



Job:

Suffering and the
Sovereignty of God



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Introduction

Great works of art often unsettle and destabilize us, forcing us to re-evaluate and rethink familiar truths. In addition, great works of art often comfort us with firmer foundations in the darkest valleys. This is the power and the beauty of the book of Job. Confronted by loss and despair, many have turned to this complex, intricately-crafted work, seeking answers to questions of suffering and the Lord's comfort. Many limp away unsettled and destabilized, questioning what they thought they knew; while others give up after one or two attempts to find answers and comfort in Job's pages. For those willing to mine its depths, the book of Job provides a firmly-founded comfort in the Lord's sovereign plan and governance even amid inexplicable suffering.

Often, we unrealistically expect clear, easily-understood answers to the mind-breaking, heart-wrenching problems of suffering and evil. We expect these truths to lie scattered on the ground like diamonds instead of having to work hard and mine for what is valuable and endures. Much like Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, we often seek an easily-understood explanation that will help us sort out what is happening. Why do we expect an easily-understood, satisfactory answer to the question of why the innocent and righteous suffer? What set of words will alleviate our grief and allow us to respond with positive platitudes as if the suffering never happened? Is knowledge really the issue? If we knew more, would we suffer less or be able to cope any better? Or would we struggle more? Such questions arise when we experience and confront suffering. In its complexity and mystery, the book of Job prompts some of these questions (and a host of others).

This mysterious complexity in Job contributes to its stunning beauty. Failing to provide trite answers to questions of profound mystery, Job, in fact, fails to provide an answer or a theodicy in words to the question of suffering at all. Hopes of a mechanistic, utilitarian solution perish in the whirlwind. As we explore Job's depths, we discover that God is not bound by our mechanized, conventional understanding of His ways or by our demands for utility so that we can exert some control. Instead, the God of Job has an eternal plan for all things, even the things we don't understand though we see them. The God of Job controls and governs all things for His glory- even

when we cannot comprehend how God could ever be glorified by such events. The God of Job is the God of the Bible and all creation working all things for His glory and our ultimate good.

These profound and mysterious truths cannot be gleaned from a cursory reading of this text. As C.S. Lewis writes in *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*, “We do not enjoy a story fully at first reading. Not till curiosity, the sheer narrative lust, has been given its sop and laid asleep, are we at leisure to savor the real beauties.” Robertson Davies, a 20th century Canadian novelist, comments that, “A truly great book should be read in youth, again in maturity and once more in old age, as a fine building should be seen by morning light, at noon and by moonlight.” Therefore, we should seek Job’s priceless treasures at various points in our lives, recognizing that we are able to clearly see changes as God sovereignly ordains the events of our lives. A firm foundation of comfort awaits those who are willing to mine Job’s depths over the span of their lives.

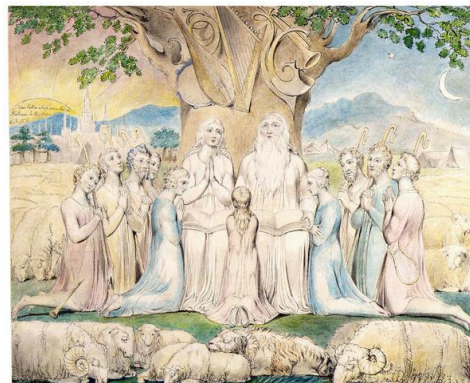
As we embark on this series, please read ahead and be prepared for the texts that will be covered that week in the service. This is critical. I also encourage you to read the chapters in Job that we do not cover to gain a more robust understanding of this book’s overall progression as Job’s and his friends’ arguments spiral further away from how God ultimately relates to His sons and daughters. Note how each attempt and response advances and changes. Let us pray that this will be an excellent series to discuss in community with your family and others who join us on this journey.

Sola Deo Gloria!

