

Chapter 12 Job 1-42

The Gospel According to Job

"I will teach you about the power of God; the ways of the Almighty I will not conceal." Job 27:11

The book of Job is a disturbing true story about undeserved suffering and an invaluable guide to knowing God. Job is our teacher in the graduate school of hard times, when it is everything we can do to stay in the story. But it is best to become acquainted with Job before tragedy strikes, so when it does, as it surely will, we will have a friend in Job.

Job is unrecognizable. He is sitting at the dump, outwardly disfigured, inwardly despairing. Even Job's friends can hardly recognize him. Job's first reaction is deliberate, controlled, and disciplined. His liturgy is dignified and dramatic, brief and to the point. Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "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." After Satan's second assault, and his wife's advice, "Curse God and die!" and after a week of silence in the presence of his three friends, Job finally speaks.

The silence of his friends was both culturally and psychologically valid. Their presence was a sign of friendship, their grief a show of support, their silence a signal of their empathy. But for Job, the silence meant seven long days of intensive soul-stirring cross-examination. What is absolutely certain is that his agonizing thoughts preceded his words, and were borne of pain and passion. They were not rash, thoughtless words. The silence builds suspense and the quiet prelude peaks our interest. What will Job say? Will he curse God? Will he confess his sins? Will he rebel or repent?

His silence is broken with a curse, but not the curse proposed by his wife. Job does not curse God. He curses the day of his birth. Job's passion explodes. The flood gates of grief and despair pour out: "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day-- may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it." Job questions "Why": "Why did I not perish at birth?" "Why is light given to those in misery?" "Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?" (Job 3:3-4,11,20,23).

Job lashes out at the human condition. There is no sniveling, self-pitying whine in Job's outburst. No bleeding heart "why me?" There is strength in every syllable, power in every line. The force of this lament is overwhelming. It is like a burst of flame that singes your eyebrows. Job wanted his life to end. As far as he was concerned everything else on earth has ended, why was his life not taken from him? Job is not a whiner, like the person who recites a sad tale of woe and resentment. Job's lament is from the depths of his soul. It is like a hammer shattering excuses, explanations, and overtures of pity. I am reminded of the Lord God as I read Job's lament. The first lines out of Job's mouth recall God's words following the Fall. God cursed. God cursed his very own creation.

"Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel....Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen.3:14-15,17).

"The curse is the affirmation of the fallen world by the Creator" (Bonhoeffer, p.83). Sin gives rise to enmity and evil, physical pain and spiritual suffering. We live between the curse and the promise. The curse is the reminder that God defines the good. We do not have to wait until the Commandments are given in the wilderness to understand sin. The curse in the Garden shouts "No" to evil. God puts his foot down and shouts across the creation, across the cosmos, across all time. Sin is sin. Evil is evil. Cancer is not health, it's hell. God's curse defines and separates out the good from the evil, life from death.

With his curse, God takes sides against evil and so does Job. His wife says, "Curse God and die!" Job truly wants to die. His lamentation extols the virtues of death: death is the great leveler, there is no difference between king and subject, master and slave; death ends life's miseries; death gives rest to the weary. Job reasons that immediate death would preserve his faithfulness.

"Oh, that I might have my request, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I would still have this consolation—my joy in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One" (6:8-10).

What is most important is that Job does not curse God. And the very fact that he does not take his own life is acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Job curses the life God has given him. He curses the miserable human condition. Made in the image of God, he shares God's moral outrage against a fallen, broken, sin-twisted, evil world. On the ash heap Job echoes God's curse in the Garden of Eden.

Five powerful lessons emerge from Job's life story: (1) God will have his way with the righteous; (2) What looks like bondage to us may be proof of our freedom; (3) We learn from Job how to comfort those who suffer; (4) True piety is honest and bold, and is centered on God; (5) A deepening understanding of God and his ways is costly.

The Lessons of Job

1. *God will have his way with the righteous.* If there ever was a person who did not deserve to suffer it was Job. Rarely do we see such a combination of wealth and spirituality, power and humility, social privilege and real dependence upon God. Job understood his life to be a testimony to God's blessing, rather than the result of his hard work or personal achievement. Job is a simple saint. He is introduced in a clear, straight-forward, unambiguous description: "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (1:1).

