God reveals Himself in suffering

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[0:00] We are into our last sermon on Job. We've done three weeks of it so far. And you've probably discovered much about Job's life, which aligns with your own in terms of suffering.

Also discovered there another link between me and Job and that he had three, the most beautiful daughters in all the land. And so I'm happy to claim that one as well.
Well, it's been a great journey for three weeks. We've been growing in wisdom as we have journeyed with Job, particularly in the face of suffering.
It has helped us see the pathway to wisdom when the world is not as we would want it to be. I said right at the beginning of this series that wisdom is knowing how to live well in God's world.
It's knowing how to live well in every situation. And last week we turned in Job 28 and discovered the nature of wisdom, of what it means to live well in God's world.
[1:09] And it said there right at the end, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the Lord is not a psychological or an emotional response to God.

It is in fact a total commitment to God within the boundaries of the relationship that he has set up between us and him through the Lord Jesus Christ.
That is what it means to fear the Lord. It's a total commitment to the God who has established relationship with us through the Lord Jesus Christ.
And so I would suggest to you that to treasure Jesus, as our mission statement says, is in fact the wise life. That is wisdom.
To treasure Jesus is wisdom. Because wisdom is not knowledge, it is relational. We will see that the wise life is demonstrated in these final chapters of Job.
[2:18] Chapter 28, which is where Sam was with us last week, is part of the final protest that Job makes against his three mates and their cruel and naive reasoning to why he is suffering.

Job's protest goes from chapters 26 to 31. And in his protest, he almost demands that God show up so he can talk to God himself about his suffering.
And instead of God showing up, we hear from a young man named Elihu who appears in chapter 32 for the very first time and he speaks all the way to chapter 37.
He's got a lot to say. Elihu says that he has been listening for some time to Job and his three friends, dialoguing and arguing and backing and toing and froing.
And he says that because he's younger, he doesn't want to be disrespectful to his elders and jump in. But he soon forgets that and he jumps in. Finally, in chapter 38, after Elihu's gone on this long monologue, God himself speaks.
[3:31] And in chapter 38, verse 2, he criticizes those who have spoken words without knowledge. And in one of the most remarkable descriptions of his work of creation, God paints a picture of his unique and sovereign power.

In these chapters, he considers the many things he has made from the sea to the stars, from the ostriches to the oxen. And then at the beginning of chapter 40, God speaks to Job directly.
Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let the one who accuses God answer him. In other words, who are you to question me?
Did you put the stars in their place? Did you create the oxen? And Job's response to that is very simple. Have a look there in chapter 40, verses 4 and 5.
I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer twice.
[4:53] But I will say no more. God replies to him in verse 8, Would you discredit my justice? This is the very thing that Job's been crying out for the whole way through the book.

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Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justifying yourself? Do you have an arm like God's? And can your voice thunder like his?
Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath. In the remainder of chapters 40 and 41, God continues to instruct Job and the others about who he is.
Have a look there in chapter 41, verses 10 and 11. This is sort of the summary of it. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay?
Everything under heaven belongs to me. You see what he's saying? I am the owner of it all and I am no man's debtor. I don't owe anyone anything.
[6:08] And at the beginning of chapter 42, very last chapter, we have Job's response to God's mighty self-revelation.

And notice there at the beginning of chapter 42, Job doesn't say, Oh, now I understand. Oh, now I get it. Now all the questions have been answered and I get the big picture now.
Verse 2, I know that you can do all things and no plan of yours can be thwarted. You see, Job is finally assured that God's power and justice are in fact established across all of the creation.
Even though his specific questions of why have not been addressed by God, he is content with what he has heard from the mouth of God.
His contentment is revealed as he summarizes God's argument and throws it back at God. In verse 3, You asked, Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge and without even trying to justify himself at all?
[7:28] Job responds in the second half of verse 3 See what he's saying there?

Even if you answered my questions, you are so great, I would not understand the answers. Even if you told me the reason, I couldn't comprehend it.
And his contentment comes from who God is, not from God's explanation of himself. Now there is no doubt that God's reply to Job's questioning is powerful and it is overwhelming.
But, it is not destructive. There has been a massive self-disclosure by God and as a result of God's revelation, Job now sees that human events are part of a cosmic whole.
Job now sees the intimate connection between God and his world. He has a new appreciation of the scope and the harmony of God's creation, of which he is but just a teeny, teeny part.
[8:58] The world is both beautiful and terrifying and God is in it everywhere, seen to be powerful and wise. He now sees God's careful and detailed superintendence of his world.

And so all mechanical views of God and his power and his sovereignty have been pushed aside by Job. God's sovereignty is not something to be argued about and theologized about.
It is the very basis of his survival. Job now knows God differently.
You see it there in verse 5 of chapter 42. You see Job here contrasts his presence, seeing of God with what he had only heard of God in the past.
There is a greater knowledge and intimacy with God. Do you remember what Job's hope was back in...
[10:22] I know it's a long way to think back. Back into chapter 19. Job's hope back in chapter 19 was this. Let me read it to you. He says, His heart was burning to see God.

