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Sermon Notes

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Job's Costly Commitment to Mercy Ministry

Job 31:13-23

The book of Job addresses the weighty problem of human suffering...

In today's sermon, we'll see that Job, an amazingly godly man, cared very much about the suffering of others before it ever happened to him. He was intensely concerned about doing whatever he could to alleviate human suffering – he used his money, his time, his strength to do this constantly.

But this track record is set in the overall context of Job's own suffering... and his ultimate repentance from his wrong attitudes about God as a result of his own suffering.

So I draw these two lessons: 1) Godly people alleviate the suffering of others; 2) Godly people suffer well themselves, trusting in God through it all.

The Bible clearly teaches us to care about the sufferings of others... but it is extremely difficult for selfish sinners like us to do so

I. Life in a Bubble

A. Two Experiences on the Mission Field

I remember well riding through the streets of Mombasa, Kenya, on my first overseas mission trip. It was the last week of a summer long trip, and we were staying in a comfortable resort right on the Indian Ocean. Some of us wanted to see the city, so we were touring some of the poorer districts in a brand-new, air-conditioned van. There was nothing unusual for any of us

Americans in the air-conditioned luxury of the van. What was new was the sight of urban poverty in a non-American city. I had never seen anything like it in all my life. The more streets we drove down, the more uncomfortable I became with the shocking disparity I saw between my lifestyle and that of the people we were viewing through the tinted glass. It wasn't long after this that I began to see that air-conditioned van as a symbol of the manner in which I was making my way through life on this suffering globe. I have wrestled with the customary comforts of my lifestyle ever since.

A second experience came a year later, this time in Pakistan. I was on a team ministering to grief-stricken, destitute refugees from Afghanistan who had fled from the invading Russian forces that summer of 1987. I still have never seen such poverty in all my life. They had literally nothing except the tattered clothing that covered their bodies. Most of them had lost loved ones very recently to violent deaths. They were squatting on the border of their former homeland, barely tolerated by the Pakistani government and basically ignored by the local people. Many had a haunted look I shall never forget. But it was not an encounter with any of them that I recall most vividly. Rather it was an encounter with a poor Pakistani woman there in the city of Peshawar that bothered me the most. We had grown accustomed to being accosted by beggars in the streets who would point pathetically to their mouths and their stomachs to indicate their hunger. The missionaries told us of professional begging syndicates that used women, children, and cripples to make money for strongmen who organized them much like pimps and prostitutes in our country. The missionaries didn't seem much concerned with the issue, but seeing our unease, they suggested, "Why don't you buy some fresh nan (local bread) and carry it in a bag with you so that you can give it to them?" I thought this was a great idea, so I bought five or six of the large, flat loaves and kept them in a bag with me. Later that morning, when one of the beggars came to me and pointed to her stomach, a I happily produced the bread and handed it to her. She became very angry, threw it down, and walked away.

My feelings at that point shocked me... I was actually relieved! I had found a perfect system, a way to beat the troubling issue of “haves and have nots.” A few minutes later, however, the Lord stirred the pot as He always does. Another beggar came to me with the same gesture – pointing to her mouth and stomach; she also had a small child with her, and gestured pathetically to her indicating her desire for food. I pulled out two loaves and handed them to her. She hungrily took the loaves, giving one to her child. Both of them began eating right away and finished them right before my eyes. It was this beggar I will never forget the rest of my life. I gave her all the other loaves I had.

B. My Desire for a Neat Solution

The fact of the matter was, I was looking for a neat formula, an exegetical equation with some proof texts that would enable me to escape the weight of facing the inequities of this world. I knew in my heart that fully facing the physical suffering in the world would mean far greater suffering for me than if I could escape it like that air-conditioned ride through Mombasa. The wickedness and deviousness of my own heart has subtly sought that neat solution ever since, sad to say.

C. Christ Means to Challenge Us Constantly

I have come to the conclusion that the Lord Jesus Christ does not want us to feel at ease with the issue of human suffering. His example compels action, and it is a call that cannot be ignored without growing sick spiritually.

