**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE FINAL WORDS OF A RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER**

**Job 29-31**

**INTRODUCTION**

We’re continuing our study of the Book of Job today as we look at Job’s final words. Many people wonder why the Book of Job is so long. They appreciate the beginning and love the ending, but they’re not sure why the middle is so long. Couldn’t we condense these 42 chapters into 4 neat and concise chapters that accomplish the same thing?

We certainly could, but then we would miss one of the main lessons of the Book of Job: pain isn’t neat and concise. Working through pain isn’t a linear process. One day you can be fine; the next day you can be crying on the kitchen floor without reason or explanation. You still believe the same things – that God is good, God is sovereign, that God knows what he’s doing – but the pain is still there.

That’s why God has given us 42 chapters instead of 4. John Piper says, “There is no haste in grief”. Grief lingers, it takes its time, and sometimes it never truly goes away.

Christopher Ash writes:

“Job cannot be distilled. It is a narrative with a very slow pace (after the frenetic beginning) and long delays. Why? Because there is no instant working through grief, no quick fix to pain, no message of Job in a nutshell.”

Job proves this to be true in his final speech. He’s already said many of the thing contained in these chapters to show us that he hasn’t gotten over his pain, just like we don’t always get over ours. But as he expresses his grief and cries out to God, he is going to lead us yet again to Christ, the one who bore our pain and carried our sorrows on the cross, so that even if we suffer, we can suffer with hope.

The title of this sermon is **The Final Words of a Righteous Sufferer.**

We will have three points today:

1. Remembering God’s Goodness
2. Lamenting God’s Silence
3. Desiring God’s Justice

(1) **REMEMBERING GOD’S GOODNESS**

Chapter 29 is Job’s most detailed description of the life of Job before the Book of Job. He takes a rare moment to reminisce, to dwell on the good old days, and to remember what it was like to feel that God was on his side.

That’s what he begins with in verses 1-5:

**1**And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

**2**“Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
    as in the days when God watched over me,
**3**when his lamp shone upon my head,
    and by his light I walked through darkness,
**4**as I was in my prime,
    when the friendship of God was upon my tent,
**5**when the Almighty was yet with me,

This is a beautiful description of what it means to walk in fellowship with God, and yet it’s tragic because he’s speaking in the past tense. God used to watch over him, but he does so no longer. God used to light his way in the darkness, but not anymore. God’s friendship used to dwell upon his tent, but that’s not the case today.

This is what Job misses most about his life before his loss. He misses God’s friendship. Even before the loss of his children, his wealth, and his reputation, his mind turns first to the loss of God himself. He doesn’t just miss God for his gifts. He misses God for his friendship. It’s God himself that he longs for, not his gifts. Job longs for the days when God smiled upon him, when God’s blessings were merely signs that pointed to God’s favour.

This is one of those moments when we as the readers wish that Job knew what we knew. We wish he knew that he didn’t have to speak about God’s friendship in the past tense. The removal of God’s blessings didn’t signal the removal of God’s favour. God wasn’t punishing him or even disciplining him. He was delighting in him. Job was suffering precisely because God knew that he would endure, and by his endurance he would prove to the world that God’s servants will trust him, love him, and worship him, even if God takes everything they love away from them.

Job remembers the goodness of God’s grace. He also remembers the goodness of God’s blessings:

**5**… when my children were all around me,
**6**when my steps were washed with butter,
    and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
**7**When I went out to the gate of the city,
    when I prepared my seat in the square,
**8**the young men saw me and withdrew,
    and the aged rose and stood;
**9**the princes refrained from talking
    and laid their hand on their mouth;
**10**the voice of the nobles was hushed,
    and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.

Job was a respected man. He was respected by both the young and old, the common and the noble. When he showed up, he was like royalty. People stood up and shut their mouths at the presence of this man.

But it wasn’t for the reasons you might expect. People didn’t respect him because of his wealth or power. They respected him for how he used his wealth and power to bless others:

**11**When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
    and when the eye saw, it approved,
**12**because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
    and the fatherless who had none to help him.
**13**The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
    and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

Back in Chapter 22, Eliphaz accused Job of exploiting the poor, ignoring the hungry, and taking advantage of his wealth. But nothing could be further from the truth. Job didn’t defend himself then, but he does now. Job was a man of justice and mercy. In his justice, he delivered the poor who cried for help. Verse 17 says he “broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth”. And in his mercy, verse 15 says he was “eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, father to the needy”.