And here in chapter 42, he says, Now I have seen God. His desire to see God is partly fulfilled here in chapter 42.
You see, he longs to see God in the flesh and he will through his Redeemer. His Redeemer means that when his flesh rots, when he dies and his Redeemer brings him into the presence of God, he will see God physically.
But right now he says that he has seen God through God's self-revelation by his word.
God has spoken to Job and he has seen God in his word. Job has been overwhelmed by the gracious presence of God through his word and what he has revealed about himself and his purposes.
[12:02] Ironically, now that God has revealed himself to Job and that God has made himself known, he is much more mysterious to Job now than what he was before.

much more mysterious than when he was dimly discerned and theologized about. It's interesting, when I first became a Christian and, you know, I knew the gospel because I knew two ways to live and I figured that was kind of all that you need to know.

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And so when I read passages about the mystery of Christ, I used to think, what mystery? I know Christ, I know what he's done, there's no mystery there.
And 18 years later, there is a whole lot more mystery there as God has slowly and gradually revealed himself through his word to me.
There's a lot more mystery now than what there used to be. Job has received a great revelation of God and he is delighted to see God.
[13:16] But, he is also ashamed. He has seen the magnificence of God and so he bows in humility in verse 6. Therefore, I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes.

That verse, right there, that is the wise life. He's finally arrived at wisdom. Job has grown in wisdom. He has grown in wisdom because he has grown in relationship with God. He sees God for who he is and with that now, he understands himself and so, the response is repentance.
That's wisdom. He, in fact, treasures God more than the answers that God will give him. Now, let's not get confused here.
Job's three mates weren't right after all. Job is not now finally admitting to a life of hidden sin that resulted in his suffering.
[14:24] What he is repenting of is the demanding that God give him a thorough answer to the reason for his suffering. It was a fault to be corrected, not a sin that need punishing because Job doesn't actually confess any sin here.

A better way to understand it is instead of Job repented, a better use is Job relented is, in fact, a better translation of the word.
It's like I'm at a bakery, right? I'm there to buy some bread and in the corner of my eye I see an apple slice and it's $3 and I get a glint in my eye and I start justifying the fact it's $3, that's a good deal and it's only one slice, it can't hurt you.
I mean, it's apple after all, we're meant to eat fruit. But there's a lot of sugar in it as well and that's not good for a diabetic. But surely it's balanced out by the goodness of the apple.
And then I think, no, stop, enough. I'm not going to get it. I relent of the course of action I was heading towards.
[15:44] I hadn't done anything wrong up until that point. But I was edging towards a decision that would have been bad for me and it's that kind of idea when it talks about Job repenting.

Job relented, if you like. He realized that he was walking down a path that would have led him to conclude that God has done wrong.
But what Job has realized is that he's dealing with a God who speaks about planets and stars like they are decorations on a Christmas tree to be arranged and played with at his will.
Job has finally seen God for who he is and he's saying, he's not saying here, I haven't been beaten into submission. I have just finally realized who it is that I'm dealing with.
And Job finally finds comfort. It's as if the contentment which has eluded him for so long has been found in submitting himself to this God.
[17:03] Job has found peace with God and it's through humble submission to God. and that's wisdom. That's wisdom.

And Job's mates are about to grow in wisdom too. Have a look there in verse 7. After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz, I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken to me what is right 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 of me what is right as my servant Job has. So Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar did what the Lord told them and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.
You see right through this book from chapter three onwards Job's longing was for his day in court so that he would be vindicated and in those verses Job's vindicated.
[18:24] It's finally come. In verse eight we see that God still regards him as he did back in chapter one and two. He calls him here my servant. verse seven has God saying that it is Job who has in fact spoken right of him.

No matter how foolish he may have said it, Job was looking for a God big enough to comprehend his suffering experience. And on the other hand, however eloquently they have spoken, his friends were upholding a God small enough to conform it to their minds.

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And there is one very subtle but very big difference between Job and his friends.
Get this. His mates were always talking about God. But Job in talking about God keeps turning to God.
God is the difference between theologizing and relationship. God's assessment is that they had not spoken what is right about him.
[19:45] And my friends, let's be very clear about that, that statement right there ought to come crashing down on us right now.

Right now. As we are gathered in the middle of corporate worship, right now, in the last 55 minutes, we have spoken of God and to God in corporate worship and how easily we babble stuff about God without giving any thought to the fact that our words will be weighed by God.
God is weighed by God. And what is weighed is not just the correctness of what we say and what we sing and what we pray.
speaking of God demands great care of us so that we do not distort, trivialize, or pervert what is true about the God who will weigh our words.
His mates were wrong about God with their simplistic tit-for-tat merit theology. theology. They have not allowed for the mystery and the majesty of God and crucially their tit-for-tat view of God leaves no room for a forgiving, gracious, and merciful God.
[21:23] That's the thing that gets dropped out in their theology, the grace of God. The roles are now reversed as Joe's vindication goes public in the course of their speeches.

