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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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God's Infinite Majesty and His Loving Closeness

Job 22-24

I. God's Infinite Majesty and His Loving Closeness

A. John's Two Encounters with Jesus

At the Last Supper, the night before Jesus was crucified, the Apostle John was sitting right next to Jesus. At one point, it literally says he was leaning his head on Jesus' chest. This is an amazing picture of intimacy, of staggering closeness to God.

But then, at the end of his life, the Apostle John was in exile on the Island of Patmos... and he heard a loud voice behind him that sounded like a trumpet

Revelation 1:12-17 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. ... His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

These are the same two people... John and Jesus. But Jesus was revealed in infinite glory, majesty, and power

And look at John now... he "fell at his feet as though dead!"

Brothers and sisters, we must have BOTH of these images in our minds as we come to Christ

B. Transcendence and Immanence

1. Theologians use the terms “transcendence and immanence”
 - a. Transcendence = God is infinitely ABOVE all creation, complete “other than” or different than his creation
 - b. Immanence = God is intimately involved with his creation, close by to it, very close to us personally and relationally
2. The Bible presents God as the infinitely majestic Creator and infinitely high Ruler of all the universe
 - a. The Book of Job has spoken of this again and again...

Job 13:11 Would not his splendor terrify you? Would not the dread of him fall on you?

Job 11:7-9 "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? ⁸ They are higher than the heavens-- what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave--what can you know? ⁹ Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

- b. Here Job will speak of that transcendence in clear and terrifying terms

Job 23:13-16 "But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases. ¹⁴ He carries out his decree against me, and many such plans he still has in store. ¹⁵ That is why I am terrified before him; when I think of all this, I fear him. ¹⁶ God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me.

- c. Yet for all of this, what Job wants the most is to be CLOSE to God... to have God near him and to speak to him and to comfort him
- d. In these two chapters, what bothers Job the most is that God seems ALOOF, distant, infinitely high and far away and not concerned with his pain and suffering

C. Isaiah 40: Amazing picture of BOTH immanence and transcendence

Isaiah 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

That is immanence... the incredible closeness of God to his people; ultimately fulfilled in Jesus the Good Shepherd... carrying us close to his heart.

But then, in the very next verse in Isaiah 40... TRANSCENDENCE

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

Isaiah 40:15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

I yearn to understand both of these in the person of Christ

D. Today... including Eliphaz's final speech, we get to probe the transcendence of God in light of also his immanence... his desire to be close to us

II. Eliphaz's Final Speech: Is Man of Benefit to God? Are Not Your Sins Endless?

A. God's Infinite Transcendence: Can Man Be of Benefit to God?

Job 22:1-3 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: ² "Can a man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? ³ What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless?

1. Much of the saving purpose of God is to humble us in our pride, to make us ready for the salvation that only he can give to us, and that he only gives to people who KNOW THEY NEED IT

Luke 5:31-32 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

2. We feel generally good about ourselves... **"I'm basically a good person who tries to do the right thing."**
3. We minimize our faults with others, and maximize the faults we see in others
4. We'd like to do the same with God... but we KNOW we can't bring any reproach against God. What fault does God have?
5. So we think we can at least put God in our debt by our service to him
6. But this is impossible... because God literally needs NOTHING WHATSOEVER from us! We cannot benefit God at all
 - a. Think of the sun, blazing away constantly 93 million miles away in outer space at the center of the Solar System
 - b. The human race cannot do anything to the sun—we cannot harm it in any way, neither can we help it in any way; we can't make it hotter or cooler, brighter or dimmer, nearer or farther
 - c. So it is with God in his infinite holiness, sitting on the throne of the universe

John Calvin: "We bring him no gain. He receives from us neither cold nor heat, and just as we cannot be profitable to him, neither can we do him any damage."

Therefore we should get rid of all the bits of rubbish we use to cover ourselves as we approach him and simply fall down and in all humility plead guilty for our sins

But instead, we tend to plead the merits of our works

Romans 11:35-36 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things.

And how much we need to meditate on this assertion by Paul:

Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

7. God has no needs at all! God is not lucky to have us serve him!

8. Instead, we should realize God has given us everything we have

Psalm 116:12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?