Job was a great man with a great heart. He didn’t use his wealth for self-indulgence. He used it to serve the needy, to relieve the oppressed, and to comfort the downcast.

Chapter 29 is a description of a truly good life. Job is surrounded by his children, prospering in his business, respected in the city, blessing the poor, serving the needy. He was with the poor and the fatherless; the widows and the dying; the blind, the lame, and the needy. He was with people like Jesus was with people, the people who were forgotten and discarded by the world but not by God.

This is the good life. It’s not a life when you look and feel good about yourself. It’s a life devoted to worship and good works. And this life brought about the expectation that Job would die happy and full of days.

**18**Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest,
    and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
**19**my roots spread out to the waters,
    with the dew all night on my branches,
**20**my glory fresh with me,
    and my bow ever new in my hand.’

Job’s hope and confident expectation was that God would bless him for blessing others. God would be good to him for being good to others. He would reward his good life with a good death.

(2) **LAMENTING GOD’S SILENCE**

But for Job, this expectation had become nothing more than a sick joke. Remembering God’s goodness in the past has only made him more bitter in the present. There is so much for him to lament, because there is so much that he has lost. But above it all, he laments God’s silence. This leads to our second point.

Chapter 30 brings us back from the peaceful bliss of the past to the dark nightmare of the present. Three times, in verses 1, 9 and 16, Job says, “But now” or “And now” to jolt us back to his present, painful reality. He begins in verse 1:

**1**“But now they laugh at me,
    men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
    to set with the dogs of my flock.

Men used to rise at his presence. Princes used to refrain from talking. But now, young men laugh at him, men who come from bad families. Job says that he would not even have set their fathers among his sheep dogs. They are weak (verse 2), lazy (verse 3), outcasts (verse 5), gangsters (verse 6). These are no-good troublemakers, rabble rousers and scoundrels, and yet they laugh at him.

Indeed, they make a sport of it. Verses 9-10:

**9**“And now I have become their song;
    I am a byword to them.
**10**They abhor me; they keep aloof from me;
    they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.

Job is so despised by them that they sing about him, they spit at him, and they have turned his name into a curse word. They use his name when they want to be vulgar and offensive. That’s how far Job has fallen. He has lost all his respect and dignity even before the lowliest men.

Job knows why. He knows that God is sovereign, and therefore it is God who has brought this upon him. Verse 11:

**11**Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me,
    they have cast off restraint in my presence.

Job hasn’t forgotten his theology. In the face of his suffering, he’s not doubting God’s existence, or God’s control over his life. He knows that God exists and that God is in control. What he’s struggling to hold onto is whether God is still good, because he’s the one who has humbled him.

Job’s third “And now” moment is in verse 16:

**16**“And now my soul is poured out within me;
    days of affliction have taken hold of me.
**17**The night racks my bones,
    and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
**18**With great force my garment is disfigured;
    it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.

Many of us know and love the hymn “It is Well”. “When peace like a river attendeth my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’” Job knows what it’s like for sorrows like sea billows to roll over him, but he doesn’t know what it’s like to say “It is well with my soul”. Instead, he says, “And now my soul is poured out within me”. He feels as if his very soul is draining away from him, and that there will be nothing left of him.

His days are full of affliction and his pain eats away at him in the night. He finds no rest. Even the simple act of wearing clothing feels like it’s choking him. And he knows that God has done this. God is the one who has cast him into the mire. God is the reason why he has become like dust and ashes. The one who sits on the ash heap is becoming ash himself as his soul drains away.

Then in verses 20-23, Job does something he hasn’t done since Chapter 14. He prays. He stops talking about God, and he starts talking to God, and he tells God exactly how he feels:

**20**I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;
    I stand, and you only look at me.
**21**You have turned cruel to me;
    with the might of your hand you persecute me.
**22**You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it,
    and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
**23**For I know that you will bring me to death
    and to the house appointed for all living.

Job can’t understand why God won’t answer him. He has cried out to God to answer his questions, but God has responded with silence. Not a word of comfort or explanation. Just silence.

