

Route Sixty-Six

Part Eighteen

Job

Out of the Whirlwind

(John 5:39; Job 42:5, 6)

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. ⁶ Therefore I abhor *myself*, And repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5, 6).

Introduction

Controversy rears its head in all the corners of the church and its attending theology. In recent years a controversy formed around something many of you have heard numerous times, perhaps without giving it a thought. It pertained to the third question in our denomination's membership vows. It reads:

Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

The controversy dialed into the word *abhor*. Does this vow encourage some level of unhealthy self-loathing? Is there great piety in the notion of hating oneself? The quick answer is 'no'. But we might be looking at this backward. The answer is 'no' not because we don't deserve, at least in some context, loathed, but because we are not qualified to be the one who is doing the loathing.

It can easily be argued that both self-love and self-loathing are self-centered dispositions. Self-love (contrary to many who would argue that if I'm called to love others and I love myself, I must begin with love of self) is never commanded but assumed. And self-loathing assumes you have a lofty enough moral credentials to hate (at least from a Christian

perspective) the one who God has chosen to love. The whole conversation is a bit narcissistic.

Yet the book of Job culminates with Job engaging in self-abhorrence. The word gives an indication of being horrified with oneself. But this self-horror appears to have been the objective of God for Job as well as the beginning of a much richer chapter in Job's life. This morning we will briefly pursue what led to this painful, yet glorious sanctification in the life of Job.

Survey of Job

This morning we're studying, not the oldest events in history (nothing can be earlier than the "In the beginning" of Genesis 1) but what many scholars have determined to be the oldest book, not merely in Scripture, but the oldest book in the world. It has also been deemed the greatest poem in the world's literature.

A quick word about the poetical books. Having finished the seventeen historical books (Genesis to Esther), we now move to the five poetical books (Job through Song of Solomon). That these are poetical does not mean that the events contained in them didn't happen. It does mean that the writing style within the books are presented poetically. If I write a poem about my wife's brown hair or hazel eyes, it doesn't follow that my wife doesn't exist. Job and his friends existed.

We are informed right up front that Job was a man of impeccable character. We are not to assume he was sinless, but certainly blameless, upright, fearing God and shunning evil. He was a hard and wealthy worker. He was **"the greatest of all the people of the east" (Job 1:3)**. We are meant to read this book with a knowledge that there was nothing about the character of Job, similar to many nations and people in the Old Testament, that would make him the target of God's righteous judgments.

Yet there is a conversation between God and Satan that I would be quite nervous about if it were me. **"Have you considered My servant Job? God seems to brag, "there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"** When it comes to Satan, I would prefer to remain invisible.

But Satan isn't buying it. The only reason Job is so admirable, according to Satan, is because God has given him so much stuff. Let us all

beware of brands of religion today that promise so much stuff. Religious pursuits that promise health, wealth, and even emotional, psychological and familial equanimity are the types of fragile religion that the devil would have people pursue due to their very tenuous nature. Herein lies the great challenge in Job. Take away Job's stuff and **"he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 1:9).**

Job's trials come in two phases (really more, as we shall see). First his stuff and then his health. It is worth noting here that Satan is a mere tool in the hand of God. As Luther stated, Satan is "God's ape." Satan can go only as far as allowed by God. Like the sea...

When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop' (Job 38:11)!

Strong is the testimony in the book of Job that it is God who ordains whatsoever comes to pass. The loss of his property and family in a secondary or penultimate sense came at the hands of the Sabeans, the Chaldeans and Satan. But in an ultimate sense, Job had no misgivings regarding whose hand was/is behind all things. It is in the context of all this loss that we read those very familiar words:

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong (Job 1:21, 22).

This healthy disposition was going to be short-lived. Soon things would happen which would prove a bit dismantling for Job. The support system of his wife, for example, was rapidly extracted.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die" (Job 2:9)!

Once again Job acknowledges God's divine and sovereign hand with the words:

“Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:10).

One gets the feeling that Job is hanging by a thread. He begins strong and full of conviction. But the chipping away of his resolve by his wife’s discouragement is followed by the entrance of his three well-meaning friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar). As I have said many times, they seemed to do so well sitting with Job in the ashes for seven days, until they started talking.

Not to be overly harsh on his friends. It was no doubt difficult to see Job begin to deplore his own birth. Things got worse before they got better. Essentially, Job began to wish he had never been born. Now comes the big question from Job’s perspective: why is this happening to me? Now enter the counsel of Job’s friends.

Their motives seem good and there is enough truth in their words to keep Job’s attention. But in the end, their consoling is reduced to condemning. Their understanding of God’s providence is much too wooden. Within the boundaries of their limited wisdom, they conclude that these things are happening because Job is a sinner and a hypocrite. Clearly they did not read the opening chapter of the book!

It is not as if there is no merit to their position.

If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments, ³² Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. ³³ Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail (Psalm 89:31, 32).

Being in a covenant of grace with God (whether old or new) does not mean there are no consequences for sin. Though we are not saved by our keeping of the law, it has been said that the **“threatenings” of the law show what our sins deserve; and what “afflictions, in this life, (we) may expect.”**¹

But it does not necessarily follow that if bad things happen to you or me, that it must have been due to some particular sin in our lives, as Job’s

¹ WCF, 19:6,

friends seemed to indicate. As well-meaning and even half-right as Job's friends appeared to be, it was no small thing for them to inaccurately teach the things of God. God would later respond,

My wrath is aroused against you (Eliphaz) and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right (Job 42:7).

