

A Final Plea

Job 25-31

We're rapidly nearing the end of our study of righteous suffering through the Book of Job, and tonight we hit a major transition. At the outset, we're introduced to this man who was "**blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil**" (Job 1:1b), surely not a candidate for the most grievous of life's suffering? Wrong. He was the LORD's boast, which made him Satan's target. In an afternoon, Job lost all his possessions, all his earthly security, and all ten of his children. Such a fierce blow would've KOed most, but by God's grace, Job was still standing, so the devil sought permission to afflict Job physically, and God granted it. Job was beset by stinging, burning, puss-filled, worm-infested sores all over his body. His body was horribly disfigured and stank. His sudden misfortune was accompanied by a complete loss of his reputation. Job's wife encouraged him to "**curse God and die,**" the very thing that Satan wanted from the start. His three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—show up to grieve with him and counsel him through his hardship, but their counsel immediately turns into bitter condemnation for the obvious wickedness he had committed and for which God was now punishing him. We see Job defend his righteousness through several rounds of heated debate, desperately desiring to argue his case with the One who alone had the power to end his suffering, God Himself. Tonight, as I said, we're going to see a major transition, an end to Job's debating with his three friends and his final plea to the Lord for an explanation and exoneration. We pick up at the end of the debate with Bildad in Job 25. It's a short one. The Bible says...

Job 25:1-6

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

**2 Dominion and fear are with God;
he makes peace in his high heaven.**

**3 Is there any number to his armies?
Upon whom does his light not arise?**

**4 How then can man be in the right before God?
How can he who is born of woman be pure?**

**5 Behold, even the moon is not bright,
and the stars are not pure in his eyes;**

**6 how much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!**

Bildad said that "**Dominion and fear are with God**" (Job 25:2a). The NET Bible translates "fear" as "awesome might," capturing the cause for the fear and dread. Though God has the ability to crush any foe with His incomparable might, He doesn't make war, but PEACE. By His MIGHT (fear) God maintains ORDER (peace) in the "high heaven." Bildad, kind of, uses this reference to God's angelic armies, His

warriors of LIGHT, as a transition, returning once again to the topic of purity and righteousness and adamantly declaring that it's impossible for man to be pure in God's eyes.

Now, to me, the reference to worms and maggots feels like a jab at Job and his worm-infested sores, but to Bildad's credit, He doesn't continue the verbal assault. He keeps himself on the topics of God's might and man's frailty and wickedness. It makes you wonder, *"Is he opening himself up to the possibility that Job may be telling the truth?"* Or is he and his two friends just running out of arguments? Whatever the reason, JOB WAS JUST GETTING STARTED...

Job 26:1-4

1 Then Job answered and said:

2 How you have helped him who has no power!

How you have saved the arm that has no strength!

**3 How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!**

**4 With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose breath has come out from you?**

As we'll see, Job is saying, "Someone besides God gave you those words because God's words WOULD'VE HELPED!" Job's response is DRIPPING SARCASM. By exclaiming HOW MUCH Bildad has helped, he's saying, "YOU HAVEN'T HELPED AT ALL!!!" Even if Bildad was beginning to entertain the notion of Job's righteousness (and that's a generous estimation not strongly supported by Scripture), you can tell from his response that Job's still on edge from their verbal barrage. At no point during this ordeal did they entertain the thought that he might just be as blameless as he claims. There was ZERO attempt to empathize, no intention of understanding him. Sure, they sat with him in silence for a week, but one can't help but wonder at this point if they only kept their silence because they thought Job already saw the situation as they did. As soon as he opened his mouth and attested to his righteousness, they POUNCED. THEIR GOAL, I believe, was to COUNSEL and ENCOURAGE Job, but having never cared enough to even try and understand his plight, their words came off as hollow, unfeeling, and unhelpful AT BEST. At worst, their words were intentionally CRUEL. It's no wonder that Job responds to their last words by saying, "YOU HAVEN'T HELPED AT ALL!"

Remember, shortly after Job's three friends first opened their mouths, he told them that, what they knew, he also knew; he wasn't inferior to them (Job 13:2). In his response to Bildad, he proves just how SUPERIOR his understanding of God was. He said...

Job 26:5-6

**5 The dead tremble
under the waters and their inhabitants.**

**6 Sheol is naked before God,
and Abaddon has no covering.**

Job thoroughly identifies the realm of the dead with three different words: waters, sheol (the grave), and Abaddon (destruction). In His omniscience and omnipresence, there is nothing hidden from God (which includes Job's life). God's omnipotence is surveyed throughout creation. Job explains that God...

Job 26:7

**He stretches out the north over the void
and hangs the earth on nothing.**

The massive work of suspending the earth on nothing (v.7), suspending water in clouds (v.8), suspending the moon and the stars in the heavens (v.9), and suspending the heavens with mountainous "pillars" (v.11) are all breath-taking glimpses of the power of God. Job tells us...

