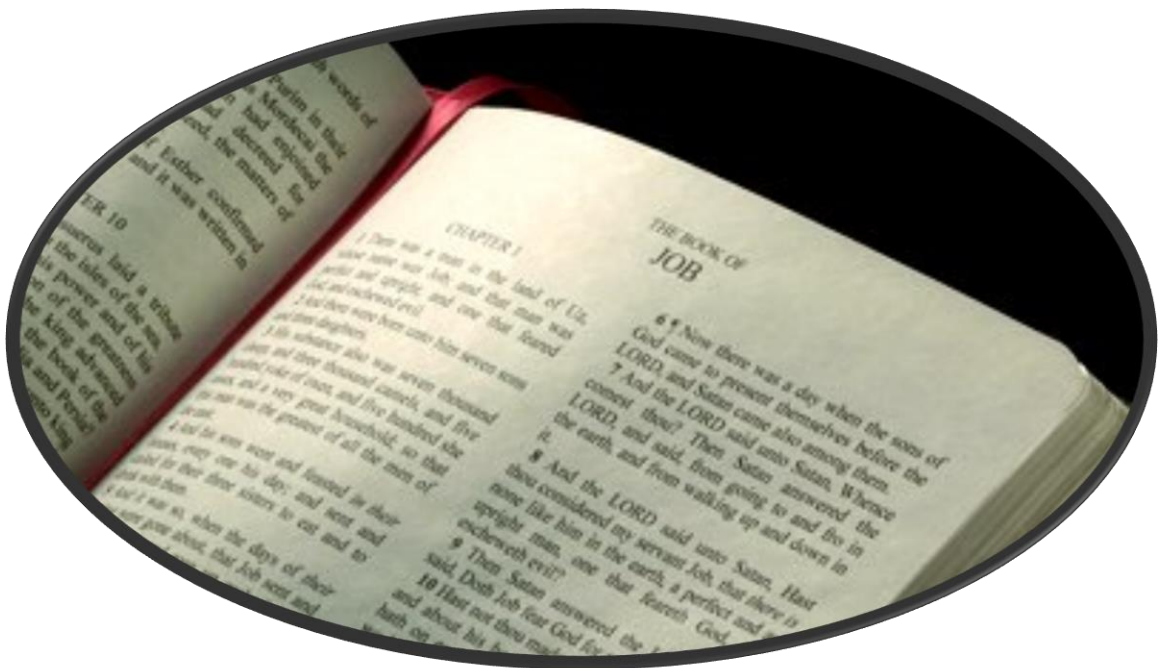


JOB

JOB'S SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Job 30:16-33:18: Job's Self-Righteousness

Job really understands God, but doesn't understand himself.

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Thank you.

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1 Job 30:16-31 (ESV)

“And now my soul is poured out within me; days of affliction have taken hold of me. The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest. With great force my garment is disfigured; it binds me about like the collar of my tunic. God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm. For I know that you will bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living.

“Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand, and in his disaster cry for help? Did not I weep for him whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy? But when I hoped for good, evil came, and when I waited for light, darkness came. My inward parts are in turmoil and never still; days of affliction come to meet me. I go about darkened, but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. I am a brother of jackals and a companion of ostriches. My skin turns black and falls from me, and my bones burn with heat. My lyre is turned to mourning, and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.”

This lament is different. Job's pain here isn't physical; it's emotional. God has abandoned Job and that hurts more than anything else.

I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. . . . My inward parts are in turmoil and never still; days of affliction come to meet me. I go about darkened, but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.

This is a preview of the agony Christ suffered. Notice the similarity between Job's words Christ's on the cross.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – Matthew 27:46 (ESV)

This is a portrait of hell. The pain of hell is not merely physical; it's mostly separation from God.

We underappreciate how comforting God's presence is. Even when He's disciplining us, it's still reassuring to feel His presence.

Imagine if, as a child, your parents suddenly stopped punishing you for anything. They were just busy and ignored you. You might be happy about it at first, but eventually you'd crave what was lost, even though that was mostly things you thought you hated.

If that's your reaction to losing the punishment aspect of a relationship, imagine how you'd feel if you mostly lost the good things in a relationship, and got a boatload of pain in its place.

That's the agony of Job – and of Christ.

2 Job 31:1-23 (ESV)

‘I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? What would be my portion from God above and my heritage from the Almighty on high? Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?’

‘If I have walked with falsehood and my foot has hastened to deceit; (Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!) if my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out.

‘If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her. For that would be a heinous crime; that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.

‘If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?’

‘If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it (for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow), if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or the needy without covering, if his body has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, because I saw my help in the gate, then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.’

This has a “cross my heart and hope to die” feel to it. Job’s defense is reaching a climax and he’s saying that if he did wrong he should be held to account.

But the interesting part is his explanation of how he avoided sexual sin. He is distinctly not overconfident. He says, “*I have made a covenant with my eyes*” to not even look upon temptation.

We’d all avoid a lot of pain and grief if we’d be as honest with ourselves about our weaknesses.

We know Job is innocent from the prologue in Chapter 1. But even without that, this passage shows his truthfulness. His friends can tell that he’s being honest with them from the way he’s being honest with himself.

One of the keys to sin is denial, particularly denial about sin. When people see their own sin for what it really is, they recoil – and change. People with major sin problems always have major denial mechanisms that keep them in the dark.

