

Evaluating Job, Right and Wrong  
Job 9–10, 42

At the end of Job, chapter 42, Job tells God that he repents in dust and ashes. A few lines later God tells Job's friends that he is angry with them, because they have not spoken the truth about God the way Job has. So if we're going to understand the book of Job, we must try to sort out why Job needed to repent, and why God said that Job had spoken the truth about God. I'm planning eight messages on Job, and I don't want to wait until the last one to pull it together, so we'll do some of that today. We will look at many different texts in Job.

Job's underlying victory was very simple: he kept calling on God, and he kept living in God's ways. That's it, people. He kept praying to God, and he lived in God's ways. And that's perseverance, folks, and that's why James uses him as a model of endurance. You have troubles that are not going away? Keep appealing to God, and keep aiming your life in the way he has shown us. That's called fighting the fight, running the race, and keeping the faith.

Today I'll list three things Job did right, then three things that did wrong, and we'll end by taking a look at Job 42. First, three things Job did right.

### 1 Job's First Responses to his Troubles – 1:21; 2:10

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.... Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*

These are remarkable lines. These words on their own make Job a hero, because he means them. He will not turn against God. In one sense he did *not* accept his troubles, because he complained bitterly about them. But he did accept them in that he refused to let his troubles turn him away from God. *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord... Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?* You try saying this to God. These are big lines.

### 2 Job kept appealing to God

Job kept praying and calling out to God. Some of the things he said to God he later needed to take back, but he was always respectful, never irreverent or insulting. Job had an underlying confidence that God was just, and therefore God would end up taking his side. Job was greatly disappointed in God, and confused about God, but he kept taking his troubles to God.

### 3 Job Refused to take Responsibility for his Troubles

The core debate of the book of Job is retribution theology, or retributive justice. Retribution theology says that in this life, God gives every person what they deserve from him. If I rebel against him, he will bring trouble into my life. If I obey him, he will bless and protect me.

In the big picture, there's much right about this. The Bible from Genesis to Revelation teaches that for those who trust and obey God, the end will be very good; and if we defy God, the end will be very bad. That's always clear, even in Job.

But retribution theology says that the good things and bad things that happen to us in life are brought by God, depending on our obedience or disobedience. If I have troubles in my life then I have offended God, and if I have good things in my life then I'm living in God's favour. That's retribution theology. And the emphatic purpose of the book of Job is to get rid of that notion.

The book of Job accomplishes this already in Job 1–2. In God's opinion, there's no one as upright and faithful as Job in all the earth. And yet by the end of Job 2, that man has had huge tragedy. And has continued to honour God. The story of Job 1–2 defies retributive justice.

Then for twenty-some chapters, we listen to Job's friends tell him that retributive theology explains his troubles, when we already know from Job 1–2 that whatever explains Job's troubles, it is not that. The friends said that if you have big troubles, it is because you have big sin.

So Job was right not to take responsibility for his troubles. That must have been hard for him to do, but he never budged on that. He did not say he was sinless, but he always said he'd not done anything to bring severe trouble on himself.

Job's friends argued from experience back to God. For the friends, you can look at a person's experiences in this life, and from that you can tell if God is pleased or offended by the person. For Job's friends, Job's troubles meant God was offended by great sin in Job's life.

This posture of Job's friends infuriated God. He told them in Job 42 that he was angry at them, because they had not spoken the truth about as Job had. As far as God was concerned, their theology was a terrible way to speak about God. "How dare you teach that nonsense about me?"

What did Job do right? (1) His first responses: he continued to bless God, and he would not let his troubles turn him away from God. (2) Job kept appealing to God, calling out to God. (3) Job refused to take responsibility for his troubles.

### Why Did Job Need Repent?

Now we're going to see three things that Job changed his mind about after he heard from God.

#### 1 Job Despised his life.

*"I despise my life (I reject my life), I would not live forever"* (7:16). *"It doesn't matter what happens to me; I despise my own life"* (9:21). *"I loathe my life"* (10:21). Job has been talking like this since Job 3, when he said that the day of his birth should not have been allowed. Those who curse days should curse that day, he said.

