

# A Broken Man Yearns For What Was

April 15, 2018

Job 29-31

As we continue our study of this remarkable book of Job, we find ourselves at Job 29-31. This is the last speech of Job. In fact, in a very surprising and instructive way, it tells us that this is the last speech of Job. It ends with these words, “The words of Job are ended.” This is Job’s final speech, his final words describing and defending his position.

In some ways they sound quite similar to what he has said about himself all along: his conscience is clear before God, he has lived a life of integrity. But, it is also a look back, a yearning for what was, when Job lived under the blessing of God, when Job knew he was blessed by his heavenly Father. He compares this to his current condition: the lowest of the low. The people who disparage him are themselves the lowest of the low...and now he is beneath them. And then he goes through a list of possible offenses, of things he might be accused of, with his response. It fits a pattern something like this: if I was guilty of this, then God would be right in punishing me, but I have not done such a thing. Fifteen or so times, he goes through a variation of such a pattern. Each time, he asserts his integrity, ending with a challenge to the Almighty to answer him. There, he has rested his case.

As you might assume, this speech is too long to deal with in a sermon. So, I’m not going to deal with all of it, or even read all of it. Instead, I am going to focus on the first chapter, ch.29. The other chapters have good stuff in them, but we have heard much of it before. What intrigues me is the first part. Here, Job laments what he has lost, and it is not all of his stuff. Instead, it is his life of knowing he was being blessed by His God. He yearns to go back to that day, when he knew he was living a life pleasing to God and that God knew it as well. He felt blessed, He was blessed. But those days are gone and he wishes he could go back.

What has peaked my interest is that he wishes he could go back to the good old days, when in fact, the future will actually be better than it was before. We know that both because we know how the book ends, but because we know there are more chapters to this story than are contained in this book. Like all of us, Job's story does not end with the last chapter of the book of Job. Even today, Job is living a life of blessing under the protective hand of his God. In fact, as a teaser, I see this as pointing us to the supreme example of someone who lived this life. So, in view of our limited time, I am going to point your attention to Job 29, the first of three chapters of Job's closing statement. READ Job 29.

Main point: The life of blessing is something we can imagine, perhaps have experienced in part, but it is nothing compared to what awaits those who believe.

We know what it would be like to live under the blessings of God, we may even think we have experienced it in the past. But the truth is that none of it compares to what actually await God's chosen people. As was true for Job, so it is true with us! The best is not behind us but before us! (4 parts)

I. We yearn for intimacy with God. vv. 1-6

This aspect is first and foremost. Whether people want to believe it or not, there is nothing to compare to having a warm, open, loving, intimate relationship with the God of the universe. And this is especially true if you have experienced it, but find it lacking at the present time.

v.I- Job continued his discourse: 2 “How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me,

One of the byproducts of unjust suffering is that you can remember back before you were suffering. There is suffering that you deserve because you have done wrong, but unjust suffering means you didn't deserve it. That means you likely were living a life of blessing. In other words, it hurts more because you can compare it to something else. And the truth is that we all have that sense of the way things ought to be. In Job's case, he lived it. For years he lived it. And he knew he was living it, he took great care lest that blessed life be taken away from him because he had sinned. We have known this about Job since chapter I. Job knew he was living the blessed life. He appreciated it, he knew God was the One blessing Him.

But when all that calamity came upon him, it was all gone. It was as if God had left the scene and satan had been given freedom to destroy everything. But notice the first concern is not the lack of his stuff, indeed that really doesn't come up in the chapter, “What happened to all my stuff?” Instead, his sense of loss is for the watchful eye of God. Job had experienced long stretches of time when he knew God was watching over him. He knew God cared and was caring. He wishes he could go back to those days. It is not as though he did not realize just how good he had it. No, he knew then and he is keenly aware now. That intimate relationship has been broken. It sounds a bit like Jesus on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Huh!

3 when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness!

In v.2, it is His provision. Here it is His guidance. God was guiding His steps. Whatever he did prospered. Notice that around him, his setting was darkness, murkiness. It was not that everything was rosy, rather there was a clear path through the thickets and thorns. God was guiding him. Can you see the difference? One says everything was perfect, the other says there was a perfect path through all of the imperfection. I see the same sentiment in David's statement in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." This is saying more than, "Life was great, now it stinks." It is saying, "I miss Your guiding hand through difficult situations, your protection from life's dangers. There was an intimacy with his God that is now missing, and he wishes he could go back.