Job believes he deserves an answer, because it seems like he’s done right and God has done wrong. He says:

**25**Did not I weep for him whose day was hard?
    Was not my soul grieved for the needy?
**26**But when I hoped for good, evil came,
    and when I waited for light, darkness came.

Job wept for the afflicted. Job grieved for the needy. But when Job was afflicted and needy, God met him with silence. It doesn’t seem fair. But still, God is silent.

Once again, we as the readers know that this wasn’t the case. Yes, God may have been silent for now, but he wouldn’t remain silent forever. Indeed, in a few short chapters, God himself would speak to Job out of the whirlwind like a man speaks to his friend. Not many have heard the voice of God with their own ears, but Job would. Job would be given the sacred privilege of hearing God speak as he finally reveals himself to his servant.

As believers, we may not hear God speak out of the whirlwind, but we do hear him speak out of his Word. God speaks today. Whenever we want, we can hear him by opening up the pages of Scripture and being reminded of who God is, who we are, and what Christ has done to save us.

God speaks to his people today, and his Word says, “Come to me, trust me, know my loving kindness.” God may not tell us all the details of all his plans, but he didn’t tell Job either, because that wouldn’t have helped. Instead, he told Job exactly what he needed to hear, and he does the same with us.

(3) **DESIRING GOD’S JUSTICE**

Job’s final speech ends with a desire for God’s justice, leading to our final point.

Job has reached the point when he just wants resolution. If he’s guilty, then let judgment fall on him. But if he’s innocent, let him be cleared of the charges.

Job wants justice, and he’s confident that if he gets justice, he’ll be vindicated. All he needs is someone to listen to him, a divine judge who is ready to hear his final appeal and pronounce him innocent.

He begins with a statement about his personal integrity and purity:

**1**“I have made a covenant with my eyes;
    how then could I gaze at a virgin?

Job has made a covenant, a sacred vow to never gaze upon a virgin with lust. In the moments when no one is watching, in the secret thoughts and fantasies of his own heart, he will not allow himself to gaze upon a virgin.

That speaks to his personal integrity, and it comes from the fear of the Lord. To fear the Lord is to know that you can’t deceive him. You can’t conceal things from God. Your whole life is laid bare before him, from the words that you speak to the thoughts of your heart. Job describes this in verses 2-4:

**2**What would be my portion from God above
    and my heritage from the Almighty on high?
**3**Is not calamity for the unrighteous,
    and disaster for the workers of iniquity?
**4**Does not he see my ways
    and number all my steps?

Job won’t let himself fall into sin, because he knows that God sees all his ways and numbers all his steps, and he will repay repeated, unrepentant sin with calamity and disaster.

The rest of the chapter consists of a catalogue of Job’s life. He combs through both the public and private aspects of his life to see if there’s any wrong in him. If there is, then he calls down God’s curses upon him. But if there isn’t, then he calls for vindication.

In verses 5-8 he talks about deception and coveting. If he’s walked with falsehood, or if his heart has gone after his eyes, then let another eat what he has sown.

In verses 9-12 he talks about lust and adultery. If his heart has been enticed toward a woman, or if he’s lain in wait at his neighbour’s door, then let someone else take his own wife as their slave.

In verses 13-15 he talks about oppression. If he has rejected the cause of his servants, if he ignored their complaints, then he deserves God’s punishment. He provides the reason in verse 15:

**15**Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
    And did not one fashion us in the womb?

Job knows that the God who made him made his servants as well, and that means they are to be treated with dignity. Their complaints must be addressed even though he’s their master. This would have been a revolutionary idea in the ancient Middle East, but it is one that Job held, and it continues to characterize the Christian view today. Everyone, regardless of their intelligence, ability, or station in life is entitled to be treated with dignity, because God has made them in his image, and they belong to him.

In similar fashion, Job talks about his treatment of the poor and the vulnerable in verses 16-23. He has fed the poor, he has cared for widows, he has clothed the perishing, he has protected the fatherless. He has risen up as a defender of the weak.

Verses 24-28 talk about idolatry. If Job trusted in his gold or worshipped the sun and moon, he knows that he would have betrayed God.

