

More Blessed Than Ever

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the book of Job this evening and to chapter 42, the second passage that we read in chapter 42 and especially the words of verse 10.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends. What is the purpose of this book of Job?

It's not surprising that we very frequently avoid going into it in any great detail because it is in many aspects a difficult book to not just read through but a difficult book to understand the meaning of and why it exists as it does there in the Bible.

There could be of course very different ways of approaching the book of Job as there are because you find as you know yourselves different features in it as well as the person Job himself who has given the name to the book.

There is obviously the role of God in the whole matter of what happened in Job's life and then there are his friends. And there is Satan as he is prominent in the beginning and then obviously behind the scenes and the rest of it as well.

[1 : 14] So all of these strands are there in the book of Job. But what exactly is its purpose? What is its main message? Why did Job have to go through or more accurately why did the Lord place his servant Job in these very difficult trying circumstances when the Lord himself made it perfectly clear to Satan that there was none like him?

And when you find at the beginning of the book there that it quite clearly states that this man in fact was the greatest man amongst the people of the East. Not only did he have all these great possessions but he was spiritually one that was blameless and upright who feared God and turned away from evil.

Well the key for it in many ways as to the purpose of the book and the meaning of the book is in verses 9 to 11 of the first chapter. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for no reason?

Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face.

And that's really the key as you find the book developing, as you see that as the purpose of Satan, so it also corresponds to the purpose of God in all of that.

[2 : 44] God who is of course above everything that Satan himself is in the book seeking to bring about for his own ends. In other words, what the book is really about as Satan is suggesting is this.

Is it the case that God's people are holy only when they are comfy? Is it the case that God's people will pursue God and live with God and be obedient to God and be faithful to God when the going is comfortable?

Or is it the case that whatever the circumstances are, God has put in the heart of his people a principle of perseverance, a principle of obedience, a principle of faithfulness that will actually carry through the winter times, spiritually speaking, as well as the summer times.

And in fact that's corroborated and reinforced throughout the book. For example, just one verse to quote to you again, chapter 13 and verse 15, where Job there actually makes it clear that he is going to pursue with his trust in God come what may.

As he says there in chapter 13 and verse 15, where he again is standing clear that he has not himself done wrong, that it's not because of specific sin that he's not confessed, as his friends are suggesting.

[4 : 15] They're all the way through the book where they appear. They're trying to make him come clean. They're convinced that all of this suffering that has come upon him is for something that he's

done that he's not ready to admit to.

And that's where Job insists on the fact that that is simply not the case. He doesn't understand all the whys or anything like it. But he knows that it's not for that reason that God has opened up this period of suffering for him.

And this is what he says there, 13, 15. Though he slay me, I will hope in him. Yet I will argue my ways to his face.

In other words, he's saying, whatever happens, though he slay me, even if he end up taking my life, I will continue to trust in him. I'm not going to be deflected from the path that I'm on in my obedience to him, in my trusting in him, in just leaning my weight upon his wisdom.

In other words, God is really going to show through this book that faith and especially holiness and integrity of life, the kind of righteousness of life that God's people have, that is not like a swallow that actually flies south when the winter begins and goes there to spend the summer in the warm climes.

[5 : 35] Your holiness is not like that. Indeed, your holiness needs the bite of winter at times to develop a certain aspect to it. And Christians need that particular winter time in their souls.

Difficult though it is at times to realize it and difficult to accept it and difficult to admit it, but it's needed in order to do just as the natural winter does, in order to do its own spiritual work and develop facets of our Christian character, which would not otherwise be there, at least to the same extent, as they are when the cold of winter actually comes to grip the soul.

Now that doesn't mean, of course, that any of us are going to experience anything like the circumstances of job, that we're going to be plunged from a time of comfort, a time of having many things materially as well, and then all of a sudden overnight you lose everything and you're plunged into it.