4 Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, 5 when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me,

Here he states it clearly, he misses the intimate friendship he used to have with his God. It was so close, so warm that he could sense the presence of God. He could see the hand of blessing all around him. Job knows what it is like to enjoy the blessings of God. He has lived it.

6 when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil.

Those might be strange word pictures for us, but they are describing resources just pouring out, flooding our path. Everything he touched, every endeavor he undertook succeeded. God blessed it. He lived the blessed life.

Now, how many here can relate to this text? How many of you have lived such a life? Or, is it just a figment of our imagination? This is where I would like to stop the sermon and just dwell on this point. I think many people here this morning hear these words and cannot relate on an experiential basis. It is just a wishful dream of having such a relationship with God.

And yet, I am also convinced that this need not be so, that it is God's desire to have the description of these verses be your experience daily, for months or years at a time. Now hear me well, I am not talking about having all the stuff of wealthy people. No! Nothing could be further from the truth. Just like Job, I am talking about a relationship with God that is so close, so warm, so friendly you can reach out and touch Him. I am talking about seeing His hand daily, guiding, protecting, providing for you. I believe with all my heart that this ought to be the normal reality of the people of God, regardless of how much stuff they have.

I know that I usually live this life. I have every sense that God is right here with me, standing beside me, watching over me, guiding my steps to keep me from harm. I see his Hand upon me. And I am convinced that this is not due to my good work, but His good work, not my faithfulness but His faithfulness. The only thing on my end is trusting, obeying and observing.

Yes, I am convinced the life of God's people is designed to usually be like this. And so, when it is not, we notice, we lament, we yearn, we wonder why, just like Job. The fact that there is unjust suffering indicates that when we are not experiencing such intimacy, it is not automatically our fault. Sometimes it is. Sometimes, we sin and we run away from God, even though He is pursuing us, knocking down walls to get to us, leaving the 99 to search for us. He is doing His part.

But occasionally, by His plan, for His purposes, as with Job, we experience distancing from God. We cry out to Him with no response. We wait, watch, and listen, with only silence in return. We are called to endure, to suffer, to wait patiently, to lament for sure, but also to look forward to what will be as well. As I've already stated, we know how this all turns out. This suffering chapter is not the end of the story!

It is at this point when we patiently endure suffering that we are reminded of Job, and more than Job we are reminded of Jesus. He knows exactly what it is like to experience the loss of intimacy with God. He lived through it in ways we can only imagine.

I am thinking of this as a U shaped experience. It started well, went to the bottom, and ends up at the top. I believe we all experience the U. Ours might be lopsided, misshapen, but we know it to be true. The problem is that when you are at the bottom, you become convinced that this is how it will always be. Our present circumstances become our view of eternal reality. We become convinced that we will always be at the bottom of the U. But that is not true. We live a life of promise. In fact, the end will well surpass what once was. We undersell by wanting to go back.

Think of Adam and Eve. They experienced life in the Garden of Eden. That is how it all started for them. But then because of their sin, they were kicked out, they were put under the curse. And yet, as we are gathered here today, are they living life in the Garden? Or better! That is my point. Living life under the Promise of God means our best days are ahead of us, no matter how well they are going today. There will come a day when there is no tears, no sorrow, no sickness, no disease.

So, today, no matter where you are, at the top or at the bottom, know that if your faith is in Jesus, your best days are ahead of you. Yes, if you are at the bottom, you can lament the way it once was, but know that it will be even better ahead.

II. We yearn for the respect of our peers. vv. 7-10

Not only do we lament a close relationship with God, but when we are at the bottom, we yearn for the lost respect we had with our peers. We see that here with Job.

7 “When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, 8 the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet;

The gate of the city is where the people gathered, where the wise men hung out, where the businessmen conducted their business, where the merchants sold their goods. Think of it as the town square just inside the city gate. Job remembers when he used to go through the gate and the people gathered there showed signs of respect. The young men made way and the old men rose in honor. Job was being treated with highest respect.

9 the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands; 10 the voices of the nobles were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

When he spoke, the people listened. His views mattered. People wanted to know what Job thought about the issues at hand. Notice that the chiefs and the nobles all listened. He was respected by the most important people in the culture. He was blessed. As we will see, this was not a matter of ego. This respect from his peers did not puff him up. Rather, it has gone from the scenario described here to that of the next chapter, where the worst of the worst mock him, despise him, treat him like dirt. So, the contrast is the key: Job has gone from the most respected to the least respected. And then we add to this that none of it is Job’s fault. It is not as though he was just exposed as a fraud or

a murderer or adulterer. All of this has come upon him unjustly. But this is where he is at. No wonder he yearns for what once was.