Job had a certain measuring stick of what a worthwhile life would look like, and since his troubles began, he thought his life was useless. His life was a waste, it was meaningless, there was no point to it. God was obviously against him, so his life had no purpose. He's rather die.

We all have some kind of measuring stick of what makes life worthwhile and meaningful, and when circumstances take that away from us, we are in trouble. We will feel like Job, and we despair. Job would not consider suicide, for Job suicide was directly against God who gave him life, and he would not go against God. But he did ask God to take his life.

In Job 42, after God's speeches, Job first spoke about God's purposes and God's plans. Job has no idea what God's purpose and plans were, but he realized that they were wonderful and far beyond his understanding. He said, "I despise myself, I repent in dust and ashes."

He said to God something like this: "I see now that my life, God, just the way it is, is as much a part of your purpose and plan as my life was when everything was good. It has as much meaning and worth now as it ever had, because it is part of your plan and purpose, which I do not begin to understand."

If we in our troubles will do as Job, we will call out to God and live in God's ways as we are able, our lives have just as much meaning and purpose before God as they could possibly have. Job needed to repent of despising his life.

2 Job: Too Much Concerned with His Righteousness, Too Little about God's Righteousness.

Job knew that he did not deserve his troubles, and he was sure that God had wronged him. 19:6–7 – "*You should know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. Though I call for help, there is no justice.*" 27:2–6 "*As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, ... till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it.*"

"God has wronged me. I call to God for help, but there is no justice. God has denied me justice. I will never deny my integrity. I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it, as long as I live." Who is the guilty party here? Certainly not Job. God wronged Job, God denied Job justice, but Job is innocent, innocent, innocent!

Until his troubles, Job assumed retribution theology just like his friends did. He believed in retributive justice just like they did. And now, even though he lived righteously, he has all these troubles. Job was offended with God, because Job did his part, he lived faithfully before God, but God did not do his part, God did not protect him and bless him. That's why Job says, "God has wronged me. God has denied me justice."

Job was too concerned with his own righteousness, too little concerned about God's righteousness. He needed to humble himself, and that he did in chapter 42. "*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.*"

### 3 Job wants to Meet God in Court, and Challenge him in a Court Case.

This is Job, still thinking retribution theology, which says that in this life God gives everyone what they deserve. More particularly, if things are going well for me, that means God is pleased with me, and if I'm having a lot of troubles, that means I have offended God and he's punishing me. That's the retribution theology of Job's friends, and Job kind of thinks like that too.

So Job wants to meet God in court, and Job wants to lay out his case before God. Job wants to say to God, "I was heart and soul faithful to you, and yet you brought all these troubles into my life. God, how is that justice? Explain yourself!" Here it is in Job's words:

*9:2 How can mortals prove their innocence before God?*

*10:2 Do not declare me guilty, God, but tell me what charges you have against me.*

*13:3 I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case before him.*

*13:22–23 Summon me, God, and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply to me.*

*How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin.*

*23:3–4 – If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say to me. 24:1 – Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?*

Job was much frustrated that he could not find a way to meet God in court and state his case. This was out of line. When God spoke to Job, God did not answer questions. God asked questions. God never mentioned whether or not Job was innocent. In the end, it was immaterial. God asked Job questions. It was a kind response, much kinder than God was with Job's friends.

God asked questions Job could not answer. God asked questions about his creation. And God talks about the wild animals he's made. God loves and admires the wild animals he made. God asked Job if he had noticed how impressive these animals were. God does not talk about Job's innocence, he does not even talk about people, and God does not talk about justice. He talks about the wild animals and how much he admires them and wants to know if Job has paid attention and noticed different things about them.

And then in Job 42, Job takes back his challenge. "*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.... I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*" Job admitted he was in over his head, and he humbled himself, he submitted to God's purposes.

Detour: the Right Way to Lament in Lamentations 3:1–33

The Lamerter of Lamentations has had the same experience of God as Job. The first 20 verses of Lamentations 3 use language and images of God's attack that are too similar to Job's language to be coincidental. One of those writers imitated the other in describing troubles brought by God.

