**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE GOD WHO RESTORES**

**Job 42:7-17**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we come to our final sermon in this series on the Book of Job called “When the Righteous Suffer”.

The Book of Job is 42 chapters long, and most of it consists of a long debate. Job debates with his friends, and Job debates with God. The subject of the debate is why Job has suffered. Why did he lose all ten of his children? Why did he lose his wealth and his health? And most importantly, why does it seem like he has lost God’s friendship?

His friends respond by asserting that Job must have done horrible things to deserve this. He must have exploited the poor, ignored the weak, and only served himself. His children must also have done horrible things to be crushed to death in their oldest brother’s home. He must be guilty, because in their minds, only the wicked truly suffer. If you suffer, it’s a sign that you’ve done something wrong to deserve it.

We do the same whenever we hear of someone else’s calamity and assume the worst. A young man gets cancer and we think, “Oh, he must have had some secret sins.” The adult child of a respected Christian family abandons the faith and we think, “His parents must have done something wrong.” We’re not that different from Job’s friends, because this kind of thinking is hardwired into human nature. We live under the assumption that if you do everything the way you’re supposed to, then everything’s going to turn out the way you want it to.

That’s what Job believed as well. So when things didn’t turn out the way he wanted, he struggled to make sense of it. He knows he’s innocent of the horrible things his friends are accusing him of. His conscience is clean before the Lord, so he defends himself, he asserts his innocence, and he cries out to God for answers.

But when God finally speaks, he doesn’t tell Job what he’s waiting to hear. He doesn’t settle the debate. Instead, he proclaims himself – his wisdom, power, and sovereignty – because Job isn’t a book of philosophy that leads to answers. It’s a book of theology that leads to worship. The Book of Job raises the issues of suffering, grief, and justice, but it is ultimately concerned about something far more important and transcendent: the character and nature of God.

That’s important, because how we read something determines what we take away from it. If you read a cookbook for entertainment you’re likely going to be disappointed. And if you read the Book of Job expecting answers to the question “Why?” you’ll miss the fact that it’s ultimately about the question “Who?” Who is God? What is he like? Is he in control? Is he good? Is he worthy of our trust?

God shows us that he is worthy of our trust, and he gives us even more reason to trust him in our text today. In the previous four chapters, he has revealed himself as the God who reigns, but now he reveals himself as the God who restores.

The title of this sermon is **The God Who Restores**. We will divide our text into three points:

1. God Restores His Name
2. God Restores His Servant
3. God Restores Our Loss

(1) **GOD RESTORES HIS NAME**

If you’re reading from a physical Bible, you may have noticed that beginning in verse 7, the text is arranged differently than most of the book. It’s back in paragraph form rather than short, indented lines. This reflects the fact that the author is back to writing in prose rather than poetry. Most of the book is written in the soaring, emotional language of poetry. But these verses are back to the grounded, matter-of-fact language of prose, which is something we haven’t seen since the first two chapters.

The transition from poetry to prose reflects a change in pace as the narrative finally settles down. This is less about feelings and more about facts as we see God at work. He’s at work setting everything right again, like a king who has returned to his suffering kingdom in order to bring peace to the land once more.

His first order of business is to restore his Name. He does that by addressing Eliphaz, the elder statesman of Job’s three friends. God’s response to him isn’t quite what Eliphaz was expecting.

Verse 7:

**7**After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

Eliphaz expected God to be angry with Job, but it turns out that God is angry with him. God’s anger is described as “burning” against him and his two friends, like a fire that has been kindled and that threatens to consume them. Why? It’s not because of what they’ve said about Job. It’s because of what they’ve said about God.

The three friends have said many false things about Job that made Job angry with them. But what provokes God to anger is what they have said about him: “You have not spoken of *me* what is right”, God says. God cares deeply about what we say about him, because our words about him are used to represent what he is like.

God will not be misrepresented. He will not have false things said about him. He is so zealous about this that it’s enshrined in the Ten Commandments. The Third Commandment forbids us from taking the Name of the Lord in vain. We often think that commandments means we shouldn’t use God’s name as a curse word. While it certainly includes that, the broader meaning is that we must treat God’s Name with appropriate fear and reverence. We fail to do that whenever we use our words to misrepresent him.

God is passionate about his Name, because his Name represents his character. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, Exodus 34:5 says:

**5**The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. **6**The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, **7**keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

The Lord has proclaimed his Name. He proclaimed it to Moses on Mount Sinai, and he proclaims it to us in Holy Scripture. And now, we must be careful to say what is true about God as he has revealed himself to be in Scripture.