It's not impossible. God still can bring that about in his wisdom, but what it's saying to us is, even to an extent, the principle of the thing still holds through, however little or however much there will be in our souls of that winter time, of that experience that Job had, even if it's much less than he had. So the two things we want to look at this evening with that sort of background is, first of all, how we read here that God actually restored the fortunes of Job. When he had prayed for his friends, God restored the fortunes of Job, and then you find, secondly, that God compensated Job.

[7 : 16] We're using the word with a certain nuance to it, but that God compensated Job in the sense that he was better off than ever before his sufferings began.

That's how the book ends. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and then he went on to have family, and it tells us right through to the end of the chapter there, the prosperity, spiritually and materially, that Job experienced after this time of terrible suffering and mysterious suffering had actually ended. So God, first of all, restored the fortunes of Job. Now that translation, restored the fortunes of, is probably not such a good translation as in this instance, at least in the older version, the AV, for example, has restored the captivity of Job.

And that's something that captures for us what we see as something very significant in the Christian life. Because for Job here, there was undoubtedly a captivity of a sort in the experience that he had of coming from that prosperity and being plunged virtually overnight into this deprivation and into this suffering.

When you compare how the book begins with its description of Job and all that he had and the happy family life he had and the contented relationship he had with God, when you compare that with the main part of the book where he is so much in agony and so mystified by everything that's happened, he is, in that sense, spiritually, he's in prison.

[9 : 08] He's been placed in confinement, if you like, and it's very near solitary confinement because what his friends are trying to do is only adding to his misery because he knows they're wrong.

And it really adds to his sense of confinement. So this word captivity and restoring the captivity really fits very well.

It's the same word that's used in Psalm 126, which begins, when the Lord turned or returned the captivity of Israel.

When the people of Israel experienced God bringing about conditions that released them from the grip of their enemy, whatever it was at that time, but you can see it repeated so many times in the

Old Testament, whether it's Egypt or the Assyrians or the Babylonians or whatever power the Philistines held them at any particular time, when that came to an end by the blessing, by the grace, the power of God, usually, whether it was raising somebody up or whatever means were used, their captivity was turned.

He actually turned it round and brought it to an end. And that's why the psalm, that little psalm, is such a magnificent jewel in the book of Psalms as to what happens when God turns a time of spiritual drought into a time of rich blessing.

[10:34] And the psalmist, as you know, ends with this appeal to God, Lord, turn out captivity as the streams in the south, as these channels in the desert that you find most of the time are just dried up.

But you can look at them and see, well, there used to be a mighty rushing stream there or even a river. You can say the same at periods in the life of the church and even if you turn it into an individual thing in the life of the Christian too.

There used to be a flowing river here and now it's a little trickle if it's noticeable at all. And that's when the psalmist is appealing to God to turn out captivity as indeed he refers to us at the beginning, back in that history.

When he did this, then we were like those who dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongue was rejoicing and even among the heathen they said, the Lord has done great things for them.

Well, here is Job and here we find the Lord turning the captivity of Job. This captivity in the sense in which we've actually explained it, Job's losses, Job's sufferings, all the things he mentions.

[11:51] Again, go back to chapter 19, for example. There are some great verses in chapter 19, as you know. Especially, I know that my Redeemer lives.

But in chapter 19, verse 8, you find the description there. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass. He has set darkness upon my paths.

He has stripped from me my glory and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side and I am gone. And my hope he has pulled up like a tree.

And so on and so on. He uses all these metaphors, these images of somebody that's come to be so hemmed in, so squeezed in, so different to what he once knew.

And that is so important for the Christian church to understand and for ourselves to understand as individuals as well. That there are times in Christian experience when you don't have the Lord as near you, as obviously close to you as you once knew.

[12:59] And perhaps you're looking for the reason for that, like Job, and you can't put your finger on it. And you're searching your life and you realize it's not something wrong that I've done.

It's not I've not committed some great sin that I'm unprepared to confess, such as Job's friends were suggesting. But there is this sense of God not being near me.