This commendation is repeated three times to emphasize the character of Job. It is said at the outset and then repeated twice by God in dialogue with Satan. Although many things might have

been said about Job's righteousness, only one particular habit or spiritual discipline is highlighted, and this was in regard to his children.

“When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. 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” (1:5).

Job had a true understanding of righteousness, the kind described in the book of Deuteronomy. His righteousness grew out of loving the Lord God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength (Deut 6:5). He was not righteous in exchange for favors from God. There was no quid-pro-quo arrangement in Job's mind, and he clung to a true understanding of righteousness throughout his painful ordeal. He was not about to curse God as his wife advised. Nor was he going to agree with his counselors that his suffering was deserved because of something he had done. Job clung to his integrity with tenacity and he held fast his grip on God's moral reality. There was no way he was going to say that what had happened was just. As time goes on, Job becomes increasingly bold. His anguish subsides and he expresses a radical confidence in his understanding of integrity. God is God, and true righteousness is unchanging. He would not let go of his God-centered conviction about righteousness.

“I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live” (27:5-6).

Late in the dialogue, after much of his anguish is spent, Job reviews his righteous deeds. With deep longing he recalls his communion with God: “Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil” (29:4-6). He recalls the respect he received in the community, because he rescued the poor who cried for help (29:12) and made the widow's heart sing (29:13).

He was a “father to the needy” and “broke the fangs of the wicked” (29:16-17). His proactive description of righteousness is followed by his declaration of sins he refused to commit. “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (31:1). He rejected falsehood, deceit, covetousness, and greed. He honored God by what he did and did not do. “If I've ever used my strength and influence to take advantage of the unfortunate, go ahead, break both arms, cut off all my fingers! The fear of God has kept me from these things—how else could I ever face him? (31:21-23, *The Message*). Job knew that his suffering was unjust. It was not God's judgment against him for unrighteousness. He clung to his conviction of God's righteousness. And it is precisely because of his righteousness that he suffered.

The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a person who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). God believed in Job, does he believe in you? Job was the kind of righteous person that God could use for his glory.

If Satan questioned Job's righteousness it is best that we not question Job's righteousness. Satan objected, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 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. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (1:9-12).

Why did God submit Job to this mean battle with Satan? God believes in Job's righteousness. God knows the genuineness of his faithfulness. God knows that Job will remain faithful with or without his family, his wealth, his health, and his friends. God put Job in play on purpose, allowing Satan to destroy Job's possessions, murder his children and torment his body. From Job's vantage point his suffering was absurd, but from God's perspective, it was victorious. We must not lose sight of God's great salvation history story, nor forget the very real conflict between righteousness and evil. As Paul said, "Our struggle is not against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). Life is so much more than personal peace and prosperity. God will have his way with Job and with us!

Job's righteousness reminds us of Jesus Christ, the Man of righteousness. We recall a second dialogue between God and Satan, when Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Through the incarnation, God himself has become the human battleground to prove the power of righteousness over evil, the power of redemption over accusation, the power of grace over judgment, and the power of life over death.

2. *What looks like bondage to us may be proof of our freedom.* The reason God takes up the challenge is because Satan accused God of programming Job for obedience. By the time Satan is finished with Job, he had stripped him bare. Job had no earthly reason, no humanistic rationale for remaining true to God. Much of Job's dialogue is his passionate, heart-rending account of his total destitution. Every gift and blessing was gone and he now feels in bondage in every way, physically, socially, spiritually, materially, and emotionally. He feels God-forsaken, abandoned by the God he loves and obeys, but nevertheless he remains faithful! He cries out, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (13:15).

He longs to make his case before God, confident that he will be vindicated (13:18). Even though God is silent, Job hopes in God. "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (23:10). Job's faithful response meant so much to God that he allowed evident injustice to take place. The Lord God boasts of his servant, "...He still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without reason" (2:3). Job did not know why he was being afflicted and the absence of that knowledge made his freedom complete. In one sense, he was never more free than when he sat on the ash heap!

