

Prelude To The Kingdom

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[0 : 00] God, grant that as we open our hearts to your word, you will open your word to our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

Looking at the book of Job, the trouble with the book of Job is that you can get into it all right.

It's getting out. It's hard. And today I want you to start with these words. And these come in the first chapter when God is in the councils of heaven and Satan comes in and he says to Satan, as in effect I say to you, have you considered my servant Job?

God goes on to say, there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.

And Satan says, yeah, but he has a reason. You've given him wealth, you've given him family, you've given him prosperity, you've poured every conceivable blessing upon him.

[1 : 41] No wonder that he's upright and blameless. And God said, take them away and see what happens.

So they were taken away. And after he had lost his family, his wealth, everything, the Lord calls in the council of heaven and speaks again to Satan in exactly the same word in chapter 2.

Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.

And he still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him to destroy him without a cause. And Satan says, touch his flesh and he will cave in.

And so the terrible disease was given to Job. Then you had in the lesson which Patty read for us this morning, the picture of Job sitting on the ash heap, scraping his sore body with the potsherd and his friends come and are aghast at the appearance of him and sit in silence for seven days.

[3 : 15] And then Job says, curse me the day on which I was born. And they listen to him until they can bear it no longer.

And then the three counselors of Job turn and speak to him. And the first of them is Eliphaz, the Temanite.

He says, he was a great preacher and he recognizes immediately what the problem is. that Job is there. His body diseased, his fortune gone, his family gone, everything because Job had sinned against God and this was the just retribution for his sin.

That's what God is there for, Eliphaz says, and that's what you're there for. Confess your sin and you will be forgiven and restored. I want you to hear how eloquent a preacher Eliphaz is and Guy is going to read to you from the book of Job as Eliphaz preaches.

[4 : 36] Listen to it. Now a word was brought to me stealthily. My ear received the whisper of it.

Amid thoughts from visions of the night when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me and trembling which made all my bones shake.

A spirit glided past my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still but I could not discern its appearance.

A form was before my eyes. There was silence. Then I heard a voice. Can mortal man be righteous before God?

Can a man be pure before his maker? And with that, Job is transfixed by the preacher.

[5 : 45] The very implication which Eliphaz sees throbbing in the heart of Job, the concept that a mortal man could be righteous before God, could be justified before his maker, is unthinkable.

Was he right? The whole of the New Testament says no.

He was wrong. Then listen to the other preacher, Bildad. And Bildad's indignation is growing as he talks to Job.

and he sees the necessity of the preacher thundering at this sinner and saying to him, Job, you must know that God is just and that what has happened to you has happened because of the justice of God.

And therefore, confess your sin, Job. Bildad says the proof that you are a sinner is that you won't repent.

[7 : 05] You may recognize that that's a kind of circular argument and that there is no way out once Bildad has said that to him. And Bildad goes on later in chapter 18 and says, Job, you are a man that doesn't know God.

Listen to Bildad as he preaches now at Job in chapter 8. Bildad the Shuite answered, How long will you say these things and the words of your mouth be a great wind?

Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the power of their transgression.

If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and reward you with a rightful habitation.

And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great. For inquire, I pray you, of bygone ages and consider what the fathers have found.

[8 : 21] for we are but of yesterday and know nothing for our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?

So Bildad brings the whole precedence of the history of the people of God to bring condemnation to Job and says, if you will but confess your sin, you will be forgiven and restored.

And then along comes Zophar and Zophar wishes that God would speak. If God would but speak to you, Job, then you would know.

But because he won't speak, I'm going to tell you what he would say if he did. That's the preacher's great trap. And so Zophar pours scorn upon Job in the midst of his suffering and says, Job, you're not getting half of what you deserve.

listen to Zophar as he preaches. Should a multitude of words go unanswered and a man full of talk be vindicated?

[9 : 52] Should your babble silence men and when you mock shall no one shame you? For you said, my doctrine is pure and I am clean in God's eyes.

eyes. But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom.

For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

And so Job's comforters carry on. So what you have at this point in the story is Job has lost everything. His body is wracked with disease.

He has suffered the bereavement of all his family. And to that is added foolish counsel.

[10 : 58] miserable comforters all of you Job says. And of course that's hard isn't it?

Because these men were speaking as they thought for God. They were announcing the will and purpose of God. They were preaching from the scriptures but they were wrong about God and they were wrong about Job and they were wrong about themselves and they were wrong about the scriptures.