9. None of God's communications to the human race is to benefit himself

10. As Eliphaz says, God is not benefitted at all if we are righteous, if we obey his laws

11. Actually, God's laws were given for OUR BENEFIT, as helpful for our salvation! Not because his throne would be shaken or rocked if we did not obey his holy laws

12. All of God's commands are displays of his goodness to us, to help us and enrich us... not because he NEEDED us to obey him

13. And God is amazingly selfless in goading us and teaching us and exhorting us through the Holy Spirit to be righteous and to obey his commandments!

14. Our obedience to God's laws does not benefit God in and of himself AT ALL!! God will continue to be the same God whether we are righteous or wicked

15. So, when we consider the infinite majesty of God, and that he is not benefitted by our service or obedience at all, should we not be deeply humbled and in awe, ravished and astonished that God lowers himself so much to care about us and our salvation?

16. Yet, for all of that, God actually invites us into his works and gives us labors to do that he chooses to USE for the building of his Kingdom; he actually by his grace puts our lowly and imperfect

services in his record book and rewards us for them, though they are of no intrinsic value

Like a wealthy art collector who has the world's most lavish collection of Renaissance oil paintings, and yet is also a doting father who has mounted pictures that his six-year old daughter colored for him... they are framed and on his office wall. Why? Because they are masterpieces? NO! But because of his tender affection for his daughter. So it is with our service to God. In his grace and mercy, our works are PLEASING to him, and he USES them for eternity!

17. Even more, God voluntarily obligates himself to us in Christ; he makes promises to save us from our sins and to make us radiantly glorious in his heavenly kingdom

John 11:25-26 I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

18. These many promises made to us by God the Father and paid for in the blood of Christ the Son is of infinite grace and mercy to us... he voluntarily lowers himself to do this for us

19. SO... man is of NO BENEFIT to God; yet in Christ he lowers himself to save us and then, by his Spirit, lowers himself more to USE us and do good works in and through us

John Calvin: "God takes pleasure in stretching out his benefits to give us such enjoyment of them, that he joins himself to us and us to him. God, then, has had such care for us that it DOES matter to him how we live. But not because he gets by it either profit or damage."

B. Man's Infinite Sinfulness

1. Eliphaz makes astonishing charges against Job

He says (again) that the reason for all of Job's suffering is his own great sin

Job 22:4 Is it for your piety that he rebukes you and brings charges against you?

Job 22:5 Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?

2. Though how Eliphaz thinks of Job will be shown to be faulty, yet it is beneficial for us to feel the weight of the words... to apply it to ourselves
3. Honestly, there is not a one among us that has a proper valuation of our sins
 - a. We do not perceive one one-hundredth part of our sinfulness
 - b. All of us are mostly blind to the scope and quantity and seriousness of our cumulative sins over our lifetime
 - c. Matthew 18: Jesus told the parable of forgiveness called the Ten Thousand Talents... a servant owed a king 10,000 talents. A talent was seventy-five pounds of gold; this servant owed more than all the taxes taken in over the entire Roman Empire in a single year... like billions of dollars
 - d. That massive debt represents what Jesus feels each sinner owes to the infinitely holy God for a lifetime of sin
 - e. Is this some gross over-statement by Jesus? Or could it be that we all underestimate our sins?

Psalm 40:12 my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

4. Should we not examine our lives more carefully and honestly and have a greater sense of what God has had to cover through the blood of Christ?
5. This will lead to a deep humility and repentance by each one of us
6. We ought to say our sins are vast in quantity and mighty in their significance... like a vast mountain range of sin, or a trackless expanse of the Amazonian Rain Forest, with each leaf representing a sin needing forgiveness

7. And it will not do to pass lightly over it and say “Oh, I know there are some faults in me... I don’t deny it.” No! That is too frivolous
8. BUT do it all in light of the cross of Christ, accepting Jesus’ warm invitation

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Jesus does not say, “Come all you who admit that there is some sin in you and you have a few faults from time to time.”

No, he invites people who are WEARY and HEAVY-LADEN with a sense of their sins... your spiritual shoulders sagging under the weight. We are indeed great sinners, but Jesus is a GREATER SAVIOR!!

C. Eliphaz’s False Accusations of Job

Job 22:6-9 You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. ⁷ You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, ⁸ though you were a powerful man, owning land-- an honored man, living on it. ⁹ And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless.