### III. We yearn for lives of significance. Vv. 11-17

As I hinted before, we see here that this is not Job the egotist. Indeed, he laments the role he had in helping those who needed it. He once was the local care giver, rescue mission, relief agency, ministry coordinator, but he is not that any more.

11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, 12 because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him.

The reason so many people respected him was not because he was so wealthy, but because of what he did with his wealth: he used it to improve the lives of others. He reached out, reached down, got in and got dirty. He loved the unlovely, helped the helpless, responded to the cries of desperate people. Job was using what God had given him for good purposes.

13 The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. 14 I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. 15 I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. 16 I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. 17 I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

He helped children, he helped the dying, he helped those left behind by the dying of others. He did what was right. He guided the blind, carried the lame, provided for the needy, advocated for the outcast. He took on the enemy and fought off the predators. I don't know about you, but all of this makes me shiver. Job was living the life we are all called to live. And he seemed to love it. He certainly laments the fact that he is no longer in a position to do so.

Why? Why would God take this all away? Now, there is a sense in which I can readily relate to this. This loss of significance is what every empty nester parent goes through. This is what all retired men go through. This is what awaits me in not that many years. You go from knowing your purpose, engaged in the lives of others to...what? Many do not make this transition well. We all think we will, but we do not. To quote Job back in v.4, "Oh for the days when I was in my prime!"

Again we are forced to view the picture painted: a blessed man living a life of blessing, sharing his blessing with all in his path. And one day it is all gone, destroyed in a way that surely shows the hand of God. I don't know about you, but I doubt I would be as patient and gracious as Job has been. I would certainly have been more than frustrated, defensive, despondent.

And yet, because Job's story was written down and included in Scripture, he has been a model of patient enduring of unjust suffering for about 4,000 years. I feel for him, but I am thankful that we have his example. Oh for more people like Job!

#### IV. We yearn for a kingly life. Vv. 18-25

This one I find especially intriguing. Job mentions living the life of a king.

18 “I thought, ‘I will die in my own house, my days as numerous as the grains of sand. 19 My roots will reach to the water, and the dew will lie all night on my branches. 20 My glory will remain fresh in me, the bow ever new in my hand.’

Job did not envision that his life would turn out the way it did. He imagined living a long life, being blessed right up to the end, his family all gathered around him in his luxurious surroundings with everything intact. Who could have dreamt that it would turn out like this!

21 “Men listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel. 22 After I had spoken, they spoke no more; my words fell gently on their ears. 23 They waited for me as for showers and drank in my words as the spring rain. 24 When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them.

He returns here (in typical Hebrew form) to a theme from earlier. He was treated with honor. His words mattered, people respected him. But then notice this last verse.

25 I chose the way for them and sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners.

He lived the life of a chief, he lived as a king. He used to be in charge. Why this image? This intrigues me. This gets my mind going. This leads me to another One who suffered unjustly.

My mind goes to Philippians 2. There, Paul exhorts his readers to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. I'd like to read the passage to you and have you notice this same U shaped pattern. Notice how high is the last upside of the U.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Are you seeing the pattern? He once enjoyed the life of God Himself. But He humbled Himself and became a servant, and not just any servant, but the lowest of the low servants, to the point of death servants, tortuous death servants. But God exalted Him, to the highest possible place, restoring His place as the God He is, but this time with every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that He is Lord, with no disrespect to His Father. I see here the highest to the lowest to the highest even higher. Oh yes, once more we see the book of Job pointing us directly to Jesus. And I see here the life of Job pointing us to what we might just be asked to endure for the sake of Jesus' Kingdom, should it serve His purposes. The New Testament writers were clear that to share in the sufferings of Christ is an honor, knowing that the best is yet to come.

So, as we come to the end of Job's words concerning his situation, amid all of his protestations concerning the unfairness of his predicament, I point you to Job 29 to get a proper perspective on his thinking. And then I ask you to use this passage to point you to an even more important example of the same thing. As followers of Jesus, the Supreme Unjust Sufferer, we may for a time have to endure a tiny bit of what he endured, but we must live as a recipient of the Promise. Like Job, like Jesus, for us the best is yet to come!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will seek and enjoy the intimacy of our relationship with Almighty God.
- 2) Like Job, we will use our lofty position of blessing to bless the lives of others.
- 3) We will cherish a good reputation among our peers.
- 4) As children of the Promise, we will live with expectation that our best days are ahead of us.
- 5) We will stand in awe of our Savior, who voluntarily gave up everything so that we might join Him in the blessed life. Thank you, Jesus!