Job 26:12-13

**12 By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he shattered Rahab.
13 By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.**

Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear "Rahab," I think of Jericho and Israel's conquest of the Promised Land, but this is actually a reference to an entity that pagans in Job's day worshiped as the god of the raging sea. We also see "**the fleeing serpent**," which is another designation for Leviathan. Both the primordial sea and Leviathan were viewed as mystical entities. They were ascribed deity by pagan cultures of that day, but the Book of Job simply presents them as a body of water and an animal, just a couple more things that God made and over which HE wields power.

Job ends his discourse in chapter 26 by saying that, even with all of these mighty works to gaze upon, we only behold the tip of the iceberg with regard to God's power. You see, Job is not only saying that he has a greater understanding of God's might than Bildad, he's saying that he understands the power of the One with whom he'd argue his case, and he still desires to do so. We gather as much because, in chapter 27, he says...

Job 27:2-6

**2 As God lives, who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,
3 as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
4 my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.
5 Far be it from me to say that you are right;
till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go;**

my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

He said he wouldn't speak falsehood, which included declaring that his "friends" were in the right. He said, "**my heart does not reproach me for any of my days,**" which is quite a statement! When we evaluate ourselves, it's often said that "We're our own" what? "WORST CRITIC." This is especially true for someone who longs to live uprightly. David said "**For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me**" (Psalm 51:3). I identify with that statement; do you? As I said, the heart is a tough critic for those who desire to live godly lives, yet Job could claim that his heart did NOT reproach him for ANY of his days.

The rest of the chapter is Job asserting that God does indeed judge the wicked in the end. Job asks,

Job 27:8-9

**8 For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off,
when God takes away his life?**

**9 Will God hear his cry
when distress comes upon him?**

And the answer is "NO" because that's the only time when the wicked call upon God. Job says that God CUTS OFF the godless. He describes how his children are multiplied only to be MASSACRED by the sword while others starve to death (v.14). Any surviving children die of DISEASE (v.15), and so his name and lineage is ended, CUT OFF.

Bereft of his progeny, his focus turns to amassing riches (v.16), but Job reveals that his wealth will be spent by the innocent(v.17), and his piles of changes of clothes (a truly valuable commodity in antiquity) will be worn by the righteous (v.17). His would-be lavish home will actually be as temporary and insignificant as a watchman's booth like this...



...a structure that's thrown together out of brush to stand guard under while a particular field is being worked, and afterward thrown into the fire. Sure, Job says...

Job 27:19-21

19 He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more;

he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone.

20 Terrors overtake him like a flood;

in the night a whirlwind carries him off.

21 The east wind lifts him up and he is gone;

it sweeps him out of his place.

Now, some feel that these words about God's judgment upon the wicked contradict his previous stance, but bear in mind that Job never said that God doesn't punish the wicked; he merely questioned why they prospered, as Tim covered last week. The FATE of the WICKED is to be ERASED in this world and PUNISHED FOREVER in eternity.

So, we've seen Bildad's last word, and Job's response to him, but as I mentioned on Sunday, there's a separate and FINAL PLEA that we're going to look at tonight. Job transitions to that final plea by way of a discourse on WISDOM, and I'd like to read most of this chapter tonight. As I read it, you'll see that this chapter kind of comes at you out of nowhere; it doesn't sound like the passages before or after it. It's an interlude, a transitional passage that sets the groundwork for Job's final plea. Job says...

Job 28:1-4

**1 Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold that they refine.**

**2 Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore.**

3 Man puts an end to darkness (see him taking a lamp into the dark recesses of the earth)
**and searches out to the farthest limit
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.**

**4 He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives;
they are forgotten by travelers;
they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro.**



Here's an ancient copper mine in Timna. It's one of those holes in the ground that you drop a rock in and listen...and listen...and listen until you think you hear a faint thud somewhere in the darkness below. Imagine being one of those miners swinging from a rope as you're lowered down into the heart of the earth. The work in such a place is going on so far down that Job says, "**[You] are forgotten by travelers.**" Those just walking along don't even know you're there. It's an UNSEEN WORLD that's extremely difficult to reach. Job continues...

Job 28:5-6

**5 As for the earth, out of it comes bread,
but underneath it is turned up as by fire.**

**6 Its stones are the place of sapphires,
and it has dust of gold.**

Basic needs, like grain, come out of the earth above. They're more readily accessible, whereas acquiring riches means much harder work and risking your life in a hole in the ground. The work is harder, but the reward is greater; the grain that grows out of the earth, while vital, just can't compare with the value of the riches below. Job says...