The question arises: Where is God in all of this? God is brave with his servant Job but does God get off lightly when he leaves Job to suffer? This question is best answered by Jesus. The cross of Christ proved once and for all that God took the problem of sin and evil upon himself. Job had

no idea how much it would cost God to fulfill his confident expectation, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27).

Job demonstrates the strength of his faith when he experiences the depths of his weakness. When the apostle Paul suffered, he was comforted by the word of the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," but Job heard nothing from the Lord (2 Cor 12:9). He was kept totally in the dark. Job felt trapped, hedged in by God. His worse case scenario was realized. "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (3:25). Yet at the point of Job's greatest bondage he was most free. He was definitely not free from pain. On the contrary he was filled with pain. Job did not know why he was being so afflicted and the absence of that knowledge made his freedom complete. Job was free to choose God when there was no worldly reason to remain faithful. He painfully, passionately clings to one consolation, "my joy in unrelenting pain that I had not denied the words of the Holy One" (6:10). Job was used to worshipping God at the altar, but now he must have felt like he was on the altar. He felt he had become a living sacrifice. Job's life testifies to the fact that what looks like bondage to us may be the proof of our freedom: the freedom to trust in God no matter what.

"Saint Augustine, in his sermon *On the Pure Love of God*, has God proposing to make a deal: "I will give you anything you want. You can possess the whole world. Nothing will be impossible for you. You will have infinite power. Nothing will be a sin, nothing forbidden. You will never die, never have pain, never have anything you do not want and always have anything you do want--except for just one thing: you will never see my face." Would you take that deal? If not, you have the pure love of God. For look what you did: you gave up the world, and more--all possible worlds, all imagined worlds, all desired worlds---just for God. Augustine asks, 'Did a chill arise in your heart when you heard the words 'you will never see my face'? That chill is the most precious thing in you; that is the pure love of God" (Kreeft, pp.94-95).

Job's passion to find God is the greatest lesson of his lament. When there was no worldly reason to remain faithful, when no shred of blessing was left, when what felt like an imprisoning hedge had become a crown of thorns, Job is still clinging to God. Naked faith. Sheer faith. Teeth-gritting faith. Faith in God no matter what happens. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (13:15). Faith as righteous obedience; faith as personal relationship with God; faith as true belief and passionate devotion. Eventually God will make himself known to Job. Powerful, penetrating divine revelation: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me." In the end, Job was overwhelmed, not with pain and suffering, but with God. The depth of his lamentation expressed the passion of his devotion to God.

Like Job our perspective is limited. What looks like bondage to us may be proof of our freedom, the freedom to trust Christ when there appears to be no earthly reason for doing so. The apostle Paul's litany of what we are up against was extensive: trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and the sword. But he was confident. "If God is for us, who can be against

us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31-32). Unlike Job, we have so much more of God’s salvation history story to strengthen our confidence.

3. *We learn from Job how to comfort those who suffer* The book of Job corrects the false perspective that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer. Evil is far more complex than Job’s counselors are willing to understand. Their pat answers hold no value against the overwhelming reality of Job’s unjust suffering. They cannot begin to fathom that God could actually be using Job’s righteousness and his unjust suffering for his glory. Eliphaz begins by trying to minimize Job’s suffering, “But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed” (4:5). He glosses over Job’s devastation with pious platitudes, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (5:17).

From the start, Job’s counselors attack the very truth that is at the crux of the confrontation between God and Satan, namely, that Job’s righteousness matters greatly to God. Eliphaz is dismissive not only of Job’s suffering, but of his humanity. He reasons, “If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth!” (4:18-19).

Because his friends were certain that Job’s troubles were brought on by his sinful ways they were spared the personal cost of identifying with Job in his suffering. They did not come alongside to comfort, rather they came against him to confront and accuse. Job didn’t have anything positive to say about his counselors. He lashed out at their insensitivity and condemnation.

“...Miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end?...I also could speak like you, if you were in my place; I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you. But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief” (16:1-5).

At least give me the benefit of the doubt, Job argued. “A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty” (6:14).

In the course of the dialogue Job becomes more sensitive to the suffering of the innocent. As we said earlier, Job came to the defense of the widow, the fatherless, and the poor, but now from the ash heap he has a much more personal experience of injustice and oppression. He complains that the poor are ripped off and the needy are pushed around. “The wretched cry out for help and God does nothing, acts like nothing’s wrong!” (24:12, *The Message*).

