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Sermon Notes

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The Prosperity of the Wicked Finally Addressed in Eternity

Job 20-21

I. The Problem: The Seeming Final Success of Many Wicked People

In the closing days of World War II in Europe, many high-ranking Nazi officials were able to slip away in the confusion and escape the justice of the world for their heinous crimes against humanity. The paths of their escape came to be known as “ratlines.” By these means, many were able to effect their escape to Argentina and other South American nations and make a new life for themselves, often with money they had stolen from their victims when they were in power. It is true that a few of them got caught... like Adolf Eichmann, who was kidnapped in Argentina by Israeli operatives in May of 1960. But others managed to live out the rest of their lives in obscurity and (in some cases) in luxury. When their stories were uncovered and told to the world in the years following their peaceful deaths, the sense of outrage was palpable – not only from Jewish survivors of the Holocaust but from all who question the existence of God.

One of the greatest issues that continually troubles the hearts of all people who believe in a sovereign, wise, and loving God who rules over all the affairs of planet earth is this: what about the prosperity of the wicked?

Why does it seem that the wicked always win... the cheaters get ahead... the tyrants win battles and build empires... the

corrupt in business overwhelm their smaller and more honest competitors, driving them out of business? Why do corrupt politicians with huge war chests for their campaigns win elections, and then are able to pay off their corporate sponsors with legislation that is favorable to their businesses? Why does organized crime succeed in corrupting the legal system and crushing opposition with murder and illegal businesses? Why do Communist governments succeed for decades in crushing Christian house church leaders and rule with impunity?

The agonies go on and on... the wicked seem to prosper and dominate... the weak get overwhelmed and suffer and lose and die. And worst of all, there seems to be absolutely no response from God in heaven! The mighty, omnipotent, perfectly good King of kings and Lord of lords just seems to do nothing and lets them get away with murder, lets them build massive mansions and live high on the hog... and there is no answer at all. It seems like so many "escape the hangman's noose" and beat the system.

That is the problem addressed in Job 20-21. But it is not addressed fully. Job really has no final answer. Zophar will try to give an answer, but Job swamps him and wins the debate. If we look a little further in the Old Testament, we will see the beginning of an answer in Psalm 73. But the full answer waits for the clearer revelations of the New Testament. And we will, in the end, find full satisfaction.

The Apostle Paul spoke of his expectation of eternal reward for his copious sufferings for the gospel...

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

He did NOT expect his rewards and his full joy IN THIS WORLD... actually, he was clearly warned by the Holy Spirit otherwise:

Acts 20:23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

In the same way, Jesus taught us that the ultimate display of God's justice concerning the wicked will NOT be IN THIS WORLD... actually, we can only see it by faith. But the scripture is clear that, in the end, in every single case, God will display his justice... either by the genuine repentance of the wicked who turn to Christ – in which case, God displayed his justice by pouring out his wrath on Jesus in their place... or by the eternal condemnation of the unrepentant wicked in hell. Not IN THIS WORLD... but IN ETERNITY.

As Jesus threw open the gates of heaven and clearly revealed resurrection glory, so it was Jesus that clearly taught on the reality and terrors of hell.

That is the subject of today's sermon

We begin with Zophar's inadequate doctrine

II. Zophar's Assertion: God Crushes the Wicked Quickly (Job 20)

A. The Joy of the Wicked is Brief

1. The time the wicked enjoys his ill-gotten-gains is very brief

Job 20:5 the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.

2. Actually in one sense this is absolutely TRUE:

Hebrews 11:25 [Moses chose] rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Sin only offers very fleeting times of pleasure! And then, the feast is over!

3. But it is also true of the righteous as well:

Isaiah 40:6-7 "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.

B. No Matter How High the Wicked Soar, God Brings them Down

Job 20:6-7 Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, ⁷ he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'

Like the ancient myth of Icarus, who made wings for himself affixed with wax, he soared aloft for a little while in his hubris and pride, but he soared too high and the heat of the sun melted the wax and he came hurtling down to his own destruction

C. The Fall of the Wicked Comes Quickly

Job 20:8-9 Like a dream he flies away, no more to be found, banished like a vision of the night. ⁹ The eye that saw him will not see him again; his place will look on him no more.

D. The Children of the Wicked Do Not Enjoy the Fruit of their Parents' Wicked Doings

Job 20:10 His children must make amends to the poor; his own hands must give back his wealth.