If Job was lying about his sin, the idea of avoiding temptation would never have occurred to him.

3 Job 31:24-40 (ESV)

"If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.

"If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me, or exulted when evil overtook him (I have not let my mouth sin by asking for his life with a curse), if the men of my tent have not said, 'Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?' (the sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler), if I have concealed my transgressions as others do by hiding my iniquity in my heart, because I stood in great fear of the multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors— Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me as a crown; I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him.

"If my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together, if I have eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last, let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley."

The words of Job are ended.

At last, Job says the words that get him called on the carpet. He wants to question God.

Let the Almighty answer me!

Oops! Job's pride has just bubbled to the surface. There's something he needs to learn, and he's about to learn it. We're finally getting to the place where the book of Job answers the great questions.

We know that God's ways are higher than our ways; God is infinite and we're finite. But we still crave a deeper understanding. If only we could just get a glimpse of God's grand priorities – or at least gain an understanding of how some tragedies *could* make sense.

Until then, we're stuck with just trying to relax and accept our lack of understanding. Yes, we know that our tiny brains can't know the great things of God, but that doesn't get rid of our hunger for more.

The ending will fix that – for Job and for us.

There's a difference between trusting what God has done for you and really trusting God.

Satan was wrong to predict that Job would curse God, but he does know how people think. Really trusting God is an advanced skill. God's infinite creativity and infinite priorities mean that the future may not be what you expect.

A bad turn of events can challenge anyone's faith to the core.

4 Job 32:1-22 (ESV)

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger.

And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said:

‘I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you. I said, ‘Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say, ‘Listen to me; let me also declare my opinion.’

‘Behold, I waited for your words, I listened for your wise sayings, while you searched out what to say. I gave you my attention, and, behold, there was none among you who refuted Job or who answered his words. Beware lest you say, ‘We have found wisdom; God may vanquish him, not a man.’ He has not directed his words against me, and I will not answer him with your speeches.

‘They are dismayed; they answer no more; they have not a word to say. And shall I wait, because they do not speak, because they stand there, and answer no more? I also will answer with my share; I also will declare my opinion. or I am full of words; the spirit within me constrains me. Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer. I will not show partiality to any man or use flattery toward any person. For I do not know how to flatter, else my Maker would soon take me away.’

Job was wrong to justify himself. He may be blameless and upright but he's not without sin. His challenge to God is wrong, and he's going to get taken to the woodshed for it.

There's also a lesson in Elihu's struggle over whether to speak up. He correctly sees himself as junior to everyone else, and he bites his tongue for a long time.

But when it's clear that Job is done and the other *three men ceased to answer Job*, he sees his opening. We don't know whether Elihu was praying about whether he should speak, but it looks like he was. His opening is totally clear – and the text highlights that.

It feels like a sign.

Christians make a lot of errors in this area. We speak when we should stay quiet, and we stay quiet when we should speak. Usually, hesitating to speak is wise, but failing to speak up when it's needed can be a big mistake. Mature Christians welcome criticism from others, especially their juniors. Even when it's off base, that just creates a teachable moment.

But taking your time and praying about this is the key. It's an interesting form of prayer too. You don't need any words; you just "connect" and wait for Him to respond. If there are any words from your end, they're something like, "Ok, what now?" Or, "I'm listening."

5 Job 33:1-18 (ESV)

“But now, hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. Behold, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks. My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely. The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me, if you can; set your words in order before me; take your stand. Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. Behold, no fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you.

“Surely you have spoken in my ears, and I have heard the sound of your words. You say, ‘I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me. Behold, he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy, he puts my feet in the stocks and watches all my paths.’

“Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, ‘He will answer none of man's words’? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.”

Elihu is wrong. Job did not say, “I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me.” In particular, he clearly said that no one is perfect.

“Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times.” – Job 9:2-3

Job didn't claim to be perfect; he claimed to be innocent of the kind of major sin that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar think triggered his afflictions. Most of Job's defense was that the wicked are not afflicted, so God's judgement must not operate the way they think it does.

Still, Elihu thinks Job claimed to be “*without transgression.*” Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar made the same mistake. Why?

There's something strange about the way people listen. You can say something reasonable, with carefully measured words, yet be completely misunderstood. We've all been surprised by a comeback like, “So, you think that ...” followed by a ridiculous caricature of what we just said.

And we've all done that too, and we usually don't notice when we do it.

Sin makes us lousy listeners. We hear what we think someone should be saying and often don't even notice when they say something different.

If we're going to be useful witnesses for Christ, we need to be good listeners. We have to get serious about this. We must admit that we have a problem. We need to raise our awareness of when we mess up. (This is where an accountability partner can be indispensable.)

Ask God to help you see the “log in your own eye.”

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Looking back at the times you were disciplined as a child – do you now appreciate them? Do you see love in them? Do you see love in God's discipline?
2. One of the keys to seeing your own sin is to have someone else looking for it. Are you in a relationship with someone who would not hesitate to call you out? Would you not hesitate to call them out?
3. How do you know you can trust God? What does He promise, and what does He not promise?
4. How do you tell the difference between a time to speak and a time to wait? How do you pray about this?
5. Can you recall a time when you severely misunderstood what someone was saying? When someone severely misunderstood you? How could this have been avoided?

Items for prayer: