereign. Thank Him that He is trustworthy and that you belong to Him. Seek to serve Him well.

Day Two: A Righteous Man's Testimony

Yesterday we were reminded that God is sovereign; He is in control and Him only. Then, in Chapter 2, more pain unfolds. Satan, and Job's wife I might add, is no doubt disappointed that Job hasn't cursed God and of course, God is not surprised. Once again, God lays out the challenge and once again, Satan thinks he's got it figured out. In the midst of this remains Job, God's champion, completely unaware of the behind-the-scenes intrigue. Job appears to be down and out... for now.

Read Job 27

I hope you read slowly and took in the beautiful poetry. As I read verses 1-6 I can feel Job's determination to maintain his righteousness, it's palpable. "... My conscience will not reproach me as long as I live," he says in verse 6. Notice, it is God Who Job says has denied him justice (also see 19:1-20). Satan is not mentioned. This is about God and Job. And, it's not about Job's sin, as his friends accuse (we'll visit them tomorrow). He will not turn from God. He does not count himself amongst the godless. He asks, "For what hope have the godless when they are cut off, when God takes away their life?" In verse 10 he asks, "Will they find delight in the Almighty? Will they call upon God at all times?" In verses 13-23 Job describes the wicked in great detail. The wicked are deceived (v. 19). They have nowhere to turn and they are swept away, in utter destruction, by their judgment for their wickedness (vv. 20-23). Maybe Job is describing his friends, counting them among the wicked. It's his friends who have sided with Satan in that like Satan, they believe a man is faithful to God because God will bless him. They argue that God is punishing Job because he sinned against God. The truth is, Job is confounding both Satan and Job's friends. Job is an oxymoron: a righteous man, suffering for no sin and yet still trusting God. He won't confess false sin and lose his integrity and he won't curse God, knowing it is God who gives him life.

Thank God that He is worthy of faithfulness in the midst of suffering and pain, even when like Job, that suffering is not the result of sin.

Day Three: Three Blind Mice

Read Job 15:1-6, 14-16; 18:1-4; 20:1-11

I have to give some credit to these guys. They waited a week before they brought judgment. At least Job got the benefit of quiet company for a few days. After that, they pounded him. They are indignant that Job would maintain his innocence, his righteousness. Doesn't Job understand he is joining the wicked? They lay out the suffering of the wicked, as if to cure Job's ignorance. They'll scare him into confession. Job must not know what he is doing, they say.

Eliphaz speaks first.

In Chapter 15 he is on his second discourse. He didn't directly accuse in Chapter 4 but he does now! He asks, "Would a wise person answer with empty notions or fill their belly with the hot east wind?" That's vivid. He goes on, "Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you." Eliphaz is beside himself that Job just doesn't get it. Mortals can't be righteous (v.14; 4:17).

Now comes Bildad.

"When will you end these speeches?," he asks. Seriously? Mr. Bildad, it's one against three, sir. Three, of whom exactly none, including Bil himself, are willing to even consider that Job might be innocent. These are friends? As they say, "with friends like these..." Bildad is saying "doesn't Job know what happens to the wicked?" In Chapter 8 ole Bildad laid out the law of reaping and sowing (see 8:4-6). That's Bildad's world. The righteous just don't suffer. You get what you deserve. I guess that means God's on autopilot. No God-work needed.

Last we hear from Zophar.

Usually, the best is saved for last, but not so much here. In Chapter 19:21-22 Job asks for pity but Zophar will have nothing of it. Check out 20:1-11. "My understanding inspires me to reply," Zophar says. He believes he has wisdom if only Job would listen. In 4-5 he says, "Surely you know how it has been from old...that the mirth of the wicked is brief." He is counting Job as wicked and hoping to persuade Job to give up his pride (v. 6). His children will suffer, too (v. 10).

If only the counsel matched the beauty of the poetry! The metaphors and similes flow freely, allowing us to grasp the depth of the friends' advice. The wicked will suffer, you get what you deserve, you won't last long and your kids will suffer. In short, Job is wicked and great suffering is his if Job doesn't give up his pride and repent of his sin. That's the advice in a nutshell.

These three really drive home the fact that on a personal level, I've been quick to judge and slow to understand at times. I see myself in these three. How about you? Do you see yourself in Eliphaz or Bildad or Zophar? James 1:19 comes to mind.

Ask God to help you come alongside suffering friends with His wisdom and not your own. Ask Him for patience and understanding that words spoken are carefully chosen, and of His Spirit.

Day Four: A Bigger Picture

Job's friends never consider the question, "Can one be righteous and suffer?" In pride they give counsel to a man who has lost everything but the breath in his chest (19:7-20). They never stopped to understand. They failed to ponder that Job could be innocent, just as he claimed, and help Job think about another explanation for his suffering. Take a moment and consider Job's life. It's a destitute picture, and yet, hope remains (19:25-27).

Read Job 31

Can you feel the frustration, the anguish, the despair? Remember, this story is about God and Job (see Day One). Here in Chapter 31 are Job's final thoughts. Job seems to want his "day in court." He names several areas of possible sin where he has kept himself righteous: lust, lying, denying justice to his servants, denying the poor, ignoring the widow, harming the fatherless, trusting in wealth, rejoicing over his enemies misfortune and more. In all these things he invites judgment if he is guilty. Yet, he desires examination (v. 35-37); he wants a chance to make his case that he is righteous, and he is, and therein lies the rub. Job's suffering is not about his sin, he is, in fact, innocent. Neither is his suffering about a fair hearing from God and justification.

Read Job 28:20-28.

In all his suffering and pain, God is giving Job a bigger picture; a picture that goes beyond what makes sense to Job or to his friends. In this bigger picture lies wisdom that only God knows. Let that sink in. Look at verse 22, "Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it [wisdom] has reached our ears.'" That's Death, that thing that is as sure as taxes. Even Death knows nothing but a rumor of wisdom. Look at v. 23-24 again. Wow! That's a big picture. Finally, verse 28 reads "And He said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

In this bigger picture, Job's ultimate goal isn't to know why, but to remember Who. His life then becomes an offering back to God.

Take a moment and just sit quietly and enjoy God's awesome presence in your life (Psalm 46:10).

Day Five: God is Sovereign (Part II)

Hopefully you've kept up this week; we've covered a lot of ground. Thinking back to Day One we considered the fact that God is sovereign. He has the authority to invite Satan to consider Job's life (and mine and yours) and He is big enough to take responsibility for all that happens to Job and us, good and bad. Bottom line, God is the final authority.

Read Job 38-42

Job has very little to say in these chapters as he comes face-to-face with the LORD, as it were. Job 38:2 captures the discourse to follow: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?" God goes on, such as in 38:12, "Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place..." Or 39:19-22, "Do you give the horse its strength...it laughs at fear, afraid of nothing." In 40:2, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Of course, Job is blown away, as they say. He can't do any of this. Job now sees a bigger picture.

Read 42:1-6 again.

Job has been given a taste of God's wisdom and he is overwhelmed; and like Job, we are overwhelmed as well. We are so small, so miniscule, and God is so far beyond us, and yet, He sent His Son for us. I can't help but think of Christ, like Job, a righteous man who suffered. Of course, unlike Job, Christ is God in flesh, Who came to us and redeemed us. And like in v. 42:10-17, His desire is to enjoy us and us Him, by blessing us as we find our rest and our very existence in Him. Augustine said about God, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you."

So, thank God for His immeasurable wisdom and that in knowing Him, we can enjoy Him without fully understanding or comprehending His ways. Enjoy His love, grace and mercy and let your life be an offering to Him.