

The Cloud of Witnesses

Job

Lesson 1: Job – His Character

Reading

Job 1:1-10.

His Character

How often have I heard the – sometimes unspoken – cry: *What is the point of trying to be good and kind when the bad people seem to ‘get away with murder’?* Or

There is no justice for the victims and all our graciousness is thrown back in our faces. Why bother any more? Why not just act like everyone else, and become self-centred and selfish?

I’ve even seen it put this way – how can we, His creation, bless God? We who are fundamentally human and with a bias towards doing evil things – how would it be possible for God to benefit in any way by the way we live?

That’s a very subtle question, isn’t it? It assumes that God is totally righteous and therefore incapable of having a relationship with us. It follows down the track that Christianity is like all other religions – man in pursuit of God and trying to attain a standard that is acceptable to Him. Unfortunately or thankfully, that is erroneous.

Christianity is totally unique. It is the evidence of a loving Heavenly Father in pursuit of His children. God longing to have a loving ongoing relationship with the people He created. He doesn’t expect us to be perfect before we can have a friendship with Him. He knows that is impossible. But He comes to us – He seeks us out so we can have a friendship with Him on the basis that He has made a way possible.

Knowing we couldn’t reach Him or His standard of perfection, God sent His Son to die in our place and to raise us up above His standard. When we accept Christ’s death for us, God sees us as perfect already. We don’t have to try and be perfect – we rest in the perfection He gives us.

Just as God did not go to the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and say – *Obey these 10 Commandments and I’ll let you out of Egypt* – No, He got them out of Egypt and then gave them the 10 promises for a life of blessing if they followed them, so today He doesn’t come to us and say, *“Be good and follow these rules and I’ll let you into Heaven.”* He comes to us and says, *“Here is My Son, put your trust in Him and the promises I gave in the past will become promises for you so you can live life to the full.”*

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Lesson 1 continued: Job – His Character

Can a person bless God? Oh yes! As we allow the Holy Spirit to live through us and change us to become more like Jesus – so God looks at us and is thrilled to see one more person like His Son – who is His total delight.

The way may be hard and frustrating but we are not supposed to compare ourselves with this world and its systems, but rather keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the goal and the prize!

Job would say to us today...

Being a person of integrity is worth it. It's a healthier lifestyle. It's a simpler lifestyle – truth remains truth – you don't have to try and remember it. It brings more peace and joy. They are priceless benefits. Lastly, it brings joy to our Father's heart as He gets another glimpse of Jesus.

Prayer

Father. Please help me remember that You delight in those whose ways are upright. Help me maintain my integrity even when it would be easier to let it drop. For Your glory I ask it. Amen.

Additional readings

Psalm 41; Philippians 2:1-11; 2 Timothy 4:1-8.

Questions

What are the character traits you would like to be known for?

What are the benefits we get through maintaining our integrity?

How are you bringing joy to God's heart as you live your life today?

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Lesson 2: Job – Found Bad Things Happen To Good People

Reading

Job 1:11-22.

Found Bad Things Happen To Good People

How Satan was able to enter God's presence here, let alone hold a discussion with God is beyond me. However, it is recorded for us so we must accept it.

What I want to focus on is Job's response to utter devastation.

Just put yourself in his shoes for a moment. You have lived a blameless life (this wasn't Job's assessment; it was God's); you have brought up your children the best you know how and taught them to honour their parents and God. However, you guess that 'boys will be boys and girls, girls' so it was just possible that amongst their celebrations they may have over-stepped the mark. You take it upon yourself to clear their name before the God you honour and serve.

Life is successful, rewarding and enjoyable. In fact, it probably couldn't have got much better, when suddenly things happen which are worst than your most devastating nightmare. In fact, if you had applied all your creative destructive thinking, you would not have been able to come up with the half of it. The full force of the enemy is let loose on you.

First of all, the surviving servant looking after Job's oxen and donkeys arrived to announce that the Sabeans had attacked and killed his fellow servants and ridden off with all the animals.

He had hardly finished his report when another sole survivor revealed his tale of woe. All the sheep and his fellow workers had been destroyed by lightning.

Even as he was finishing his tragic story, another man burst into the conversation to add that the Chaldeans had come in three raiding parties, driven off all the camels and killed the keepers.

Lastly, as he was nearing the end of his outburst, another servant arrived and began delivering the most painful blow of all.

Yes, it was hard enough for Job to have to listen to the news of the destruction of his wealth and business, his present and future, but then he had to hear the last heart-rending account. All of his sons and daughters were killed when the building they were sheltering and celebrating in collapsed on them. Not one escaped.