Outline of the Book of Job

Prologue:

<i>Job</i> 1:1-5:	The Biography of Job
1:6-22:	The First Test
2:1-10:	The Second Test
2:11-13:	The Arrival of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar



The Progressive Cycles of Speeches of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

<i>Job</i> 3:1-26:	Job's Lament from the Trash Heap
4:1-5:27:	Eliphaz' Opening Speech Gently Calling for Repentance
6:1-7:21:	Job's Response Calling for God to Leave Him Alone
8:1-22:	Bildad's Opening Speech Forcefully Proclaiming Retribution Theology
9:1-10:22:	Job's Response Recognizing the Theological Truths but Defending His Own Righteousness and Calling for an Arbiter Between He and God
11:1-20:	Zophar's Opening Speech Attacking Job's Theology and Declaring He Deserves Worse Punishment
12:1-14:22:	Job's Response Recognizing the Sovereignty of God Clinging in Faith to God's Faithfulness to Forgive the Righteous
15:1-35:	Eliphaz' Second Attempt
16:1-17:16:	Job's Response
18:1-21:	Bildad's Second Attempt
19:1-29:	Job's Response
20:1-29:	Zophar's Second Attempt
21:1-34:	Job's Response
22:1-30:	Eliphaz' Third Attempt
23:1-24:25:	Job's Response
25:1-6:	Bildad's Third Attempt
26:1-14:	Job's Response



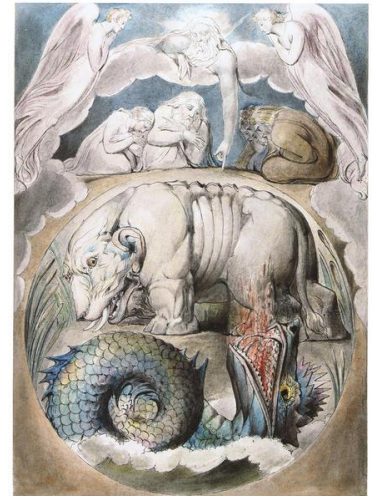
Job's Closing Arguments:

- Job* 27:1-23: **Job Vows to Maintain His Integrity**
28:1-28: **Psalm of Wisdom**
29:1-25: **Job Describes His Previous Situation with God and Man**
30:1-31: **Job Describes His Present Humiliation Before Man**
31:1-40: **Job Appeals One Last Time to God to Give Him a Hearing**



Elihu's Speeches:

- Job* 32:1-33:33: **First Speech**
34:1-37: **Second Speech**
35:1-16: **Third Speech**
36:1-37:24: **Fourth Speech**



The Speeches of Yahweh:

- Job* 38:1-39:30: **First Speech: God's Sovereign Plan**
40:1-41:34: **Second Speech: God's Sovereign Rule**
42:1-6: **Job's Confession**

Epilogue:

- Job* 42:7-9: **God's Verdict and Redemption**
42:10-17: **Job's Restoration**



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Associated Scriptures and Titles:

Job 1:6-2:10: *Job and His Family*

Job 3:1-27:23: *Job Rebuked by His Friends*

Job 29:1-31:40: *Job's Despair*

Job 38:1-41:34: *Behemoth and Leviathan*

Job 42:1-17: *Job's Sacrifice*

Sermon Schedule

August 16th: *Job* 1:1-2:1-13

August 23rd: *Job* 3:1-26

August 30th: *Job* 4:1-5:27: Communion

September 6th: *Job* 7:1-21

September 13th: *Job* 8:1-22

September 20th: *Job* 10:1-22

September 27th: *Job* 11:1-20: Communion

Intermission: **October 4th**

October 11th: *Job* 19:1-29: Communion

October 18th: *Job* 27:1-31:40

October 25th: *Job* 36:1-37:5

November 1st: *Job* 38:1-39:30: Communion

November 8th: *Job* 40:1-41:24

November 15th: *Job* 42:1-17: Communion

Disclaimer: The sermons will **not** cover every verse of the chapter(s) listed but will focus on key passages so as to gain an understanding of how to understand the whole section covered.

Weekly Confession

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of the law.”

Deuteronomy 29:29

Q 7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Q 8. How does God execute His decrees?

