
Day 260 - September 17

The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE)
Job and the Problem of Suffering

Readings: *Job 38:1-42:17*

Reflections:

- We arrive at the grand finale when the Lord finally answers Job. To understand this conclusion there are two overarching insights to be gleaned from this story: 1) Job did not sin by having a negative outlook on God's apparent absence in his suffering, he was simply unwise and it is this foolishness that he repents from; 2) Job's friends did sin by viewing God's approach to life as a simple cause and effect – sin and get punished, live righteously and get blessed and as a result, they harshly judged Job. This basic conclusion to the book is well worth pondering. When we have a false view of God that leads to us wrongly judging other people (a religious approach to relationships) we sin against God and against the people we judge. When we simply are down, discouraged and feel like God has abandoned us, God doesn't count this as sin but it is an unwise way to look at God because it doesn't account for his power, wisdom and grace.
- The Lord speaks out of a whirlwind storm. It is common in the Old Testament for God's appearance (called a theophany) to be accompanied by a storm (Ezekiel 1:4; Nahum 1:3; Zechariah 9:14). This would in some way be similar to God appearing in a cloud or pillar of fire. It is a natural demonstration that reveals God's presence and power. Some scholars say that this whirlwind is not the storm of Elihu because it uses a different word for storm. That doesn't make sense though if Elihu's speech is a later addition and is pointing to this section. The editor may not have used the same word but no doubt would have been attempting to align his thoughts with the following section.
- God's tone with Job is quite harsh even though God does not credit Job with sin. To understand this harshness, we probably want to view the development of this parable similar to the story of Moses and God when Moses was kept out of the promised land for striking a rock (Numbers 20:10-12). When a person is a friend of God, there is a different expectation with that friendship. Job is portrayed as the most righteous guy possible and so God's direct dealings are based on the fact that although he knew so much about God he didn't actually trust God when things got really bad. He had lost sight of the basic truths about God and so God in this section calls him to account for such a foolish way of looking at life.

- God asks Job questions that basically say the same thing: “Are you God?” God walks through creation and the rule of creation to remind Job of God’s ultimate wisdom and power and how Job is unable to understand the mysteries of creation. God does this again with bird and animal life. Job doesn’t understand these mysteries and so how can he judge the mysteries of God?
- Job’s response to the Lord’s first speech shows that he should have remained silent through his suffering: “I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but have no answer – twice but I will say no more.” Waiting in silence is at times the greatest act of faith we can offer God.
- God continues his questioning of Job. Here in this second speech is a key question: “Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” This is a key heart question. In our loyalty to God, are we more interested in how people see us and our righteousness during times of trial and suffering or are we more interested in defending God? This is a key question of friendship, isn’t it? Are we good friends to God when things go badly? Now, again we may ask if God was worthy of this friendship in light of all the suffering God allows Job to endure because of Satan’s challenge. This is where we are probably pushing this parable into a logical sequence that causes it to break down. Here is the basic point of this story that the writer is trying to build on: 1) Satan maintained that Job only trusted God because of his wealth and if that wealth was removed he would curse God; 2) To demonstrate Job’s true relationship with God and his righteousness, God brings great suffering on Job; 3) Job doesn’t curse God but he does feel abandoned by God and doesn’t defend God; 4) God challenges Job that he should have still trusted him but acknowledges that Job did not sin by cursing God.
- We see in this parable that Job remained fixed on his relationship with God and so in this way Satan was wrong and God was right. Job revealed his true relationship with God although it was not as grounded in a complete trust worthy of Job’s relationship and knowledge of God. Maybe again a good parallel to consider is Abraham offering Isaac. Such a painful request that goes beyond reason is used to reveal Abraham’s ultimate trust in God. In both the cases of Abraham and this parable, the revelation of the true heart of God’s servant is followed by blessing.
- The reference to the two prehistoric beasts, the behemoth (which means beast) and the leviathan has raised interesting discussion by scholars. First, these two creatures add very little to the argument at this point in the story. Is the behemoth a hippopotamus or is it a mythical creature similar to the leviathan? Some have wondered if these are dinosaurs. Most likely, these two creatures are mythical creatures that non-Jews hearing this story would identify with and understand the power and greatness of God is bigger than the biggest, most frightening monster gods in their religious systems or myths. These may have been inserted later but the point again is that God is bigger than everything, including all the gods or religions of the world.

- Job makes his final confessions: “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” Job is still unaware of the dialogue between Satan and God and now accepts that he will not understand the mysteries of God or the spiritual realm. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” This is a very important statement, maybe the most important in the entire book. Job’s understanding of God has moved from simply hearing about God to actually seeing him. This is not about Job actually seeing God with his eyes (the storm) but about having eyes to see God rather than simply living out of second-hand information about God (what others have told him). As Job has actually come to the place where he can hear God and perceive him, he now repents and humbles himself because of his foolish judgment of him (dust and ashes are a sign of complete humility, abandoning everything to simply be humbled before God with nothing to offer).
- As mentioned at the beginning, Job’s friends did sin against God and Job and therefore must make atonement for their religious sin. Again Elihu is notably absent suggesting that his speech was a later addition.
- Job’s life is now blessed beyond imagination. His sons are a complete number (seven) and his daughter’s names appear to be references to beauty (dove, horn of eye-paint). There is an interesting statement about his daughters receiving an inheritance as well as the sons. This shows the degree of his lavish blessing and wealth that there is so much that even his daughters receive an inheritance. This also points the way to a time when all people, male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free would receive equal blessing from God (Galatians 3:28). Job’s extended life fits him within the stories of the patriarchs and he dies, “old and full of years.”
- This happy ending would have no doubt encouraged the nation that was suffering in exile. As they learned to trust God, even though they failed to understand the spiritual realm and unfolding drama, they would reveal a wisdom that transcends mere human wisdom. For from this small nation, out of their poverty, failure and suffering would emerge a savior that would triumph over this ancient enemy and accuser.