

Will evil and suffering ever end?

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[0 : 00] Okay, and they all lived happily ever after. That is the classic ending to fairy tales, isn't it? And I guess you could sum up the book of Job at the end with this. It all ends happily ever after.

Where Job, this man, had endured great suffering throughout his life, and then we get to the end and his life ends with great blessing, as we just had read for us. It is like a fairy tale ending where Job does live happily ever after. But it sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Because while fairy tales do have happy endings, they are just fairy tales. And so often in life, real life generally doesn't have a happy ending at the end of terrible suffering. And so we may doubt as we come to these verses today whether it is possible for things to end so well, especially when suffering in life has been so painful. And so as we've wrestled alongside Job looking at suffering in this book, the great mystery of suffering is really a mystery. It perplexes us. It challenges us. We can't really understand it or grasp it. And so when it comes to suffering is the takeaway message from the book of Job, Job, don't worry, don't panic. It will be okay in the end. All's well that ends well. And yet that doesn't seem like a really satisfactory answer to suffering, does it? We don't want to resolve suffering just by saying, it's okay, it's fine, it's going to get better. And so what should we make of this when we come to this in this passage today? Well, we need to see that the real resolution to suffering, whether Job's suffering or our suffering, actually comes through an encounter with God. The God who made us, the God who loves us, the God who knows us, the God who works for our good. And that's what Job has. He has an encounter with the living God. And so even if we don't get all the answers to our suffering, Job is saying to us in this book that what we need most is God himself and a relationship with him. And so we see this in three aspects. And we're going to look at these three points this afternoon. Job's confession, verse 1 to 6. Job's vindication, 7 to 9. And Job's restoration, verse 10 to 17. And then as we finish this up, we'll have a think about our invitation into a relationship with God. So first of all, Job's confession in verse 1 to 6. Job has been longing for God to answer him through his suffering. And the Lord finally spoke to Job. If you look back, chapter 38, 39, 40, and 41, God gave a lengthy couple of speeches to Job about his life and about his suffering and about the Lord himself. And now we come to Job's response to what God has said to him.

And Job's response isn't, ah, I get it, God. That makes perfect sense to me. Now I understand why I've had such a painful and terrible life of suffering. No, that's not Job's response. Job's response is actually one of humble worship. Let's just read verse 1 to 3 again. Then Job replied to the Lord, I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. What's interesting here is that God didn't give Job the answer he was looking for, which is the reason for his suffering. And yet God's speeches revealed more of God and his ways to Job in such a way that it helped Job make sense or make better sense of his suffering. And that's why Job confesses a number of things about God here and about himself. So firstly, Job now knows that God can do anything. God's just said how he's in control of this symbol of Satan, this beast Leviathan that we thought about last week, the supernatural power of Satan. God's told Job that he is in control and in charge of evil and the devil. And now Job is convinced that God is in control of everything, which means no purpose of God can ever be thwarted and none of God's plans can ever be frustrated.

[4 : 47] And Job realizes that there are reasons why God does what he does, even if we can't understand them. And so Job confesses the Lord is sovereign over all things, means he's in charge, he's in control, and that includes evil and suffering. And so I wonder, is that something that we are able to confess that God is in charge of everything? And not just when life is going well for us, but even when we are going through suffering. Because like Job, we may question whether God

is sovereign over everything. Or ever, we've just wondered, does God know what he's doing?

And Job here has learned through suffering that God is God. And because God is God, then God knows what is best. And so God's got everything in hand. He's even got evil on a tight leash and under his control. And that's why, secondly, Job confesses his own ignorance. He realizes that he's spoken ignorantly of God, without knowledge, about stuff that he doesn't understand. Which means Job has wrongly spoken of God and said some things that he shouldn't have said. And he's tried to justify himself before God. And he has demanded that God explain everything to him. But he's discovered there's just too much that he didn't know and could never know. And now that God has confronted him, he's just aware of how limited his own knowledge and understanding has been. It's a little like being confronted by your English teacher at school when the book that you were meant to read for homework isn't the book you actually read for homework. And the teacher asks you, knowing that you never read the book, and you're aware, as is everybody else in the class aware, that you don't have a clue what you're talking about when it comes to the contents of this book. And so just imagine how Job felt before God.

