

The Book of Job:
A Window into a World
of Suffering and Faith, #7

The Final Appeal of a Righteous Man Job 29-31

--CEFC 2/25/18

I don't know what it's like in real life,
but in legal dramas on television,
the closing argument is always the gripping climax of the trial.
The lawyers get one final opportunity
to deliver an emotional plea for justice to be done.

They seek to tell a compelling story--
a story that allows the evidence to shine on their client in the best light possible,
a story that seeks to draw the jury onto their side.

I've never witnessed a real trial in person,
but I do remember Johnny Cochran's most memorable words
in his closing argument of the O. J. Simpson trial—
"If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit."
And, as I recall, it worked!

Our study of the book of Job isn't nearly as long as the O. J. Simpson trial,
but now after 25 chapters of heated dialogue,
and the interlude reflecting on divine wisdom in chap. 28,
we come, at last, to Job's final argument.
Here we see the culmination not only of his lament,
but also his desire for litigation—
as Job is desperate to take God to court and set his case before him.
Job pleads for justice.

In our passage this morning,
Job gives a passionate appeal for vindication,
for his own honor is at stake,
but more than anything else,
he longs for a renewed relationship with God.

In the story he has to tell,
Job begins in chap. 29 with a nostalgic look back on his past life--
it's a nostalgia mixed with grief about what has been lost.

29:1 **Job continued—**

or as the ESV has it "**Job again took up his discourse:**

2

'How I long for the months gone by'

Life had been good for Job, very good—
 He could look back on a life of health and prosperity
 with vast property,
 a loving family
 and high social position.
 Those were the good old days—
 if only he could recapture their delight.

But what Job most longs for
 is his lost connection with God—
 for in those days
 he felt he was enjoying God's blessing on his life.
 "How I long for the months gone by," he says,
 "for the days when God watched over me, . . ."
 How much he yearned for that assurance
 that he lived under God's loving care.

How Job wished he could return to that time in v. 3
 **"when [God's] lamp shone upon my head
 and by his light I walked through darkness!"**
 Yes, there was darkness, but God was always there to show the way forward.

4 **"Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,
 when God's intimate friendship blessed my house"**

"**God's intimate friendship**"—the word there is a warm and strong word
 suggesting a relationship in which one confidently confides in another.
 It is found in Psalm 25:14--
 "The Lord confides in whose who fear him"
 and in Prov. 3:32—the Lord "**takes the upright into his confidence"**

Job, like Abraham, had been a friend of God.
 How much more painful it was for him now
 to feel as if God were treating him as his enemy,
 hiding his ways from him.
 How Job longed for those days, v. 5, "**when the Almighty was still with me."**

God had been with him;
 God had been for him—
 and Job had experienced that blessing of God in very material ways—
 **"my children were around me,
 6 my path was drenched with cream
 and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil."**
 "Paths drenched with cream" and "streams of olive oil"—
 Not exactly the way I would put it.

But we get the idea—
 He was blessed with an abundance
 that more than met his every need.

But Job was no hedonist—

he wasn't simply longing for all-you-can-eat banquet tables.
 This material blessing seems to be surpassed in his mind
 by his longing for the place of dignity and respect he once enjoyed in society.

v. 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;
 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.
 11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me,
 and those who saw me commended me."

Job had once been esteemed, highly regarded, honored as a man of great worth.
 And his status was not based on his wealth, or his power, or some frivolous celebrity—
 it was grounded in his character—

he was considered a great man because he was a good man--
 "those who saw me commended me,
 v. 12 because I rescued the poor who cried for help,
 and the fatherless who had none to assist him.
 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."

People spoke well of him, they blessed him (v. 11),
 because he listened to the cry of the poor, the fatherless and the widow—
 in his public role, he showed no favorites,
 he was impartial and incorruptible;
 he was a righteous judge
 who brought the blessing of justice to others.

We'll talk more about Job's righteous character later,
 but there's one more thing that Job longed for as he looked back on his past—
 and that was the expectation that his blessed state would last—

v. 18 "I thought, 'I will die in my own house,
 my days as numerous as the grains of sand.'
 His abundance would endure without the interruption of drought--
 19 "My roots will reach to the water,
 and the dew will lie all night on my branches."
 20 My glory—my reputation, my honor--will remain fresh in me,
 the bow—either as a sign of strength, or of victory or of provision—
 the bow [will be] ever new in my hand.'

Isn't this the way life is supposed to work?
 Walking with God,
 experiencing the blessing of God,
 joy, glory, and honor,

Their fathers are described as close to animals in their behavior in vv. 2-8--
**"A base and nameless brood,
 they were driven out of the land.**

v. 9 --"**And now their sons mock me in song;
 I have become a byword among them.**
 10 They **detest me and keep their distance;**
they do not hesitate to spit in my face."

