

The End Comes At The End

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Job 42, I'm going to begin reading in verse 7 all the way to the close of the chapter. Verse 7.

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My anger burns against you and against your two friends.

For you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves.

And my servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has.

[1 : 16] So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuite and Zophar the Namathite went and did what the Lord had told them.

And the Lord accepted Job's prayer. And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends. The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before. And ate bread with him in his house. And 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. And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning.

He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters.

[2 : 19] And he called the name of his first daughter, Jemima. The name of his second, Keziah. The name of his third, Karen Hapok. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters.

And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And after this, Job lived 140 years. And saw his sons and his sons' sons.

Four generations. And Job died. An old man full of days. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, this morning, we come to the last verses of Job. This 42 chapter incredible book.

We've said from the beginning that Job is not a book you study until you have to. You have to. I've read Job many times. But I did not have to study it until the spring of 2001.

[3 : 35] In the spring of that year, my best friend from high school, Jeff Leslie, lost both of his children and both of his parents in the deadliest shooting in South Carolina since the Charleston Nine.

It's hard to exaggerate the impact, and many of you remember, of that day on my life and my ministry. To give you a little bit of a background, my dad and Jeff's dad met at FCA basketball camp when they were 14 years old.

They became fast friends. They became the best of friends. They went on to become roommates in college, best men in each other's weddings on consecutive weeks.

Colleagues in the medical world and elders in the same Presbyterian church for three decades. All that meant was my family spent a lot of time with the Lesleys, with Jeff's family.

They were like family. After the tragedy, a friend called me and said, I cannot think of the Lesleys without thinking of the Alexanders. In God's providence, Jeff and I went on to share many of the same experiences our dads did.

[4 : 50] Classmates, teammates, groomsmen, in each other's wedding, and in God's unexpected kindness, fellow followers of Jesus Christ.

All that aside, on the evening of April 7, 2001, which happened to be my 41st birthday, my brothers called me that night to inform me that both of Jeff's parents, Robert and Barbara, both of Jeff's kids, Ada and Noah, had been murdered.

And that my dad was on the way over there. I was away on a ministry trip, and I woke the next day and drove seven hours, eight hours, to Jeff's house.

I remained there for a week. I spent nearly every waking moment beside my friends and sometimes slept in the bed next to him.

Trying to be a friend. Trying to help. There's so much I could talk about. But alas, we got a sermon to preach.

[6 : 10] But in the hours and weeks and months after April 7, I knew I needed the book of Job. I needed a deeper theology of suffering.

I needed to learn what it means to grieve. I needed to learn how to comfort and help. I needed to learn how to suffer well and wisely and help others do the same.

I needed a better understanding of what God is doing in innocent, inexplicable, horrific suffering. While it would be hard to exaggerate the impact of April 7 on my life, it would be hard, even harder perhaps, to exaggerate the impact of the book of Job on me.

I hope I've given you just a bit of a taste. I hope it's helped you in some way. But this morning, the book of Job has a final lesson for us. The book has something else to say.

You know, the last verses of Job return to the story. They return to Job's life. They break from poetry into story form or prose again.

[7 : 21] And they seem to say they all lived happily ever after, you know. A story fit for Hallmark. Hallmark. Now some find this fairy tale ending unbelievable.

How could this be the ending of Job? We don't even get to hear what else he's thinking and feeling after all he's experienced. Some find this ending offensive.

This ending is too Hallmark. What about what he lost? What about what happened to him? We just cover it up and move on. But I believe there's a final lesson for us in these verses.

I believe it's written and crafted very carefully. The most severe test in suffering is the test of waiting. We've said it many times.

I've said it many times. The most severe test in suffering is to suspend judgment. To not draw conclusions about what God is doing until the end.

[8 : 21] It's a severe test. It's a severe test because all you see, all you feel, all you've experienced screams that God doesn't care. But you don't know the final score until the end of the game.

