

February 27, 2022

JOB'S STEADFASTNESS AND GOD'S RICH MERCY

Job 42

(7 of 7 in a series through Job)

There is only one New Testament text that mentions Job explicitly, and it's in the book of James. It comes in a where James is encouraging believers to be patient in suffering. Then, he adds in 5:11, "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." The reason this is so helpful for us as we study Job, of course, is that it reveals to us two elements that the Spirit intended for us to see in the in the book of Job, namely, Job's steadfastness and God's compassion and mercy. And I think these two elements reach their climax in the last chapter of the book—the epilogue—Job 42.

In some ways this last chapter feels too brief. After the opening two chapters which revealed to us the heavenly dialogue between the Lord and Satan about Job (a conversation which led to Job's suffering), we've had chapter after chapter of speeches. We saw twenty-four chapters of speeches between Job and his three friends, followed by four chapters of Job speaking once more, followed by six chapters of Elihu confronting Job and preparing him for the voice of God, which we finally saw take place over the last four chapters. So, if you're keeping score, that's thirty-eight chapters of the book that has been made up of speeches, which come to us in the form of poetry. Now, we're at the conclusion and ready to wrap things up. Prose takes over once more. And we get it done in only a few short verses. Therefore, it can feel anticlimactic. It can feel like you've watched a three-and-a-half hour movie of sorrow, difficulty, despair, and confusion, only for the movie to tie everything up real nice and neat in the last two minutes. However, as I've noted, I think it is here that we actually see Job's steadfastness and God's compassion and mercy reach their climax, and we also get a reminder of the blessings God intends for his children. And so my hope for us this morning is that we'll feel exhorted, comforted, and encouraged once more as we look at one final chapter of this book. So, let's look at those themes in order. First, we see the steadfastness of Job.

The steadfastness of Job

To be steadfast means to stand firm, to be unwavering, and to persevere. That's what we've seen from Job throughout. Satan had told the Lord that if the Lord took away Job's blessings and afflicted his health, he would curse God. Then, it all happened. God granted Satan permission, and the devil did his worst. Job lost his flocks, his servants, his children, and his health, and yet he worshiped. More impressively, he kept pursuing God throughout all the time of his suffering. Now, we can't know precisely how long it was, but Job says in 7:3, "I am allotted months of emptiness," and 29:2, he reflects back on the time before his suffering, saying, "Oh, that I were in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me." Therefore, it's safe to say that Job's suffering lasted months.

And through it all, Job persevered. He kept pursuing the Lord. Yes, at times he said things to God for which he would later be ashamed. But the Lord was his pursuit at every step. He wanted nothing more than to walk in friendship with God—something he felt that he'd lost through this suffering. And so he kept fighting and pushing and demanding. When his friends told him simply to confess sins that he didn't commit in order to get everything back that he'd lost, he refused. He wasn't first and foremost concerned with what he'd lost as much as *who* he seemed to have lost—God. What bothered him deeply was that it seemed that God was against him, treating him differently than his life merited.

Then, the Lord finally spoke in a way that was very clear to Job. In chapter 38 he began speaking in the storm, and he rebuked Job for thinking that he was wiser than God, for thinking he was better at governing the details of the universe than God is. And the Lord reminded Job of his goodness. One day he would slay Leviathan—representing Satan—and there would be no more suffering, sin, or death. In other words, though the Lord was the one who called Satan's attention to Job specifically and then granted him permission to afflict him, the Lord made clear that his purpose was to one day do away with sin and everything that sin has brought into the world—including our suffering.

As chapter 42 begins, then, we see Job's response to this revelation of God's wisdom, might, and goodness. After the Lord reveals his purpose to judge every evil in the end, Job responds, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (v. 2). If God can slay the mighty Leviathan then nothing can stop his purposes and plans for good. Then Job notes two specific things God says in order to provide context to his response. He quotes God's opening words to Job: "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" (v. 3a) and then he responds, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (v. 3b). Job acknowledges that he has spoken much more than he should've. He should never have demanded God give him an answer in his arrogance or charge God with injustice when he speaks—as a mere man—from a place of such great ignorance. Then, Job quotes the Lord again, "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me" (v. 4) and he responds, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (vv. 5-6). This, of course, is not Job repenting for some terrible sin he'd been hiding that had brought on his suffering, but rather he repents "of not having known God better."¹ He despises that he did not realize God's overwhelming wisdom and goodness more than he does now that he sees him. Had he known this, he would have never charged God with injustice or made demands of him.

