

## **Series Job**

### **This Message Lord, Please Listen to Me**

#### **Scripture Various**

At the beginning of the story of Job, Satan, the Accuser, challenged the integrity of both God and Job. In response to the challenge, God gave permission to the Accuser to test the faithfulness of Job by taking away all his possessions and killing his family members.

We don't know how long Job grieved over his losses, but it must have been more than a few days since adequate time was needed for both the Accuser and the LORD to evaluate his faithfulness and integrity. Job did not act as the Accuser anticipated. The LORD pointed this out to the Accuser by saying, "He still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him" (*Job 2:3*).

After the Accuser caused the miseries of Job to increase by afflicting his body, another period of days passed by before his friends heard about his circumstances and traveled to be with him. After their arrival they sat in silence for seven days before the dialogues between them began. Most likely the dialogues were spread over several days. The point is that the grief and miseries of Job lasted a long time.

We can assume that Job spent these days in deep thought and reflection about his circumstances. He could not think of any reasons why his friendship with the LORD had turned to hostility. He could not account for the adversities he was experiencing. His first speech was filled with bitterness — he cursed the day of his birth, but after that speech he became increasingly determined to find out what had happened between himself and the LORD.

Job's thinking was influenced by several convictions: He recognized that his troubles were caused by or, at least, allowed by, God. He insisted that he had done nothing to warrant the degree of suffering he was experiencing. He did not want to abandon his faith in God. He believed that God was ultimately just.

Job also realized that his previous beliefs about the relationship between God and humanity were inadequate, and that he had to come up with a new and better theological perspective. He quickly recognized that the friends were of no help to him. In fact, he became frustrated with them because of their rigid thinking. When he insisted that he was not guilty of any wrongdoing and that God was not punishing him because of personal sin, the friends did their best to convince him that he had brought judgment on himself because of some unconfessed sin. Job stubbornly insisted that wicked people often prosper in this life and that the righteous often suffer, a belief that the friends could not accept.

Instead of the fruitless dead-end debate with the friends, Job longed for the opportunity to dialogue directly with God Himself. He insisted that he would be vindicated if he could confront God and demand an explanation. As time went on, he became more and more excited about this possibility, although he admitted to being terrified at the thought of a face to face encounter with God. As he reflected on his situation, Job concluded that there was no other way for him to resolve his perplexing circumstances. A meeting with God? It was a wild hope based on his faith that God would eventually do for him what was just and right.

Job struggled to understand the ways of God. He did not know about the challenge of the Accuser. He had no Scripture to help him understand the purposes of God. He did not know that there were heavenly purposes behind his earthly circumstances. He did not realize that God sometimes used negative earthly circumstances to achieve eternal results.

Fortunately, we have an abundance of information that helps us to understand God's ways. We know the backstory of Job. We have a Bible that reveals lots of truth to us. I want to explore this theme with you for a couple of minutes. Consider what the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the believers in Rome: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes." This is one of the verses frequently quoted to people who are suffering. The phrase "all things" represents negative circumstances, pain, and grief to us, but these things which adversely affect us may very well be part of one of God's behind-the-scenes secret purposes.

There was a heavenly, eternal purpose behind the sufferings of Job. His mission was to invalidate the challenges of the Accuser. God did not spare Job. He allowed him to endure “all the things” necessary to prove that the Accuser was wrong.

Now think about the incarnation of Jesus. God sent His Son to endure abuse, opposition, suffering, and death for a reason. Likewise, God may not spare us. There may be a purpose behind the sufferings of the people of God. (*Think Hebrews chapter 12 and Revelation 6:9-11*).

Job’s loss of possessions, family members, and personal health were a significant set back for him, but his faithful endurance became the basis of a heavenly victory. The death of Jesus on the cross also seemed a major defeat, but it proved to be, instead, the most significant of victories for the benefit of the human race.

What about us? Are we willing to allow God to fulfill His purposes in our lives? To be God’s representatives and witnesses even if it involves suffering? God’s purpose is to bring good out of bad, to bring order out of chaos, victory out of apparent defeat, light out of darkness, life out of death, and we are called to be participants in His work, to advance His Kingdom, to bring glory to Him, if necessary, through suffering.

The Apostle Paul wrote some other verses which apply to His people. He asked a rhetorical question: “Shall trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and the sword separate us from the love of Christ?” (*Romans 8:35*) “No,” Paul said. “In all these negative circumstances, we are more than conquerors.” The point is that everyone who is called by God may be afflicted in some way, but He will maintain His relationship and there will be ultimate victory.