All Job had left were his wife and the four messengers of doom. How would you feel? Really, stop and think for a moment – how does one deal with tragedy of that magnitude? I guess most of us

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Lesson 2 continued: Job – Found Bad Things Happen To Good People

have had to experience things we would prefer not to, but have any of us experienced anything that extreme? Very few of us, I would suggest.

He was devastated. He reacted, as anyone would expect. He expressed utter grief.

Yet, through it all, he held firm to his trust in God. A good God. One He may not understand but One who knew what was going on, and One who cared, despite all that Job had to endure. Job never accused God for the evil that happened to him – on the contrary, he praised God for being there for him.

I shall never forget when our baby died of cot death at 10 weeks old, my wife and I sat on our bed and cried our eyes out. Yet through the grief, misery and devastation, we were able to thank the Lord that at least we could turn to Him for help and comfort at such an awful moment.

Job would say to us today...

God is not interested in your happiness. He wants to give you joy in the midst of pain, and peace in the midst of turmoil. God is much more interested in our character than our convenience and circumstances. You need to learn to trust God in every situation and know He knows what He is doing in your life.

Prayer

Father, please help me remember that this life is not all there is – I am destined for eternity. Help me learn to trust You through all the hard times and never forget that through it all You are there, and You are good. Amen.

Additional readings

Genesis 37:17-35; Habakkuk 3:1-19; Romans 8:28-39.

Questions

Why do we think the Christian life should be easy?

Why is God not interested in our happiness?

How do you react when things go wrong in your life?

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Lesson 3: Job – Knew What His Values Were

Reading

Job 2:1-10.

Knew What His Values Were

Hopefully, upon reading this passage, you realise, if never before, that Satan is evil personified. His one aim is to destroy the Kingdom of God through the destruction of the followers of God. However, he is not all-powerful, and we should never forget that.

Having robbed Job of his possessions and family, Satan, still not satisfied, turned his wrath against Job's person – his physical body. How evil Satan is, isn't he? Please never underestimate his intentions. Satan is not trying to play games with us – he intends to destroy us – that is why we should avoid all forms of satanic influence, occult writing, occult practices and all forms of deception.

Satan is not to be 'humoured'; he is to be avoided and exposed for who he is – the Arch-enemy of the human race. Those who underestimate him will pay severely. Those who ignorantly or unintentionally open themselves up to his influence always pay dearly and live to regret it in the long term.

Job hadn't opened himself up to Satan – he was viciously attacked for nothing more than jealousy. Job was worshipping God rather than Satan. Satan hates anyone who worships God through their lifestyle and does all he can to destroy it. He wanted to prove that Job only worshipped God for what he could get out of God. What Job proved was that he worshipped God for who He was.

That's the problem for most of us too. We have reduced God to little more than the genie of the lamp or a glorified Father Christmas. As long as God 'delivers' we will 'follow' Him, but as soon as life becomes challenging, I want out and start blaming God for all that has gone wrong. But God is not there to hand out lollies all the time or rush at my beck and call. He has an Eternal Kingdom to run.

So life will deal us heavy blows from time to time. Some are of our own making – through the poor or unwise choices we make. Some from events that are totally outside of our control. Some from the poor or unwise choices of others. Some even from uncontrollable 'natural' causes and some from the mere frailty of human flesh.

The question is how will you respond when the storms of life arrive – as they surely will? Leaders fall, not because they get caught off guard, but because they failed to establish the correct integrity choices. We live the life we choose.

We are at risk as soon as we make a choice, which is in conflict with our chosen values. However,

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Lesson 3 continued: Job – Knew What His Values Were

there is a far greater risk of failure when we fail to establish our own set of values. That's where most people fall. It doesn't matter whether that is in business, in politics, in sport or in leisure activities – the consequences are tragic.

The greatest area of potential devastation is in the moral challenges we face. In truthfulness, in social interaction and in relationships. Sooner or later, you will find yourself in a compromising position – how you respond to it will reveal whether or not you have already established your immovable values and principles.

Job would say to us today...

Choose your values and live by them before the storms of life beat against you or your shallow foundations will be exposed. Take time out now to write yours down.

Prayer

Father, please help me be a person of integrity like Job. Keep revealing to me Your eternal values so I may walk confidently into the future, knowing I will make wise choices. Amen.

Additional readings

Deuteronomy 6:1-19; Daniel 3:1-30; Matthew 7:15-27; Proverbs 30:7-9.

Questions

What are your values regarding time and money?

What are your values regarding relationships?

How can we avoid making poor choices in life?

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Lesson 4: Job – Was Surrounded By Friends

Reading

Job 2:11-13.