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu did to Job what the scribes and Pharisees did to Jesus. And what Job said to his miserable counselors reminds us of what Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23). Jesus sided with the poor, the lame, and the blind. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18-19). Jesus is much more than Job could ever be, but his message is completely consistent with Job’s Ash heap theology. Because of his suffering, Job shared an affinity for those who were oppressed. Because of his suffering, Jesus shared salvation

with the lost.

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...” (1 Tim 2:5).

4. *True piety is honest and bold, and is centered on God.* Job did not face his suffering with quiet resignation like a Stoic. Nor did he accept suffering with disciplined passivity like a mystic. Nor did he put up with suffering with blind fatalism like a determinist. He certainly did not try to drown out his suffering like an addict. Nor did he attempt to escape his suffering through pleasure like a hedonist. He faced his suffering head on. Job's intensity is true to life. He looks wide-eyed at the tragedy of the human condition. He doesn't blink. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't whine. He wails. He faces reality as a man of God. Job refuses to escape--to look away. He confronts his God. “Job took his stance before God, and there he protested his suffering, protested mightily” (The Message, p.5).

Job sees himself on trial and refuses to put God on trial. He lashes out at God, like a son against his father or a daughter against her mother. But the argument, no matter how fierce it becomes, always assumes a deep abiding relationship. If anything it is the silence of God that Job cries against. He rails against his overwhelming sense of Godforsakenness. Job pleads with God because he is being tested and tried. An unjust indictment hangs over him. He feels falsely accused; more than that—falsely condemned, without ever having made his defense. More than anything else Job wants to make his case before God. Job fought against his suffering. He recognized evil as evil and felt it breathing down his neck. He cursed the day of his birth and wished he had never been born. He cried out, “I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me” (10:1-2). He wants his day in court to prove his innocence. Job does not sit in judgment against God. God is not on trial, Job is. And no one knows that better than Job. To the question, "How do you plead?" Job answers, "Not Guilty!"

How could he be true to himself and do it any other way? “If I say, ‘I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile,’ I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent” (9:27-28). Job’s counselors could not tolerate his honest lament.

Bildad complains, “How long will you say such things? Your words are a blistering wind” (8:2).

Zophar whines, “Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? Will your idle talk reduce men to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock?” (11:2-3).

Eliphaz condemns, “Would a wise man answer with empty notions or fill his belly with the hot east wind? Would he argue with useless words, with speeches that have no value? But you even undermine piety and hinder devotion to God. Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you” (15:2-6).

Zophar may have given the most telling response when he said, “My troubled thoughts prompt me to answer because I am greatly disturbed. I hear a rebuke that dishonors me, and my understanding inspires me to reply” (20:2-3).

Their stock answers and religious platitudes expressed the orthodoxy of the day, but not the will of God. Job’s three counselors are spared the pain of truly identifying with their friend, because they have convinced themselves that Job’s suffering is justly deserved. Their orthodoxy cannot explain how a person who was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil, could be subjected to such pain and suffering. But Job is not about to give up or give in. His confidence in God and his righteousness has not lessened, but deepened. He is eager to make his case. “Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense--let the Almighty answer me.”

Job made his case, a powerful and compelling defense, driven by dark currents of lamentation and powerful torrents of despair. Miserable comforters incited his rage, provoked his passion, and scorned his soul's anguish. They unwittingly drove Job to radical devotion and intense faith. Job's dark night of the soul catches flashes of light. Rays of insight shine through the gloom, "The fear of the Lord--that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (28:28). For moments at a time hope overshadows the overwhelming sense of feeling Godforsaken. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (13:15). Confidence in God holds despair at bay. "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (23:10).

At times Job sounds shockingly unspiritual, but through it all he addresses his lament to God. He does not speak for God as his counselors attempt to do, but he speaks to God. Job is sorely afflicted by evil and he cannot do otherwise than plead his case before God. He shares God’s curse against evil and cries out to God for God’s justice. In the end, God sets the record straight in a sentence.

“You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7).