Jesus means to bring us to a point of desperation concerning the overwhelming physical needs of people all around us. Not ultimate desperation, but desperation in our usual system of confidence: self-reliance.

He continually challenged his disciples...

The Feeding of the Five Thousand shows how Jesus stands in our face and challenges us with this issue:

Matthew 14:15-16 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat."

In John's account, Jesus asked Philip, "**Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?**" Then the text tells us **Jesus only did it to test him**, for he himself knew what he was going to do. This word "test" is poignant. Jesus means to use this issue to probe our hearts and advance our sanctification. This is the test: will we face the huge, overwhelming need, look upward and trust God to work?

D.WE NEED HELP!!

- 1.From infancy, we have been fanatically committed to self
- 2.Augustine, in his classic *Confessions*, described the staggering level of selfishness of even an infant nursing at his mother's breast, howling with anger a moment earlier, demanding his food whether the mother was weary or hurting or not... utterly self-absorbed
- 3.And so we grow up in this same mode... fanatically committed to self; only Christ can break this fanatical commitment and enable us to fulfill the two great commandments

To love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength

To love our neighbor as ourselves

- 4.To this end, we are given the greatest possible example... Jesus Christ himself

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

5. But in scripture, he has given us many other examples of sacrificial giving to the poor and needy... and in the Old Testament, Job may be the greatest

E. Job's Pure, Faultless Religion

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Job 31 stands as Job's final defense against the slanderous accusations of his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

As you remember, Job is introduced to us as a very holy man:

Job 1:1 ... blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

God chose to allow Satan to assault Job... to steal from him his wealth, his ten children, and his health

Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to be with him

In the cycles of discussion that followed, their theology became crystal clear: it was because of his sins that Job was suffering

So, Job is asserting the blamelessness of his life in Job 31... and he does so AT LENGTH

We've already looked in overview fashion at the various elements of Job's holiness

Last week, we focused on Job's commitment to absolute sexual purity

Today, we will look at Job's costly commitment to a lifelong pattern of mercy ministry

This is a direct answer to Eliphaz's false accusation of him:

Job 22:5-10 Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? ⁶ 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. ¹⁰ That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you

Job's amazing piety in three realms of mercy ministry:

- 1) Fair treatment for his servants (verse 13)
- 2) Sacrificial care for the poor and the widow (vs. 16)
 - Bread for the hungry (vs. 17)
 - Guidance for the orphan and the widow (vs. 18)
 - Clothing for the shivering (vs. 19-20)
 - Housing for the stranger (vs. 31-32)
- 3) Justice for the needy in court (vs. 21)

We will walk through each of these, as well as Job's stated reason for these commitments

II. The Cost of Job's Care for the Needy

A. Job's Life of Service to the Needy was ENERGETIC and COSTLY

B. Basic Principle: Christ's Law is Harder, Better Than Confucius's

1. "Golden Rule"

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

2. Christ's statement implies a very energetic life of active service

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

If you think about it, that means ACTIVITY... energy... resources;

"Put as much energy into caring for the needs of your neighbor as you do into caring for your own needs"

“Be as diligent in alleviating the suffering of your neighbor as you would be in alleviating your own.”

So... Christ’s Golden Rule is harder than Confucius’s...

Confucius says “DON’T DO to anyone what you would NOT HAVE DONE to you...” Christ says “DO...”

Remember Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan? A man was beaten and left for dead alongside the road to Jericho; a priest came by, and saw him there, and travelled on the other side of the road and went on his way. He DID NOTHING to hurt the man further. So also a Levite came by, and saw him there, and travelled on the other side of the road as well, and he also went on his way. Again, he DID NOTHING to hurt the man further. Both of them fulfilled Confucius’s edict... but they failed miserably to fulfill Christ’s Golden Rule

C.Job Lived a Life of Active Service

- 1.It was COSTLY for him to care for the fatherless and the widow
- 2.It was COSTLY for him to feed the hungry and clothe the naked
- 3.It was COSTLY for him to house the stranger
- 4.This is the pattern Jesus commends to all his servants
- 5.The “Sheep and the Goats”

Matthew 25:35-36 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Matthew 25:40 whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25:45 whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

There's was the sin of the priest and the Levite... they DID NOT DO what they could have and should have for the poor

III. The Patterns of Job's Care for the Needy

[NOTE: the style of Job's speech is of an oath, like in a court of law; If I have done X, then let me be cursed!"]