You don't know the meaning of your life until the end. You don't know what God's doing. So we must wait.

We must take courage. We must not lose heart. The Lord is coming. The man's coming around. He's going to set things right. He knows your name. He knows where you live.

And where we're going is be patient. The end doesn't come till the end when the man comes around. And that's a reference for you country fans to Johnny Cash.

But the end doesn't come to the end when the man comes around. He's going to come. He's going to set everything right. Our Lord Jesus Christ. So we're going to walk through this fairy tale ending in a couple, four points actually.

[9 : 20] First one is an unexpected rebuke and commendation. An unexpected rebuke and commendation. As I mentioned, our text returns to the story.

The book of Job begins with a story in the first two chapters and 38 chapters of poetry that's dense and confusing and you can get lost, man. There's still people lost out there in the book of Job.

But it returns to a story at the end. Ten verses of prose. The ending is not what we expect. For some of us, it's too unrealistic, too fairy tale.

But for the friends, it's too surprising. Because of who the Lord rebukes and who the Lord commends. After speaking with Job, the Lord speaks to Eliphaz, the oldest of the three friends.

Look down there in verse 7. He says, The Lord addresses Eliphaz and his two friends.

[10 : 25] Earlier, these friends were introduced as the friends of Job. Now they don't have that title. The friends of Eliphaz. The Lord rebukes them.

Twice he says, and you heard it when we went through, that you have not spoken of what is right. He's saying you haven't spoken what is correct, what is accurate. You've not spoken truly.

Now what did they say that was so bad? And we've talked about this again and again, you know. They said they were right when they said that sin always leads to suffering. You know, that's one of the things we're trying to teach our kids as you get older.

Sin leads to consequences. The world that God's created is a consequential world. Sin leads to suffering. But they were dead wrong when they said that suffering is always because of sin.

There's not always this causal relationship. And so the friends began their speech to Job, essentially saying, You have not spoken of what is right. Job. The Lord begins his conversation with the friends saying, No, you have not spoken of what is right.

[11 : 38] And he says, My anger burns against you. Now it may be difficult for you to see how a good God could get angry. You may even bristle a bit at that.

You know, sometimes we think the Old Testament is this irascible, uncontrollable, angry God. And Jesus saves us from him in the New Testament.

That's not the Bible at all. God, if he is a God worthy of worship, must be a God that cannot sweep evil and wickedness under the rug. And so he's angry at the friends.

But look at why he's angry. So these friends have been going along for a long while. Look at him. He's angry. Not about what they did.

But about what they said. Why? Because God cares how we talk to people who suffer. God commands a massive sacrifice for their sinful speech.

[12 : 44] Which also means God cares when we're the object of slander and gossip. God cares when we become the target of suspicion, speculation, and self-righteous judgment.

We live in a culture where the accusation is the verdict. And we just escort the guy out the back door. Well, God knows who's been falsely accused.

And God defends. Though he rebukes the friends, the Lord commends Job four times. You saw it. The Lord said, my servant Job. A title of dignity and honor.

He's honoring Job. Twice he said, while he rebukes the friends for not speaking about what is right. He underlines immediately, as my servant has. Now, if you're reading the book of Job this afternoon, you would think, how in the world has Job spoken about what is right?

How has he spoken rightly? Doesn't he just complain a whole lot? Well, the main point, what the Lord is saying is Job was right. He's not suffering because he sinned in some specific way.

[13 : 55] This great tragedy that has come upon him is not because he deserves something. Then, in a shocking reversal, the Lord commands the friends to offer a sacrifice and to ask Job to pray for them.

Now, it's just staggering to me that immediately after his anger burns, the Lord gives a way out. He tells them to offer a sacrifice, a big sacrifice.

Seven bulls and seven rams when Leviticus says only one is sufficient. It alerts us to who this God is.