Verse 29 talks about his treatment of his enemies. If he had rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated him or cursed his enemy with his lips, then God would repay him.

Verse 31 talks about hospitality. His servants always ensured that the sojourner was fed meat, which wasn’t nearly as common then as it is now.

And in verses 33-34, Job talks about concealing his sin:

**33**if I have concealed my transgressions as others do
    by hiding my iniquity in my heart,
**34**because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
    and the contempt of families terrified me,
    so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—

Job knows that he would have sinned by concealing his sin from others. He would have sinned by living as a hypocrite, by projecting himself to be one way while secretly living another way. It’s a natural tendency of the human heart, because as Job says in verse 34, we stand “in great fear of the multitude”. We’re afraid of the “contempt of families”. We hide our sin because we’re concerned about our reputations. We want respect, not contempt, so we conceal our sins.

Job shows us that hiding our sin is sin itself. Keeping silent about what we have done wrong is just as wrong as the wrong we’re being silent about.

This is a very significant chapter in the Bible, because it shows us what it means to fear the Lord. This is the picture of a life lived in reverential submission to God. It’s not a sinless life. Job clearly sinned. Otherwise he wouldn’t talk about the possibility of concealing his sin. But it is a life without deceit. It is a life of humble confession of sin, of careful treatment of others, and of an awareness that nothing is hidden from God.

Job knows that this is how he has lived. But it all seems like it’s been for nothing, because no one seems to be willing to listen to him. And so, he cries out in verse 35:

**35**Oh, that I had one to hear me!
    (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)

Job is crying out for the final time for an advocate, a heavenly witness who would speak for him after hearing his final appeal. “Is there anyone who hears me? Can anyone see that I’m innocent? Will anyone speak on my behalf?”

Thanks be to God, there is. There is one who heard Job, and there is one who hears us. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. But the difference between Job’s advocate and Jesus is that Jesus doesn’t comb through our lives. He combs through his own. When Jesus stands before the Father to speak on my behalf, he doesn’t say, “Look at Josh’s life”. He says “Look at *my* life. Look at how I walked without deceit, how I walked in purity, how I cared for the poor, how I welcomed the lost, how I kept my worship pure. Look at *my* righteousness, and count it as belonging to him.”

Job may have been blameless and upright, but he wasn’t sinless. He had sin that he was tempted to conceal. But Jesus had no sin. No sin to confess, no sin to conceal, no sin to atone by the blood of another. He was perfectly righteous in deed and thought, in his actions and in his emotions. He was the perfect man, and when we come to him in repentance and faith, trusting in him as our Saviour, he gives us his perfection.

He takes the righteousness that belongs to his account and deposits it into ours, so that even though we are sinners, we can be counted as saints.

Job didn’t know this, so he lamented. But we know this, so we rejoice. And that makes us want to live differently. We want what is true for us in Christ to be true for us in our day to day lives. We will make covenants with our eyes not to gaze upon a virgin. We will refuse to walk with falsehood and deceit. We will hear the cries of the oppressed and respond. We will welcome the strangers into our homes. We will love our enemies, confess our sins, and worship our God.

**CONCLUSION**

This is what the Book of Job is all about. Job isn’t ultimately about suffering. It’s about a Saviour who suffered on our behalf. Yes, it is helpful in giving us tools to learn how to grieve, and how to comfort others. It helps us learn how to listen well and how to speak comfort. It teaches us to have a right theology of suffering, to not be hasty in judgment, and to learn the importance of compassion. It helps us understand why the righteous suffer, so that when we do good but receive evil, we will be ready for it.

But at its core, Job is about another righteous man who suffered, an innocent man who was laughed at, spit upon, and despised. He received the highest honour in heaven and the lowest humiliation on earth. Jesus is the greater Job. He is the advocate Job longed for. He is the judge Job appealed to. He is the Redeemer Job hoped for.

Whatever you’re going through, whatever trials you’re facing, whatever pain you’re experiencing, whatever betrayals and disappointments continue to weigh you down, the Book of Job invites you to look to Jesus. Look to him and live. Peace for your soul isn’t found in looking back at the good old days. It’s found in looking forward to the best days with Christ. Look to Jesus, trust in his death and resurrection, and find peace for your soul.