Verse 16, 17, 19, 21 are four "Ifs" all part of one long sentence:

It concludes with: "then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint."]

So, we should take all the Ifs and the negative action connected with it, and turn it around... Job is asserting he did the opposite!

A. Fair treatment for his servants (verse 13)

Job 31:13 "If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me

1. Job ran a great household, in fact a great estate
2. He had tons of livestock and a huge number of servants
3. Job was zealous to treat his servants very well... humanely
4. If any of them had a grievance against him... they felt he had wronged them in some way, treated them in any way they didn't like or that hurt them in any way...
5. He could have crushed them for even mentioning anything they felt he did wrong
6. But instead he listened carefully to their case and made sure that his own wrongdoing was addressed
7. Job obviously wasn't claiming to be the perfect man; he knew that things happened in a vast estate like his that would hurt some of his servants; he was HUMBLE ENOUGH to listen to their grievances and make certain all was addressed

8. Modern-day application: some of you are employers or bosses, running a business; you are in charge of employees... do you treat them fairly, listen to their grievances... or do you lord it over them and make their work lives bitter?

B. Sacrificial care for the poor and the widow (vs. 16)

Job 31:16 "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary

Job now mentions his lifestyle of active care for the poor and widows in their community

He did not deny their desires... the basic commodities of food, clothing, and shelter... he saw that they got it; he didn't send them away empty-handed without their desire met

1. Bread for the hungry (vs. 17)

Job 31:17 if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless

John Calvin uses the image of us as a steward to convict us: Suppose a servant is put in charge of his master's goods, and the Master commands him to give a certain amount of food and money to one, and certain amount of food and money to another... but the servant refuses to dispense his master's goods, but holds on to all of them. And when one comes rightly and says "Pay me," that steward refuses, even though the absent master told him to pay it and to make sure all those needs were met. That master will return and be enraged at the actions of the steward, and because he made the Master look like a selfish MISER, unjustly withholding food and money when he should have paid it. So we Christians make God look bad when we hoard resources God has meant for us to distribute

We cannot make a certain rule how much to give to the poor:

Mark 14:7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.

God leaves it to us to be wise stewards, giving in proportion to our income; wisely learning the condition of the poor; expecting in many cases to get taken advantage of by unscrupulous poor people who will abuse the money we give and waste it

Job was lavishly generous with any poor person he knew

We tend to be very stingy, and then feel excessively proud of ourselves if we should help one out of one hundred of the poor people we encounter in a year

I know it's hard to get it right... and we'll never reach Job's level; but we need to take tangible steps toward greater and greater sacrificial giving to the poor

2.Guidance for the orphan and the widow (vs. 18)

Job 31:18 but from my youth I reared [the fatherless] as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow

Job devoted his whole life to caring for the life circumstances of the orphan and the widow

It literally says that the fatherless GREW UP with him... this implies adoption, active care... giving him an education and rearing as a father would a child

This is the level of Job's piety... very costly; it is hugely inconvenient to open your home and your lifestyle up to an outsider; but to be a father to the fatherless involves a lot more than giving money; it means pouring wisdom into the young man, seeing him grow up

And for the widow, again, it was not merely money, but it was GUIDANCE; she was stripped of her protection in that she had no husband; Job gave her business advice, legal protection in court, planning for the future... GUIDANCE

This is a whole life investment... Job "spent himself on behalf of the poor and needy" ... it takes TIME and EMOTION... HEART

