

## “The End of Suffering”

Job 42:7-17

March 19, 2023

As we have worked our way through the book of Job, we have talked a lot about the justice of God and the sovereignty of God, yet it is not until we get to the final verses that we see what we have all been longing for in this discussion of suffering—the goodness of God. After 42 chapters of mystery and unanswered questions, it is not until the final 11 verses that we can understand the one-verse summary of the book of Job in James 5:11: “Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” So get ready to see the goodness of God overflowing in compassionate mercy and grace from His generous heart.

### Scripture reading: Job 42:7-17

Here’s what I hope to help you see in these final verses of Job: ***The final outcome of the Lord’s dealings is the bountiful display of compassion and mercy to bless those who repent of their sin to walk in His grace.***

These final verses illustrate 5 basic truths that point us forward to the gospel of Jesus Christ:

#### 1. **Misrepresenting God is the gravest of sins** (Job 42:7).

[vs. 7] Why is misrepresenting God the gravest of sins? Because God alone is the source of pure goodness. So to misrepresent God is to pervert the purest good, and to violate goodness is an act of evil. This burning anger in vs. 7 is not sinful anger. It is holy wrath. There is nothing more terrifying that you could ever hear than for God to say to you, “My anger burns against you.”

In your battle against sin, you will never get to the root of the issue until you understand that the core problem of every sin is not that it violates a moral

principle or even another person but that it is rebellion against God Himself. This explains Ps 51:4 where David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed in battle, could say to God, “against You and You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight so that you are justified when You speak and blameless when you judge.” David is not suggesting that he didn’t sin against Bathsheba or Uriah, but rather that the true problem was that he sinned against God, most holy—the judge to whom he must give an account. We may seek to be reconciled to other people, but not until we have come to terms with the seriousness of our offense before God, can we truly sever the root of our sin.

Verse 7 not only exposes the sobering reality of God’s holiness, it also raises a perplexing question. Why is Job commended for speaking what is right of God when He struggled so contentiously with God’s justice and even expressed how he thought God was against him? One commentator put it this way:

“Job spoke without understanding (vs. 3) and was often fiery and emotional in his remarks (15:12-13; 18:4). His opinions and feelings were often wrong, but his facts were right. He was not punished for sins he had committed. But the friends were claiming to know for certain things they did not know and so were falsely accusing Job while mouthing beautiful words about God. Job rightly accused them of lying about him and trying to flatter God (13:4, 7-11).”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, there was a core of integrity in Job’s genuine pursuit of the truth unlike his friends who were overly simplistic and hypocritical in their counsel. Had Job followed their advice, he would have forfeited his integrity and failed to come to terms with a more accurate view of God.<sup>2</sup>

Beware of replacing God himself with a system of belief that misrepresents God (this is what Job’s friends did with an overly simplistic understanding of retribution theology, the idea that sinners suffer and the righteous are blessed). There is a human tendency to gravitate toward a system of belief in either extreme or the other of lawlessness or legalism. *Lawlessness* is overly simplistic in its *permissiveness* leaving no room for moral standards

<sup>1</sup> Elmer Smick, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: Vol 4 (Job), pg. 1057.

<sup>2</sup> John Hartley, *The book of Job* (NICOT), pg. 539.

while *legalism* is overly simplistic in its *rigidness* leaving no room for grace.

So it's important that we keep 3 truths in mind:

- **Excusing God's law or undermining His standards (lawlessness) condones sin.**
- **Upholding the law by itself (legalism) condemns.**
- **Divine grace empowers repentance, leading to salvation.**

Both of these extremes (lawlessness and legalism) are promoted as religious systems of belief. Yet both of them misrepresent the gospel as a true representation of God's character.

This is important for us to wrestle with given the current culture around us. To misrepresent God's character and redefine moral issues in the name of love is to undermine the power of the cross where God's love is truly displayed to grant mercy to repentant sinners. The world (including the liberal church) in the name of love is saying that God condones sin (things like same-sex "marriage," gender fluidity, etc.) rather than calling people to repent of sin which is the only doorway to God's mercy. Lawlessness is not the way of love because it leads to judgment.

On the other hand, if the church only responds with a message of condemnation (legalism), we also undermine the power of the cross which offers sinners *hope for change* through repentance and faith in Jesus. For example, it can be so easy for us to condemn a transgender individual without taking the time to consider how they got there and how to offer them the only hope of true change through the gospel. Legalism is not the way of love because it is void of grace that leads to repentance and reconciliation with God.

So what does all this have to do with Job? Well, not only did Job's friends misrepresent God with their incomplete theology, but Job himself had to relocate his personal identity from his moral behavior to his merciful God.<sup>3</sup> Church, we too must ask ourselves, "is my confidence in my moral beliefs and behaviors or in Jesus Himself who loves me with undeserved mercy?" No moral or religious system can replace a vital relationship with Jesus Himself.

The only way to truly represent God is to uphold an undiminished vision of *God's holiness* which exposes sin and *God's grace* that redeems repentant sinners.

2. **God does not overlook sin but requires that it be paid for (Job 42:8a).**

This is a direct implication of God's holiness. Vs. 8a: "Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves..." Why does God require sacrifice for sin? Because the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). God is the source of life and to rebel against Him is to reject life and embrace death. God, in His holiness, does not and indeed *cannot* overlook sin, excuse sin, or minimize sin's damage. Yet already we are beginning to see glimmers of God's grace in allowing an animal sacrifice as a substitute for the 3 friends themselves. As they watched those bulls and rams be slaughtered, they beheld what they themselves deserved, left to their sin.

