

Job 31

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[0 : 00] Well, hello everyone, it's so good to be with you. You know, there's nothing quite as dramatic as a TV or a film scene of a closing argument in a courtroom, is there?

One of my favorites is in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Atticus Finch closes his lengthy, beautiful defense with these last words. Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury.

A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family.

In the name of God, do your duty. What we've just heard in Job 31 is Job's closing argument. I rest my case. It's his final lengthy speech in this book.

And I think the reason we're so drawn to closing arguments in courtroom scenes is because we all share this longing to be justified, to be presented as we truly are, and then to be told, well done.

[1 : 13] You are righteous and worthy. Yours is a life well lived. We all long to be justified. In fact, Job demands to be justified, doesn't he?

To be declared innocent by God himself after the slanderous charges of hidden sin from his so-called friends. Is Job innocent? Is Job innocent?

That's a good question. Well, we already know that he's blameless. After all, in chapter 1, we read this. 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.

And it was the Lord, in verse 8, who said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. And next week, we'll hear at the close of the book, chapter 42, verse 7.

And the Lord spoke these words to Job. After the Lord spoke these words to Job, he said to Eliphaz, the Temanite, My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken to me what is right, as my servant Job has.

[2 : 21] So Job never curses God. He never stops loving God as Satan predicted that he would. Job knows that he's innocent. And that actually provides the structure for this final defense in chapter 31.

Did you notice how many times Job said, if I have, if I have, if I have done X, then let Y happen to me. X is the crime and Y is the punishment.

And there's a ton of innuendo and accusations against Job from his friends, and Job now has reached the end of his rope. You've slandered me, he said, but where's the evidence of my guilt? Where's the evidence?

Step forward with supporting evidence. And then Job provides us with a laundry list of potential sins. Lust, dishonesty, adultery, oppression, miserliness, greed, idolatry, vindictiveness, I'm running out of fingers, inhospitality, hypocrisy, exploitation of creation.

He lines them all up and he says, I'm innocent of all these things. It's an exhaustive list. And we will return to it later. But for now, simply notice Job's point.

[3 : 31] I'm not guilty of any of these crimes. But is Job claiming to be sinless, therefore? Well, no, he's not. Just look at verse 33 with me. If I have concealed my transgressions as others do, by hiding my iniquity in my heart.

So Job admits that he's transgressed. He's sinned. But even then, he never tries to hide it from the Lord. He confesses it with honesty and with humility.

He seeks accountability from God. In other words, he always walks in the fear of the Lord, which is the source of true godly wisdom. See Job 28 in last week's sermon.

So Job, the innocent sufferer, demands to be justified by God. But what is justification? To be declared righteous and innocent by the honorable judge, the holy God.

Job, his final demand for justice begins in verse 35. Oh, that I had one to hear me. Here is my signature. Let the Almighty answer me.

[4 : 38] Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary. Surely I would carry it on my shoulders. I would bind it to me as a crown. I would give him an account of all my steps. Like a prince, I would approach him.

Now, is Job going to get the answer and the verdict that he's demanding? Not exactly. But there is a surprise coming in the remaining chapters of this book.

You see, what Job wants from God is fairness. But what Job receives from God is grace. Do you remember Job's three friends' worldview?

Do you remember their worldview? Do good, get good. Do bad, get bad. We know from Job's blamelessness that this is an oversimplification of how God works.

Bad things do happen to good people. But do you see how Job's final argument here in chapter 31 actually rests on the same bad theology as his friends?

[5 : 40] He says, I haven't done anything bad, so I don't deserve bad things to happen to me. But his argument only makes sense if he believes that suffering is actually caused solely by his sin.

So Job, therefore, still has a very important lesson to learn about God's purposes and plans through suffering. What Job wants from God is fairness.

But what Job receives from God is grace. And this is the gospel at the heart of Job. It's a very important point. So let's just step back for a moment and we'll look at it from another point of view.

And I want to ask you another question. What is it that justifies Job? What is it that justifies Job?

What is it that's going to lead to a happy ending for this book?

Right now, Job thinks it's got to be his blamelessness. You and I, we might try to live a good life, a righteous life. Maybe that will be enough to secure our good reputation. But will it be enough to justify ourselves to a holy God?

[6 : 50] So what is it that actually justifies Job? It is Job's faith that makes him righteous before God. Not his blamelessness, not even his works, certainly not his sinlessness.

It is his faith. And I know that we're in deep waters here. So let's just pause for a moment. And let me take us to the New Testament book of Romans, chapter 4.

And if you have a Bible and you want to turn with me, we'll be in Romans, chapter 4, verses 3 and onwards. Let me read this for us. This is Paul speaking. For what does Scripture say?

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted to him as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

[8 : 00] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Here's what Paul is saying. He uses Abraham and King David as two Old Testament examples of faith.

From Genesis and from the Psalms. Faith in who? Faith in God, yes. But faith, Paul says, actually, and finally, in the atoning, saving work of Jesus Christ.

How is that possible? He quotes Psalm 32, verse 1, a Psalm of David. We know that David lived a thousand years before Christ. How can David be a righteous apart from works, as Paul claims?

Well, let me quote commentator Christopher Ashe here. David has appropriated the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

A righteousness from God, an alien righteousness, as Luther called it, is counted, imputed, or reckoned to him, so that when his steps are counted, they are counted righteous.

[9 : 06] David, in his faith, foreshadows all who are righteous by faith in Christ today. And so does Job. And so does Job. End quote. And so too does Job.