Once again Job reminds us of Jesus. His lament anticipates the anguish of Gethsemane. The anguish of the ash heap and the ordeal of Gethsemane have a common bond. When he, who was without sin, contemplated being pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities he experienced the guilt and God-forsakenness of our sin. Job is one long commentary on the Gethsemane experience. Every line of Job's lamentation says either, "Take this cup from me!" or "Not my will, but your will be done!" Job’s utter feeling of being abandoned by God, his experience of God-forsakenness, parallels Jesus’ words from the cross. “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34).

5. A deepening understanding of God and his ways is costly. Job is on the ash heap, feverish and friendless, homeless and hounded, scraping his sores and mourning his losses, but he has acquired a powerful new strength. Job is confident before God, refusing to yield, pursuing the truth, convinced of the justice of his cause. He presents his case (26-31) even though God has not convened the court. Eliphaz and team have run out of words. They are speechless before their estranged, undefeated, unrepentant friend. The prosecution rests its case, but Job is only warming

up. The marathon continues, Job has not run out of words. Only now he speaks with less anguish and more reflection, less anger and more reason. He talks less of his personal suffering and much more of God and wisdom, justice and righteousness. Job has acquired strength and dignity and a deeper understanding of God, even though God has not answered him.

Job's dark night of the soul, was perhaps longer and more traumatic than we will endure, but that does not lessen the importance of his example. On the contrary, it heightens his example. Job's learning curve is steeper than most of us will ever experience, but his soulful lessons ought to guide us. For our good, Job serves as an especially helpful spiritual director.

Throughout the Word of God we are encouraged and challenged and exhorted to grow up in Christ (Eph 4:15; 1 Peter 2:2). In Job, we have a picture of what maturity in Christ looks like in the face of profound suffering. Job's trust in God's power foreshadows the confidence that the apostle Paul challenged believers to have, when he declared that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). Job's faith in God's justice reminds us of James' teaching on persevering faith. Job's memory of God's blessing reminds us that "God is faithful; he will not let [us] be tempted beyond what [we] can bear..." (1 Cor 10:13). Job's hope in God's righteousness reminds us of both Jesus' description of true, heart righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount and the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. What does it mean for us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? The story of Job's discipleship in the dark helps us to *see* what it means. The lessons of Job separate the admirers of Jesus from the followers of Jesus.

By allowing Job to walk on his own in the midst of pain, without the benefit of soothing answers, God let him acquire powerful new strength (see Yancey, *Where is God when it hurts?*). God does not explain away the suffering nor justify his actions to Job. His response to Job focuses not on the reason for the suffering but on the heart of the matter—God's relationship to Job. God's vindication of Job does not mean that God endorses everything Job said. The concluding dialogue begins with God asking Job, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (38:2). Yet as hard as the experience was for Job, the blessing and the benefits were greater. "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6).

The climax of Job's story is found here, not in the epilogue, but in Job's deeper relationship with God. James points us in the right interpretative direction when he commends the perseverance of Job as an example for us (James 5:11). Job persevered in his integrity, by clinging to his God-centered understanding of righteousness. He persevered in his freedom, by remaining true to God when he had no humanistic reason for doing so. He persevered in his lament, by insisting on making his case before God. Job shows us that a deepening understanding of God and his ways is costly, and he points us forward to Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

By faith—by sheer, naked, teeth-gritting, soul-clinging faith, Job remained faithful to God and

expected justice from God. Even though Job is walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the glory of resurrection hope shines through. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27).

The God of Job

When God finally breaks his silence, it is not with apologies. God does not sound very conciliatory nor consoling. To some, God may even sound angry. But we must not confuse intensity with indignation, nor God's seriousness with God's wrath. God comes to Job as the Lord of the Universe, not as a counselor nor as therapist. God Almighty, holy and majestic, commissioned Job as a major warrior in the battle of righteousness. Job is approached by his Commander, not a chaplain. God makes no effort to explain. Congratulations for a job well done will come later.