E. The Wicked Will Never Enjoy All the Fruit of their Ill-Gotten Gains

Job 20:12-15 "Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, ¹³ though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, ¹⁴ yet his food will turn sour in his stomach; it will become the venom of serpents within him. ¹⁵ He will spit out the riches he swallowed; God will make his stomach vomit them up.

Job 20:17-18 He will not enjoy the streams, the rivers flowing with honey and cream. ¹⁸ What he toiled for he must give back uneaten; he will not enjoy the profit from his trading.

So... all the pleasures the wicked imagined they would lay around and enjoy... they will not get to for long

At some point, their ill-gotten delicacies will become like poison in their stomachs and they will vomit them out... God's justice will see to it

F. God Himself Will Slaughter the Wicked

Job 20:23-29 When he has filled his belly, God will vent his burning anger against him and rain down his blows upon him. ²⁴ Though he flees from an iron weapon, a bronze-tipped arrow pierces him. ²⁵ He pulls it out of his back, the gleaming point out of his liver. Terrors will come over him; ²⁶ total darkness lies in wait for his treasures. A fire unfanned will consume him and devour what is left in his tent. ²⁷ The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him. ²⁸ A flood will carry off his house, rushing waters on the day of God's wrath. ²⁹ Such is the fate God allots the wicked, the heritage appointed for them by God."

1. In other words, God is the heavenly hunter, and he inevitably hunts down the wicked
2. No one can escape God's wrath

G. Application to Job

1. Zophar is not merely speaking in abstraction
2. As with the other two friends, his basic premise is that Job is suffering the just deserts of his hidden wickedness
3. He is implying that Job is the wicked person that God has hunted down... "See, Job, what happened to you?! All your wealth and luxuries were taken from you in an instant!"

III. Job's Response: Actually, the Wicked Do Quite Well in This World (Job 21)

A. Job Questions Zophar... But Really, He Questions God

1. Zophar's premise is that the wicked get crushed very quickly by the relentless justice of God
2. But Job is just not buying it... his experience tells him otherwise
3. Though Job seems to be questioning Zophar, he is really questioning God's way of ruling the world
4. As far as he can tell, the wicked do very well in this world, and there is no justice for their many wicked acts

5. This is a profound assault on theodicy... the justification of God

B. Job Begins His Assault on Zophar... But It's Really God He Wants to Talk With

Job 21:4 "Is my complaint directed to man?"

In other words, my real problem here is not you, my mocking arrogant friend. My real problem is with God, Almighty God, the just and righteous Ruler of the ends of the earth

C. The Real Issue: The Wicked Do In Fact Prosper

Job 21:7-16 Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? ⁸ They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. ⁹ Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. ¹⁰ Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. ¹¹ They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. ¹² They sing to the music of tambourine and harp; they make merry to the sound of the flute. ¹³ They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace.

The fact of the matter is, a lot of wicked people make it safely through this world successfully, right to a peaceful death in their beds

They are successful in all their business ventures, they live very long lives, they are generally healthy, they have large, loving families; they die in their beds surrounded by doting children and grandchildren who weep and lament when they die

They have no fears, because nothing bad ever happens to them

As Job says, **"The rod of God is not upon them."** God leaves them alone and lets them prosper.

Their agricultural ventures go very well... their bulls breed and their cows calve... nothing ever seems to go wrong for them

And their children laugh and play and dance and sing... they are well-fed, not knowing that their comfortable lives were paid for by sinister business deals and wicked defrauding of the poor

Those healthy happy kids never learn in their childhood why they are so wealthy and healthy and happy... later in life, they will find out, and join in the wicked, corrupt family business and continue the multigenerational prosperity

And the head of the clan, the grandfather who founded this empire of evil dies at age 95, passing away sweetly in his sleep.

WHY, O LORD???

In 1969, Mario Puzo published a novel which eventually became one of the most famous movies in the history of American cinema... *The Godfather*. It is the violent tale of a Mafia family through multiple generations. On the facing page of chapter 1, Puzo put this quote from the French philosopher Balzac: **“Behind every great fortune there is a crime.”**

In the story, both the godfather Vito Corleone, and his son, Michael Corleone, died peacefully and in prosperity.

They are fictitious examples of the very thing Job is bitterly lamenting

D. These Are People Who Openly Mock God

Job 21:14-15 Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. ¹⁵ Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?'

