



While Jonah descends to the deep in the belly of a fish to reach the point of repentance over his disobedience, Job requires an encounter with God to find humility. These experiences are primarily individual in nature, but they have corporate implications that we saw exemplified in Nehemiah's story on Sunday. In his prayer Nehemiah identifies corporately with his people, takes personal responsibility, and repents of their wickedness and disobedience. Job doesn't take personal responsibility for his friends' sins, but God does give him responsibility for communicating their restoration.

In Job 42:7-10 God turns from Job to his three friends to identify their sins and address them. While Job works through issues of submission to God, his three friends have not been truthful. They don't seem to have lied intentionally, but they have accepted inaccurate cultural assumptions about God that are prevalent at the time. So when Job settles his own issues with God, God gives him the task of mediating for his three friends. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are to offer burnt offerings to God with Job, and Job is to pray for them.

The command from God to sacrifice burnt offerings to show repentance is clear, but the command for Job to pray for them as a condition of their acceptance by God raises a natural question: Why doesn't God just accept their offerings? God's goal is not merely a transaction of forgiveness but restoration of relationship between God, Job, and his three friends. More than anything this requires humility before God. Nehemiah experiences this by identifying with his sinful ancestors, Job discovers it in his encounter with God, and his friends demonstrate it through their burnt offerings.

But humility alone doesn't bring restoration. God highlights the fact that Job has spoken the truth about him where his friends have not. Similarly, Nehemiah is willing to identify the elephant in the room, that Judah is in exile because of their sin, not injustice from God. Truth spoken and received in humility helps us identify our own sin and prepares us for and enables us to receive restoration.

The final piece of both Job's restoration and his friends' restoration takes place through Job's mediation for his friends. No longer adversaries, Job advocates for them before God and all four experience God's forgiveness in the expression and reception of Job's prayer. "After Job prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes" (Job 42:10). Job's wealth is an external indication of the restoration he has experienced with God and his fellow men. Like Job, Jonah, and Nehemiah, it is only when we are humble before God, speak truth, and seek others' reconciliation that we can experience the fullness of God's forgiveness and blessing.

Discussion Questions

How does humility prepare us both to receive God's forgiveness and to participate in his mission of restoring others?

Why is prayer an essential component in restoration and participation in God's mission? Why is humility an essential part of meaningful prayer?

We often think of prayer as a last resort in the list of ministry options when we recognize a need. How can we reorient ourselves before God with prayer as a priority rather than an afterthought?