The question is, what did the friends say about God that wasn’t right? They have said many things about God that are right. They have upheld God as holy, righteous, just, and wise. They even believe in God’s forgiveness, promising Job that God will restore him if only he repents. So why is God angry with them?

The answer is captured in Eliphaz’s first speech. There are a few lines there that represent the main assumptions and ideas of all three friends. In Chapter 4, Eliphaz asked:

**7**“Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?
    Or where were the upright cut off?
**8**As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
    and sow trouble reap the same.
**9**By the breath of God they perish,
    and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

Eliphaz believed that God so ruled the world that people always got what they deserve. The innocent don’t die young. Only those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. God always gives people what they deserve, which means that there is no such thing as innocent suffering. There is no such thing as people getting something that they didn’t deserve. If your children die, or you get sick, or you lose all your wealth, it’s because you deserved it.

But God says that’s not true. In fact, saying it provokes him to anger because it undermines the gospel, and the gospel is the fullest revelation of God’s character. For the gospel to be true, an innocent man must suffer. Jesus Christ had to receive what he didn’t deserve. He had to die though he deserved to live. He had to be condemned, though he deserved to be justified. And Jesus did all that so that we wouldn’t receive what we deserve.

The gospel is all about Christ receiving undeserved wrath, so that we could receive undeserved grace. It’s about the innocent one being pronounced guilty, so that guilty ones could be pronounced innocent. That’s what God is like. He is the God who forgives iniquity and transgression and sin while by no means clearing the guilty. Both his mercy and justice were satisfied on the cross as Christ took what we deserved, so that we could receive what he deserved.

There is nothing more antithetical to the gospel than the idea that people always get what they deserve. That is why God was angry with the friends. They had completely misrepresented him taken his Name in vain.

So what does God do? Does he give them what they deserve and consume them in his wrath? No. Instead, he shows them the truth and beauty of his mercy by how he treats them. In verse 8 the Lord says:

**8**Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”

God instructs Job to pray for them so that he would not deal with them according to their folly. They deserved wrath, but God gave them mercy. By the atoning blood of a sacrifice, and by the mediating work of God’s servant Job, God decides to pardon them.

Verse 9 says:

**9**So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

In this simple act, God restores the three friends, and he restores the glory of his Name. He upholds his justice through sacrifice, and he upholds his mercy through their forgiveness. The friends may not have understood God’s character when they first came to comfort Job, but they do now. They know because they have tasted God’s mercy and grace for themselves, and now they believe.

(2) **GOD RESTORES HIS SERVANT**

We see the same mercy shown to Job as we turn to our second point.

God refers to Job as his servant three times. Once in verse 7, and twice in verse 8. This is the title he gave to Job in Chapters 1 and 2 when he asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him in all the earth.” To be called a servant of God is a title of immense dignity and honour, because it confirms that Job is authorized to speak and act on God’s behalf.

Unlike the three friends, God commends his servant Job as having spoken what is right. This is repeated once in verse 7, and again in verse 8. He says to Eliphaz, “You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”

If you’ve been following this series, you might be puzzled by this, because we know that Job has said a number of things about God that aren’t right. He has said that God “mocks at the calamity of the innocent” (9:23). He has accused God of hating him (16:9). He has said that God doesn’t forgive sin (10:14), doesn’t offer any hope (14:19), and doesn’t do what is just (30:26).

None of that is true, and yet God says that Job has spoken what is right about him. How can that be? It’s because Job has repented of speaking of what he did not know. Remember what came earlier. God challenged Job out of the whirlwind, asking, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth… when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

God then takes Job on a vast tour of the created world, showing him the mountain goats, the donkeys, and the wild ox; the ostrich, the horse, and the hawk; mighty Behemoth and invincible Leviathan. God challenges Job and asks, “Can you tame them, Job? Do you know their ways? Will they obey your commands?” In response, Job not only lays his hand on his mouth in silence, but confessed that he had uttered what he did not understand, and he repents in dust and ashes.

God can say that Job has spoken what is right, because he has cancelled all that was wrong. For those who repent and believe, God doesn’t count our iniquities against us. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us, so that only what is true and right and good remains.

This is how God wants Job to be remembered. Job spoke what was right about him. We know that not only because of these verses, but because of the New Testament. In the only reference to Job in the New Testament, the Apostle James writes this:

“Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” – James 5:11

This is Job’s legacy. He was steadfast. It doesn’t matter that he cursed the day of his birth, or that he questioned God’s justice, or that he spent days upon days grieving and lamenting while cutting himself on the ash heap. All that matters is that he repented of his sin, he trusted in God once again, and he endured to the end, and that made him steadfast.