They are like a pack of ravaging dogs,
 v. 14—"They **advance as through a gaping breach;**
amid the ruins they come rolling in.

As one commentator put it:
 "Job has exchanged the respect of the most respectable
 for the contempt of the most contemptible."²

v. 15—"Terrors overwhelm me;
**my dignity is driven away as by the wind,
my safety –my prosperity³ (ESV)--vanishes like a cloud."**

Job seems overwhelmed by a deep sense of shame at his sorry condition.
 His sufferings seem to brand him as a sinner in the eyes of all those around him.

v. 16--"**And now**—" for the third time, he refers to this present misery—
**"And now my life ebbs away;
 days of suffering grip me.**
 17 Night **pierces my bones;**
my gnawing pains never rest."

He continues his lament in v. 27—

27 "The **churning inside me never stops;**
days of suffering confront me.
 28 I go about **blackened, but not by the sun;**
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.
 29 I have become a brother of jackals,
a companion of owls.
 [Those creatures known to inhabit ruins.]
 30 My skin grows **black and peels;**
my body burns with fever.
 31 My harp is tuned to mourning,
and my flute to the sound of wailing."
 A dirge, a requiem, a funeral march—
 that is the only music my ears can hear.

²So Anderson.

³יִשְׁעֵתִי

Job's has turned from life
to death;
from dignity and honor
to degradation and humiliation.

And what is most hurtful in Job's mind
is that God himself is the source of his hardship--

30:18—"In his great power [God] becomes like clothing to me;
he binds me like the neck of my garment.

19 He throws me into the mud,

and I am reduced to dust and ashes.

20 "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer;

I stand up, but you merely look at me.

21 You turn on me ruthlessly;

with the might of your hand you attack me.

22 You snatch me up and drive me before the wind;

you toss me about in the storm."

This is not the way you are supposed to act, Lord—

Isn't it true that, as the psalmist says,

"To the faithful you show yourself faithful,

to the blameless you show yourself blameless" (Psa. 18:25)?

Haven't I been blameless before you?

So when I am in distress,

aren't you supposed to be my deliverer, my Rock, and my Refuge.

And when I call to you,

aren't you supposed to hear my voice and answer?

And when my enemies surround me,

aren't you supposed to attack them, not me (cf. Ps. 18)?

Is this how you treat your servants, your friends?

30:24--"Surely no one lays a hand on a broken man
when he cries for help in his distress.

25 Have I not wept for those in trouble?

Has not my soul grieved for the poor?

26 Yet when I hoped for good, evil came;

when I looked for light, then came darkness."

Why, Lord, why would you treat me this way?

Here Job is making his emotional closing argument—

telling his tragic story—

from enjoying God's blessing

to experiencing what seems to him to be God's curse.

Job had declared earlier in 13: 3—

"But I desire to speak to the Almighty

and to argue my case with God. . . ."

In this final speech, he appeals to God's compassion
as he relates his horrible fall
from honor into shame./

Now in chap. 31, Job engages in his most daring ploy—

It is a final appeal to God's justice,
an appeal that takes the form of a negative confession
and a self-curse.

It's a negative confession because it is an affirmation of what he hasn't done—

Here he refutes the charges of his friends that he was, in fact, a guilty sinner.

The list on these denials is quite extensive,
and depending on how you number them
between ten and sixteen misdeeds are described,
and Job denies them all.

It's a negative confession,

but it also takes the form of a self-curse.

The form Job uses (though not complete in every case) is

"If I have done X, then let Y happen to me!"

where X is the crime, and Y is the penalty.

For example, look at 31:7--

7 **if my steps have turned from the path,
if my heart has been led by my eyes,
or if my hands have been defiled,**
8 **then may others eat what I have sown,
and may my crops be uprooted."**

And v. 9-- "**If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door,**

10 **then may my wife grind another man's grain,
and may other men sleep with her."**

And v. 21—"if I have raised my hand against **the fatherless**,
knowing that I had influence in court,

22 **then let my arm fall from the shoulder,
let it be broken off at the joint."**

Commentators frequently refer to the ancient legal procedure that lies behind this chapter.

This self-curse is a kind of oath, sometimes called an "oath of clearance,"

forcing a verdict by calling down upon oneself the wrath of God
if what one is swearing is false.

This oath forces the issue--

God must either clear him or activate the curse.