Was Surrounded By Friends

I may struggle with some of the issues addressed in the Book of Job, yet I am so glad to find Job was an authentic human being. Yes, there are attributes in his character and attitudes about life that really challenge me with my somewhat comparatively shallow faith; yet through it all, we see a real man. Someone who hurts as we hurt. Who struggles with the same big questions of life that we struggle with.

Job opened up his personal space to allow his friends to enter into his grief. He didn't shut the door on them and run away and hide. He didn't piously respond to their approach, and tell them that everything was fine and God had it all under control. He didn't hide his grief and frustrations. He didn't escape into a position of denial. He let it all 'hang out'. He allowed himself to become totally vulnerable.

Even though he experienced the deepest of all sorrows and exhaustive pain and suffering, he acknowledged his need for human companionship. In doing so, he reveals to us the fact that we are created for relationship. We have been created, first of all, to have a relationship with God.

Secondly, we have been created to have relationships with other humans. God created Eve because He noticed Adam was lonely. The intimate relationship experienced between a husband and wife is extremely precious and wonderful. However, there is another level of relationship we can all thoroughly enjoy and that is the fellowship we have with close friends.

Grief is an interesting emotion, isn't it? It is intensely personal – no one else really knows how we feel, no matter how hard they try. Then there is that internal conflict – I desperately want to be on my own to process my grief and yet I so desperately need someone else there to support me through it. I long to know someone else cares. I don't want to be smothered but I dread being alone.

I find it interesting that when Job's friends first arrived, they truly were great friends to have around. It wasn't until they opened their mouths that the trouble started.

Yes, they came and took one look at Job and sensed something of the enormity of his desolation. Not only was he grieving but, on top of that, he was suffering agony from the sores covering his whole body. He looked a mess and was in a mess. The sight must have been horrific. I probably would have run a mile and left a message saying I would be praying for him and for him to let me know when the prayer was answered.

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Lesson 4 continued: Job – Was Surrounded By Friends

His friends were more caring than that. They assumed the most sympathetic and contrite attitude, and did you notice they sat on the ground with him for 7 days without saying a word? That is sympathy. That is empathy. That is true friendship. That was over and above the 'call of duty'. These guys were proving that they were there for him 'over the long haul'. Please don't write them off completely – they tried their best, and I'm sure for those first 7 days, Job saw them as a gift from God.

Job would say to us today...

We all need friends at our time of deepest hurt. Don't close yourself off at times of stress and deepest hurt. And if you want to be a real friend – be a good friend, sit quietly and let the bereaved person speak first.

Prayer

Father, please help me to mourn with those who mourn and grieve with those who grieve. And please protect me from refusing friendship, love and care when I go through the hard times. Amen.

Additional readings

Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 12:9-21.

Questions

Who are your real friends?

To whom are you a real friend?

Who (human) would you call at the time of your deepest need?

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Lesson 5: Job – Came To Realise That God Was Bigger Than Him

Reading

Job: 40:1-14 & 42:1-6.

Came To Realise That God Was Bigger Than Him

This is probably one of the most significant questions we need to be able to find an answer to: How big is your God?

As you can see, we haven't gone through the whole book of Job, nor have we taken time to look at the individual discourses by Job and his friends; time and space do not permit us. However, I want us to consider something that all of those men had to face. The question was – is God bigger than your theology?

I have found that for most of the people I have spoken to their concept of God is governed by one of two major issues. Their experience of God or their theology of God. In other words, they 'understand' God through either their experiences of God or who they think He is.

As far as they are concerned, from the subjective evaluation of their circumstances, God has been 'good' to them; been 'hard' on them; 'neutral'; 'bad/unkind' or even 'absent'.

As they consider God from the reference point of the 'information' they have, their view of God is coloured by what they have gleaned from the media, from their friends, from the members of their family, from teachers, from the 'church', from other Christians or from the Bible.

In one sense, Job and his friends were coming from the same starting point. They started from the point that God is righteous and man unrighteous God wants man to be righteous so He has given him rules and regulations to achieve that.

- God punishes wrong, so if we suffer punishment – illness, accident or harm – it is because we have done something wrong.
- It is impossible to please God because we can't do anything good, and even if we could, He wouldn't notice it, as it would be just what He would expect anyway.
- You can't argue with God, and any frustration at God is sinful.
- Just 'grin and bear' whatever life brings along because God is righteous and can do what He likes. However, as He is righteous, whatever He does must be in retribution for wrongdoing.

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Lesson 5 continued: Job – Came To Realise That God Was Bigger Than Him

As you read their arguments, a lot of what they say is true. The only problem is with their reasoned corollary.

I love what we read in Job and I want to highlight just two things:

1. Job found that he could 'let rip at God' and survive.

I am so grateful that we are 'allowed' to ask God the question – "Why?" I'm confident that all of us will sooner or later experience something in our lives, which will cause us to cry out with all our beings: "Why?" "Why God?" "Why did You allow that to happen to me?" "Why now?" "Why him/her?" "Why not me?" "Why this/that?"

Did you notice Jesus did on the Cross? I'm so glad He did. It gives me permission to do so as well. However, did you also notice He didn't get an answer? Neither did I. But it isn't a sin to ask.

2. God gave Job a glimpse of His majesty and power.

Wow, did you read what God said? One of the most fascinating descriptions of 'creation' I've ever read – and by the Creator, too. When we read it again, we begin to understand why Job repented and went very quiet.

God is not an aloof Judge, or impersonal benign Being. He is Our Loving Heavenly Father, and He longs for us to love Him in return. We get a glimpse of Him in creation. We get a better picture of Him in Jesus – Jesus opens our eyes and opens the way for us to have that sort of relationship with God. Have you got it?

Job would say to us today...

Your god is too small. Whatever your god is – it is insignificant. Whoever you perceive God to be – your perception is too small. God, our Heavenly Father, is both the Creator and the Sustainer of the whole vast Cosmos. When you finally reach that humble conclusion, you have started the journey to life eternal and an awesome relationship with Him.

Prayer

Father, You are truly awesome and yet You want to be my Heavenly Father. Thank You Jesus for opening up the way. Help me develop my relationship with You and remind me that it's O.K. to say "Why?" when I don't understand what You are up to. Amen.

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Lesson 5 continued: Job – Came To Realise That God Was Bigger Than Him

Additional readings

Colossians 1:9-23; Psalm 2: Psalm 24; Revelation 1:10-18.

Questions

Why is our concept of God so important?

What is your concept of God?

How does Jesus help us get a 'handle' on what God is really like?

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Lesson 6: Job – Found The Best Is Yet To Come

Reading

Job 42:7-17.

Found The Best Is Yet To Come

God always honours a person of integrity and we know, don't we, that honesty usually rises to the surface in the end? No matter the slander, the misrepresentation or the out and out lies told about us, sooner or later the truth will be exposed and we will be exonerated.

Yes, it's painful while we wait, and we are often tempted to take things into our own hands – but that rarely works for the best – it is far better to leave it to God.

Joseph left everything to God and became the Prime Minister of Egypt. Jesus left everything to God and once He had paid the ransom for us, God exalted Him to the highest place, and gave Him the Name above every name – so that eventually every knee will bow before Him and confess Him as Lord.

Satan may have accused Job before God – incidentally, that is what Satan means: 'Accuser' – that's what he does and who he is – but God knows the truth.

God knows you. He sees right into your heart and He knows those who are His. We can trust Him in every situation and we can trust Him with the future. We can trust Him to bring about the final result He has chosen for maximum impact, and remember, it is not necessarily for our convenience but for His glory.

I am sure Job was totally satisfied with his new found relationship with God. Nothing else mattered. He sought neither fame nor fortune. But God proved once more that He was both merciful and gracious. He let Job live. He let him be a priest on behalf of his friends, and He allowed Job to keep them as friends. And God restored to Job more than he had before.

Indeed, Job ended up with double his original possessions, and God even gave him the same number of children again. Plus his daughters were the most strikingly beautiful in all the land. Job went on to reach the grand old age of 140 years.

What have we learnt from this brief look at the Book of Job? God is a good God. Satan is the accuser bent on destroying the people of God. We serve God in integrity, not for what we can get out of it – although it is the best way to live – but primarily as it pleases God.

We need to fix our values now, so when the storms of life hit us we will react in the correct and healthy way. We must never forget that bad things happen to good people and so it's wise to build up a circle of friends with whom we can be transparent and vulnerable.

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Lesson 6 continued: Job – Found The Best Is Yet To Come

We need to let our view of God grow because He is always bigger than our extreme exaggerations. Finally, never forget – the best is yet to come, so hang in there, like Job, and wait for God's amazing ending.

No matter what you are facing today – surrender it to God and let Him take over. His way is best and His timing is perfect. His conclusion – out of this world!

Job would say to us today...

When the going gets tough, it's time to cast all your anxiety on God and wait patiently for Him. He didn't let me down. My relationship with God grew beyond belief as I came through the most desperate time of all.

Prayer

Father, it's hard living without seeing the end of the tunnel. Thank you that You have written the final chapter for each of our lives. Help us trust You, knowing that the ending is beyond our wildest dreams. Amen.

Additional readings

Hebrews 12:1-13; James 1:2-8; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 5:6-11.

Questions

What are you going through right now that you need to release to God?

Why is it so hard to trust God in the hard times?

What has God done for you in the past that enables you to trust Him for the future?