They have no time for God... they are too focused on advancing their own evil agendas... furthering their earthly realms

They are pragmatists... and piety doesn't return anything on the investment

E. Job Speaks His Frustration About Their Perspective

Job 21:16 But their prosperity is not in their own hands, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked.

Job knows full well that every good thing they have ever enjoyed came ultimately from God... it GALLS him that they refuse to give God honor and glory for his good gifts!!

F. YET God Doesn't Do Anything to Them!

Job 21:17-18 "Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does calamity come upon them, the fate God allots in his anger? ¹⁸ How often are they like straw before the wind, like chaff swept away by a gale?"

Job seems to say "Usually NOT!" They don't get paid back for evil for the evil they have done. This is what SHOULD happen to them, but it doesn't!

G. One Answer is that the Punishment Falls on his Children

Job 21:19 It is said, 'God stores up a man's punishment for his sons.'

Job is not satisfied with that at all!!

Job 21:19-21 Let him repay the man himself, so that he will know it! ²⁰ Let his own eyes see his destruction; let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty. ²¹ For what does he care about the family he leaves behind when his allotted months come to an end?"

H. Both the Wicked and the Righteous End Up with the Same Fate!

Job 21:23-26 One man dies in full vigor, completely secure and at ease, ²⁴ his body well nourished, his bones rich with marrow. ²⁵ Another man dies in bitterness of soul, never having enjoyed anything good. ²⁶ Side by side they lie in the dust, and worms cover them both.

So, the wicked man prospers and dies in his old age, perfectly healthy. The righteous man struggles all his life, and dies as well... if DEATH is the final answer, WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE???

I. Bottom Line... the Wicked DON'T Get Repaid in this Lifetime!

Job 21:27-33 "I know full well what you are thinking, the schemes by which you would wrong me. ²⁸ You say, 'Where now is the great man's house, the tents where wicked men lived?' ²⁹ Have you never questioned those who travel? Have you paid no regard to their accounts-- ³⁰ that the evil man is spared from the day of calamity, that he is delivered from the day of wrath? ³¹ Who denounces his conduct to his face? Who repays him for what he has done? ³² He is carried to the grave, and watch is kept over his tomb. ³³ The soil in the valley is sweet to him; all men follow after him, and a countless throng goes before him.

J. So... Job Says to His Friends... Your Theology is Deeply Flawed

Job 21:34 So how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!

1. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar all come at Job with the same basic theology... the “law of retribution” ... “You reap what you sow”
2. But there is a double flaw to your theory... actually two sides to the same coin.
 - a. First, Job would say, look at me! I am blameless, innocent of great transgression... and yet look at the calamity that has happened to me
 - b. Second, look at so many wicked oppressors that never get what’s coming in this lifetime. They never get punished! They escape justice by death. They die old and vigorous and beloved and prosperous, surrounded by their doting families. Their kids and grandkids laugh and dance and play and eat good food.
 - c. Where is the justice of God in all of this?
3. Job Has No Answers... He Is Simply Refuting the Theology of His Friends
 - a. In one sense, he is continuing his frontal assault on God himself
 - b. He is deeply concerned with the justice of God
 - c. He does not see any fair solution to this problem of the prosperity of the wicked

d. The solutions must come somewhere else

IV. The Final Answer Comes in Eternity

A. Psalm 73 Covers the Same Ground and Begins to Give an Answer

1. The problem asserted plainly

***Psalm 73:1-3 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my
 foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of
 the wicked.***

2. The problem expounded

***Psalm 73:4-5 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not
 plagued by human ills.***

***Psalm 73:8-9 They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they
 threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their
 tongues take possession of the earth.***

***Psalm 73:11-12 They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High
 have knowledge?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like-- always
 carefree, they increase in wealth.***

3. The issue is exceedingly burdensome

- a. The Psalmist said he almost slipped into unbelief and rebellion... at least bitterness, at worst "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!"

***Psalm 73:13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I
 washed my hands in innocence.***

- b. He says what a burden this was to him

***Psalm 73:14-16 All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished
 every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have
 betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was
 oppressive to me***

4. The solution comes to him

Psalm 73:17-19 I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!