God had spoken such wonderful things about himself, things that Job knew nothing about. And then Job confesses his faith. Thirdly, look at this in verse 4 to 5.

You said, listen now and I will speak. I will question you and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

So remember God spoke to Job out of the storm and Job now says, now my eyes have seen you. It's because God reveals himself through what he says. Because seeing God is bound up with hearing God speak and grasping what God is saying. And this is what happens with Job to the extent that it leads to a deeper and a richer and a fuller experience of God. And so of course, Job had heard of God's power, he'd heard of God's might, he'd heard of God's majesty, but he didn't see God until this great truth about God gripped his heart and forced him to bow in wonder.

[8 : 15] So Job doesn't just have this intellectual, deeper knowledge of God. He actually has a fuller experience of God, which then leads fourthly to repentance, which is there in verse 6.

Because when Job repents, he's not repenting of any sins that he's committed, he is not finally admitting that his friends were right all along when they said, Job, you are suffering because you've been wicked, you've sinned, and your suffering is the punishment for your sin. That's not true.

Remember, Job, we're told, is an innocent sufferer. I mean, we know this from the beginning of the book where God and Satan speak, and right through to the end, Job has not done anything that deserves this suffering.

And we should have noted as we were listening to God's speeches to Job that God didn't say in all of his long speeches to Job, he didn't accuse Job of any sin, which must have been a comfort for Job.

And yet Job knew that he'd spoken wrongly about God, and he needed to repent of the wrong things that he had said. He had presumed that he'd been in the right, he knew better than God, and God had been wrong to work in this way with his life. And so he repents of misjudging God. He realizes he had no right to demand an explanation from God for God doing what God wants to do. And so that's Job's response to God after God revealed himself to him, and he gets no answer from God to his suffering.

But what he does get is God himself. And so what should our response be when we are faced with suffering, suffering in our lives? Well, surely we need to be careful we don't speak without knowledge, or we don't think that we know better than God. So let's not assume that my plan or my agenda for my life is actually better than God's plan or God's agenda for my life. Job is humbled before God, and we should be too. And confess that God knows far better than we do about how to run this world and how to run our lives. So that's Job's confession. The second point is Job's vindication in verse 7 to 9. Now, all the speeches in Job have ended, and we now come to the epilogue, which connects back to the prologue in chapters 1 and 2 of Job, and it completes the story. And the first part of this is Job's vindication.

And this is what Job wanted all along. And now finally, God vindicates Job, and he proves that Job's been right all along. Job's friend said Job was suffering because of his sin, and Job denied this, and now God vindicates Job as an innocent sufferer. So look down with me at verse 7 to 9.

[11 : 19] After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Elipaz the Tenemite, I'm angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has.

So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has. So Elipaz the Tenemite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Nahemite did what the Lord told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer. So here is God, and he is rebuking Job's friends for not speaking the truth about him, and he commends Job. And yeah, Job did need to repent for sometimes speaking wrongly about God, but God's verdict is that Job was right and his friends were wrong. And so for all of Job's questions and all of Job's complaints, his heart's desire was for God. So we're being told that he was a true believer who wanted God to help him make sense of his suffering. And Job wasn't prepared to accept some kind of cold or mechanical or tit-for-tat solution to suffering, where if you've done something good, then you're rewarded. If you've done something bad, then you suffer. That's not what's going on here.

Job was wrestling with God, whereas his miserable comforter friends had failed to do this. And in the end, God vindicates Job. I wonder if you noticed how God referred to Job four times in these verses, verse 7 to 9, the Lord calls him my servant Job, just like he did at the start of the book. But there's more to it. See how God tells the friends to go to Job with a sacrifice for themselves so that Job would pray for them. God's angry with these friends. But he wants Job to intercede for them. And so there's an ironic twist here. After all of their speeches, these three friends thought that they were representing God to Job. Turns out they'd been misrepresenting God to Job. They thought they were helping Job get right with God. But it turns out all along, it was Job who'd been the servant of God. And they needed Job's help to get themselves right with God. Job had to pray for them. And so God appoints Job to this kind of priest-like role to mediate for them, which must have been a humbling experience for these friends who thought they were so righteous before God. Because the man that they condemned as wicked was the one that they needed in order to reconcile them with God. And the Lord accepts Job's prayer on their behalf.