Not one of Joe's mates ever hinted that they might be the object of God's anger and in need of his grace. And it is a delightful irony that they now need grace from the God who in their theologizing was not big enough to be gracious to the wicked.
And it is a further delightful irony that grace must be mediated by the very one that they had treated as in such need of their spiritual resources.
And so here is Job's final trial in the book. This is Job's final trial of wisdom, his last test.
Will he lay down the weapons of revenge and accept the terms of God's treaty and extend forgiveness and fellowship to his three friends in the way that God has?
[22:40] Will he say, you got what you deserved? And play into their tit-for-tat theology? And reveal that he's learned nothing?

Or will he find his vindication in God and humbly intervene for his friends who have treated him so badly? There's a whole lot of application just there.
We see at the end of verse 9 that Job has in fact grown in wisdom. The Lord accepted Job's prayer.
The drama ends with the massive restoration of Job.
His wealth is restored. He is given a new family and all the old honour which is held previously is restored. And in fact, everything is increased dramatically for Job. Don't you just love the happy ending of Job?
It's like a Hollywood ending except for those movies like Arlington Road which don't have the Hollywood ending where the bad guys win and the good guys don't. You go, oh that's bad.
[23:53] It makes you feel awful. But don't you think there's something really strange about the way this book ends? The ending of Job is frustrating, happy and confusing all at the same time.

It is frustrating because there are so many loose ends that need to be cleared up. You see, Job's three mates get put in their place but what about the young punk Elihu? Nothing's ever said of him.
And what about Satan? He's such a major player there in the first couple of chapters, he doesn't even get a mention at the end. None of Job's questions about suffering ever get answered and let's be honest, they're the sort of questions that we have and want answers to.
But it is also a happy ending because things work out the way we want them to work out. You see it there in verse 12, the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first.
Family, wealth, health, they're all back and the last sentence leaves us with a feeling of just completeness of life and so he died old and full of years.
[25:03] happiness. But the happiness of the ending contributes to the confusion. Up until now the book has been saying that Job's mates are wrong because their life is so neat, their theology is so neat, innocent suffering can happen and good people don't necessarily have good things happen to them.

And yet all of a sudden, here at the end of the book, Job repents or he relents and good things happen to him again. So were Job's friends right? Job has been vindicated by God and now we see

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God doing good things for a good person.
I mean, come on! God and so with the end of the book, we are left with the same confusion that we had at the beginning and such is the experience of life.
It is the mysterious aspect of life that takes us right to the heart of what the whole book of this Job is about and so what we need to do as a final point, we need to see the end of the book of Job in light of it all, the whole lot.
What was Job's major issue in the book? It wasn't so much tell me why I'm suffering, his major issue, give me my day in court that I might be vindicated.
[26:45] my integrity is at stake. That's his issue. And one of the points that we find here at Job is it's finally brought to bear, in the end the people of God are vindicated.

God is a just God. Life has purpose and meaning, life is not random, God is a merciful God and he does not ask his people to suffer without vindication.
He doesn't call us into self denial and sacrifice without the promise of heaven. Evil might be mysterious right now but the point of the end of Job is that it won't be triumphant in the end.
Evil won't be triumphant. Christians are not spiritual masochists who find pleasure and fulfilment in suffering. If there is any delight in suffering, it is that we delight in following the Lord Jesus who suffered.
Even the Lord Jesus did not delight in suffering. Hebrews 12 tells us that the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith was the one who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
[28:07] The joy that was before him was the presence of his father in heaven and that is why he endured the suffering of the cross. Suffering was not the end and the end of Job confirms that suffering will not be the end.

Justification and vindication and restoration will come and it will be better than before. It will be final. It will be complete. It will be eternal.
The end of Job does not promise that it will happen now but it does confirm the character of a good and compassionate and merciful God who will restore all things.
James 5 tells us what the stance of the Christian should be while we wait for the day of vindication. it is to stand firm in faith in the one who has perfected our faith.
Be patient then brothers and sisters until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield his valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.
[29:27] You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other brothers or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. Brothers as an example of patience in the face of suffering take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know we consider blessed those who have persevered.
You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
Both Job and James call us to stand firm in Christ in the face of suffering and one of the important lessons here is the need for us to turn to God in the face of suffering.
Don't just theologize about him but to turn to him turn to his word to seek his face to seek his revelation of himself to cry out to him in tears until you are able to say we Job I see him I see him oh that we might see him until we see him.
[31:00] May the Lord grant us grace to learn that while his ways may not be our ways and his thoughts may not be our thoughts yet they are the wisest of all and his ways are full of mercy.

So stand firm persevere be patient until the Lord comes. Job affirms that in the confusion and the uncertainty of life and the pain and the tears the Lord is in fact good and to live well is to fear him because the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
Let's pray. Father who am I to say these things about you?
Father we pray that we would cling to you in the moments of trial we pray Father that you would rescue us if we are trivialising you perverting you and what you have revealed about yourself Lord we pray that you would rescue us from babbling and theologising about you we pray that we might be a church that speaks true things about you that we might humbly submit to you that we might treasure you that we might turn to you Father we pray that you would grow us in wisdom that we might fear you the Lord of compassion and mercy and we ask it for your glory Amen

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