Job did not have our New Testament perspective. In his early speeches, he had an attitude of hopelessness. Although he was aware that his death would be an unbearable disgrace, leaving him without vindication, he assumed that death was the only way out of his experience. This was his prayer:

### **Read Job 6:8-13**

8 “Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, 9 that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! 10 Then I would still have this consolation — my joy in unrelenting pain — that I had not denied the words of the Holy One. 11 What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? 12 Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? 13 Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me?”

Job was concerned that if his suffering continued on much longer, he would not be able to control himself. He had no inner resources to sustain himself. Even in his pain, he did not want to deny God. He did not anticipate healing and considered death to be the only release from the pain he was experiencing.

However, within a short time, Job began to think about taking his dispute directly to God, and this thought gave him hope. The idea was appealing to him, but he was greatly concerned about the reaction of God.

### **Read Job 9:14-19**

14 “How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? 15 Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. 16 Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. 17 He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason. 18 He would not let me regain my breath but would overwhelm me with misery. 19 If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty. And if it is a matter of justice, who will summon him?”

Job recognized the absurdity of an argument between a human and the sovereign, omnipotent God. He recognized that God could do whatever He wanted to do, and that He was not answerable to anyone.

### **Read Job 9:32-35**

32 “He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. 22 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, 34 someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. 35 Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.”

After chapter 9, Job began to use the imagery of a courtroom more and more. Although he recognized that it would be a foolish and foolhardy endeavor to engage God in legal action, he wanted to try to convince God that he was an innocent victim. Job believed that God was behind his troubles, and he knew that he, as a human, would have an impossible task presenting his case for justice and vindication. How could he hold God accountable for His actions? After all, He was sovereign.

And how could God be an impartial Judge in the dispute? In the courtroom, God would be both prosecuting attorney and judge. In such a situation, Job could not hope for a favorable outcome.

Job wished for someone to umpire and arbitrate the dispute, but as soon as he articulated this thought, he undoubtedly recognized how absurd it was. After all, who is greater than God? Who would be able to deliver judgment against the way God had been executing justice? Yet, in spite of the absurdity of his plan, Job became more and more convinced that it was what he had to do.

In a later speech, Job boldly asserted his readiness to present his case to God, but, at the same time, he also recognized that he was putting himself in a dangerous position.

### **Read Job 13:14-15**

14 "Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands? 15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him. I will surely defend my ways to his face."

By this point in the dialogue, Job had decided to throw caution to the winds. He was determined to express his thoughts to God. He wanted to do it even if God killed him because of his audacious behavior. As he understood his situation, he had no other option.

Job was not without self-confidence. He was convinced that there were no outstanding charges against him.

### **Read Job 13:18-19**

18 "Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated." But then he hedged just a bit, 19 "If anyone can bring charges against me, I will be silent and die" (*paraphrased*).

Job had two requests of God. The first request was in the form of a pre-condition which had to be met before there could be a confrontation between himself and God.

### **Read Job 13:20-27**

20 "Only grant me these two things, O God, and I will not hide from you: 21 Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors. 22 Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. 23 How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin. 24 Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy? 25 Will you torment a windblown leaf? Will you chase after dry chaff?"

If Job could be free of the suffering he was experiencing, then he would be ready to meet God in court. It was not important to him who would make the opening statement (see verse 22). The two most leading questions he would put to God would be, “What have I done?” and “Why are you doing this to me?”

As Job reflected on his treatment by God, he became so angry and frustrated that he was almost irrational. He realized that he would have to be in better physical condition to stand before God. This was the reason for the pre-condition mentioned previously. However, because there was never any improvement in his condition, Job felt that God was deliberately keeping him in an impoverished condition so as to avoid their meeting.

### **Read Job 16:6-14**

6 “If I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away. 7 Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. 8 You have bound me, and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me. 9 God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. 10 Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. 11 God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. 12 All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; 13 his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. 14 Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior.”

In verse 9 Job compared God to a wild animal, perhaps a ferocious lion. In verse 11 he accused God of throwing him into the clutches of wicked men. In verses 12-14 he used strong vivid words such as “shattering,” “seizing,” “attacking,” “piercing,” to describe the violence and hostility with which he was being treated. He used words which might apply to a murderer who tortures his victim before killing, and, in his thinking, Job was accusing God of being the murderer.

At this point in time, Job was without hope of proving his innocence even though it was his desire. He did not expect to live long enough to be vindicated in this life. He had one remaining plea: that after he was dead and buried, there might still be someone to represent him.

### **Read Job 16:18-21**

18 “O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! 19 Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. 20 My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; 21 on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.”

Verse 18 seems to be a reference to an episode in the book of Genesis. After Cain killed his brother Abel, the LORD said to Cain, “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (*Genesis 4:10*). Job, as another innocent victim, wanted his blood to be a continuous cry to God for justice.