It's Job's last desperate attempt to get God's attention,

in a final appeal to God's justice—

That desperation comes out in v. 35--

**"Oh, that I had someone to hear me!
I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me;
let my accuser put his indictment in writing."**

Earlier Job had said to God--

13:22--"**summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply.**"

But since God had not replied, he now seeks to compel God to respond—
to file his complaint in writing—
to make a formal indictment against him—
though Job is so sure of his right standing with God
that he is assured that any indictment must result in an acquittal—
and become a written statement of his innocence.

And Job would be so proud of that document,
that he says in v. 36—"Surely I would wear it on my shoulder,
I would put it on like a crown."

Like a military insignia worn on the sleeve or a royal crown of honor,
Job would want to declare to the world his blameless, upright character.
"Having been humiliated publicly,
Job would be vindicated publicly."⁴

Again, notice that Job's preeminent concern
is not with the restoration of his wealth or even his family—
it is his right relationship with God
and his own sense of dignity that comes with it.

Job now puts his own life on the line—
"O God, if I am guilty, pour out your wrath upon me;
but if not, just speak to me—
bring me out of this deep darkness into your light.
Vindicate me before the world!"

And with this, we read in v. 40—
"**The words of Job are ended.**"

The defense rests.
All he can do is await the verdict of the court.
All that is left is the declaration of the Judge.
We as readers are on the edge of our seats,
anxious to hear God's ruling.

So by way of application, let's step back and look at two issues
that stand out in this passage.

First, What does this passage tell us about human virtue?—

⁴ so Hartley, 425.

What does it mean to live a good life, a godly life?

Remember, it was Job's righteous life that got him into this mess in the first place—
When he was approached by the satanic accuser,

God himself put Job forward—

"Have you considered my servant Job?" he asked.

"There is no one on earth like him;" God says;

"he is blameless and upright,

a man who fears God and shuns evil."

And in our passage this morning, we get a fuller description of Job's life
than in any other place in the book.

So what do we find?

What does Job's godliness--his holiness before God,

his blameless and upright life—what does it look like?

As we mentioned, back in chap. 29:12-17, Job first sets forth what set him apart—

He was commended by the respected men at the city gates

because of his concern for the vulnerable and the marginal,

his protection of the weak, the disabled and the defenseless.

"I rescued the poor who cried for help,

and the fatherless who had none to assist him.

The man who was dying blessed me;

I made the widow's heart sing.

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."

And in chap. 31 the description of his holy life is filled out even further.

He begins there with a statement of his sexual purity—

Job 31:1--**"I made a covenant with my eyes
not to look lustfully at a girl."**

Now there's a verse that every man should commit to memory!

The eyes are the gateway to the heart,

and here Job has resolved to guard that gateway,

and to avoid the lustful gaze.

I have to say it,

with the introduction of the internet and now the smart phone,

we are experiencing an epidemic of pornography.⁵

Did you know that 30 percent of all data transferred across the Internet is porn.

⁵Cf. <https://fightthenewdrug.org/10-porn-stats-that-will-blow-your-mind/>

Did you know that porn sites receive more regular traffic per month
than Netflix, Amazon, & Twitter put together?⁶

One of the world's largest porn sites reported that it had
21.2 billion visitors to its site last year,
who viewed over 87 billion videos while they were there.
In one survey it was reported that 64% of young people, ages 13–24,
actively seek out pornography weekly or more often.
But we know it's not just a problem for young people—
or even just for men.

And it's not just internet pornography that will get you—
now it's what's on television and in the movies,
what's in the mall and what comes in the mail.

Pornography is a plague in our culture—
It is a drug that is reeking havoc among us.
And it is crippling marriages
as it distorts our minds,
perverting the good gift of our God-given sexuality.

We've got to address this as a church—
and we are planning a breakfast for men in April
with a speaker I have heard myself with a powerful testimony
who will offer a range of responses to help us fight back.
It is a breakfast that every man here should plan to attend,
for this menace affects us all.

Job says, "**I made a covenant with my eyes
not to look lustfully at a girl.**"
For he knows that it is wrong in God's sight—
and our God sees everything--
**"Does he not see my ways
and count my every step?"**
He certainly knows everything that you put before your eyes.

From lust, Job move to honesty—
v. 5--"**If I have walked in falsehood
or my foot has hurried after deceit—
let God weigh me in honest scales
and he will know that I am blameless—**"
The word for "**falsehood**" is especially used of lying speech, a perversion of the truth.
Job didn't equivocate, prevaricate or obfuscate to deceive and deflect.
He was man of his word. Period.
"**Honest scales**" signify integrity in one's business dealings—
not cheating a customer,
or using deceit to gain an advantage.