They didn't understand it. there's a terrible indictment of these three men. If any of them applied to be the next rector of St.

John's he would be welcomed with open arms because they were so highly qualified. They had such wonderful command of scripture.

They had such a glorious sense of the majesty of God. They knew everything. They had every qualification and they were wrong.

[12 : 21] If you look in the 42nd chapter of Job you can see what God has to say to them. My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends.

You have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has. Take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering and my servant Job shall pray for you for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly.

God. Now in the condemnation of the counselors of Job the whole structure of our world is turned upside down.

It's just destroyed because they would seem to have eloquence on their side precedent on their side scripture on their side experience on their side knowledge on their side there they were watching Job and telling him that he was deserving of all that he had received but they could not understand the great mystery of the whole of humanity and that is that the most profound suffering belongs to those who know God and there it is that's how the book of Job turns our world upside down blessings and sunshine and light and music and prosperity and food and friends and all the delights that this world is able to offer should be showered upon those who are the believers in God and Job says the heart of the mystery is that those that deserve everything get nothing and are left to wonder about who

God is the span of every human life yours and mine and every human life allows us time for only one great enterprise an enterprise which we all carefully avoid and that is to explore the reality of suffering there was a story of women who in Cambodia had seen with their eyes the most horrendous and awful experiences that human eyes could be subject to and the result was that they were hysterically blind they simply couldn't see because they wouldn't see so we in the same way can only deal with the the death and horror of human suffering in our world by going blind by refusing to look at it by refusing to go near it and we protect ourselves from it by saying in some way that suffering is deserved by you my prosperity is deserved by me and that's the way humans relate to one another job says they're wrong well we live in a world that is eager to share in the wealth and prosperity that our world offers and our whole life is oriented to doing that the whole structure of our society the values of our culture to share in the wealth and prosperity of our world and we recognize that suffering is a travesty of human rights and shouldn't belong to any of us and

[17:16] Job opens up great riches to our world and says that that riches which belongs to our world is not for the few but it's for everyone and the riches that belongs to our world is in taking hold of the reality of human suffering and allowing it to take hold of you you see they thought that they were counseling Job but if they'd understood they would have listened to Job counsel them we read Job not for the counsel of his counselors but for the counsel of Job's experience and agony of human suffering I'm sorry to tell you this but it's there and I think it's inescapable do you know what

I think this is a prelude to this is a prelude to the kingdom of God anticipated by Job in the experience that he didn't understand and it's a prelude because in the kingdom the rich will be taught by the poor the doctors will be taught by their patients teachers will be taught by their students counselors will be taught by those whom they counsel adults will be taught by children the whole of the world will be turned upside down and those who have tasted and experienced the suffering of human life on this planet will teach others about the kingdom and that's the only way you'll learn about the kingdom you see we've set up an amazing kind of world where we exalt people like preachers up into pulpits and they talk down to people and doctors talk down to patients and teachers talk down to students and counselors talk down to their counselees the way it's going to be is the reverse and all the pride and all the self sufficiency that is demonstrated by the counselors of Job when they hold him condemned before the law of God all that's going to be turned around we're going to have to learn in exactly the opposite way the whole process of our life is that we might be exalted just someplace above the rest of struggling suffering humanity so that we can advise it and we can suggest and we can dictate and we can say how it must be done but it's going to be quite the opposite and if you want to see how that opposite is expressed look in 1 Peter chapter 2 and this is verse 18 of 1 Peter chapter 2 where Peter takes the slave the bottom man in society and he says rejoice in being at the bottom be submissive to your master with all respect not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing for one is approved if mindful of God he endures pain while suffering unjustly what credit is it when you do wrong you're beaten for it you take it patiently but if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently you have

God's approval for to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example you should follow in his steps he committed he committed no sin no guile was found on his lips when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but he trusted to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree by his wounds you have been healed you see somewhere and I don't expect you to understand it because I don't think you can understand all you can do is to say like Job though he slay me yet will

I trust him like Job in the midst of his affliction saying I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and though worms destroy this flesh yet in my flesh will I see God that's what Job said you see the whole order of the kingdom is turned upside down because the one who is nailed to the cross is king of kings and lord of lords we despised him and we rejected him we counted him as a curse he is the one whom God has vindicated way back in the very beginning of time where the story of

Job comes from it was as it were a premonition of that moment that Job in his righteous suffering without understanding anticipates another kingdom the kingdom to which we are called through faith in and submission to Jesus Christ Amen Amen Amen