There's the connection. The innocence that Job claims in chapter 31 is an innocence reckoned to him perfectly by grace, through the perfect obedience and the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, Job doesn't know anything yet about Jesus or the cross. But Jesus died once for all time for those who put their faith in God.

Saints from every generation, past, present, and future. And Job is actually already hinted at this longing for a redeemer back in chapter 19, verse 25 and 26.

For I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. Job's redeemer is our redeemer, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, fully God and fully man.

[10:16] Here's how G. Campbell Morgan, who was a London pastor, a mentor to Martin Lloyd-Jones, here's how he expressed it. There is no final answer to Job till we find it in Jesus.

Every cry of Job finds its answer in the high priestly ministry of Christ. In the closing argument of salvation history, Job is assured that he has a kinsman redeemer to take up his case and argue it for him.

What Job wants from God is fairness. What Job gets from God is grace. This is the gospel at the heart of the book of Job.

And this is the gospel for you and me as well. Here's the Apostle Paul again, back in Romans 4, now verses 23 to 25. But the words, it was counted to him, were not written for King David's sake alone, but for ours also.

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. That longing that all of us have to be justified, it can only be satisfied when we turn away from our boasting in our own innocence, in our own worthiness, and we trust in the one who took our penalty and clothes us in his perfect righteousness.

[11:44] If you're familiar with the story of Job and the story of Jesus, then you can't help but notice the similarities between these two. How Job's innocence reminds us of Jesus, and how Jesus is the truly innocent sufferer who voluntarily went to the cross to rescue us.

You see, the cross shows us that at the heart of history there is undeserved suffering that makes possible undeserved blessing.

That because a righteous man suffered, unrighteous people like us can experience mercy and grace. This is the wisdom of the cross. Job foreshadows this great truth.

Well, we've been talking about justification by faith. If yours, mine, and Job's. And this raises another big question for us as we read Job 31.

Perhaps this question has already come to your mind. If Job really is justified by his faith and not by his works, then what value do all his righteous actions have?

[12:52] Why is it so important that he's blameless? Do you remember the structure that we've been talking about from chapter 31? This structure that says, if I've done X, then may Y be my punishment.

What value do his righteous actions have? You see, Job's justification, we learn, actually has life-changing consequences.

In other words, if we gather up all these virtues and these values that Job extols here in chapter 31, we discover, we paint a portrait of what human flourishing looks like when we are united with Christ. Romans 6.22 You remember last week in Job 28, we learned to value and to pursue wisdom, which is that fear of the Lord and shunning of evil.

But what does that look like practically speaking? Job 31 now shows us in beautiful detail. More importantly, this chapter demonstrates that genuine justification by faith always will bear fruit in life-changing holiness.

[14:13] We receive our salvation by grace and respond with gratitude. So Job becomes a model for us of this sanctified life in Christ. And let's take a look at a few examples.

Beginning with verse 7. Verse 7. If my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes. So here Job recognizes that obedience begins by faith in the heart.

And he warns against coveting, which is when the heart follows the eyes into sin. But Job also recognizes that what begins in the heart must overflow into outward action.

Our belief and our behavior is never merely individual. It's always social and communal. And so that leads us to verse 13 and 15.

If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant when they brought a complaint against me, did not he who made me in the womb make him also? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

[15:18] So this is a workplace illustration where Job says, seek to be a good boss. Love those you work with as equally made in the image of God.

And he follows us up with an illustration of loving our city and our neighbor in verses 16 and 19. If I have withheld anything that the poor desired or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing or the needy without covering.

And Job reminds us to be especially concerned for those who are most likely to be forgotten. Our love must be generous. And that means generous with our time and our affections as well as with our money.

Two more examples. First, a call to love our enemy in verse 29. 29 says, It was Jesus who said, It's easy to love our neighbor and hate our enemy.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. So this is what gratitude looks like from a rebel heart who's been transformed into a child of God.

[16:34] And finally, verses 38 to 40. If my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together, if I've eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last, let thorns grow instead of wheat and foul weeds instead of barley.

Job seeks to care for God's creation as a good steward. He refuses to exploit God's good gifts and he longs to see the Lord sanctify and redeem the curse brought on by Adam and Eve's disobedience.

One final point before we conclude. It's true that Job's example of godly gratitude isn't given here as a mandate or a command for us to follow step by step.

But Old Testament scholar John Walton, he suggests that what we have here is an invitation, an invitation for Christian self-evaluation. Walton says, Our struggles today rarely take the form of theft, murder, idol worship, or polytheism.

Most churches, however, are plagued by conflicts in which integrity of character is sadly lacking. We can easily recognize ourselves in Job's list. Too often, churches must engage in discipline related to sexual sin.

[17:55] Many churches insulate themselves from the needs of the world, neglecting compassion. In an established church culture, we may find it easier to rely on ourselves, our programs, and our strategies than to rely on God.

Outsiders may enter the doors of the church once and never return because they were treated coldly or ignored altogether. And too often, the church's population itself is divided among social cliques with lonely people held at arm's length.

Fostering values such as Job's helps us honestly evaluate our shortcomings and avoid erosion of character within the church. This is what we pray for as a community.

You know, the courtroom makes for dramatic theater, but it ought not to be where we live our lives. We long to be justified, and the good news of the gospel is that there is peace and there is pardon available by faith through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So there's no need to stay in that courtroom justifying ourselves, proving our reputation. Instead, there's a whole world of joyful response opened up for us in the grace and gratitude of being united with Christ.

[19:20] This is the love of Christ on display in our lives. And let me finish with Philippians 3, verses 7 to 11. But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Amen.