1. Oppressive business practices: demanding security for no reason
2. Cruelty: stripping men, leaving them cold and naked
3. Withholding water from the thirsty and food from the starving
4. Like the rich man in Jesus’ parable, with Lazarus at his gate... the rich man living in luxury day after day and doing nothing for the poor he saw every day
5. This is WHY you are suffering:

Job 22:10-11 That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, ¹¹ why it is so dark you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you.

BUT Eliphaz has absolutely NO PROOF for these accusations... he is dead wrong about Job... This is Eliphaz's worst moment.

D. Job's Later Denial (Job 31:16-23)... But What About Us??

Job 31:16-23 If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, ¹⁷ if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless-- ¹⁸ but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow-- ¹⁹ if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, ²⁰ and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, ²¹ if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, ²² then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. ²³ For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

So, Job is actually innocent of these charges!! But what about us? Did WE spend ourselves on behalf of the poor? Were WE generous to the needy? Job's righteousness will not save us if we haven't.

E. The Way of the Wicked Will Perish (Job 22:12-20)

1. Eliphaz says Job denies the presence of God to judge his sins

Job 22:12-14 Is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! ¹³ Yet you say, 'What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? ¹⁴ Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens.'

2. But, Eliphaz warns Job that the way of the wicked, that he is following, will in the end perish

Job 22:15-17 Will you keep to the old path that evil men have trod? ¹⁶ They were carried off before their time, their foundations washed away by a flood. ¹⁷ They said to God, 'Leave us alone! What can the Almighty do to us?'

F. Eliphaz's Final Advice to Job... Very Sweet, Though a Faulty Foundation

Job 22:21-26 "Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you. ²² Accept instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. ²³ If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent ²⁴ and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, ²⁵ then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you. ²⁶ Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God.

III. Job's First Lament: God is Aloof to Me (Job 23)

A. I Yearn to Present My Case to God (23:1-7)

1. Job doesn't even address Eliphaz's slander against him... he will address it later, as I have mentioned.
2. But here, he just turns his lonely and lamenting eyes upward to God
3. It's as though he is saying no amount of logic or reasoning or prayer or debate can heal his torn soul... what he wants more than anything is to be close to GOD! For God to talk with him, relate to him, be close to him
4. But in the midst of his suffering, perhaps the greatest trial is the seeming distance of God... that God is ALOOF from him
5. So, he says nothing to his friends... he addresses his lament to God

Job 23:1-7 Then Job replied: ² "Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. ³ If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! ⁴ I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵ I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say. ⁶ Would he oppose me with great power? No, he would not press charges against me. ⁷ There an upright man could present his case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge.

He is saying, If I could FIND God, if I could TALK TO HIM, I would present my case to him, I would fill my mouth with my arguments and I KNOW he would listen and agree with me

But the bitterest part of all is I can't find him:

B. But... I Can't Find Him (23:3, 8-9)

Job 23:3 If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!

Job 23:8-9 "But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. ⁹ When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

It's amazing how different this is from Psalm 139:

Psalm 139:7-10 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Perhaps the hardest part of any trial for a believer is the feeling that God is not there... that God is not walking through the trial with him

C. God Knows How I Have Lived (23:10-12)

1. Job appeals to his blameless life... which God knows well

Job 23:10-12 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. ¹¹ My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. ¹² I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

2. Job does not consider silver or gold his true treasure... actually Job knows that his own godly character is his greatest possession
3. He speaks of the carefulness with which he has lived his life
4. He has followed God's footsteps very carefully; he has lived meticulously before God; remember how careful he was concerning his own children's HEARTS

Job 1:5 Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

5. At the core of his piety was a deep love for the words of God... though we don't know WHEN Job lived, God has always spoken to his people; so whether this was before or after the Books of Moses and the words of the prophets, we don't know
6. But God's words, spoken from his own lips, were Job's greatest treasure, his daily bread

Matthew 4:4 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Job is FULLY CONFIDENT that when all is said and done, when the refiner's fire is done testing him, he will shine like PURE GOLD

D. But God is Utterly Aloof from Me... and I Am Terrified of Him (23:13-17)

1. Yet for all of this piety, yet for all of Job's confidence, he still CAN'T FIND GOD ANYWHERE

Job 23:13-17 "But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases. ¹⁴ He carries out his decree against me, and many such plans he still has in store. ¹⁵ That is why I am terrified before him; when I think of all this, I fear him. ¹⁶ God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me. ¹⁷ Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face.