A. God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Q 11. What are God’s works of providence?

A. God’s works of providence are, His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and their actions.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Isaiah 55:8-13

Job 1:1-2:13

1. Read *Psalms* 1 and reflect on the hallmarks of one who is blessed and righteous. How does this blessedness and righteousness affect the various seasons of one's life? What is the ultimate blessing that is denied the wicked?
2. According to *1 Peter* 1:3-7, what is the result of our inheritance in Christ being imperishable, undefiled, and unfading? What role do trials play in this process?
3. Describe Job's character as revealed in *Job* 1:1-5, 1:20-22, 2:8-10. What strikes you about his responses to both tests by Satan as governed by God?
4. In *Job* 1:9-11, Satan describes Job's relationship with God as utilitarian based on God as the means to another more attractive end. Why do you love God? Do you struggle with making God a means to another end instead of Him and His glory being the highest end?
5. Based on *Romans* 1:16-17, what is the substance of our hope? How does this reality affect how we live?

"The author is telling us in this way that a utilitarian religion lacks depth and authenticity; in addition, it has something satanic about it....The expectation of rewards that is at the heart of the doctrine of retribution vitiates the entire relationship and plays the demonic role of obstacle on the way to God. In self-seeking religion there is no true encounter with God but rather the construction of an idol."

Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*

Job 3:1-26

1. What does David believe to be true of the Lord that causes him to cry out specifically to Him in *Psalms* 5? What do you know to be true of the Lord your God that causes you to cry out to Him in your time of need?
2. Read *1 Peter* 1:8-12, and consider what the prophets, saints of old, and angels longed to see come to fruition. Give thanks for the fruit of their service to you.
3. *Job* 3:1-26 records Job's opening lament. How does this compare to his proclamations in *Job* 1-2? Have you struggled or are you struggling in a similar way? What is ultimately being questioned by wishing you were never born?
4. What can be gained by a life of law-keeping and good behavior according to *Romans* 3:19-26? Who's righteousness is of greatest cosmic and eternal importance?

“Now the real major burden of the book of Job begins to unfold. Job's faith does not relieve his suffering, it makes it worse. To some extent it causes it. Job's faith was based on the living God who cares for his people. It was faith in Yahweh, the Covenant Lord, the God of justice, mercy and goodness. Job knows God's grace (why else would he offer burnt offerings?). For him, God in grace prospered the upright man; God, thought Job, blesses the righteous. Now, however, Job has to square this faith with his own desperate situation. Everything Job believed about God was being called into question.”

David Atkinson, *The Message of Job*

Job 4:1-5:27

1. How does *Psalms* 7 define the wicked as compared to the righteous? What ultimately unleashes God's judgment?
2. According to *1 Peter* 1:13-21, what grants us the ability to be holy as God is holy and live lives that are pleasing to and glorify God? Reflect on how you have grown in holiness through sanctification over the last year or so.
3. Note how Eliphaz begins his first speech with Job in *Job* 4:1-6. His tone will change significantly over his second and third speeches. What does he appeal to in 4:12-21 for his defense of retribution theology (4:7-9: you reap exactly what you sow)? Have you ever experienced (or provided) this type of comfort?
4. What is Eliphaz calling Job in *Job* 5:1-7?
5. Read *Job* 5:8-27 and reflect on the truths it contains as stated in other passages in the Bible. What is it that Eliphaz has wrong in his thinking and application?
6. Based on *Romans* 5:1-5, what transforms our sufferings into a means of sanctification? How does this contradict Eliphaz's retribution theology?

"(Job's friend's) first premise that we reap what we sow is valid. Their second premise, however, that we reap only what we sow is false. All suffering, as Job's experience validates, is not due to sin. They rightly assert that God is all powerful, righteous, and wise, but they deny his freedom by not allowing God the freedom to use evil to accomplish his sovereign purposes."

Bruce Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*

Job 7:1-21

1. Read *Psalms* 8 and reflect on God's unique care for humanity. Praise Him for how He has been mindful of and cared for you and those around you.
2. What is eternal according to *1 Peter* 1:22-25? What affect does it have on us?
3. Reflect on Job's view of life in *Job* 7:1-10. What renders life meaningless as he describes here? What gives your life meaning?
4. What is Job's understanding of God's attention and presence in *Job* 7:11-21? What is your understanding of God's attention and presence?
5. Is a life of weakness and despair to be our fate according to *Romans* 5:6-11? Thank God for His loving deliverance in Christ.

"It seems counter-intuitive initially, but when we ask the question 'Why?' we actually reveal that we believe there is a God, and not just any God, but a God who could and should be powerful enough to make things different, and who might care enough to want to both answer our question and make things better. The question 'Why?' reveals that none of us can escape the paradox that we believe in a powerful and loving God, albeit we don't understand how we can reconcile this with a broken world replete with injustice and suffering."