Yet the book of Hebrews goes on to tell us the blood of bulls could not ultimately remove the guilt of sin (Heb 10:4), but pointed us forward to what only Christ could do as our substitutionary sacrifice for sin. Jesus stood in our place as a man who could truly represent us, yet One who was sinless, whose sacrifice was fully pleasing to God. Beloved, sin must be paid for, and that payment will either be laid on Christ through faith or on yourself in unending judgment.

3. **God offers grace to sinners (Job 42:8b-9).**

**[vs. 8-9]** Notice that Job is acting the part of a priest here. He offers up sacrifices on behalf of his friends, he intercedes to God on their behalf, and God accepts Job's prayer which apparently is offered up from a genuine heart of faith. The result is that God does not deal with these 3 fools according to their folly—that's mercy!

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<sup>3</sup> John Hartley, *The book of Job* (NICOT), pg. 537.

So what does this have to do with us? Well, Job is foreshadowing the superior ministry of Jesus on our behalf. As our high priest, Jesus intercedes before God on our behalf. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus “is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” His intercession is effective not because he offers up animal sacrifices like Job did, but because He offered up Himself as the one and only perfect sacrifice for our sin (Heb 10:12). So, God remains just by requiring that our sin is paid for. Yet He also is merciful to sinners by allowing Jesus to die in our place. The result is that God does not treat us according to our folly if we repent and put our trust in Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf—that’s grace!

4. **Mercy triumphs over judgment** (Job 42:8-9; cf. James 2:13).

Why is mercy superior to judgment? Because judgment kills but mercy preserves life. I simply want to point out here that Job is a good example of overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21). Earlier in 1:5, Job offered sacrifices and interceded for his children just in case they had sinned against God. Now in the final chapter Job is serving and praying for his friends who became his enemies by sinning against him. Yet Job’s gracious character is but a reflection of God’s gracious character in accepting his prayer and not holding the sin of Job’s friends against them.

And even as Job pleads mercy for his accusers, so we too are called to pray for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44) even as Jesus prayed from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

Who do you feel has wronged you? How will you pray for them? How will you overcome evil with good by serving them? How will you demonstrate your willingness to be reconciled to them because of what God has done through the cross for you to be reconciled with God and with your brother or sister? To say that mercy triumphs over judgment is not a mere principle (James 2:13). It’s a call for us to imitate Jesus in our relationships by serving those who wound us. It’s a call to walk in the way of the cross which is the ultimate expression of overcoming evil with good so that mercy could triumph over judgment.

5. **God’s heart toward his children is to bless them beyond what they deserve** (Job 42:10-17).

Lest we think that God was overbearing when He asked Job 77 questions to humble Job, we now see that God was preparing to overwhelm Job with kindness (by the way, take note that humility is the best posture to receive God’s blessing and kindness). The Lord blessed Job in double proportions, and allowed Job to live another 140 years to see 4 generations of children and grandchildren—but not until Job had a proper attitude of humility and God had His proper place of honor. [**vs. 10-17**]

God’s generosity to Job in the end is stunning! Not only vast wealth, but seven more sons and 3 daughters of exceptional beauty along with the joy of 4 generations of grandchildren.

Do you see the goodness of God? God’s goodness is displayed not only in the obvious blessing that He lavished on Job in the end, but also in the mercy and grace he bestowed on undeserving fools, and God does all of this without every compromising the perfect goodness of His holy character.

One of the main purposes of the book of Job is to demonstrate that “there is a benevolent divine purpose” threaded through the sufferings of God’s people and if we were to know all the facts, we would be able to see God’s good and gracious purpose in them. Yet there are times when we are not meant to understand God’s purpose but to live by faith and be comforted not by mere explanations but in a deeper understanding of God Himself as our Comforter.

Now I realize that not every person who suffers gets an earthly ending like Job’s. Yet every true follower of Jesus holds the promise of an even better inheritance than Job’s. Don’t forget that all of Job’s wealth in chapter 42—as impressive as it is—was merely temporary and earthly. Yet we who trust in Christ are promised an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Let me reiterate what I said last week. *For the believer* (and for the believer only), *suffering and affliction will never have the final word!* Consider the promise of Rev 21:4 for every person who is in Christ: “*He will wipe away*

*every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning or crying or pain.”*

Beloved, we have learned from Job that not every particular affliction is the result of a particular sin. Yet we also know that suffering and pain entered the world through sin which had a corrupting impact on all of creation (Rom 8:19-122). So, we can say that the reason there is suffering and pain in this world is because there is sin in this world. Yet sin is more than a mere principle. It is a personal act of rebellion toward God. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,” sent Jesus to die the death that we deserved, to provide forgiveness of sin, to bring a final end to suffering, and to lavish on those who trust in Him, endless waves of kindness for all eternity (Eph 2:4, 7).

Let me be very clear about our need to respond to the call of the gospel.

- ***The final end of all suffering for the believer is blessing and joy forever in heaven*** (Rev 21:4). (The end of all suffering for the believer is the end of all suffering.) (Believer = one who believes, trusts, loves, follows, makes his whole life about Jesus)
- ***The final end of all suffering for the unbeliever is suffering unending in hell*** (Rev 20: 10, 14-15). This is the Lake of Fire reserved for those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life. Seven times Jesus refers it as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Three times Jesus described it as place where worm does not die, and fire is not quenched.

Ultimately, the only guaranteed way out of suffering is to abandon all self-rule to follow Jesus as Lord, the One who loves you and gave Himself up for you to cancel the condemnation of your sin. And having fully satisfied God’s justice, God raised Jesus to life again just as He will do for all who trust in Him.

Congregation declare together:

***Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him,***

***because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1Peter 5:6-11)***