⁶ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/internet-porn-stats_n_3187682.html

Job is willing to be judged by the same standard that he has used with others.

Then Job rejects **adultery**--

v. 9—"If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door,
10 **then may my wife grind another man's grain,
and may other men sleep with her."**

Notice, he would count himself guilty

if he allowed himself to be enticed.

He knew that he was responsible for the inclinations of his heart.

Adultery is a treacherous act,

violating trust both of his neighbor, of his own wife,

and supremely of God himself—

"For that would have been shameful,

a sin to be judged.

It is a fire that burns to Destruction;"

Then Job moves to the treatment of his servants in v. 13--

**"If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants
when they had a grievance against me,
14 what will I do when God confronts me?
What will I answer when called to account?"**

You must treat others as you would want to be treated--by God!

And the rationale for this standard of fair treatment of his servants is critical—

v. 15 **"Did not he who made me in the womb make them?**

Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?"

Job is pointing to the intrinsic dignity of every human being

that is grounded in their creation by God.

Every person is created in his image

and therefore is deserving of being treated with respect.

The Proverbs makes this same connection—

"Rich and poor have this in common:

The LORD is the Maker of them all" (Prov. 22:2).

This, I think, is a central moral principle—

for Job goes on to talk about his treatment of the poor,

the widow, and the fatherless—

all are deserving of care.

We all share a common humanity—

which means we share a certain sacredness

as persons created in God's image.

You see, meaning and value--

these comes through personal qualities—

we instinctively value persons.

Respect for others is almost demanded of us when we see their "personhood"—

and we identify ourselves with them.

Think of what happens when we personify our dogs—
we give our dogs names,
we talk to them,
we attribute to them personal qualities.
That's very easy to do, because dogs seem to have a sort of empathy
and can seem to be very expressive of emotion.
That's what makes them such great pets.

And when we attribute personhood to our dogs,
we then give them dignity, and we care for them.

But too often we treat our dogs like people,
but we treat other people like dogs.
They become less than human—brute beasts.

And ultimately that is how we are enabled to mistreat them and even to kill them.
I think of the example of Dylan Roof
who was convicted of the gruesome killing of nine church members
at a prayer meeting at a church in Charleston, SC.
The prosecutor Nathan Williams said in his closing argument at the trial:
"He executed them because he believes **they are nothing but animals.**"⁷

All human beings are persons created in the image of God
and so are to be treated with dignity—
and isn't that what we all want?
Isn't this what the #MeToo movement is all about—
women wanting to be treated with respect and dignity
as human beings, real persons,
and not as mere sexual objects.

And I have found in listening to some of my African-American brothers in this last year
that this is what is most needed for real racial reconciliation to take place—
Black-Americans want to be afforded real dignity
in this dominant-White culture,
a dignity of which they were so long deprived.

**"Did not he who made me in the womb make them?
Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?"**

Job respected that dignity in all his relationships in society.

We talk about living a life of holiness—for the gospel calls us to a life of holiness.
Holiness begins with a deep respect for the holiness of God,
but that respect for God's holiness must issue
in a respect for every person created in his image.

⁷ *The Washington Post*, 12/16/16, p. A.1.

It was an essential aspect of Job's godly character.
Remember that when you interact with another human being—any human being—
you are dealing with a person who is precious in the sight of God.
That person is God's image in the world.

Job goes on to speak in v. 24 of his refusal to put his faith in gold—instead of in God.
His security was not found in his wealth.
Holiness, godliness, cannot coexist with greed.
And generosity is the necessary evidence of a freedom from such idolatry.

It is appropriate then that Job next denies in v. 26
that he has been drawn to worship other idols
in the form of the sun or the moon.
These would "**be sins to be judged,**
for I would have been unfaithful to God on high" (31:28).

Then he says he didn't gloat over the misfortune of his enemies,
or fail to show hospitality to strangers. //

All this is what holiness, godliness, looks like.
This is what it looks like to fear God and to shun evil.
Necessarily, it involves how you treat people—
people who are created in the image of God.

Godliness is a life of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Let Job, in his righteousness, be a model to us,
as he points us to the holiness we are called to as followers of Christ.

But hasn't Job rather overplayed his hand?
Hasn't he overstepped the bounds of what is appropriate
in this rather pompous protest of his innocence?
One writer has called Job's words
"a unparalleled volley of vehement vituperation at the Almighty."⁸
Doesn't he border on blasphemy when he questions God's justice?
Hasn't he demonstrated a loss of faith
in voicing his complaints
and even declaring God to be acting like his enemy?

Some think so.
There is a strong Christian tradition that questions whether
the protesting Job of the poetic middle chapters
is quite up to the pious Job of the prose prologue
and it wonders whether he should be considered
a model of piety at all.