That's the first 20 verses of Lamentations 3. In verses 21–33, we read the response of the writer. That section begins like this: *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

It continues like that for another 10 verses. The Lamenter of Lamentations 3 has had the same kind of troubles as Job, but the Lamenter talks about hope, and about God's great love and his compassions and great faithfulness. The Lamenter in these verses also talks about waiting for the Lord, waiting on him because of his love and faithfulness. *"The Lord is my portion; I will wait for him.... No one is cast off by the Lord forever."*

The Lamenter never despises his own life, he never proclaims his innocence, he never says God wronged him, and he never asks to meet God in court. He assumes that trouble is part of the righteous life. And the troubles of Lamentations 3:1–20 are severe. What Job got wrong, the Lamenter got right in Lam. 3:21–33. This detour is over.

Conclusion: God's word to Job's friends – 42:7–9

We cannot evaluate Job properly until we listen to what God told Job's friends: *The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as **my servant Job** has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to **my servant Job** and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. **My servant Job** will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as **my servant Job** has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.*

The friends have not spoken the truth about God as Job has, and God is angry at the friends. Seven bulls and seven rams – that is a large offering; they are in big trouble with God. And Job, who they were sure was a sinner, will act like their priest. They will take the animals to Job and offer them there. And Job will pray for them so that God does not punish them.

And four times God called Job "my servant Job," which God does rarely. When God calls someone "my servant" is a high compliment, it means someone God can rely on. God called Abraham and Moses and Joshua "my servant," people like that. My servant Job, four times.

How were the friends wrong about God? They were confident that they knew why God acted as he did. The ways of God were no mystery to them. They had God figured out. That's not good. They told Job that the events of life show us if God is pleased with us or offended at us. That's why you have troubles, Job, because you sinned.

They taught that consistently, and God was angered by that. God did not want to be represented like that; God did not want people talking about him like that. It was not the truth.

In what way did Job speak the truth about God? Not easy to know, since Job has been pretty hard on God. But we know what the friends said, and that was wrong, so then we know what God liked about Job's words. Above all, Job refused to agree with their retribution theology.

He stuck to his innocence before God. He consistently rejected what they were telling him. Job did not know why God brought such trouble on him. Job did not know why God was doing what he was doing. But he knew from his own experience, suffering even though righteous, that God did not govern the world with that kind of justice. And that was the truth that God liked.

The Surprise Ending: God Gave Job Twice as Much – 42:10; Exodus 22:4

At the very end, God gave Job twice as much as he had before. Exactly twice as much livestock. We're told the twice as much in 42:10, and then we get the exact number of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. We can compare Job 42 with the numbers in Job 1. And Job also got twice as many years. Ps 90 says our days come to 70 years, and Job got 140 years. Twice as much.

In Exodus 22:4, God said that whoever steals someone's ox or donkey or sheep, they must pay back double. They must give back two for each one that they took.

All along, Job has been complaining that God wronged him, God has not been just toward him. And God, by his actions at the very end, seems to agree that he was not fair to Job, that Job did deserve better. Now God will make it up according to his own laws. It is truly a surprise ending.

The emphasis on exactly twice as much suggests that God is not just rewarding Job, he's righting a wrong. God will not bring Job into his courtroom, and God will not answer Job's questions. But he will give Job back twice as much as he took.

People, we do bring troubles on ourselves, by sins and weakness and poor decisions. But our God is bigger than these things. You know very well that sometimes people make poor decisions and no bad things happen at all. Whether we "deserve" our troubles or not, our God is in charge. Job teaches us that our lives are in God's hands.

Those of us who live faithfully in severe troubles should be encouraged. *The Lord is my portion. I will wait for him. His mercies are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness. No one is cast off by the Lord forever.* So let's fight the fight, and run the race, and keep the faith. Amen.

PRAYER: Lord, give us the faith to respond as Job. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord. We shall accept good from the Lord and also trouble. Thank you that your compassions never fail, they are new every morning. We will wait for you. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. May the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in every way. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.