Why has he withdrawn? Why is there this kind of midnight or winter or autumn time, whatever, in the soul that varies greatly in its extent?

But every Christian knows something of that. And really, again, we have to try and teach our young people of these things because I think one of the things that we're concerned about for those young ones growing up today in our midst is yes, of course, they have to know their doctrine and realize the importance of doctrine, but they also have to get to grips with Christian experience.

What it is to know the Lord's presence, what it is to know the Lord's withdrawing, what it is that drives the Lord away, and sometimes what it is that the Lord himself does that, in a sense, we cannot understand, and yet we know something is going on and I miss him from my life and I'd like that actually to be turned.

[14:21] There's a brilliant paragraph in the Westminster Confession of Faith which is, of course, such a great pastoral document as well for our souls. It's not just for ministers by any means.

And in chapter 18, it's a chapter on assurance. And in paragraph 4 of chapter 18, it has this wonderful passage. I'll read it through and then come back and pick out that one phrase that's more relevant to our thoughts tonight.

It says this, True believers may have the assurance of their salvation various ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted.

And then it goes on to give reasons that relate to that. where it says, As by negligence in preserving it.

Or by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the spirit. Or by some sudden or vehement temptation. This is really the one.

[15 : 24] By God's withdrawing the light of his countenance and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and have no light. You see how relevant that is to job circumstances especially.

Or to someone who's really wrestling with this issue of God appearing to be nowhere near as he used to be and wondering why this is. This is what it says.

By God withdrawing the light of his countenance and suffering even or allowing even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light. Yet they are never utterly destitute of that seed of God and life of faith that love of Christ and the brethren that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty out of which by the operation of the spirit this assurance may be in due time revived and by the which in the meantime they are supported from utter despair.

Now really that's worth just if you've got a copy of it if not it's easy enough to get when it's really so worth just sitting down and reading through every phrase and every sentence of that passage because it's absolutely filled with Christian experience and the Christian's relationship to God and the various things that from time to time come into that relationship and affect that relationship and particularly there when it says that God may withdraw the light of his countenance and allow even such as fear him to walk in darkness and have no light.

Now it doesn't say that that is from any neglect on their own part mentions that as another reason. This is a reason in itself and it is simply under the sovereign wisdom of God that at times he chooses to do that and he doesn't actually give you the reason for it but if you go to the book of Job you can see the purpose for it and the purpose is that God by you is seeking to prove to all who might have an interest in seeking to deny this that your faithfulness to God is not hanging upon whatever circumstances God will allow into your life.

[17 : 41] It is just as it was for Job. A faithfulness that is determined though he slay you yet you will trust in him.

You will not be unfaithful to him. You will continue even if it is not chastisement or rebuke but it does bring as it did for Job a greater knowledge of God.

In fact you find that in chapter 42 there in verses 5 to 6. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you. This is after all his experience has passed and he's come back to this point where God is now speaking to him and God has indeed rebuked him for the way that he thought it might be better if he had charge over his own life but in any case this is what he's now saying and you can see the difference there between the hearing and the seeing.

hearing. It's not easy for anyone to be without hearing. Nor is it easy for anyone to be without sight and have hearing.

But most of us would probably say if I had to do without one or the other I'd rather have my sight even if I didn't have my hearing than have my hearing without my sight.

[19 : 07] because when you have your sight when you have your hearing rather and not your sight you can hear the sounds you can hear the rustling somebody can describe to you what a beautiful day is like you can hear the wind and the grass you can feel the heat of the sun on your back but you can't see it and in order to appreciate it you really have to see it even if you can't hear the wind at the time or whatever it is.

And that's really something of what Job is saying spiritually. I was at the level I knew you Lord by the hearing of the ear. I had that measure of understanding and of knowledge of you in my life previously but now that all this has happened I see you.

Now my eye sees you. Now I understand something more of your sovereign wisdom and of the fact that you alone know all things perfectly and you alone are able to bring things out of suffering as nobody else can.