3. Clothing for the shivering (vs. 19-20)

Job 31:19-20 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

Job took his massive resources (remember he had 7000 sheep) and he used a large portion of the wool to clothe the naked he knew

He rescued them from perishing in the cold

He SAW them... this is a key moment... to LOOK AT THEM with compassionate eyes

Often in mercy ministry, we stay away from certain places in town and our lives stay in that bubble and we never have cause to LOOK on someone shivering in the cold

Job saw them and cared for them

4. Housing for the stranger (vs. 31-32)

Job 31:31-32 if the men of my household have never said, 'Who has not had his fill of Job's meat?'-- ³² but no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler

Back then, there were not the hotels and inns that we have today... so hospitality for the stranger in town had to come from a kindly, hospitable homeowner... Job was that man

As Jesus said, "I was a stranger, and you invited me in!"

C. Justice in Court (vs. 21)

Job 31:21-22 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.

It's very easy for the poor and the widow to get dominated in court

It's very easy for the powerful men in the community to corrupt the legal system to their profit and advantage

Jesus said the teachers of the law of his day “devoured widow’s houses” ... using their power to crush and take economic advantage of a widow who has no protection

A truly godly man will come to the aid of widows in a court of law:

Isaiah 1:17 Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

IV. The Reasons for Job’s Care for the Needy

A. God-Centered Piety

1. From the beginning we are told of Job that he “feared God and shunned evil”
2. We see this God-centered piety in Job again and again
3. He fears what God will do if he fails to care for his servants properly, or for the poor, the widow, or the orphan
4. He is always thinking about God... how will God see this? What will God do?

B. Job’s Future Accountability to God (vs. 14)

1. For example, his reason for making certain he didn’t deny justice to his own servants is that he himself will have to give an account to his own master
2. He know that while he is the master, he is also a slave himself... accountable to God

Job 31:13-14 "If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, ¹⁴ what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?"

C. God Made Us Both (vs. 15)

Job 31:15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

John Calvin said whenever you are looking at another person, created in the image of God, you are looking in a mirror

There is no significant difference between you

So this is the foundation of all our ethical treatment of others... this person is a human being, created in the image of Almighty God, and fashioned in the womb by his hands **JUST LIKE YOU!**

D. Fear of God's Judgments (vs. 23)

Job 31:23 For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

Job knew that God will be highly motivated to judge all who oppress the poor and needy...

Proverbs 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

E. Bringing Delight to Others (vs. 20)

Job 31:19-20 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

There is a deep satisfaction to meeting needs... the whispered thanks, the look of contentment and relief that comes on a person whose needs have been met

NOW we know that poor people do not always show appreciation... some act as though they're entitled; they might be downright belligerent. But their stomachs are full, their bodies are warm, and **GOD SEES WHAT YOU HAVE DONE!**

V. Applications

A. Job is an Amazing Example of Mercy Ministry... Let's Follow Him

1. As I've said, we are not likely to reach his level
2. But let's take specific steps

3. Husbands and wives... get together and discuss what changes you could make in your lifestyle and your budgets so you can begin giving sacrificially to the poor

4. As a church, we are strategically located in the city of Durham to find ways to bless marginalized people

B. Prioritize the Soul over the Body... but remember Christ cared for BOTH

1. Jesus met felt needs to point to true spiritual needs

John 6:27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

TGC Conference on mercy ministry: "We care about all suffering, but especially eternal suffering." What good would it be to give all earthly benefits to people who will lose their souls on judgment day?

C. Get Out of the Bubble!

1. God did not ordain for us to ride comfortably in an air-conditioned van ride to heaven, surrounded by suffering people

2. Find ways to interact, to get to know needy people

D. Christ's Ultimate Generosity Enriches Us

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Christ was infinitely wealthy in heaven

He was willing to leave a comfortable place, where he was worshiped and adored and perfectly happy to enter our world of sin and suffering and death. He did it so that we could be rescued from this world and brought to heaven

Trust in him! Thank God that we will be saved in the end not by our track record of care for the poor and needy, but by faith in Christ's death for the poor and needy