It is no small thing to speak on behalf of God. There are most certainly stricter judgments (James 3:1).

A fourth, younger friend enters the dialogue in chapter thirty-two. Elihu seems a little closer to the mark. He engages less as a judge and more as a brother. He, with perhaps more tenderness and accuracy indicates that suffering from the hand of God is not necessarily punitive or retributive but corrective and sanctifying. Was not our Savior perfected through suffering (Hebrews 2:10)?

Interestingly enough, Elihu did not so much suggest that the suffering was a result of Job's sin, but that Job was currently sinning because of his suffering. This may have contained a nugget of truth.

In chapter thirty-eight, the wisdom of man comes to a conclusion and the Lord speaks **"out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1)**. The whirlwind is a symbol of divine revelation (Psalm 18:7-15; Nahum 1:3; Zechariah 9:14). We are so fond of asking questions of and about God. There is a place where this is a healthy pursuit. But there does come a point where we have reached our boundaries. A God who is comprehensible (in the strict definition of the word, which means to know completely) would not be God at all.

This is not to suggest that God is irrational, illogical or not apprehensible. But I will never get to the end of God. We will so comfortably make that statement regarding finite nature. The naturalist will acknowledge that the study of the cosmos will never end. Yet we somehow want to fit God into the tiny skulls.

We have reached the place in Job where God is, as C. S. Lewis puts it, no longer in the dock. We are not asking him questions; He is now the one asking.

Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me (Job 38:3).

For four chapters God presents, what is called, His natural government. By simply exposing Job's lack of insight vis-à-vis the natural order, he will conclude his utter incapacity to grasp that which is significantly more elusive, that is God's moral government. God begins with asking where he was when He created all things-the earth and the heavens-light and dark-the stars and the laws of nature. He wants to know if Job is there when the goats bear their young-when the animals are hungry.

For four solid chapters God does not answer Job's question of why he was suffering. He could easily have told Job of His conversation with Satan. He could have offered to Job the rationale that Satan doubted the perseverance of the saints. Satan doubted that the grace of faith would outlast the fiery darts of the evil one. God's simple, yet to many unsatisfying, answer is that I am God and you are not.

There are times when it becomes obvious that our afflictions are the consequences of our behavior or even the behavior of our cultures. But there are times when the reason for our trials is concealed from us. Let us recognize that God is as wise in what He reveals as He is in what He conceals. Sometimes to know the *why* of our trial diminishes the value of the faith and patience the trial is designed to produce.

In the depths of Job's despair, we see a desolate soul seeking a God who could not be found, living in an anguished self which could not be escaped, rifling through the fires of difficulty which could not be explained. Like Peter, Satan had asked if he could sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31) and the Lord granted the request.

Peter, Job (and at a certain level most of us at one level or another) stand as a consciously naked soul before our Maker. And the answer, the peace and consolation is not found in an explanation from God, but it is found in God Himself. God has not presented to Job an explanation (not that explanations are always necessarily wrong or bad) but God presents Job with Himself.

It is because of that personal encounter with God that Job puts on the secondary level that he had "**heard of (God) by the hearing of the ear.**" What is now elevated is presented with the words "**But now my eye sees**

you” (Job 42:5). And it is with a new sight, as if a blind man had been given sight, that Job now “abhors” himself. It would be the gravest of errors to conclude that this self-aborrence in the presence of God was bad news for Job. On the contrary, it was the beginning of the Good News.

As a poverty-stricken man might walk into a palace of pure gold, take a glance at his own rags and feel grotesquely out of place and under-dressed, might be transformed when he finds that he has become the heir to all these riches, so was Job when his eyes were truly opened to see the glory of his God and the riches of his inheritance.

Christ in Job

Where is Christ in Job? Christ is the means by which the we find ourselves embraced by our heavenly Father. As Jesus told Philip, “**He who has seen Me has seen the Father**” (John 14:9). Jesus has prepared a place for those who trust in Him that He might receive us to Himself, that where He is, we might be also (John 14:2, 3).

When our Lord speaks to us by word and sacrament, it is an encounter with God. All that Job lost was restored and more so. “**Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning...**” (Job 42:12). But such a blessing was merely a foretaste of the immeasurable riches that await Job and all who call upon Christ in glory. And although it is difficult for our corporeal, limited, fleshly selves to grasp and appreciate this now, there will be nothing richer than the joy of fellowship with Christ Himself.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss what it means to abhor oneself. Is this good or bad? Why or why not (pages 2, 3)?
2. When a book in the Bible is poetical, does that mean the things recorded in it didn't truly happen (page 3)?
3. Job opens with a description of Job's character. Why (page 3)?
4. What kind of religion does Satan like (pages 3, 4)?
5. Awful things happened to Job. Who did those things (page 4)?
6. What explanations did Job's friends give regarding why Job was suffering? Did these explanations have any merit at all (pages 5, 6)?
7. How was Elihu's explanation different than the others (page 6)?
8. How does God answer Job's dilemma? Why do you suppose God answers this way (pages 6, 7)?
9. Have you ever had a Job-like experience? What helped (pages 7, 8)?