Our God is not one that can sweep evil under the rug, but he's also one who comes to offer sacrifice, to bring his people to himself. He forgives, but through sacrifice.

But it's staggering as well that the Lord has them ask Job to pray for them. Don't you just want to be in that conversation? Hey, Job.

[15 : 03] Forget about all that stuff before. Would you pray for us? I don't know what's more staggering, that the friends ask Job to pray or that Job prays.

Probably the latter. How in the world could Job pray for these friends after what they did? Early in our marriage, we established a rule that if either one of us, theoretically, was ever angry or annoyed or frustrated, if we met that occasion, and the other asked, can I pray for you?

This is something you only agree to when you're sane. If the other asked, can I pray for you, you cannot refuse. Now, it's led to some difficult conversations over the years.

Sometimes it's tough. You want to say, no, you may not pray for me. I'm not in the praying mood. I'm in the fighting mood right now. Ready to wring someone's neck.

We established that because we wanted to cut off the dead end of anger and bitterness immediately. But also because unforgiveness is a great evil.

[16 : 21] I find it so striking. So striking. Why do we find it hard to forgive? Because we're right. We're victims. Somebody's done something wrong to us.

We've been mistreated. We've been maligned. That's the story of Job. And it's as if the Lord is saying, Job, though I said that you were right, though I know how these friends have sinned against you, unforgiveness is not an option.

Go pray for them. If unforgiveness is not an option for Job, it's not an option for you and I. I think this passage is saying, is there anyone you need to forgive?

So an unexpected rebuke and commendation. Second point, an unexpected restoration. After this unexpected rebuke and commendation, there's this unexpected restoration.

Job prays for his friends and he's restored to his friends and he gets all of his fortune back. Look down in verse 10. The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for them.

[17 : 35] The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Now lest we be confused, this is not a tit-for-tat sort of thing. That because Job prayed for his friends, then the Lord blessed him in this way.

The Lord does not work like this. He has mercy on whom he has mercy, pardons whom he pardons. The Lord is sovereign and free to take away and give as he deems fit.

Rather, once again, Job does what is right for nothing. He obeys God. Without expecting anything in return, the Lord blesses him.

The Lord gives him twice as much as before. But I find it striking, before the Lord restores his wealth, the Lord restores his friendships. Look down there in verse 11. Then came all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before.

In the earlier chapters, particularly in chapter 19, Job talked about all the people that had abandoned him, that had forgotten him. Brothers, relatives, servants, his wife, siblings, even young children on the street would curse his name.

[18 : 47] Close friends, but they're all coming back. Brothers and sisters, all who had known him before, they're all coming back into the house. They're coming and eating bread with him, feasting with him.

They say the way to a man's heart is through his front door. Why? Communicate acceptance and love and welcome and care. And that's what they're doing.

It's almost as if they say, did you hear? Did you hear that Job's back? He's been through the ringer, but we've got to go see him. We've got to hear what's going on.

It gets better, though. Look down to verse 11. After they ate bread with him in his house, they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought about.

The last time these two words came together, sympathy and comfort, were in chapter 2, verse 11. When they came to Job and they sat with him in seven days, but they didn't sympathize and comfort with him.

[19 : 49] They began to accuse him. They began to believe it was all his fault. Their sympathy was hollow. Their comfort is terrifying. But now it's all sympathy and comfort. The friends have learned.

And now suddenly the friends of Job are the friends he needed all along. Friends are fickle.

If you've been a Christian for any length or just a person, you know, friends are just fickle. They'll fail you. But sometimes suspend judgment.

They come back around. I love this picture. These friends that have done so much damage to Job. Become the very friends that sympathize with him and comfort him.

They began to give him money. Look at the end of verse 11. Each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. Are these reparations?

[21 : 01] Are they paying down his damages? Are they paying down his damages? Are they paying down his damages? Fruit of a lawsuit like we might do? No. This is their brother now. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Now they want to restore him. They don't want to leave him in their state, you know. Like James 2 says, sometimes we say to the poor among us, be warm and well fed.