And in this action, Job points, of course, to the true servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the greater priest who would mediate for his sinful people. And so God publicly vindicates Job as a true believer and innocent sufferer, which is where the book of Job helps us when we're suffering and asking why. Because there might not be any sin that explains why we're suffering.

We may not know if God is trying to teach us something. And we're just completely perplexed by it all. Well, Job teaches us that we can't expect to get an answer that completely satisfies.

Sometimes God will allow us to suffer, not because we've committed some sin and he's angry with us, not even to teach us something about ourselves, but in order to teach us more about him and his ways.

[15 : 28] Forcing us to lean harder on him and to trust him even more. Because God is at work in saving us.

That's why we were created is to be in a relationship with God. And so God wants us to spend eternity with him and we'll be in relationship with him. And so Job's sufferings would show whether Job loved God for himself, not just for the blessings that God gives. And that's the issue in the dialogue between God and Satan at the start of the book. Will Job love God for himself or will he simply love God because God blesses him with lots of stuff? And that's the test.

It had to be proved to Satan that Job didn't fear God simply because God had blessed him. And the proof would come through Job's suffering. God would allow Job to suffer to show Satan and all of Job's readers, including us, that Job loved God for himself, not for what he could get out of God. And I think that's also a test for us, isn't it? Because in life, relationships tend to be transactional. We get along with people. We like people. We love people. We enter into a relationship with someone because of what they can give to us or the way that they can serve us or how they can help us.

We want something in return. But I guess the question is, well, is that how we treat God? Or do we love God simply because he is God and he made us? And will we continue to love God even when life doesn't go so well, like when we're suffering? Because for Job or for us, it will test just how genuine our relationship with God really is. So that's Job's confession, Job's vindication, secondly, and then thirdly, Job's restoration, verse 10 to 17. You notice here that after Job's suffering, his life is restored. Verse 10 says, after Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. And that brings us to this satisfying conclusion to the story. Everything Job had lost has not just been restored, but God gives Job twice as much as

before, a double portion. Look at verse 12. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. That's a lot of livestock. It's a lot of children. And Job's daughters here get a special shout out. And the reason, I think, is because each name of these three girls represents beauty. So Jemima means turtle dove. Kizia means cassia, which is from the aromatic plant used in perfume. Apparently it's a variety of cinnamon. So she is the original spice girl, Kizia.

And then Karen Hapuch apparently refers to black powder that's used to highlight the eyes. And these three are called the most beautiful women in all the land. And so this is saying to us that the Lord is bringing beauty and blessing back into Job's life again. And then we get these final words in verse 16 and 17 that emphasize his long and flourishing life. After this, Job lived 140 years. He saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died an old man and full of years. [19:31] It's all speaking of God's generous and lavish blessing on this man's life. Now, did you spot the order here? Remember, Job's repentance wasn't a response to God's blessing.

Job repented when he was suffering and Job prayed for his miserable comforter friends. And all of this happened before blessing came. So it's not as if Job realized God's been good, therefore I'll connect to God again.

The restoration is like icing on the cake, as it were. In other words, what Job was longing for in his suffering, it wasn't a return for all his stuff or a big family or loads of money and loads of livestock and loads of children. He didn't just want all God's blessings back again. It's clear that Job wanted God himself. And it had been clear throughout Job's life that Job never wanted stuff from God. He wanted God. Whether suffering with nothing or whether blessed with everything, Job wanted his relationship with God to be close. And that's why this happy ending isn't unrealistic after all. It is fantastic because, of course, Job's restoration doesn't mean that his suffering had completely gone. Job surely bore the scars of his suffering for the rest of his life. Remember, 10 of his grown-up children were killed. And yes, he's blessed with 10 more, but Job must have carried the grief and the pain of such tragic loss to the grave. And even though he lived to this ripe old age, he still died, and he lost everything anyway. And so the restoration of Job didn't remove the trauma or the tragedy of his suffering. But it brought Job into this deeper relationship with God for having gone through it all. And so that's how the book of Job ends well. Not because every question Job had was answered by God about why he was suffering, but because he'd been helped to find God, a deep relationship with God through suffering. And it shows to us how we need not just a better understanding of what God is like, but a deeper experience of God in our lives, whatever our circumstances, to see God as he is and to relate to him as we ought. Because only then will we manage to make best sense of our suffering and to persevere through it. Because it's been clear that God does allow suffering to accomplish his purposes in our lives. And no matter how dark and difficult our days and this life are, the point of the book of Job is that God's purposes for us stretch way beyond this life. That this life, this world, this world, you, your relationships, your job, your family, all of that is good.