The Lord does not condemn Job, nor call for his repentance. The opening question challenges Job's understanding, not his integrity: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" Job is ignorant, not sinful. His request for a written indictment, a list of the charges against him, goes unanswered. The questions that have tormented him are ignored. God sets the agenda. "He answers Job's questions with a deluge of counter-questions...Job is led out into the world...He invites Job to meet him almost as an equal, standing up 'like a man'" (F.Andersen, p.268-269). Job is enrolled in God's school of vocational holiness and the Professor knows his subject.

Even though everything in Job's life has appeared out of control, God is in control. The God of Job speaks:

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?...Have you ever given orders to the morning?...Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?...Can you light up the light or put out the dark?"

Job is led out of his confined world of suffering into the large world of God's making. There he is challenged to explain the origin of the earth, the expanse of the sea, the light of dawn, the ocean depths, the formation of snow, lightning, and rain, and the order of the stars and seasons. (This is no pop quiz!) God's questions sound more like exclamations, designed to inspire rather than interrogate. "Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this" (38:18). Of course, Job has never even hinted that he knew such knowledge, let alone made such a claim. So when God says, "Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!" (38:21), his intent is not to put Job down sarcastically, but to make a point emphatically. In other words, "Job! Let God be God!"

God's review of creation moves from the natural world to the animal world. Job is asked if he could satisfy the hunger of lions or provide food for the ravens. Is he able to explain the wild donkey, tame the wild ox, understand the ways of the ostrich, or take credit for the horse? Did he teach the hawk to fly or the eagle to soar? No, of course not, but God did, and the message

comes through loud and clear, “Job! Let God be God!”

In the second round of God’s revelation to Job, Yahweh briefly, but strategically, addresses his control over the moral realm. God raises the issue of justice at the center of his response to Job. Right in the middle of God’s extended discourse on his creation and management of the universe God asks, “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can you voice thunder like his?” (40:8-9). Job is compelled to see that God’s control extends not only to nature but to human justice as well. In the end, God vindicates Job. God says to Eliphaz, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7). But in this private and personal encounter, God holds Job strictly accountable. God chides Job, “Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you” (40:11-14).

Job has said nothing that would contradict God’s authority. He has never implied that he could set things right if he were in charge, but he has lamented God’s apparent indifference to his plight. But now the thrust of God’s message, and its “aggressive tone,” brings Job “to the end of his quest by convincing him that he may and must hand the whole matter over completely to God more trustingly, less fretfully” (Andersen, p.287). Job has to admit that whatever he had implied about God’s indifference or thought about God’s lack of concern was clearly wrong. The message is absolutely convincing. “Job! Let God be God!”

The climax of God’s revelation comes with a graphic description of the behemoth, the untamable land creature, and leviathan, the terrifying sea creature. God doesn’t have to look far to come up with creatures that test the limits of human control. Just try putting a nose ring in a hippopotamus or reeling in a crocodile. Who would be crazy enough to try tackling a charging hippo? Who would ever think of giving their girls a pet crocodile? (41:5). These creatures are described with imagination and humor in order to make the serious point that God is in control. “Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me” (41:11). The message is unmistakable. “Job! Let God be God!”

Job's agonizing questions boil down to a passion for God. God's barrage of creation questions add up to a pronouncement of his Sovereign control. It is not just anybody asking these creation questions it is the Author of Life. God's response does not focus on the why and wherefore of suffering, but on the heart of the matter: Job's relationship with God. God's response does not treat Job like a hero, but a servant. Job is not exalted he is educated, matured, brought closer to God. He is humbled before God, but not humiliated.

Before others, God commends Job, both at the beginning and at the end. Job's ash heap faithfulness is vindicated by Almighty God. But when God and Job finally meet and go one on one there is no doubt who is the Master and who is the servant. This is what Job wanted all along. He wanted to be back in fellowship with God. "Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me..."