Krish Kandiah, *Paradoxology: Why Christianity Was Never Meant to be Simple*

Job 8:1-22

1. Who decides who will be saved in *Psalms* 3? Why is this good news?
2. Who are we as God's people and what is our purpose according to *1 Peter* 2:4-12? How have you grown in your identity and purpose over the last year or so?
3. Note how Bildad opens his first speech to Job in *Job* 8:1-7. How is it different than Eliphaz's approach? What does Bildad appeal to in 8:8-10?
4. What reason does Bildad give for Job's suffering in *Job* 8:11-22?
5. Read *Romans* 5:12-17 and consider how God chooses to relate to His people through the person and work of Christ. Compare it to Bildad's argument.

“Bildad knows nothing of a personal God who puts man to the test through the trial of his faith. Bildad’s divinity is, on the contrary, a nearly mechanistic adjudicator who functions entirely as a moral arbiter of human behavior, not a loving, redemptive God who shapes man’s destiny through His personal interest and intervention.”

Patrick Henry Reardon, *The Trial of Job*

Job 10:1-22

1. Why does David expect the Lord to answer as he calls on Him in *Psalms* 4? How has the Lord given you relief and put joy in your heart in the past?
2. What is Christ's example to us in *1 Peter* 2:21-25? How are you living out that example in the various contexts that the Lord has placed you?
3. Read *Job* 10:1-22 and consider how he is breaking down. How has his view of life changed from *Job* 3 to this passage? How is his questioning of God changing? Have you ever had any of these thoughts?
4. Meditate on *Romans* 6:4-11 in light of *Job* 10:1-22. What have you gained in Christ? How does it affect your daily life?

"Job had forgotten who he was. As a child of God he was to learn that God was more concerned with his Christlikeness than his material prosperity or health."

Derek Thomas, *The Storm Breaks: Job Simply Explained*

Job 11:1-20

1. What is the reward for those who seek God in *Psalms* 9:1-10? Recount how have you been blessed and rewarded by seeking the Lord.
2. According to *1 Peter* 3:13-18, what is the point of suffering well? Reflect on a time when someone's suffering served as a powerful missional witness to the glory of God
3. Note Zophar's approach to Job's circumstance in *Job* 11:1-6. How does it compare to approaches of Eliphaz and Bildad? What does he appeal to in *Job* 11:7-12? How is his overall argument inconsistent?
4. What are we to focus on in this life based on *Romans* 8:1-11? Compare the discussions in Job with what is taught in this passage.

"If (Job's friends) had confessed the mystery and owned their ignorance regarding it, all would have been well. They would have been saved from their subsequent errors and mistakes, and from the gross injustice of which they were guilty towards Job. By acting as they did, they in fact arraigned the providence of God, which they were professedly defending. They prescribed a rule for its administration as the only compatible with justice, which is not, after all the method which it actually follows. Suffering is not distributed according to the ratio nor on the principles which they allege to be absolutely demanded by God's essential attributes."

William Henry Green, *Conflict and Triumph: The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*

Job 19:1-29

1. Read *Psalms* 6 and meditate on the time(s) you have languished and suffered from your wounds. Did you turn to the Lord in prayer expecting Him to answer?
2. Based on *1 Peter* 4:1-6, what are we to live for? Will this be easy?
3. Who does Job identify as the sovereign source of all of his suffering in *Job* 19:1-29? While the answer to this question generates a host of additional questions, how is it still good news that it is true?
4. Based on *Romans* 8:12-17, what evidences our adoption to our Abba Father?

"...if God brings us into the trial he will be with us in the trial, and at length bring us out, more refined. We shall lose nothing but dross...."

Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*

Job 27:1-31:40

1. Read *Psalms* 13 and reflect on David's honesty amid the trials of his life. Do you pray with this kind of honesty?
2. What is the purpose of the gifts that we have been given in union with Christ in *1 Peter* 4:7-11? How are you stewarding God's varied grace through your gift(s)?
3. What is Job's continued commitment in *Job* 27:1-6? How does Job's theology in *Job* 27:7-23 compare with his friends' theology?
4. What is Job teaching us about God's wisdom in *Job* 28?
5. According to *Job* 29, what does Job miss the most? What has been the cost of his suffering as detailed in *Job* 30? Have you ever felt cut off because of suffering? What did you miss most?
6. Meditate on *Romans* 8:18-25. Give thanks for the hope that we have in the fullness and completeness of redemption.

