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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Timeless Lessons from the Book of Job

Job 1-42

It is time for us to bring this study to a conclusion. What lessons can we draw from this incredible Book of Job that will help us?

Every book in the Bible has its place, its mission from the Holy Spirit for the people of God.

Recently I was meditating on a single verse in the Gospel of Mark, Mark 15:38

The context is powerful... Christ has just died, and the Roman centurion is about to make an astonishing proclamation about the identity of Jesus Christ:

Mark 15:37, 39 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last....³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Right in the middle of these two statements, we have this one historical fact:

Mark 15:38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

It occurred to me that the Holy Spirit, inspiring Mark to write his gospel, moved him to record the simple fact of the curtain in the temple being torn in two, and the additional detail that it was torn in two *from top to bottom*. But what struck me was that the Holy Spirit did not inspire Mark to add a single explanation. Not one. Not one word about what that curtain in the temple was for, what significance there was to it being torn open. I have heard that the Gospel of Mark is the basic gospel

introducing to the Gentile world, the Roman world, the person and work of Christ. So if you were a Roman citizen and got a hold of this document, you might have no idea what this curtain was for, and what it was IMMENSELY SIGNIFICANT that it was torn in two FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.

You would be in the dark. But the Holy Spirit is very wise... he left to the author of the Book of Hebrews the task of explaining it... the curtain in the temple separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. And the Most Holy Place was the place where God himself symbolically dwelled in a glory cloud above the Ark of the Covenant. And the curtain was a barrier, keeping sinful human beings OUT of God's holy presence. The one exception was the Day of Atonement, once a year. And only the High Priest, a descendent of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, from the Jewish nation could enter... once a year, with the blood of the atoning sacrifice. Jesus by dying on the cross has changed all that forever. By his death on the cross, God himself has torn the curtain and thrown it open for all sinners to come near THROUGH CHRIST'S ATONING WORK:

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

My point here is that the Holy Spirit didn't assign to Mark, the gospel-writer, the task of explaining all that. He knew that that explanation would be made later by the author to the Book of Hebrews. Every one of the sixty-six books of the Bible has its task... its assigned task. It is limited, bounded by the Holy Spirit to achieve that task.

So... let's apply that now to the Book of Job. What is its purpose? What is its assigned task? Obviously, there is not just one purpose, because it is a long book with many verses and many

concepts. But I would say plainly the Book of Job was given to us by God the Holy Spirit to help God's people with the problem of SUFFERING... of PAIN... even the problem of EVIL in a world governed by a wise, loving, all-powerful God.

Simply put, the Book of Job was given to us to help us SUFFER WELL.

What does it mean to "suffer well?" I believe it means to let God bring suffering in you life without you accusing him of wrongdoing, without you cursing God and being estranged from God. That's putting it negatively. More positively, I believe this one verse from Job sums it all up very well:

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him

Or, "Even though God brings suffering in my life, I will use that suffering to learn from God and draw close to God and be strengthened in my faith in God... and yes, I will be filled with HOPE in God even while I am suffering."

Hope = a strong sense in the heart that the future is bright based on the promises of God!

So, the Book of Job will help you to get the most out of your suffering... to not waste your cancer (As John Piper puts it in his booklet, *Don't Waste Your Cancer*)... or to not waste your unemployment, or to not waste your experience of aging, or even the sorrow of burying a loved one – even a child. That you will not WASTE your suffering through unbelief, through accusing God of wrongdoing, through rebellion, through sin.

Along with that, we see that the Book of Job was given to the canon, to the Bible, in the Old Testament era... it is VERY OLD. Some people say it was the first Bible book ever written. I don't have any idea how anyone can know that. It strikes me as a presumptuous argument from silence: because it doesn't mention Abraham or Moses or any other Jewish theme it must have preceded it. We don't know that. But one thing we do know... it definitely preceded the coming of the Savior of the

World, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the wisdom this book gives on suffering is limited... it is like a SHADOW compared to the FULL LIGHT OF GLORY in Christ.