And yet, here is Job, still not having recovered any of what he had lost, repenting before God. He's been steadfast. He's persevered. He's never turned away. And now he has what he's been pursuing this whole time—a more intimate walk with the Lord. He knows God better. He sees him more clearly. And because of that, he will speak of him more truly.

¹ D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Faith in Job 38:1-42:16," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies in the Book of Job*, ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 376.

This is our goal as well. Jesus once told Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32). If we see Satan’s sifting of Job in the Old Testament and his sifting of Peter in the New, then it stands to reason that we should expect the same in our lives. It may well be that—like Job and Peter before us—Satan has asked to sift you as well. Interesting Jesus doesn’t say, “But I denied him access to you, Peter” just as God did not withhold access to Job from Satan. Therefore, we shouldn’t assume that it’s the Lord’s will to prevent all of Satan’s attacks against us. But in those moments, we must remember that just as Jesus followed up by saying to Peter, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail,” so he is interceding for us that our faith may not prevail. He will hold us fast. And we must not lose sight of our goal as we go through suffering. It isn’t primarily to get back what we’ve lost but to know our God more (Phil 3:10-11). And so we persevere in faith, holding fast to the Lord and pressing on to know him more—which is the greatest gift we can have in this life. As James reminds us, “We consider those blessed who remained steadfast” (James 5:11)—even as we see in Job—so let us make sure this is what we see in ourselves as well, pursuing our God more even as he holds on to us.

But the steadfastness of Job isn’t all we see. We also see the compassion and mercy of God.

The compassion and mercy of God

The compassion and mercy of God can be clearly seen in this last chapter. Note what God says to Job’s friends. We read in verse 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.’” Now, at this point, you may be thinking, “Where do we see God’s compassion and mercy?” The first part of answering that question is to look at how the Lord commends Job in this exchange with Eliphaz. I mean, we all know that Job has said some things he shouldn’t have, things he repents of in 42:6. And yet the Lord notes that Job has spoken rightly of him. Clearly this can’t mean that everything Job has spoken is correct. Otherwise, chapters 38-41 makes no sense; nor does Job’s repentance make sense. He uttered things he didn’t understand. But it does mean that Job has said something right about God. And I think it is in reference to the fact that Job rightly told his friends that his suffering wasn’t because of some heinous sin he’d committed, though some have argued that it’s because the Lord saw through Job’s words to his heart. Either could be true but because the Lord is referencing the dialogue between Job and his friends, my guess is that Job has spoken correctly that God was not punishing him because of some sin with his suffering.

Already that is showing the Lord’s mercy. The Lord has just spent four chapters noting that Job has spoken incorrectly, and Job has repented. And yet the Lord does not hesitate to speak well of Job in front of his friends, commending him before them. In fact, not only does the Lord credit Job before his friends of speaking rightly about God, but he repeatedly refers to him as “my servant”—using this term without exception as he refers to Job before his friends. Now, I know that this might feel slight, but think of how many moments Job has been attacked with the thought that he has somehow become God’s enemy. Now the Lord will not even refer to him

without identifying him as “my servant,” a term that the Lord reserved for those such as Moses and the prophets. It’s as if the Lord is bending over backwards, if you will, to let Job know that he is pleased with him and that Job is the object of the Lord’s affection, mercy, and grace. The relationship that Job was so bothered about being disrupted is completely restored. God shows compassion and mercy to his servant Job.

This is helpful for us because many of us have this impression of God that if we’ve sinned and come to him in repentance, he may well forgive us, but we assume he doesn’t want anything to do with us. He wants to keep us at a distance. We think of him like a father who chastises his son and yet continues to berate the son and make him feel unwelcomed even after the son has repented. But that image is not the image of our Heavenly Father given to us in the Scripture. Job has just repented of saying things that are shameful and instantly the Lord is bragging about Job before others like a proud father. He is using a term of intimacy to let Job know he loves him. This is our God. Do not hold a weak view of his compassion, mercy, and love toward us—even as we see in Job.