But you see the effect it had. Therefore I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes. To somebody who's just looking in on that and not a Christian as I never had Christian experience they would say there's something wrong with that.

Here's a man who's actually coming to say he now sees God much clearer than he did. He has a better understanding of God. He's really again back to fellowship with God and to in that way rejoicing in God.

[20 : 45] Surely he's not immediately going to say I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes. But then that's what the knowledge of God does to you. And the more you're actually aware of the immensity and the greatness and the perfect wisdom and the inscrutable will of God, the more you

realise that you're just a frail, weak, very limited person indeed.

And particularly that you're sinful. I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes. It doesn't seem as if there was very much at all wrong with Job's life previously.

And as we said what happened to him was not a chastisement for having done wrong or gone out of the way of obedience and God trying to bring him back. Nothing like that. But he's now saying and God indeed is saying through him the best man in the world at the time, the best Christian in the world, believer in the world at the time is now acknowledging that there were things about himself that he had not taken account of as he now is.

And that there were hidden depths in his own heart that he wasn't aware of but was made aware of through what God had brought about in his life.

So there is Job's captivity turned by God. And it brings clearly for us the way in which God not only benefited Job himself from this but actually for his church's benefit.

[22 : 26] you can see how God is opening up for us here the way in which in his people's life he has complete mastery over all that happens for their good, for their end in further benefit.

And that brings us to God compensating Job just in a brief word. You can see verse 12 there and what follows on from that. the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.

But we have to take care there because we live in days when what you find called the prosperity gospel and it's not just the thinking is not just confined to what's called the prosperity gospel which usually runs through the God channels that you find on television has most of its roots in America but is still very much found in our own nation as well.

And the prosperity gospel along with many other things that are not biblical or accurate biblically says this. If you give so much to God and if you have sufficient faith then God is going to double or treble or whatever it is you've given him and you'll end up rich and there's nothing wrong with seeking that God will make you rich.

That's why it's called the prosperity gospel. It's reckoned to be part of the blessing of God and every Christian we're told from that teaching has a right to expect this and indeed it has a right to come to God and plead for this.

[23 : 59] And of course what you find happening is that yes people give but of course primarily they're giving to the person on the screen and making them millionaires and they're building all their big mansions and traveling about in private jets and having exotic mansions everywhere, other places in the world as well.

Yes of course that's why they're saying, I'm not saying they're altogether just sinfully misleading in everything they say but it's pretty obvious from many of the big ones at least that they're really out to just grab more millions into their bank accounts.

And what they'll tell you is this, if you give to our ministry ten dollars today through our prayer and your prayer you'll have twenty dollars in your bank tomorrow, guaranteed.

Double what you give to God. Well you see that's equivalent to really putting God in your debt. It's equivalent to saying well Lord here am I, I've given my ten dollars, where's your twenty dollars in return?

I've done such a good thing for your cause, isn't it now your duty to do this in return for me like this person promised me, like your servant on the TV screen said? That doesn't work like that.

[25 : 23] And there are many things wrong with that besides but you see what's important is that you don't come to this passage as some of them do and say well there's the proof. Here was Job so much that was lost from his life and here's God compensating him.

It's very different to a Christian giving to God's cause, giving to the support of gospel ministry and expecting that despite that giving, even if they're giving sacrificially God is still going to provide for them.

That's not wrong. Allow me a personal reference, I never came home when I was away, even since I became a minister while my mother was alive, that she didn't press 20 pounds or 40 pounds or 50 pounds or whatever in my hand for myself, for the children as well.

And when you said to her, but that's too much, you're not leaving yourself much, the Lord will look after us. She was never saying, well I'm giving this so I'll double back from the Lord. But she was saying, I'm giving this and I know that God will still provide even if I give in support of his cause. And that's the Christian mindset and the Christian attitude and that's something that you must be aware of as you come to these passages in the Bible and people misuse them.

[26 : 48] Remember always to distinguish between the word by and the word because of. By something, the means of doing something is not the same as the reason for something.