Hope it goes well with you out there. And that's dead religion. They say, let us help you. It reminds me of the story of George Bailey.

Undoubtedly the greatest Christmas movie of all time. It's a wonderful life. Christmas is not legal, but you can't watch this movie. It's not legal right now.

It will be soon. Christmas trees, all that stuff will be soon, but not yet. But the story of George Bailey just blows me away every time I watch it. George is in this jam.

[22 : 06] If you remember, his uncle and his partner loses a big check. He's famously a doofus, you know, and wanders around, loses this big check. The bank is going to be foreclosed on by the end of the day if George doesn't get \$800 in cold, hard cash.

And George goes into a dark place, as we often do when suffering strikes. He begins to believe he's on his own. He begins to believe the world would be better off without him in it. He contemplates suicide, jumping off the bridge.

And while he's out, his wife Mary goes throughout the town and says, George is in a jam. We've got to help George. We've got to help the old Bailey's savings and loan.

We've got to rescue this. They begin to help him. They all come to his house and begin giving money to him. Bringing it in. It ends spectacularly.

Celebrating, singing Auld Lang Syne. And celebrating this deliverance that the friends gave. And George is surrounded by his family and friends. And he reads a little note that says, remember, no man is a failure who has friends.

[23 : 19] Why does the Lord restore his friendships before his wealth? Because forgiveness and restoration is sweeter than vengeance. Down with bitterness and anger.

Down with unforgiveness. It's demonic. It's begging us to turn away from it. But it's also telling us the Lord restores all these things because there's no sweeter gift in this life than friends.

Augustine, the fourth century, wrote, my greatest comfort and relief is in the consolation of friends. Friendships have joys that captivate my heart.

The charms of talking and laughing together. And kindly giving way to each other's wishes. Reading elegantly. Written books together.

Sharing jokes and delighting to honor one another. Now we might not say it just like Augustine. But we can relate to that. The gift of friends. And so the Lord restores Job to his friends.

[24 : 26] Suddenly these friends had done so much damage to him. Are beside him to help him. To encourage him. After an unexpected rebuke. Unexpected commendation and restoration.

We find Job receives an unexpected blessing. Point three. An unexpected blessing. The book of Job began with God blessing Job after he had lost everything.

And the book of Job concludes with God blessing Job. God pouring out so many things on him. Before Job was the greatest of all the East.

The numbers did not lie. He was rich. And now he's even richer. It says once he's doubly rich. Once he had 7,000 sheep.

Now 14,000. Once 3,000 camels. Now 6,000. Once 500 yoke of oxen and donkeys. Now 1,000 yoke of both. Like before he had seven sons and three daughters.

[25 : 29] Why? Because that was the perfect number before. Seven's the number of completeness. He has a full quiver of sons. We think of Psalm 127. He has all the arrows.

He needs to send out into the world these sons. He has three daughters. It's fascinating. We get the names of the daughters but not the sons.

Why? We get the names because they underline how beautiful they are. The first name, Jemima, means dove.

Like the bird. Peaceful bird. Keziah means something like perfume. So fragrant aroma. Karen hapik means something like container of eye makeup.

Seriously. Now why does this book end commenting almost two verses on the beauty of Job's daughter?

[26 : 31] Well, I think because in that culture, men were what you wanted in some ways. They would continue the family line. But even with these daughters, Job has a bright future.

He talks immediately after that about Job providing an inheritance, not just for his sons, which was customary in that culture, but for his daughters as well.

So Job has a wonderful future all the way around. And it unfolds beautifully. He lives double the amount of time that he's already lived.

So he's lived 700 years. He lives 140. He sees his sons and his sons' sons. The scriptures say, seeing your children's children is a great blessing.

Blessed is the man who sees his children's children. Job sees four generations. Verse 17, and he died an old man and full of days.