This steadfast servant is now given the most holy task of all. He is called to foreshadow Christ himself. When God calls him to intercede for his friends, he calls him to become the very thing that he longed for: a mediator. Job had longed for an arbiter between God and man, a witness in heaven who would speak on his behalf, a Redeemer who lives, so that after his skin has been destroyed yet in his flesh he would see God. Now God tells him, “There is a Redeemer, Job. There is a mediator, and I want you to point to him.”

Christopher Ash writes:

“The one who longed for a mediator becomes the mediator and foreshadows the only mediator between God and people, the man Christ Jesus.”

If you don’t know this mediator, if you’ve never put your trust in Christ, then God calls you to do so today. None of us can approach God on the basis of our own merits, because we’re just like the three friends. All of us have sinned in countless ways. All of us have taken the Lord’s Name in vain, whether it’s because we said he doesn’t exist, or he isn’t good, or he could never be merciful enough to forgive us, or he’s so merciful that he just forgives everyone of everything. Those are all wrong statements about God.

If you don’t have Christ, then God’s anger still burns against you, and he will give you what you deserve in eternal punishment. But if you have Christ, then God will forgive you, restore you, and call you his beloved child both now and forevermore.

(3) **GOD RESTORES OUR LOSS**

This leads to our final point.

Verses 10-17:

**10**And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. **11**Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

**12**And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. **13**He had also seven sons and three daughters. **14**And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. **15**And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. **16**And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. **17**And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

This is a picture of paradise. All that God had taken, he restores. Not only that, he pours out his blessings to Job in even greater quantity and measure. He has twice as many animals as before. He has so much land that he can afford to give all ten of his children their own inheritance, including his four daughters. His daughters are so beautiful that they were renowned across the land. We are even given their names, either to ground Job’s life in history or to confirm their beauty or both. Jemimah means “dove”, Keziah means “cassia” (which is a type of fragrant cinnamon plant), and Keren-Happuch can be loosely translated as “eye make up”.

Job is blessed materially, and Job is blessed relationally. Unlike his three friends who ended up becoming “miserable comforters”, Job now has “all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before”, and “they showed him sympathy and comforted him”. For what? For what evil men had brought into his life? For what Satan had brought into his life? No, for “all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him.”

The Lord may not be responsible for evil, but he governs it in such a way that the Bible can accurately say that it was the Lord who brought it upon him. It was the Lord who gave, and it is the Lord who has taken away, as Job said in Chapter 1. But God is so merciful and kind that he ensures that it doesn’t end that way, not when it comes to his servants. It doesn’t end with “the Lord has taken away”, but with “the Lord gave, and gave, and gave, beyond all that we could ask or think.”

This is a picture of paradise, and it points us to the ultimate paradise that all who are in Christ will one day enjoy. Some of us will find restoration in this life, but most of us will need to wait until the life to come.

When Peter reminded Jesus of what he and the apostles had lost, Jesus said:

“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” – Matthew 19:28-29

Christian, this is what awaits you: an eternity of receiving a hundredfold what was lost as the Lord gives, and gives, and gives; and nothing will be more precious to us than the gift of himself. God not only restored Job’s fortunes. He restored Job to himself, so that he will never again question that God is with him, and that God is for him.

Psalm 84 says “a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (Psalm 84:10). A single day in the presence of the Lord is better than a thousand in the greatest earthly paradise you can imagine. And because of Christ, you won’t just have a handful of such days. You will have an unending eternity of them as the infinite God pours out his infinite love into your eternally sinless heart.

Better days are coming, because we serve and worship a God who restores. Don’t we need to remember that? This pandemic has been hard. It has resulted in lost lives, lost jobs, lost health, lost relationships. But Job reminds us that better days are coming. It’s only a matter of time before the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, and our latter days are more blessed than the beginning.

**CONCLUSION**

About twenty years ago John Piper wrote a poem inspired by the Book of Job called “The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God”. It was turned into a book and a short film. Some of you may remember the Sunday service when we watched the film together. It’s a powerful poem that has remained with me over the years. My favourite part is the very end, and I end this series with his words:

“Behold the mercy of our King,

Who takes from death its bitter sting,

And by his blood, and often ours,

Brings triumph out of hostile pow’rs,

And paints, with crimson, earth and soul

Until the bloody work is whole.

What we have lost God will restore –

That, and himself, forevermore,

When he is finished with his art:

The quiet worship of our heart.

When God creates a humble hush,

And makes Leviathan his brush,

It won’t be long before the rod

Becomes the tender kiss of God.” – John Piper