But it’s not just toward Job that we see God’s compassion and mercy. We also see it toward Job’s friends. After telling them that his anger burns against them for the way they castigated Job, the Lord tells them how they might be reconciled to him. In verse 8 we see the Lord saying, “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.” And they showed their repentance by doing what the Lord said so that we read in verse 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.”

This is the definition of mercy. Notice how the Lord explicitly says in verse 8, “And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly.” That’s mercy. You might think that Job is somehow special but if others who are lesser than he mess up, they won’t be shown the same compassion and mercy. Yet here the Lord rebukes Job’s friends and then prescribes a means for them to be forgiven and reconciled. Is it any wonder why James notes the “compassion and mercy of God” as he references the book of Job?

But there’s one more element I want us to see. We not only see the compassion and mercy of God but we also see just how far the Lord’s mercy goes as we also see in this chapter the disproportionate blessings of God.²

The disproportionate blessings of God

² Anthony T. Selvaggio uses this language of noting that God’s response of blessing is disproportionate in our favor. *Considering Job: Reconciling Sovereignty & Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 162.

In the last few verses of the chapter (vv. 10-17) we see that Job's blessings are restored. After Job prays for his friends, the Lord decides to lavish grace on his servant. Job's brothers and sisters and all who had known him come and eat with him, show sympathy and comfort to him, and give him some of their own riches. This would have been customary in that time for a family that suffers misfortune. The neighbors, family, and friends would all give a little bit to help them get back on their feet.

But notice that Job doesn't just get back on his feet or just recover what he'd lost throughout this whole ordeal. We read in v. 10b, "And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before." Obviously that wasn't the case with his children. He is given ten children and not twenty, but everything else is doubled. So what are we to do with this ending of Job getting back twice as much as before?

Well, first we need to understand that this isn't a confirmation of the simplistic retribution principle that Job's friends argued. In other words, it's not the case that Job did well and therefore he gets a bunch of beautiful kids and gets rich. Again, that's not how life works in this age. Though many faithful will see immense blessings in this age, but will also be many godly people can't have kids or walk through great tragedy or poverty in this life. This isn't a picture of the retribution principle so that we're supposed to see what Job has earned. Rather, it is a picture of God lavishing grace on his servant. It's meant to show us the Lord's compassion and mercy. Job had not persevered in order to have his blessings restored. He'd just been after God. And yet the Lord has decided to lavish blessing after blessing on Job—greater than what he'd lost.

This is a reminder to us that the Lord likes to give disproportionate blessings to his people. He doesn't weight out our suffering in this life and make sure we're credited for it in the end. He lavishes grace. Job 42:10-17 is a picture for us of the blessings of eternity and of God's heart toward us. It's a reminder that even though you and I do not deserve to be with the Lord forever on our own merits, we're going to be the objects of rich and gracious blessing—disproportionate to what we deserve or have suffered in this life. Isn't this point made again and again in the New Testament? Paul can say in Romans 8:18 that the suffering of this world isn't worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. And he'll remind us in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that "this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Two times we're told that the blessing that awaits us isn't able to be compared to what we've experienced in this age.

I think that's what these last verses are here to show. Some people don't like the ending of Job because it feels like it wraps up all too nice and neat. Job suffers, endures, and gets all kinds of blessing. But if that's our complaint I think it reveals that we're missing the point. The point of Job's blessing at the end isn't to highlight Job getting what he really deserves. It's to highlight the compassion and mercy and grace of God. The Lord gives blessing disproportionate to our suffering. And when we are with him in glory, we will all know that. We'll affirm with Paul that the glory of our heavenly home makes our suffering appear light, momentary, and not worthy of comparing to what we'll know on that day. And that'll be the case because our God is good.

Job has shown us the picture of a righteous man who went through suffering and endured and who was greatly blessed by God. But ultimately he points us to another righteous one who was absolutely sinless and yet suffered death. The apostle Paul actually puts that in terms of his steadfastness. Jesus was obedient to the point of death. And therefore, as he was raised from the dead, his Father blessed him immensely. He was given the reward of a people from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation that would be his. We are that people. And because he is rewarded, we are blessed. We are his, and that means that we get to be with him forever. Why should we get to gain from his reward? That's just grace—just like we see in Job 42. And one day we'll see it more clearly than we do now. But until then, let's walk in persevering obedience, never losing sight of our compassionate and gracious our God is. Amen.