[27 : 37] What is the greatest blessing? It might be long life, and Job has that. But what's up with this ending? What's up with this happily ever after ending?

I hate endings like this, you know. I am not Hallmark, so I don't like Hallmark, you know. It's not real life. Life has never been happily ever after.

Life is always they limped along together hereafter. I want sad endings. Serious. I like drama.

I like sadness because that helps me relate. You know, famously, Shakespeare's King Lear ends with everybody dead. And so over the years, many have rewritten it to make it happy, you know.

Happily ever after. But that's not what Shakespeare wanted. So what's the deal with this, Lord? Why does Job end like this? Now, some say, scholars have said, this couldn't be the real ending of Job.

[28 : 40] This was amended. It doesn't even make sense. After all he's gone through to just tack on 10 verses of this, it must be the scribes that added this ending. Others say the ending teaches the opposite of the story.

Isn't the whole point of the story that Job can trust God and follow God for nothing? That he's not in it? That he's not a mercenary? He doesn't need to be paid off with blessings? Isn't that the point of the story?

And then now it ends with the reverse. Because Job is blessed like never before. Isn't this teaching, as some would say, maybe you've never heard, the prosperity gospel that if you trust God, God will bless you?

Wouldn't people read this and get the wrong picture? Or maybe it teaches the therapeutic gospel that if you trust God, then you'll just be happy and content all your life? That's not a message I can faithfully preach.

It's not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. So what's going on? The ending tells a lie. I'm throwing a flag. Still others say the ending is deeply offensive.

[29 : 48] How can God take all you have, all you own, and all whom you've loved, and then just replace it with a substitute?

What about his kids? What about his kids? What about his kids? What about all that he had before?

Those are real. But all of them are missing the point. The meaning of this ending is that the end doesn't come to the end.

And in the end, all those who trust God will have no regrets. This ending is the end of the book of Job.

Job did not suffer because he sinned against God. God was not trying to get at him or pay him back. And Job was tempted and tried by the devil. The temptation is over, and the Lord restores him to where he was.

[30 : 54] He's making it very clear to all the world that there is a way to trust God for nothing and that Job did not suffer because of anything he's done. And so the Lord vindicates Job.

He establishes him again because he was not suffering because he sinned. But this ending, the Lord is saying something to us as well. The end of your suffering is not until the end.

You think you've been forgotten by God? You think he's forgotten his promises? You think your life's over?

You think your life is a loss? Down with such nonsense is what this ending is saying. The end is not until the end. Don't judge until the end. When the fat lady sings, you'll know what God's done in your life.

And the Lord is saying, in the end, you'll have no regrets if you trust him. Your life will not be loss. It will not be loss.

[31 : 52] You will not remember the days of loss because you'll be overwhelmed with gain. I think that's what this ending is saying. No matter how much suffering afflicts you, no matter how much suffering takes from you, you will not, you cannot lose more than God gives.

That's what this is saying. What is the meaning of this ending? The scales will soon fall on the other side. You feel lost now, but there will be gain.

Sorrow now, but then joy, suffering now, then peace, contentment, and joy. The best is yet to come. That's what this is screaming to us. Why? Because the book of Job wasn't written for Job.

It was written for us. It is God who'll get the last laugh. It is God who triumphs over suffering for his people. The end of your life will be a happy ending.

I love the way John Piper says it. One of my favorite quotes. And you'll see why. Because it relates to where I spend so many of my days up in the hills.

[32 : 57] He says, the life of the godly is not an interstate through Nebraska, but a state road through the Blue Ridge Mountains of Tennessee. Amen. Go Big Orange. There are rock slides and precipices and dark mist and bears and slippery curves and hairpin turns that make you go backward in order to go forward.

But all along this hazardous, twisted road that doesn't let you get very far ahead, there are frequent signs that say the best is yet to come. All the perplexing turns in our lives are going somewhere good.