As we saw, Old Testament saints had a very limited and defective view of death, the grave, and anything beyond it. There is, it seems to me, almost NO clear teaching on hell as eternal conscious torment after death in the Old Testament... that teaching was brought into the world by Jesus Christ himself. And in the same way, even a great man like Job seemed to have a very defective view of death and the grave... not much of a view of eternal life in heaven, or of the bodily resurrection from the dead Christ promised for all who believe in him.

So, as we've said many times, "Job was a better man than any of us will ever be, but we have a better hope than Job ever had." Christ is that hope! Christ's triumphant resurrection from the dead means that death has been swallowed up in victory!! So we can and should hope much better than Job did. We drink in his words and live BY CONTRAST... we hope to IMITATE him in his godliness, but to greatly SURPASS HIM in his hope. Not because we are better people... we AREN'T. But because we live beyond Christ's cross and empty tomb. We have Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul's epistles, John's epistles, Peter's epistles. We know FAR MORE than Job ever did. AND we have the amazing Book of Revelation... we realize how totally death will be swallowed up in victory for God's redeemed people... how totally we are going to triumph over Satan and all his attacks and put our feet on his neck! How radiantly gloriously we will shine!

So... let's summarize all this in ten timeless lessons from the Book of Job

1. Suffering will most certainly come, but don't live in fear.

A. Have a proper view of life under the curse

Job 5:7 Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

Job 14:1-2 "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. ² He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure.

Sometimes it seems like we are surprised when trials come... as though we expect a trouble-free existence. And we forget that we are descendants of Adam, and that in Adam we all sinned, and in Adam we all die. Because of Adam's sin, God cursed the ground to produce thorns and thistles for our labors. So let us not be surprised when trials and afflictions come.

B. YET... Do Not Dread Them Before They Come!

Job 3:25 What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.

God does not want us to live in constant fear of the three categories of loss that Job experienced: loss of our wealth, loss of our loved ones, loss of our health.

We see the final purpose of God in Job's life as all blessings were fully restored to him in the end. And we know that our true blessedness is our citizenship in heaven, not on earth.

It has been sad to see so many people living in constant fear of the COVID virus. I wonder if they will ever get beyond it. But we know that fear and faith are usually opposites in the Bible. Faith drives out fear:

Mark 5:36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

Matthew 8:26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

2. Love your earthly blessings, but hold them loosely.

- A. We stand in amazement at how quickly all of Job's earthly blessing were taken from him... in a single day, he lost all his wealth and his ten children. Then, in phase two, he lost his health in a single day.
- B. Earthly blessings are a delight... we should not refuse to partake for fear they will be taken from us

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

1 Timothy 6:17 God... richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment

- C. But the Book of Job teaches us to hold them loosely... they belong to God and God has the right to do whatever he wants with them
 - 1. "Our" children are not really ours... they belong to God, for he knit them together in their mother's womb

Job 10:9-12 Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? ¹⁰ Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, ¹¹ clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? ¹² You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.

- 2. Much of the trouble comes from us thinking our money and our homes and our clothes and our bodies and our children are really... OURS. We forget we are stewards of things that belong to the Creator

- D. We are vulnerable in this present age...

Proverbs 23:5 Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

- E. James tells us how to live

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

3. Understand Satan's relentless hatred and the hedge of protection.

A. The Book of Job clearly reveals the hidden activities of Satan...

Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

B. His accusations of Job prompted the test that God allowed

Job 1:11 stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

C. His direct involvement in Job's sickness implied he was just as involved in all the earlier assaults on Job's wealth and family

Job 2:7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

D. Satan is a roaring lion, prowling around, seeking someone to devour

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy

E. Much of the sorrow and misery we experience in this life is almost certainly delivered to us by Satan and his demons, though their activities are hidden from our sight

1. It is quite possible that Behemoth and Leviathan, those terrible beasts God describes in Job 40-41 represent demons and Satan
2. It makes sense, because Satan was so instrumental in the beginning of the assault on Job, and Leviathan in Isaiah 27 clearly represents Satan
3. We need to be aware that we have a relentless enemy prowling us like a lion... Satan wants to trick us into thinking God is the prowling lion, and he had Job tricked for a little while in that regard

Job 10:16 If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me.

