

Job 31

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Bible Text: Job 31

Preached On: Sunday, July 16, 2017

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Job 31. And I'm glad for a patient congregation who is willing to walk slowly. I know that it's taking us awhile. I have a good friend in life and in ministry who, not too long ago, announced "I'm going to do a series on Job." And I said, "Oh, I've been in Job for over a year, I can share some thoughts with you." And he has since come and gone out of the book of Job. And so I really do appreciate friends who will walk slowly with a brother. And I hope it's encouraging to you as, particularly, we come to the end of Job's defense. We're- and this is the third of 3 chapters in which this is his swan song in self defense. And as we come to this chapter we will see that it seems to be particularly speaking in answer to Eliphaz in chapter 22. A lot of the the things brought up there are addressed here. We also see in Job 31, and I will- I will read it as we go, since it is a longer chapter. Bill Edgar has broken up open a whole new way of- of preaching for me, that I can read as I go. We also find here legal-- Hebraic legal language. It's found in- in these phrases: if I've done this, then let the Lord do this. And those are found in some form in verses 5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 38, and 39. So you start to get the feeling that this chapter is about that. That Job is truly, in- in a legal way, seeking to defend himself against what has been said. We also see a similarity here in Job 31 to Zechariah 3. You'll remember there that Joshua the high priest is on trial. And even the similarity comes down to crowns that are prepared for Joshua there, and in verse 36, Job mentions his desire to bind a crown on his head regarding these accusations. So we see here clearly that Job 31 interrelates with, not only other passages in the book of Job (it's a cohesive whole), but it also intertwines with things that we see elsewhere in the Old Testament. And so we find Job, in a final way, defending himself.

He does, firstly, through his declared reputation, his declared reputation. He says, [vs 1-4] "I made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman? For what portion of God is there from above? And what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Does not destruction belong to the wicked, and calamity to the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?" Job is declaring, "God can see how I live, He can see what I've done, He can see the covenants that I've made." And this is just one of many portions you'll hear as we read through, where the heart is dealt with and connected to. Job here seeks to declare a reputation of holiness, a reputation that is honoring of God, as he asks these questions. "Why would I do wicked things? Why would I do corrupt things? Doesn't God see all that I do? Doesn't He see my ways and count all my steps?"

Job goes here from these more general, over-arching questions, secondly, down to these detailed rebuttals of what has been said, these detailed rebuttals. We see where he rebuts a lack of integrity in word and deed. He says, [vs 5-6] "If I have walked in vanity, or if my foot has hurried after deceit, let me be weighed in an even balance the God may know my integrity." He goes on, [vs 7-8] "If my step has turned out of the path, and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has clung to my hands,

then let me sow, but let another eat; yes, let my offspring be rooted out." He's saying, "If I don't have integrity, if I had done something that is wicked, if I've gotten the cart before the horse and let my eyes decide where my heart will go, then let me die, let my children die."

He rebuts secret immorality. Verse 9: "If my heart has been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbor's door, then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down over her." Now this is- this is an interesting statement because in- in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, early on in Job, the Septuagint goes into more detail about what all of this meant for Mrs. Job, in her life. That she had taken on a life of going door-to-door, looking for work, basically, looking for others to do tasks for. And it's interesting here that Job would- would say what he says about letting his wife grind for another and let others bow down over her. Now he's here speaking in more definite terms of- of being passed on as someone else's wife and performing those wifely duties. But the Septuagint, at least, tends to already touch on this that- that his wife, because the empire was gone, was forced to go door-to-door. I wonder if I did this here, but I've done it elsewhere, I've likened that to, you know, living in Seattle and having Melinda Gates show up on your doorstep asking if you need any help with laundry or dishes or anything in your house. And you think, "well, your husband is Bill Gates, what's your problem?" You know. Mrs. Job shows up at your door. "Your husband's the most powerful man in town, in the region, in the known world. Why are you out looking for work? But Job here is speaking against that his- his heart has been overturned. He goes on in verse 11[-12]: "For this is a heinous crime; yes, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges. For it is a fire that consumes to destruction and would root out all my increase."

The largest section here is- is dealing with him rebutting social injustice. [vs 13-23] "If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant when they complained against me, what then will I do when God rises up? And when He visits, what shall I answer him? Did not He who made me in the womb make him? And did not the same One fashion us in the womb? If I have kept the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel by myself, so that the fatherless could not eat of it (but from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided the widow from my mother's womb); if I have seen anyone perish for a lack of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his body has not blessed me, and if he is not warmed-- was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw I had help in the gate; then let my arm fall from my shoulder blade, and my arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God is a terror to me, and because of His highness I cannot endure." Job is basically saying, "look, I've had all the means in the world to help the fatherless, to help the window, to help those who could not help themselves in the legal system. I had help and so I gave help to them."