That's what Job is saying. They don't lead off a cliff. In all the setbacks of our lives as believers, God is plotting for our joy.

That's the meaning of the ending. The best is yet to come. You will not lose more than you gain.

Point four, an unexpected answer. So lots of unexpected things today.

[34 : 22] Rebuke and commendation, restoration, blessing, and an unexpected answer. Why do we suffer? Right? That's the question.

What does God want? What does he expect? What does he require of us? You know, the scriptures tell us when we suffer because of our sin, God means for us to repent, to turn from sin.

We see that like Psalm 51 and other places. God means for us to repent. When we suffer because we need to grow, you know. When I got married, I was a sinner.

And I said I do to somebody, you know. Which meant I was trying to lay down my life. And the Lord revealed sin in my heart. I need it to grow when we suffer because we need to grow. God means for us to respond in humility and faith when we suffer because we're followers of Christ.

Like these people, like these Christians in Nigeria. God means for them to be faithful to the end. God will set things right. But he wants them to remain faithful, to not recant.

[35 : 25] But what does God want us to do when we suffer inexplicably? That's what the book of Job is all about. Sometimes the bus hits you and there's no reason. What does God want us to do when mom gets a blood clot and is dead within minutes?

What does God want us to do when the house burns down? What does God want us to do when a tornado rips through the neighborhood, leaving many dead? What does God want to do when a mother's body goes into eclampsia and denies the baby?

What does God want to do when cancer takes another one? What does God want us to do when another relationship ends in rejection? What does God want when suffering makes no sense when it seems useless?

The book of Job has so much to say. Sometimes we suffer even though we haven't sinned. Sometimes we suffer even though God doesn't want us to grow in some specific way.

About a year after April 2021, my buddy Jeff received a message, a recommended sermon by someone.

[36 : 41] The message was all about how we often suffer because God's removing idols from our life. We want success and so God takes away success.

We want approval. God takes away approval sometimes or something like that. I remember Jeff sent me this message and said, can you listen to this? And he said, did God take my kids because they were an idol?

I remember listening to this message and wanting to scream. I called him immediately and I said, no, no, no, no.

But to be quite honest, I still couldn't answer the question why God made him suffer. And it drove me nuts.

I kept searching. I kept studying. I got into the book of Job. I began reading a book that changed me. And in many ways led to this series.

[37 : 51] Eric Ortlund, at the end of this book called Piercing Leviathan, he said, the book of Job, why do God cause inexplicable suffering? Well, this is why right here.

This quote can change your life. The book of Job teaches us that God's requirements, what does God want for us? What's God after? God's requirements of his saints when undergoing a Job-like suffering are surprisingly minimal.

Like Job, all we have to do is hold on to our relationship with God and not curse him. I will never forget reading this page, immediately calling my buddy Jeff, reading the page to him and he's saying, that's it.

That's it. What does it mean? Because he was searching his life, assuming that God, he must have some idol that he needs to confess, or that God was wanting him to grow.

But why would God take his kids to make him grow? And this is it. Sometimes what God expects of us is just to hold on and not curse him.

[38 : 56] And not curse the Lord. I think that's why the book of Job is in the Bible and the Bible agrees.

Job is mentioned three times outside the book of Job, twice in one chapter in Ezekiel 14 and once in James 5, 11. Look at what it says.

Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

What does he honor Job for? Steadfastness. Holding on to God.

Refusing to curse him. Waiting on the Lord. Being patient.

[40 : 02] Not judging the invisible God in light of what is visible right now, but entrusting your life to the Lord. That's the call of the book of Job.

The riddle is solved. For me it was. Be patient. Wait to the end.

The man is coming. The man is going to come around. He's going to set all things right. That day will not be a day you think of loss, but a day you think of gain.

The man will assess what is right for you, what is good for you, what is best for you. The man is coming. Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming. The end is not the end until he says it's the end.

So hold on. Press on. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[41 : 10] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you.