Unfortunately, Job knew that there was a problem with this request. If God was his killer, then to whom would the cry of his blood be addressed? Who would hear and intercede with God? Who could be his witness in heaven? Back in chapter 9 Job had complained that there was no umpire qualified to arbitrate disputes between God and humans. God had all the power and authority on His side.

Job’s only hope for vindication was that there would be someone in heaven to be his “witness,” his “advocate,” and “intercessor” — someone who would plead with God on his behalf. The question in verse 19 is: Who is this witness already in heaven? Some believers have assumed that Job was referring to Jesus, the Son of God. This assumption is based on New Testament knowledge which is read back into the Old Testament. The assumption is possible only because believers know the story of Jesus. Unfortunately, interpreting the Old Testament from the standpoint of the New Testament is not good interpretation. There is no reason to think that this information about Jesus was available to the writer of the book of Job.

Most commentators identify the “witness” with God Himself, and they state that Job was calling on God to witness to Himself. Although he was crushed by God, Job was still forced to turn to God as his only hope. Job had memories of the days when God was his friend. He remembered God as compassionate and generous and just. Job was appealing to the God he used to know to hear his pleas and present his case with the other God who had turned against him. Of course, Job believed in only one God, but he had become confused by the radically different actions of God. His enemy God was, at the same time, the only One who could offer to him vindication and deliverance.

As I said, Job anticipated his death, and, in the likelihood that an encounter with God was not going to be possible while he was alive, he wanted the truth about his life to be remembered by future generations. Notice his desire:

### **Read Job 19:23-27**

23 "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, 24 that they were inscribed with an iron tool and lead, or engraved in rock forever! 25 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes, I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

This passage contains the most familiar words of the entire book. Unfortunately, the precise meanings of the Hebrew text in the verses are not clear. What is not questioned was Job's desire for a written record of his innocence to remain after his demise. Job wanted future generations to remember him as a righteous man who was treated unfairly, and not as a sinner who suffered the consequences his sins. He also wanted his Redeemer, the One who would stand at the end of the age, to have available the record of his life.

Job was confident that he would eventually be vindicated and that justice would eventually be extended to him, even if it would not happen until the end of time. The word translated "redeemer" (*Hebrew "go'el*) in verse 25 speaks of the next of kin who performs certain actions on behalf of a relative who is not able to take care of himself/herself. In the Old Testament law, the "redeemer" would be the one to avenge the blood of a family member who had been murdered, or who would buy back property for a family member who was in debt. The most significant example of a "redeemer" in the Old Testament was Boaz in the book of Ruth. He married Ruth in order to provide her deceased husband with descendants to bear his name.

Most Bibles translations make a mistake when they capitalize the word "redeemer." By doing this they force us to think about a specific individual rather than leaving the word to be a general title, which it is. By giving the word a capital "R," translators are applying New Testament concepts to an ancient Old Testament document. As appealing as this may be for believers, it is an unwarranted stretch of interpretative license to make the "redeemer" in verse 25 a specific reference to Jesus.

Several facts help us to put the interpretation of verses 25 through 27 into context: Job had been hoping for a meeting with God but he had come to realize that he would die before the meeting would occur. He knew that his vindication could only come from God, and he believed so strongly in his eventual vindication that he was convinced that God would somehow restore his life in order to make this known to him. In the context, Job needed someone to speak for him in court, to be an advocate, someone to offer the convincing argument that would secure a favorable judgment.

The big question is whether Job had a clear hope for life beyond the grave or not. Previous to chapter 19, Job seemed to have no hope for a new life after death. In chapter 21 he pointed out that everyone, whether righteous or wicked, came to a common end. They returned to dust and were covered with worms (*see Job 21:23-26*). As far as Job understood the future, there was no bodily resurrection or judgment following this life (*also see his speech chapter 14*).

The closing phrase in the reading indicates that Job was not sure about the future. The phrase was an expression of longing and yearning, something on the order of “wishful thinking” rather than a confident assertion of fact.

I want to close with a passage which indicates the determination of Job. Throughout this book he had been stubbornly insisting that he was innocent of wrongdoing and that he did not deserve his suffering. He wanted the opportunity to defend his position.

### **Read Job 23:1-7**

1 Then Job replied: 2 “Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy on me in my groaning. 3 If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling. 4 I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say. 6 Would he oppose me with great power? No, he would not press charges against me. 7 There an upright man could present his case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge.”

From the New Testament, we know that all of us will some day stand before God and give an account of our actions while on earth. When we come before God, will we have the confidence of Job? I close with the words of Paul, “Although I am suffering, yet I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (*II Timothy 1:12*).