And he rebuts false trust and idolatry. Verse 24[-28]: "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, 'you are my confidence'; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gained much; if I saw the sun when it shined, or the moon moving and brightness; and my heart has been secretly enticed, or my mouth has kissed my hand; this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I would have denied the God who is above." He says, "I have- I haven't put my trust in physical things, whether financial or idolatrous, I- I have not done that ever." He rebuts hatred of adversaries. Verse 29[-32]: "If I rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, or lifted up myself when disaster found him (nor have I allowed my mouth to sin by wishing a curse-- for a curse on his soul); if the men of my tent have not said, 'Who is there who has not been satisfied with his meat?' (the stranger has not lodged in the street, but I opened my doors to the traveler)" He rebuts the cultivation of secret sin. [vs 33-34] "if I covered my transgressions as any man, by hiding my iniquity in my heart, did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, so that I kept silence, and did not go out of the door?" He even makes a case for his agricultural integrity. I mean, Job is really going all

out to speak to his innocence. We see this in 38 to 40: "If my land cries out against me, and its furrows also weep together; if I have eaten its fruit without money, or have caused its owners to lose their life; let thistles grow instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley." He's seeming to call attention and saying, "if I've done these things, let the curse take a particular hold on my life and on my land." These are very detailed rebuttals. In fact, as one commentator said (well, a paraphrase of what the commentator said is), me thinks he doth protest too much.

This is the point where, even the most conservative of commentators who would stand ready at Job's defense all the way say, in chapter 31 he seems to go a bit too far. And if you read there again, as you have time to go back and look at some of the details, it's almost as if he's saying, "there- there hasn't been any homeless problem in my city because I've- I've taken everyone--" and everything is in grandiose terms of what Job has done. And in this moment, he seems to be on that tipping point of letting Job's righteousness outshine Christ's righteousness in his life. And so over the coming chapters as he backpedals a bit, these are the pedals he is pedaling, this chapter 31.

Thirdly, we see his desired response. We've seen his declared reputation, we've seen his detailed rebuttals, and now his desired response: [vs 35] "Oh, that one would hear me! Behold, my desire is that the Almighty would answer me, and that the One who contends against me had written a book!" Again, ironic words, as he calls out to God. God HAS written a book where we find out about life, and godliness, and death, and cursedness. And God would indeed answer Job. God does answer this call. He says, [vs 36-37] "Surely I would carry it on my shoulder and bind it on me like a crown. I would declare to Him the number of my steps; like a prince I would approach Him." Job here is getting quite bold. He is at the end of his defense. If any of you have ever been in court you know that, in some ways, if you've been in a real courtroom you know that courtroom drama TV shows and movies most-most of the time, in real life, it's not that dramatic. You know, there's no Perry Mason where every single case he has hinges on this dramatic moment in the closing arguments. You know, not everybody is Matlock, who gets the real criminal on the stand and gets them to confess before the court room that they did it, not the defendant. It's not always that dramatic. But sometimes it is. And- and here in this courtroom Job is really going all out, calling on God to show up so we can- so I can show you just how righteously I have walked.

And fourthly, we see Job's that defense rests. He has laid out his case, he has pleaded his cause, and here we read "the words of Job are ended." And that's a- that's a short sentence, isn't it? But it's a turning point. It's a turning point as we will see in the book, as this younger brother, as this young man Elihu stands up and speaks next. We'll see that in the weeks to come. But for now Job is done defending himself. He has rebutted, he has called out on God to respond to him, on God to show up, and then his defense rests.

There's another D. R. that's lacking here that I want to bring in. That's the fifth point that I'm adding because it's not in this chapter but it needs to be for us as we come to the Lord's table. As dramatic as a courtroom scene can be, as much tension and strife as there can be in a legal moment, the legal moment that we need is declared righteousness. We need to be justified before the Lord. And we can't do that by declaring our own reputation, we can't do that by offering detailed rebuttals of everything that everybody has ever accused us of. We all want justice for ourselves. We all want to take whatever anybody has ever thought of us and go back and address, address, address. We can't do that. We can have our desired response but, if your desires are like mine, more often than not, it's not going to happen. In a sense, that last point is all that we can do is rest. Rest in the fact that in Christ we have been declared righteous. Whenever we try to uphold our own righteousness as the standard by which we and everybody else needs operate, all it does is reveal our hearts of sin. [LC, Q 70] "What is

justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone." That, brothers and sisters, IS the good news. That is the good news as we come to the table today. That sinners like me and like you can come to the table by faith. Not because of our own reputation, not because of our own righteousness that rebuts what anybody has ever said about us, but because of Christ and what He has done for us on the cross.

Stand with me as we pray.