(29:4). When God speaks, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" Job does not cower, he bows. This is communion, not condemnation. He receives God's word as an invitation, not a threat. Job does not hesitate to humble himself before God Almighty, to do otherwise would have been sin. His actions are completely in character. Job is speechless, "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (40:4)

Those who don't understand Job may judge his confession as proof that the trouble was with him all along. Here at last is Job's long awaited admission of guilt; "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." But such ignorance fails to understand the true humility of the servant of God. In the awesome presence of God, Job is both delighted and ashamed at the same time! This is worship at its best. This is what it means to love God with your whole being, body, mind and soul. "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Job and Jesus

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus pulled together the meaning of Salvation History. Christ's death on the Cross is the conclusion that salvation history had long anticipated. In that seven mile conversation from Jerusalem to Emmaus, it would have been hard not to mention Job. Job shows us faithfulness in its most passionate form. He illustrates the extent to which God will go to gain the victory over evil. Job offers us a reason for the Cross and a picture of Christ as the Suffering Servant. Job is a model of Christian discipleship, righteous integrity, Jesus-style tenacity and Christ-like humility. Job is a prophet of Resurrection Hope and everlasting life. We have found the Holy Spirit using Job to deepen our thanksgiving for the Cross of Christ. The passion of Job has inspired our passion for Christ. Having studied Job ourselves we can understand how Jesus could have used Job to teach these two disciples. They describe the impact of Jesus' conversation with them, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (24:32).

Who is this man Job, who is ancient enough to represent both Gentile and Jew? Whose story does not comment on God's covenant with Israel, nor mention its land or people or Scriptures or temple, but whose life offers powerful testimony to God's good news. Who is this Melchizedek-like Job, without record of ancestors, who emerges from nowhere as a man of God, a true disciple of Yahweh? Who is this man honored by God and despised by Satan? Who is this man who maintains his integrity and walks by faith in spite of becoming a human battlefield in the war between God's goodness and cosmic evil? Does this one man's faithfulness count for much? Yes! declares God, a thousand times yes!

Who is this man Jesus, who is condemned by the religious leaders, mocked by the crowds, deserted by the disciples? Who is this man, paraded in public with a crown of thorns and a purple robe? "Behold the man!" shouts Pilate, who, having claimed his own innocence, condemns him to be crucified (Jn.19:5). Yes, indeed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.3:29). "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..." (1 Tim.2:5).

"Have you considered my servant Job?" asks the living God. Yes, we have and we will. For in the gospel according to Job we see the gospel of Jesus Christ. God at work ahead of time. Even though Job must have looked pathetic on the ash heap we know he was victorious over Satan. He proved the authenticity of his faithfulness to God by the things that he suffered. Even though Jesus looked defeated on the cross; condemned by the religious, scorned by the masses, deserted by his followers, we know there is more to the cross than meets the eye. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: `I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'" (1 Cor 1:18-19).

The parallels between Job and Jesus are striking. What is foreshadowed in Job is fulfilled in Jesus. What is true of Job is truer of Jesus.

Both Job and Jesus serve as examples of righteousness. Job depends on the grace of God, Jesus is the grace of God. Job is blameless, Jesus is sinless. Job's righteousness foreshadows Jesus' perfect righteousness. Job's understanding of God's righteous ways parallel Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

God delights in their faithfulness. God's acknowledgment of Job, "He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil," (1:8; 2:3) reminds us of God's affirmation of Jesus following his baptism, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt.3:17). In both cases, God's acknowledgment of Job and God's affirmation of Jesus, come before a time of severe testing. Job's family, possessions, property and health are wiped out. Jesus, God's Son, is led into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. In both cases righteousness reigns victorious, but not without grave injustice in Job's case, and in Jesus' case the most unjust suffering that ever happened in history.

Both Job and Jesus are warriors in a cosmic spiritual battle. The stakes could not be higher. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" is Satan's slur. "Strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" Is God's way stronger than Satan's way? Does righteousness have the victory over evil? In a sense, God stakes his reputation on Job. Does one man's righteousness really mean something to the Lord of the Universe? It sure does!

Does the righteousness of one man, Jesus, the Christ, really mean something for the destiny of humankind? It sure does!

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous" (Rom.5:19).

Both Job and Jesus experience resurrection hope. "Though he slay me," Job cries, "yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (13:15). Later he affirms, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27). Job believes in resurrection life. Jesus is the

resurrection and the life: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (11:25-26). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus reviews God's great Salvation History. The message of the Cross has come through loud and clear, but there is more to life than ash heap theology. There is Easter hope. There is more to life than death, there is resurrection---not a mythic, metaphoric symbol, but the real historical resurrection of Jesus.