⁸ Will Kynes, "The Trials of Job: Relitigating Job's 'Good Case' in Christian Interpretation," *SJT*, 66 (2013), p. 176.

I reject that assessment—

first, because, as we will see, God never calls for Job to repent of any sin,⁹
and instead he commends the way Job has spoken about him.

And second, I reject it because Job is not alone among the heroes of faith in the Bible
who engage in this kind of struggle with God.

We noted earlier in our study of this book

how often the psalmists cry out in anguish, "How long, O Lord?"

And what about Abraham who contends with God

and almost bargains when him

when he announces his plans to judge Sodom and Gomorrah?

"Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

What if there be fifty righteous people in the city? . . .

Far be it from you to do such a thing— . . .

Far be it from you!

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:23-25).

Or there's Moses who objected to the Lord's intention

to destroy the people of Israel

after they had worshipped a golden calf (Exod. 32:1-14).

And I could mention Jeremiah (e.g., 20:7-20),

and Amos (7:1-9) and Habakkuk (1:2-4, 12-17)

all of whom also confronted God with their demands.

And then there is Jacob—

from whom the people Israel derive their name—

In that passage we read earlier,

Jacob wrestles with the angelic stranger,

who represents God himself.

And he says, **"I will not let you go unless you bless me"** (Gen. 32:26).

Then the man said to him,

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,

because you have struggled with God and with men

and have overcome" (Gen. 32:28).

That's what the name Israel means: "struggles with God."

And that's what Job does—he struggles with God.

He struggles with God precisely because he believes that God is just

and that he will in some way vindicate him.

That's why he is so confident in this final appeal--

so confident that he is willing to place his own life on the line

with this self-curse,

demanding that God reply.

It is his faith that keeps him coming back to God

even when God's current actions toward him seem so harsh.

Job won't give up;

he won't give in.

He won't let go of God until God blesses him with his presence.

⁹ Job 38:2 comes close but the affirmations of 42:7-8 speak otherwise.

Job is struggling with the conflict between his faith in God and his experience of God—
between who he knows God to be
and the way he is now being treated.
His is, as I've said, a "faithful revolt"
a "pious protest,"
a "believing belligerence."

As one student of the book has said,
"If Job has a vision of God which he deems worth fighting God for,
the friends have a much smaller understanding of God
which they are only willing to fight Job for."¹⁰

And another has written:
"To Job . . . people who are afraid
of confronting the tough, faith-shattering questions
are not fearers of God.
Rather, they are simply fearers, theological cowards, for they fear the truth."¹¹

Job shows us a tenacious faith—
a faith unafraid to ask tough questions of God—
and that keeps pressing him to respond.

And I would say,
it is a faith that ultimately is only possible through the gracious power of God.

Hold on to God in your hardships,
with the confident assurance that in the end,
it is he who will hold you fast.

Prayer—

Closing Song: *He Will Hold Me Fast*

Benediction:
1Pet. 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ,
after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you
and make you strong, firm and steadfast.
To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹⁰ W. Kynes, "The Trials of Job," p. 190.

¹¹ C. L. Seow, cited in Wilson, p. 355.

The Book of Job, #7
Feb. 25, 2018

The Final Appeal of a Righteous Man Job 29-31

Job, the righteous man, goes at it one last time. Has he gone too far in his "faithful protest" to God? Not if you see Job joining the ranks of those who "wrestle with God" and don't let go until they receive a blessing.

I. A Nostalgic Look Back (chap. 29)

"How I long for the months gone by . . ." (29:1)

II. A Pathetic Present (chap. 30)

*"And now my life ebbs away;
days of suffering grip me." (30:16)*

III. A Final Challenge (chap. 31)

*"I sign now my defense—
let the Almighty answer me." (31:35)*

"The words of Job are ended." (31:40)

Application:

- A Description of a Righteous Man—
"Have you considered my servant Job?"
- Presumptuous Protest or a Tenacious Faith?—
"I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Sermon Discussion:

**The Final Appeal of a Righteous Man
Job 29-31**

- Is there a time in your life for which you are sometimes nostalgic? What was joyful about it? What happened to it?
- Do you believe that every human being has an intrinsic dignity that comes from God? Why do we treat our dogs like people and people like dogs? How should our common creation by God affect the way you deal with people, whatever their social status?
- How is dignity related to the #MeToo movement? How about problems related to racial discord?
- How has the story of Job encouraged your faith?
- Does the model of a godly life found in these chapters fit your conception of what holiness means? As you look at Job's example, what is most challenging to you?