5. BUT there is still the same limit according to Job... this judgment doesn't seem to happen in every case... or even in most cases

6. But the Psalmist DOES have a sense of eternity

Psalm 73:21-26 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. ²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

7. Therefore, it is quite possible the Psalmist sees the destruction of the wicked as eternal as well

Psalm 73:27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

It's just never clearly spelled out anywhere in the Old Testament!!

B. The Final Solution: Eternity in Hell

1. Jesus Christ gives us the full picture on what happens after death and into eternity

a. It was Christ who made it plain the terrors that await the wicked
AFTER DEATH

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 God has the power to destroy BOTH soul and body in hell

b. Jesus quoted Isaiah 66

Mark 9:48-49 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.

c. He gave the image of “eternal fire”

Matthew 25:41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

d. He said it would be exquisite torment

Matthew 8:12 thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

e. He gave a clear picture of what hell will be like in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16)

i) The rich man lived in luxury every day and never cared for the poor Lazarus at all

ii) When the rich man died, he went to hell where he was in fiery torment

iii) Lazarus died and went to heaven, where he was joyfully at peace

iv) The rich man begged for Lazarus to cool his tongue from the fire... but it was impossible

v) THIS is the final answer to the problem of the rich oppressors... the answer does not happen in this world, but in eternity

2. The Apostle Paul continues to expand our comprehension

a. The wicked are actually storing up wrath every day

Romans 2:5-8 because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who

by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

b. The wicked reprobate existed to put God's attributes on display

Romans 9:22-24 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-- ²⁴ even us

God shows three attributes concerning the wicked: wrath, power, great patience

God shows all his attributes to the righteous... "the riches of his glory", but especially his MERCY

The fullness of this display cannot happen in this world... because God allows the wicked to play out their full story right to the end of their lives

But heaven will bring an eternal education in the glory of God; and part of that will be replaying how wisely and patiently and powerfully he dealt with the wicked

c. God tells us that he WILL repay

*Romans 12:19-20 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; **I will repay,**" says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

d. This display must happen in eternity... not before

i) We don't know who the reprobate are in this life

ii) As Job 21 makes plain, the wicked often don't get punished at all in this life

iii) In heaven, the righteous will yearn for justice and they will get it

3. So... for the arrogant wicked, there is no escaping justice: a far more terrifying enemy awaits

So, when Hitler blew his brains out in the Berlin bunker, he thought he was escaping the terrors of the enraged Soviet Army... but a far more terrifying enemy was waiting for him when he died... the holy God

And when other wicked men chuckled to themselves as they lay on their deathbeds, surrounded by loving family and confident of passing on a vast fortune amassed by crime, when they felt they had beat the system and escaped an invading army or a peasant uprising or an FBI enquiry... as they slip from this world in peace, they cannot conceive of the terrors that will await them in the next world

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

These verses at last will come true

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

V. Applying It to Ourselves

A. God Is Being Patient with ALL Sinners... Not Just the Extremely Wicked

1. It is wrong for us to become angry with the patience of God toward notorious sinners, while being sinners ourselves
2. We should realize a central point: all sin deserves condemnation by God
3. AND God's patience is meant to bring us to repentance

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance

B. Flee the Wrath to Come!

1. We are all sinners
2. We should realize that we all deserve to be judged
3. God sent Jesus Christ to die under the just wrath of God to save any who will call on his name!

C. Trust God Concerning the Wicked Oppressors!

1. Some of them may yet be converted
2. Those who will never be converted will be paid back fully by God's wrath

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

3. Their victims will be richly rewarded in heaven

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

D. Patience for those Oppressed

Luke 18:2-8 "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets

justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"
⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

E. Answering the Charges of Skeptics

1. Unbelievers frequently bring up this issue... like the Holocaust and wicked oppressors who never get dealt with in this life
2. Use it to point that person to Judgment Day and to Eternity... and to Christ!!

Closing story:

Over a century ago, there was a farmer in a Midwestern state who had a strong disdain for God. As he plowed his field on Sunday morning, he would openly mock the church people who passed by on their way to worship. October came and the farmer had his finest crop ever – the best in the entire county. When the harvest was complete, he placed an advertisement in the local newspaper which belittled the Christians for their faith in God. Near the end of his ad, he wrote, "Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper."

One Christian in the community decided to respond. In the next edition of the town paper, a small ad appeared. It read simply, "God doesn't always settle his accounts in October."