

Is this the story of your soul?

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[0 : 00] I also have been there, having had the dark night of the soul. The 6th of February this year, I celebrate 50 years since I received the Lord.

And during that period, there have been dark nights. But one thing has been constant, and that is, he preserves the life of those that believe in him.

That is true. So what kind of book is the Book of Job? Now, D.H. Lawrence, not a name you would normally associate with defining what biblical books are, he said this, if you want the story of your soul, you will find it perfectly enacted in the Book of Job.

So the question that comes to us this morning is, is this the story of your soul? And if it is, what can we learn from it?

Well, it's commonly said that the Book of Job deals with the problem of suffering. Well, if it does, it doesn't give you an answer to the problem.

[1 : 33] The American journalist, Philip Yancey, who writes with a punch in such books as *How Amazing Is Grace*, also has written a book called *The Bible Jesus Read*.

And in that book, he asserts that the problem that is being demonstrated in the Book of Job is not the problem of suffering, but the problem of a person who's lost his confidence in God.

And I believe that that is absolutely correct. And when you read it, you get these speeches that go on from chapter 3 to 42.

And they operate within a set of maxims. As we saw in chapter 3, Job starts.

And then Eliphaz replies, and Job replies, and Bildad replies, and Zophar replies, and then Job sums up. And that happens three times in the book.

[2 : 44] 3 to 14, 15 to 21, 22 to 31. But here, in chapter 19, the speaker is Job.

And the address is directed not to God, but to his three friends. And after the second of these addresses, contained in verses 21 to 22, he gives expression to his belief, his wish, and desire. Now, what I want you to notice, first of all, is that Job is giving us a request. And the request is that his words will be written down.

Verse 23. Oh, that my words were written. Oh, that they were inscribed in a book. Now, why is it that Job wants his words to be recorded?

What is it about them that he thinks should last for all time? And granted, his wish has been granted because we're looking at it this morning.

[3 : 54] Well, the reason is that he wants to be vindicated from this situation that he finds himself in. But he thinks in his heart that this is going to be such a long time in coming, it's going to need his record to be made permanent.

Now, what is it he wants to be made permanent? In chapter 13, in some of the verses we read, you find some of the statements he wants to record for all time.

But in particular, in chapter 13, in verses 23 and 24, he says this, How many are my iniquities and my sins?

Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? So, in other words, the accusation is by God.

And Job is saying this, Let me know how many iniquities and sins are now being laid against me to my charge.

[5 : 11] So, the real heart is this, in chapter 19, verse 6, Know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me.

So, he feels that God has wronged him. Now, if you go right to the beginning of the book of Job, you'll find it starts with a statement, There was a man in the land of Uz, which is contemporary Jordan, whose name was Job.

And that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. So, what he's saying here is, The fact is that my present experience doesn't match up with the life that I've conducted and led before God.

And if you go to the first two chapters, you find that there's these servants who keep coming to him. And they report that he's lost his oxen, his sheep and his servants, his camels, his sons and daughters, and finally, his health.

And his interpretation of it is this, Job 16, 11, God gives me up to the ungodly and casts me into the hand of the wicked.

[6 : 36] How is it that all of this has come my way when I have walked before God with the integrity of my heart?

Indeed, in chapter 19 and verse 19, he says, All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I love have turned against me.

Now, the circle of intimates who have deserted Job also includes his wife. Job 19, verse 17. I am repulsive to my wife, loathsome to the sons of my own mother.

Now, what is there in the Hebrew about this first statement, I am repulsive to my wife, which doesn't come out in English translation, is this, that the reason his wife is turned off by him is that his breath, because of his skin disease, smells.

That's what he's saying. I am repulsive to my wife. The skin disease is defined in Job 7, verse 5.

[7 : 56] My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt. My skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. This is what he wants recorded.

I have walked in the integrity of my heart, yet all of this has come my way, when in his view it shouldn't.

Second, the preservation of Job's words. Verse 24. Oh, that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever.

Now, if we date this book about 2000 BC, the time of Abraham and the patriarchs, there's a limited number of ways that things could be recorded or written down.

But one of them is defined here as being an iron pen and also made of lead, which literally means an iron stylus.

[9 : 06] Now, this instrument of writing you also find in Jeremiah 17, verse 1. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron.

With a diamond stylus, it is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of their altar. Now, the case referred to by Jeremiah is interesting because what he's saying is this.

The sin of Judah is indelible. It's still there on the horns of their altar.

And to turn aside just for a moment from Job, the question is, why is it still on the horns of their altar?

The book of Leviticus, in the first seven chapters, gives you a great number of sacrifices that those in the Old Testament could offer so that their sins might be passed over and forgiven.

[10 : 11] So why is it still there? Well, the answer is they've gone to the wrong altar. They've gone to a false god.

They've gone to a pagan sacrifice. It still remains on the horn of their altar. Now, you can update that.

There are many people walking in today's society who have the stain of guilt upon them. It's not removed. Why not?

They've gone to the wrong altar. And the only altar you can come to to have it removed is the altar of Jesus Christ, him crucified on the cross.

But to return, Job makes this request because he considers his vindication will not come to him in his lifetime so that in order for it to come at all, it must be preserved for future generations.

[11 : 19] Now, this is a request that he gives and he presents it in language of a forlorn hope.

Is it possible that this can happen? And there are a number of requests like this that you find in Job. In Job 6 and 8, they're all introduced with this, oh, that God will kill him.

In Job 6 and 8, the wish is recorded that God will kill him as a sign of his futility of his existence.

In words we've already read in Job 13, oh, that his friends would keep their peace. In Job 14, oh, that God would hide him until his wrath is passed.

In 23, oh, that he could discover where God is located so he could argue his case personally with God.

[12:29] 29, that he could be restored to his former life as in the months of old. And finally, in 31, that he wishes he had a legal opponent who would respond to him.

So all of these he sees as impossible or fulfillment in his own day. so there is this spirit of hopelessness that pervades all these requests.

And if you're going through the dark night of the soul, that spirit of hopelessness, you will be able to identify it.

Is this your story? But given that these requests are being expressed, who's going to be responsible for bringing them to pass?

Well, every now and then, in the book of Job, in the spirit of hopelessness and forlorn hope, there dawns a flash of light.

[13:45] And you see the flash of light in Job 16, 19. Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven and he that vouches for me is on high.

A flash of light. Yes, in the dark night of the soul, flashes of light occur. And these flashes are sufficient to turn his forlorn hope of fulfillment, as we'll see, into something more positive.

Thirdly, the content of Job's words, verse 23, oh, that my words were written down. We've already seen something of these words that he wants written down and they contain the details of his case. But these words also contain the details of that which Job actually believes. Now, listen to them. He believes that God is his enemy.

The arrows of, this is Job 6, 4, the arrows of the Almighty are in me. My spirit drinks their poison. The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

[15:17] He believes that he will never again see good, Job 7, 7. Remember that my life is a breath. My eye will never again see good.

He believes he will soon be dead, Job 7, 21. Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?

For now I shall lie in the earth. You will seek me, but I shall not be. He believes he will be murdered by God, Job 16, verse 18.

O earth, cover not my blood and let my cry find no resting place. He believes that he is innocent of any suffering that he might be or any wrong that he might be suffering for.

Job 9, 15. Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him. I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. He believes he has no hope.

[16:30] There is, Job 9, 33, no umpire between us who might lay his hand upon us both. Yet, he believes in his own innocence.

Job 13, 18, I know I shall be vindicated. Now of all those statements, and there's many more that could be added, that come to us from the depth of his depression and his forlorn hope, there are two that are very important.

one is that he is innocent. Though I am innocent, I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.

And the second, I know I shall be vindicated, Job 13, 18. Now it is this expression of his innocence out of his forlorn hope, that now stands before the heavenly court as his witness advocates, spokesmen, and pledge prepared to argue his case with God.

Innocent. God's love, but the experience doesn't add up to it. The experience is completely different. He's not got the experience he once had as a man who's a man of integrity, perfect and upright, who eschewed evil.

[18:10] There is no violence in my hands, he says, and my prayer is pure. So we come to the heart of this, the vindication of his words.

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. So he wants his words written down. He wants them preserved.

He wants it noted that he is innocent, and in the integrity of his heart, he is offered a pure prayer. fire. And finally, finally, the dawn of light is that at the end of the day, he will be vindicated.

Now the strange thing about vindication is that it never happens the way that you think it will happen. Job was clearly looking for the Lord to appear in a cloud of revelation and condemn his friends, but that's not what happened.

The text speaks of my Redeemer. When we think of the word Redeemer, we think immediately of the doctrine or the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

[19:40] that's not what's meant here. Because in the New Testament, the word redemption means a liberation or a setting free.

In John 8, 36, whom the Son of Man sets free is free indeed. That's not what Job's talking about. what he's talking about, and you'll see there's a sub-note to your text that says, can also be translated as my vindicator.

Now, the Hebrew text, the verb that's used here, is used to denote the action of a person's nearest relative with a brother, uncle, cousin, or some other person who had the responsibility of buying back family property, or of raising up heirs for a dead person, so as to keep it in the family inheritance.

If you want the legal situation, we don't have time to read it, but it's there in Leviticus 25, verses 47 to 54. But the most familiar example of this practice is the role of Boaz in the book of Ruth.

[21 : 02] he acted out this role, this vindicator for Ruth. Ruth couldn't do it for herself.

She needed a champion, and Boaz was the man to champion her rights, and it's that that's meant here.

God so in this flash of inspiration, Job is not only talking about a witness that he has in heaven, he's talking about someone who's available, and that someone is God, who will at the last champion his rights.

even now behold, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high. My friends scorn me, my eye pours out tears to God, that he would maintain the right of a man with God like that of a man with his neighbor.

So this is a breakthrough. Earlier he had considered that God was his enemy. Now he's saying he's my champion.

[22 : 21] He's my vindicator. When we come to the end of the book of Job, you read this. 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. There's no flashing light here. This is vindication all right.

But it's a vindication that comes to Job and says these people that spoke against you who accused you of being the vilest sinner and of hindering meditation before God all that they said you can still remember but now you've got to pray for them.

There's something here that speaks to New Testament Christianity. None of us can go free from this for people have said things to us that not only shouldn't have come in their mind but shouldn't have been said at all.

Pray for them. The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

[23 : 52] If you look at the end of Job and count up the number of camels, sheep, oxen and all the rest of it, you'll find there was double the amount that he had to start with. So he emerges from this experience with a new vision of who God is.

And it's in this dark night of the soul that this is beginning to come to him. And there is a very real sense in which God still holds to his word that he spoke.

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? Only to update this, you remove Job's name and you put yourself there.

But there are black moments. These black moments can be caused by illness, by unemployment, by family tragedy, by many other things.

They come into us and they sweep right across us and engulf our attention so much that God seems far away.

[25 : 14] But whether he seems far away or not, the truth is we have a heavenly champion who will attend to your needs and mine.

And Job has this conviction. I know I shall be vindicated. What do we have? we have the promises of God.

Of course, the promises of God can be delayed, but they can never be denied. So that in the darkest moment, you take your stand on the promises of God and you say with Job, you address your circumstances.

I know my champion is living. That will defeat your depression, give you a hope to live for and give you a faith to stand on.

Amen. to him.