Job 28:7

**7 That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.**

**8 The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.**

Few of God's creatures have keener eyes than these birds of prey, yet not even they have such things. Neither have the most stealthy, most powerful, most majestic beasts of the earth walked in the depths among such riches. They're not like us. Job says...

Job 28:9-11

**9 Man puts his hand to the flinty rock
and overturns mountains by the roots.**

**10 He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.**

**11 He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle,
and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.**

"Man can do these things," Job says. He can accomplish such feats...



I think of the Chunnel. Are you familiar with the Chunnel?



It's the 31-mile long, UNDERGROUND, UNDERWATER tunnel that connects Great Britain and France.



It was cut beneath the floor of the English Channel by massive drills like this tunneling toward each other from both sides, Great Britain and France. If you've never watched a documentary on it, you ought to check it out. It's fascinating. As I said, when I read Job's words about man's innovative and ingenious ways of mining deep into the heart of the earth to acquire riches, I think of marvels like this. Nevertheless, for all of man's innovation, for all his determination and courage, there's one thing he'll never lay his hands on my such means. Job asks...

Job 28:12-19

12 But where shall wisdom be found?

And where is the place of understanding?

13 Man does not know its worth,

and it is not found in the land of the living.

14 The deep says, It is not in me,
and the sea says, It is not with me.

15 It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.

16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.

17 Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.

18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.

19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.

"Where shall wisdom be found?" It can't be found by man's great effort in searching out the hidden things of the earth. Even if he succeeds in finding riches in the depths, he can't BUY wisdom with them. As Matthew Henry said, ***"The caverns of the earth may be discovered, but not the counsels of heaven."***

So, think about Job's words for a moment. If you can't buy wisdom or earn it through great effort, then we can't equate it with worldly successes we've had or with the sum total of our experience. Wisdom is more than what "makes sense" to you, what's "proven" by worldly standards, or what has "worked" and given you success in the past. It's been said that *wisdom is life experience*, and while it's true that, whatever wisdom we receive, we receive it as we experience life, Job adamantly declares that you and I can't procure wisdom for ourselves.

What's more, there's NOTHING in this world that's as valuable as wisdom. Wisdom is worth more than all of the wealth in the world combined. That means that there's nothing in life that we should pursue more passionately. NOTHING. I love the NET Bible translation of Proverbs 4:7. Solomon writes...

Proverbs 4:7, NET

**Wisdom is SUPREME—so acquire wisdom,
and whatever you acquire, acquire understanding!**

We must pursue wisdom ABOVE ALL ELSE—above creature comforts, hobbies, vacations, collections, perceived "security," or anything else upon which we place a high premium. So, WHAT EXACTLY IS WISDOM, and HOW DO I GET IT??? Those are the right questions, and Job asks them for us...

Job 28:20-27

20 From where, then, does wisdom come?

And where is the place of understanding?

**21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living
and concealed from the birds of the air.**

**22 Abaddon and Death say, [destruction and death say]
We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.**

**23 God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.**

**24 For he looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.** (only God is omniscient, which is why only He knows the way)

**25 When he gave to the wind its weight
and apportioned the waters by measure,**

**26 when he made a decree for the rain
and a way for the lightning of the thunder,**

**27 then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.**

Here Job sounds like Solomon describing how wisdom was with God when He established the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth (Proverbs 8:27-31). None of God's creatures can lay hold of wisdom for themselves, not even man with all his innovative zeal, risk-taking, or accumulated wealth. Only God understands the way to it, and...

Job 28:28

**And he said to man,
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.**

These words form a bookend with the description given of Job when we first meet him...

Job 1:1

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Wisdom comes from FEARING GOD alone, not in terror, but in respect, honor, and obedience, and we've taught this before. The FEAR OF THE LORD is an IMPERATIVE. It's the understanding that THINGS IN OUR LIVES MUST BE JUST SO BECAUSE OF HIM. Solomon spoke to this as well when he taught...

Proverbs 3:5-6

**5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.**

**6 In all your ways ACKNOWLEDGE HIM,
and he will make straight your paths.**

And here's the kicker...

Proverbs 3:7

**Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.**

The pursuit of true wisdom is itself an act of worship because at the heart of both is the desire to honor the LORD, to SURRENDER one's life to Him and thereby PLEASE Him. We turn to God for wisdom because, in His OMNISCIENCE, He's the only one who knows the way to it. Job has relentlessly claimed to have lived with such a desire. Ever since Job was first struck with physical pain, he has longed to make his case to the Lord (Job 13:15;), and he laid the groundwork for his case with this interlude on wisdom being the fear of the Lord. He has lived with the fear of the Lord, and now he'll present the evidence of it.

Remember, before Job lost everything, including his standing, he sat in the gate of the city, making legal decisions for people. The most prominent princes and nobles were silent and hung on his every word, calling him blessed and approving of his decisions...