The ravenous beast is Satan, not God.

F. BUT the teaching of the “hedge of protection” is vital for us

1. Satan is frustrated in his efforts to get at Job and all he has
2. God WON'T LET HIM!

Job 1:10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

3. The image of God controlling Behemoth and Leviathan on a leash or a cage is comforting

Job 41:5 Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?

Job 41:10-11 No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me? ¹¹ Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.

G. Central to this is this promise:

1 Corinthians 10:13 God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

4. When suffering comes, respond like Job did.

A. At the end of the book, God commended Job saying “He spoke of me what is right.” Most likely, this is what he meant:

Job 1:21-22 "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

1. So... imitate Job! Do not charge God with wrongdoing!
2. Do not charge God with INJUSTICE!

3. Speak words of praise! Sing to him... weep before him, yes. Pour out your pain to him. But do not sin against him in what you say

B. Part 2:

Job 2:10 Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

1. What a mature view of life!
2. God is wisely bringing into our lives both blessings and trials
3. He is the one that mixes the ratio... how much of the one, how much of the other.
4. Can you TRUST God to bring the right amount into your life? Can you also respond like Job did?

5. Expect God to use the suffering to probe you, expose you, convict you.

- A. The trial went on MUCH LONGER than Job wanted
- B. That's why he began to decay in his piety... to say harsh things about God
- C. Expect the trial to keep going... God is probing the depths of your being, the innerworkings of your heart, to expose deep-seated sin

Job 7:17-20 "What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, ¹⁸ that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? ¹⁹ Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? ²⁰ If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target?

- D. Job was probed to the deepest level of his being... and in the end, he repented of his sins of harsh attitudes toward God

Job 40:4-5 "I am unworthy-- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. ⁵ I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more."

Job 42:1-6 Then Job replied to the LORD: ² "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ³ You asked, 'Who is this

that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴ "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' ⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶ Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

- E. Understand that the trials are meant to sanctify us, including warning us from future sin and causing us to discover within our hearts hidden levels of unbelief and rebellion

6. Develop a deep, powerful sense of the overwhelming majesty of God.

- A. Perhaps no book in the Bible gives a greater sense of the infinite, unsearchable majesty and glory of God
- B. One verse in particular

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

- C. God's speech in a whirlwind revealed this sense of the infinite person of God... the terror of him overwhelmed Job

*Job 38:1-11 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind. He said:
² "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- ⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? ⁸ "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, ⁹ when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, ¹¹ when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"*

- D. The more we develop this deep sense of the holiness of God, the infinite glory and majesty of God... what causes the seraphim in Isaiah 6 to cover their faces and their feet and to cry continually *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty... the whole earth is full of*

his glory!” The more we see that by faith, the better we will be prepared to live well, to prosper well, and yes, to suffer well

7. **Don’t ever question God’s love, justice, or wisdom.**

- A. Satan predicted that he could make Job “curse God” to his face
- B. Job’s wife was Satan’s mouthpiece, when she said “Curse God and die.”
- C. As the trial wore on, Job’s negative attitudes toward God became more and more pronounced, more and more shocking

Job 9:17-18 He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason. ¹⁸ He would not let me regain my breath but would overwhelm me with misery.

Job 9:23 When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent.

As though God is some unjust vicious tyrant.

- D. This is the essence of suffering poorly! We are talking about “suffering well”... suffering well is to NEVER QUESTION GOD or his nature or his choices or his purposes. Never. It’s never ok.
- E. Furthermore, it is not therapeutic... such impious disrespectful “venting” toward God does not help you at all.