2. The infinite loftiness of God... his solitary stance over all the universe... his immeasurable highness and holiness; GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE becomes TERRIFYING
3. God makes decrees and carries them out, and no one can stop him
4. Furthermore, no one can hold him accountable, asking him "What have you done?"
5. God does as he pleases with every creature in the universe

6. And that terrifies Job... he sees God as lofty, aloof, distant, and cold

7. YET he is still willing to speak his case before him

IV. Job's Second Lament: God is Aloof to the Poor & Oppressed (Job 24)

Here Job refutes Eliphaz's accusation that he has no concern for the poor... he has GREAT concern for the poor... we will establish this much more in Job 31, so just listen to his passion:

A. Job Yearns for Justice for the Poor... But God Seems Aloof, Distant, Silent (24:1)

Job 24:1 "Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?"

B. Economic abuse of the weak (24:2-4, 9)

Job 24:2-3 Men move boundary stones; they pasture flocks they have stolen. ³ They drive away the orphan's donkey and take the widow's ox in pledge.

Because of this oppression, the poor are driven into hiding:

Job 24:4 They thrust the needy from the path and force all the poor of the land into hiding.

C. Oppressive living and working conditions for the poor

Job 24:5-6 Like wild donkeys in the desert, the poor go about their labor of foraging food; the wasteland provides food for their children. ⁶ They gather fodder in the fields and glean in the vineyards of the wicked.

The poor are naked, shivering in the cold rain at night:

Job 24:7-8 Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked; they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold. ⁸ They are drenched by mountain rains and hug the rocks for lack of shelter.

Their children are snatched from them to repay their debts:

Job 24:9 The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt.

The poor work hard, laboring to the last fiber of their being, but make very little money:

Job 24:10-11 Lacking clothes, they go about naked; they carry the sheaves, but still go hungry. 11 They crush olives among the terraces; they tread the winepresses, yet suffer thirst.

So the poor groan, desperately looking for help that never comes:

Job 24:12 The groans of the dying rise from the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out for help.

WHERE IS THE JUSTICE OF GOD IN ALL OF THIS???

Job 24:12 But God charges no one with wrongdoing.

D. Unpunished Criminal Acts (24:13-17)

1. The wicked LOVE the darkness, which hides all their evil deeds

Job 24:13 "There are those who rebel against the light, who do not know its ways or stay in its paths.

Job 24:14 When daylight is gone, the murderer rises up and kills the poor and needy; in the night he steals forth like a thief.

Job 24:15 The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed.

Job 24:16 In the dark, men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light.

Job 24:17 For all of them, deep darkness is their morning; they make friends with the terrors of darkness.

This reminds me of Jesus' statement:

John 3:19-20 men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

E. Yet... Job Still Believes the Wicked Will Get Judged (Job 24:18-25)

Job 24:18-25 "Yet they are foam on the surface of the water; their portion of the land is cursed, so that no one goes to the vineyards. ¹⁹ As heat and drought snatch away the melted snow, so the grave snatches away those who have sinned. ²⁰ The womb forgets them, the worm feasts on them; evil men are no longer remembered but are broken like a tree. ²¹ They prey on the barren and childless woman, and to the widow show no kindness. ²² But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. ²³ He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. ²⁴ For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like heads of grain. ²⁵ "If this is not so, who can prove me false and reduce my words to nothing?"

In other words, the wicked are like frothy bubbles on the surface of a lake that pop suddenly and are gone... God moves out powerfully and drags them away to their demise

V. Lessons

A. Meditate on God's Infinite Majesty... and How Lovingly Close He Desires to Be With Us in Christ

B. Ponder at Length the Question: Is Man Profitable to God?

Acts 17:25 God is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Humble yourself about your service to God!

C. Ponder the Quantity and Weight of Your Sins

1. The Bible is not written to puff up our self-esteem
2. It is written to give us a true diagnosis of our sin condition and to move us to seek salvation in Christ

Luke 5:31-32 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

D. Seek Salvation in Christ

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

E. See How Job's Suffering Made Him Feel Distant from God

F. Know That the Remedy is to Draw Near to God in Your Suffering

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.