But there is more. There's more to life than just now and what we can see. God is building a world and a new creation whereby we will be with him forever. And that's why the Apostle Paul tells us to consider that our present sufferings that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us. But I love the way that Teresa of Avila, a Spanish nun, put it when she said, from heaven, even the most miserable life will look like one bad night in an inconvenient hotel. [23:37] Can you believe that? That this life and these sufferings are actually small and short compared to the beauty and the joy of an everlasting relationship with God. And so as we come to the end of the book of Job, reading it with a bigger story of the Bible in view, it's clear that the glory and the blessing and the great restoration doesn't always come in this life. But the point is, whatever we have suffered, whatever we have lost, whatever we have gone without, we will get it all back. And then some. And that's why James, in his letter in the New Testament, highlights Job as an example of patience in suffering. It's the only mention of Job in the New Testament. But James says, as you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. So yes, Job was perplexed about his suffering, but he persevered. And he was vindicated by God in the end, indicating that

God was working his purposes out in Job's life, even though that included suffering. And so Job is meant to encourage us, you and me, to keep going, essentially through suffering because of what the Lord will finally bring about, which is a glorious future for all of his people. And so Job's restoration here points to everything that is coming. Unlimited blessings for all those who know and love God.

And that's why we shouldn't close out Job without mentioning our invitation into a relationship with the God who made us. And that's our final point in our conclusion. Because by studying the book of Job, it's been clear to see how the character of Job foreshadows Jesus. But I'd be even further and to say that the book of Job is about Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate Job because Jesus is the true and better innocent sufferer. For Jesus not only lived a life of perfect obedience, but lived the life of Job to its ultimate conclusion, which meant suffering and then death. And yet Jesus went even further than death and into God's forsakenness when he died on the cross. Because while Job only felt like God had abandoned him and he was under God's judgment, Jesus actually experienced the absence of God as he hung in darkness on the cross. Jesus faced the wrath of God, the worst possible suffering, the wrath of God for our sin, on himself. And he did it for us. And then Jesus was vindicated by God through his resurrection.

And so Jesus' death and resurrection, which we celebrate at Easter, brought about the defeat of Satan and sin and death. And so God's purpose in allowing Job to suffer at the hands of Satan, and God's purpose in sending Jesus to suffer on the cross was to use Satan's work against him. In other words, God gave Satan just enough rope to hang himself with. Because this conflict between God and Satan that's been raging since the fall at the very beginning has only ever had one winner.

[27 : 35] The writing has been on the wall for the devil ever since God's promise that a snake crusher would come. And Jesus has now crushed the snake through his death on the cross. The New Testament tells us the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. And so now the resurrection of Jesus is our guarantee of the restoration of all things. When this world that is broken, we know it's broken, there is evil, we know it's evil, but it's because of sin, this world will become God's perfect new creation. And there'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. And so even if you're here this afternoon and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you aren't really sure what you believe, then don't you want all of this to be true? Don't you want an end to all suffering and evil and sin?

What we're being told here in the Bible is that that day is coming. And so the story of Job fits into the story of the Bible, which fits into the story of our world of human history.

The story that we are all a part of, where we really will live happily ever after, but only if we're one of God's people and we're in a relationship with him. We're being told here that this life of pain and suffering will pass. And even if we don't know and are never told the reasons why we suffer, we can know that it isn't because God doesn't love us or that God has somehow forgotten us.

God calls Job my servant and he calls Jesus Christ my beloved son. And that's how God's love has been supremely displayed for you and for me at the cross on Good Friday where Jesus died.

And so when you suffer, you can be sure that because Jesus bore your sin to rescue you from the worst imaginable suffering in hell, then whatever you face in this life is only leading you closer to him and closer and closer to that new creation, to that perfect world where there will be no suffering, there will be no death, there will be no mourning, no crying, no pain. There will only be unending joy and delight as we live with the God who made us and loves us. And that day is coming.

[30 : 30] How great would it be if we're all there when that day comes and Jesus returns and he takes us to be with him, that we're there. We're there with him. And we go to that great future. Let's pray together.

Let's pray together.