Job 29:12-17

**12 because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to help him.
13 The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
15 I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
16 I was a father to the needy,
and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
17 I broke the fangs of the unrighteous
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.**

He tells the Lord, *"See! I've been good!"* He's given ample reason (in his mind) as to why he should NOT be suffering, but despite living a life that HONORED GOD, he is still suffering. Before his plight, everyone sought his counsel; deference was shown to him by all, but in chapter 30 he says...

Job 30:1-9

**1 But now they laugh at me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.
2 What could I gain from the strength of their hands,
men whose vigor is gone?
3 Through want and hard hunger**

they gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation;

**4 they pick saltwort and the leaves of bushes,
and the roots of the broom tree for their food.**

**5 They are driven out from human company;
they shout after them as after a thief.**

**6 In the gullies of the torrents they must dwell,
in holes of the earth and of the rocks.**

**7 Among the bushes they bray;
under the nettles they huddle together.**

**8 A senseless, a nameless brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.**

9 And now I have become their song;

I am a byword to them. [I'm a folktale, a story with the moral: Don't be like Job!]

Job goes on to talk about how he's mistreated at their hands. Pain racks his body, and all the while he feels like God's got him by the COLLAR. He says...

Job 30:19-21

**19 God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.**

20 I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; [Ever feel that way? Job is nothing if not genuine]
I stand, and you only look at me.

**21 You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.**

Virtually every blessing, everything good about Job's life described in the previous chapter has been OVERTURNED, and now we come to it: Job's FINAL PLEA. Chapter 31 is marked by Job's denial of wrongdoing in a given area and the calling down of CURSES upon himself if he is guilty. He starts by denying having ever lusted after a virgin girl (vv.1-4). Then he says...

Job 31:5-8

**5 If I have walked with falsehood
and my foot has hastened to deceit;**

**6 (Let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity!)**

**7 if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,
and if any spot has stuck to my hands,**

**8 then let me sow, and another eat,
and let what grows for me be rooted out.**

This is the pattern of Job's CLOSING ARGUMENTS, if you will. He goes on to say, "If I've ever committed adultery with another man's wife, let someone do the same against me with my wife" (vv.9-12). "If I've ever treated my servants unfairly" (vv.13-15), "if I've ever withheld good and 'raised my hand' against them, let my arm be torn off at the socket" (vv.16-23). He says, "If I've made my life about riches to the point that I've essentially WORSHIPED them...if I've rejoiced over another's ruin...if I've cursed others...if I've failed to provide for my household and the sojourner...(skip to verse 38)...if I've defrauded my employees or taken land without paying...if I've done any of this, let my land turn on me and only yield thorns and stinking weeds" (vv.24-40). In the midst of Job's self-vindication, he breaks out and says...

Job 31:35-37

35 Oh, that I had one to hear me!

(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)

Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!

36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;

I would bind it on me as a crown;

37 I would give him an account of all my steps;

like a prince I would approach him.

Job's insistence upon receiving a written indictment from God for any wrongdoing is his attempt to engage God. He's crying out and doing everything in his power to get an audience with the Lord. It's reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the Unrighteous Judge (Luke 18:1-8). The judge didn't fear God or man, but he eventually relented and gave a particular widow justice because she wouldn't leave him alone. Now, remember, neither that parable nor my comparing it to Job's situation is a claim that God is unjust; He isn't. The point of the parable was PERSISTENCE. Jesus said...

Luke 18:7

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

Job desperately sought JUSTICE from the only One he knew could give it to him. As I said on Sunday, a "final plea" is composed of desperation and confidence, total dependence and hopefulness. Sure, Job feared God at the outset, but do you think HIS FAITH GREW during this ordeal? YOU BET! The beautiful thing about Job's recorded agony, his relentless questioning of God, is the understanding we glean from it that GOD WELCOMES OUR QUESTIONS! It's the PURPOSE of the trial, to DRIVE us to Him! He is NOT put off by our questions; He WANTS us to come to Him with our concerns. Peter encourages us...

1 Peter 5:6-7, 10-11

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (and he reminds us that...)

10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Remember, even if the trial we're facing lasts for the rest of our lives, it's still only temporary. When we're in the midst of our trials, there will likely come a time that we too will feel like the Lord isn't listening, like He's nowhere to be found. However, He there. God's Word says that **"the Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Psalms 34:18a)**. Also understand that I'm not standing up here and saying that everything is going to be alright this side of glory. We're leaving Job on his knees tonight, hands raised to God in desperation, and that's okay. When you think about it, that's how we were made to live, and suffering is just the tool in our loving Father's hand that He uses in appropriate measure to bring us to that place. Through it all, we remind ourselves that God is still God. When we seek wisdom for the trial (as James teaches us to do), what we get is the Lord, and He's always enough for whatever we face.