"The book (of Job) is teaching us about God and his policies, not offering Job as a biblical paradigm for how we approach suffering. We will uncover the authoritative teaching of Scripture by unfolding its rhetorical strategy, not by imitating its characters. To say this another way, we will learn more about surviving crises by understanding God than by imitating Job. Therefore we ought to be more discerning and allow Job his weaknesses: a flawed theology and deficient view of God. Such allowance is essential because we often share these shortcomings."

John H. Walton, *Job: The NIV Application Commentary*

Job 36:1-37:5

1. Reflect on *Psalms* 16. Can you with David say, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”? Why or why not?
2. What is the role of suffering in the Christian life according to *1 Peter* 4:12-19?
3. What does Elihu get right in *Job* 36:1-37:5? What does he presumptuously get wrong? What can you learn from him?
4. Read *Romans* 8:26-27 and give thanks for the work of the Holy Spirit in our sufferings.

“And when man has debated the matter thoroughly to and fro, he must needs come to the said conclusion, namely that we comprehend not the greatness and height of God’s doings, further than it please him to give us some taste of them, at least wise according to our capacity: which is oversmall.”

John Calvin, Sermon 8 in *Sermons on Job*

Job 38:1-39:30

1. What 3 things declare the glory of God in *Psalms* 19?
2. What is the reward for suffering well in Christ in *1 Peter* 5:6-11? Does this truth help you to suffer well in Christ?
3. Read *Job* 38:1-39:30. What does Creation teach us about God? Do you understand how all that you can see works according to God's sovereign plan? If not, then how can you expect to fully understand all that is mysterious and that you can't see? If God is sovereign over the minutest of details in Creation, how much more is He sovereign over our lives?
4. Does *Romans* 8:28-30 comfort you? What does it teach about God's sovereignty?

"Having seen not only the majesty and beauty but also the savagery and bizarre nature of the universe, we are being forced to the conclusion that there is far more mystery at the heart of providence than we have yet understood and that this sense of mystery is fundamental to all true worship."

Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You:*

Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job

Job 40:1-41:34

1. Read *Psalms* 24 and give thanks for the King of Glory.
2. What does *2 Peter* 1:2-4 teach us about God's governance of His children?
3. In *Job* 40:1-41:34, God challenges Job's view of His governance going so far as to call him to govern if he thinks he can do it better. What is your view of God's governance? Do you think you can govern better than God? What attributes are required to govern well? Who has these attributes?
4. Meditate on *Romans* 8:31-34 and praise God for His sovereign ability to protect you from the wicked, limited governance of humanity.

"Only God can destroy creatively. Only God can transmute evil into good. As Creator, responsible for all that happens in His world, He is able to make everything (good and bad) work together into good. The debate has been elevated to a different level. The reality of God's goodness lies beyond justice. That is why the categories of guilt and punishment [which we kept on meeting in the three friends], true and terrible though they are, can only view human suffering as a consequence of sin, not as an occasion for grace."

Francis I. Anderson, *Job: Tyndale Old Testament Comment*

Job 42:1-17

1. Why is David celebrating in *Psalms* 30? What has the Lord done for him?
2. Reflect on God's mercy and grace in *2 Peter* 3:8-13. How has He shown patience toward you in awaiting your repentance?
3. What has Job learned from his painful experience according to *Job* 42:1-17? What have you learned from your times of suffering?
4. Read *Romans* 8:35-39 and give thanks for the assurance that the Lord provides in Christ Jesus despite life in a fallen world and all that we don't understand.

"It is the good news that God comes for his people, but he does not come on our terms. He does not come and leave us untouched and unchanged. He comes to transfigure us- to cleanse us, transform us, and draw us up into his glorious presence. He comes in the storm of his presence, and he blows upon us and our families and our stories; he blows upon them until they glow with the fire of his glory."

Toby J. Sumpter, *A Son for Glory: Job Through New Eyes*