You can see that of course faith. You are saved by faith in Christ, not because of faith in Christ. And when Job came to this richness and this abundance at the end of his life, what he's saying there in verse 10 is quite important.

And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before when he had prayed for his friends. Not because he had prayed for his friends, not because of his own prayers, not because of what he had gone through, but through all that and by all that.

And by means of all of that, Job actually came to enter into a period of great riches and blessing at the end of his life.

And it suggests something else to us. When it says there that Job restored his fortunes or turned his captivity, when he had prayed for his friends, it's as if the Lord was saying, Job, I'm going to restore things to you in abundance, more than you ever had before, but I want you to do something else before I do it.

[28 : 21] To pray for your friends, because in doing that, it will prove to me, Job, you can imagine if God can put these words in God's mouth from what you're seeing, seeing there, it will prove to me, Job, that you're not a vindictive man, that you're not going to try and avenge yourself upon them for what they've said about you, that you're going to forgive them, that you're going to treat them as one who fears my name, and not to achieve your own ends.

And in a sense, that fits in with the whole purpose of the book, doesn't it? Because if Job had said here, look, I'm going to actually take it out on these people, they've done so much damage to my life, and I'm determined that I'm going to get my own back.

Well, you see, Satan could step in and say to God, I told you so. Isn't that what I said? That he only does it as long as things are easy for him or comfortable.

double. And there's another thing as well that you notice in this passage, where you find in verse 11, then came to him all his brothers and sisters, and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house.

Where had they been? Where did they all go to? Well, if you go to chapter 19, again, and at verse 13, you'll find an answer to that question, I think, there, when you come to see what Job says about his own relatives.

[30 : 04] Chapter 19, verses 13 to 19. He has put my brothers far from me, and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me. My relatives have failed me.

My close friends have forgotten me. The guests in my house and my maidservant count me as a stranger. I have become a foreigner in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer. I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy. My breath is strange to my wife, and I am a stench to the children of my own mother. Even young children despise me.

When I rise, they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me. Those whom I loved have turned against me. men to them to them to be to them to them.

They were very much his friends while he had all that abundance of good things. But when he became destitute and sick and sat in his ash heap, they all disappeared.

[31 : 20] And now they're back. Isn't that typical of how we are as human beings? Especially in our unregenerate state. Especially as you see the world and its values.

How soon people are abandoned when they no longer have the resources that other people enjoyed. People move on to somewhere else. They're left alone.

There's a great lesson in this for ourselves that we just do not turn away from those who are in need.

However great their need may be. Because they were simply saying of Job, I can't go near that person. I don't even know what to make of that person anymore.

I just can't have anything more to do with them. That's just too much for me. And here they are, they're back. And Job does not actually seek again to take out any vengeance upon them.

[32 : 29] Instead, he prays for them, prays for his friends. things. And there's no evidence here that he did anything other than as he says, he showed them, they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him.

And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. Maybe they hadn't utterly despised him or forgotten him, but certainly they're now back where they had not been present with him

before.

And in all of that we learn, friends, of one thing above everything else in the book of Job, and that is the supremacy of God. Yes, it's a book about Job, but more than that, it's a book about God.

God's supremacy in every sense, his wisdom, his power, his plan, his purpose in the life of his people, every single matter is under the supreme will and control of God.

And that's where we have to leave it to, as Job left it, with our life, with our circumstances, with everything individually, congregationally, nationally, denominational, it is all under that supremacy.

[33 : 55] Let's pray. Lord, our God, we again give thanks for the teaching of your word, even in regard to those issues that you bring into our life, that from time to time make life such a challenge for us.

We thank you tonight for the way in which you support and uphold us, for the way that you give to us the strength inwardly, so that we can continue to remain faithful to you.

and Lord, we pray that you would help us to continue by the strength of your spirit to trust in you.

Come what may. Hear us we pray now and accept our worship for Jesus' sake.

Amen.