8. **Do not expect here on earth full explanations of your suffering.**

- A. Even when God spoke to Job directly in the whirlwind, he never explained anything about his own condition, or the reasons why
- B. Job is yearning to know “Why??!!”

Job 7:20 If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target?

- C. But God never tells him anything! God does not let him know about his boasts to Satan, or Satan’s accusations, or any of God’s larger reasons
- D. We the readers know more than Job did at that time

E. Fundamentally, God makes it plain that he does not owe any of us any explanation for anything he does ever

Job 41:11 Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.

F. But that is not the final word concerning God's reasons for our suffering... more in a moment

9. Know that in Christ, you have a perfect Mediator and Redeemer.

A. All roads lead eventually to Christ

B. Again and again, Job yearns for a mediatory and a redeemer... we know very well that Christ is that mediator

Job 9:33-34 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, ³⁴ someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

C. Because Christ has come, and his life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven have been perfectly recorded for us, as well as the doctrine of his salvation... in the pages of the New Testament, we have a much clearer sense of Christ as our Mediator, Redeemer, and Savior through all of our sufferings

D. He is "God with us", walking with us through every trial

Isaiah 43:1-2 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

E. Furthermore, since Christ has risen from the dead, we know that this world is not all there is... resurrection and eternity in heaven free from all death, mourning, crying, and pain is the answer to all our deeper questions

F. That is why I say that Job was a better man than any of us will ever be, but we have a better hope than he had

G. For Job, the grave was a place of deep darkness and hopelessness

Job 17:13-16 If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, ¹⁴ if I say to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother' or 'My sister,' ¹⁵ where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? ¹⁶ Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?"

H. For us, the grave is a place of hope... a transfer portal to a world filled with joy

1 Corinthians 15:55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Philippians 1:21 For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:23 I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far

10. Know that in heaven, God will perfectly restore, vindicate, bless, and educate you.

- A. Job died old and full of years... but we know from the New Testament that that was not the end of his story
- B. In heaven, God has been completing Job's education in his own glory
- C. Job's true wealth is in heaven; his redeemed children can never be taken from him; there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain
- D. Job is perfectly vindicated before all the redeemed as a hero of the faith... and in radiant glory he will shine for all eternity
- E. So it will be with us... our true vindication will be our own resurrection in glorious bodies; our eternal blessing will be in the New Heaven and New Earth
- F. And for all eternity, God will reveal all of his wisdom and purposes to us in our sufferings

William Cowper, an eighteenth-century English hymnwriter, battled depression for most of his life. His most famous hymn is known by its first line... "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill;
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

Look carefully at the last stanza: "God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain." God will interpret his own works, however peculiar and mysterious they seem to us when we experience them. And he will make plain each detail and what it accomplished in his overall perfect plan. But *when* will he do that? Certainly not here on earth. God did not tell Job about the challenge issued by Satan, nor why all ten of his children died. We know more of those details now than Job did then. But we cannot possibly believe we know more now than Job knows in heaven or what we will know for all eternity when God gives his full interpretation for all the elect. "He will make it plain."

In heaven, I believe God will explain all his purposes for our sufferings.

In 1873, the ship *Ville du Havre* collided with another ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, broke in two, and sank within twelve minutes. Aboard were Anna Spafford and her four young daughters. Anna was rescued, but all four of her daughters died. She wired her husband, Horatio, "Saved alone." Anna said, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. *Someday, I will understand why.*" As her husband was sailing to reunite with her, he passed over the watery grave of their daughters. He began writing the words to the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul" there.

"Someday I'll understand why"

God has a reason for everything he does.

God delights to explain himself to his children:

Genesis 18:17 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

So while we cannot fully understand in this world why God lets us suffer, or doesn't heal us, or doesn't protect our children from accidents, or doesn't give us the desires of our hearts, in heaven we will eventually know all things.

Final word: COME TO CHRIST!

Job 9:33-34 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, ³⁴ someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men-- the testimony given in its proper time.