



The Purpose of the Lord is Compassionate & Merciful

Grappling with God: The Gospel According to Job

Job 42:7-17

David Sunday

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Oh God, as You created light out of darkness by speaking, speak now into our hearts and shine the light of the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. As we see Him, may the hard and stony ground of unbelief be broken up. May we who walk in darkness be led by the light of Your Word. May we who are weary be strengthened. May we who are weak and needing comfort receive the balm of healing that comes through Your good Word. I pray for the power of Your Spirit to anoint the preaching and hearing of Your Word now, for Jesus' sake and for our good. Amen.

You have heard it said, "Everything will be okay in the end, and, if it's not okay, it's not the end" (John Lennon). We're going to see that illustrated as we turn to the end of the book of Job. We've heard the story of Job since June—a man who was righteous and blameless. He feared God and turned away from evil. He was the richest and most prominent man of the East. Satan appeared in the presence of the Lord and said, "This man fears You, God, simply because of all the good things you do for him. Take it all away and he will curse You to Your face." And God said to Satan, "You have My permission."

So Job lost everything. He became bankrupt; he was bereft of all his sons and daughters; and he was covered with boils. We have watched him suffer and suffer and suffer, chapter after chapter. Everything was not okay in Job's life. Today, we're going to come to the end. As you turn to chapter 42, this is the last sermon in Job. We started here in June. It's now October. When you heard that we were going to spend about four months in this book, I wonder how many of you groaned at the thought of four months in the book of Job and how many of you have been surprised and refreshed at the beauty and profound wisdom of this book. My disappointment is that there's so much more for us to see. If you want to read more about Job, I would encourage you to turn to a book Crossway publishes in the "Preach the Word" series by Christopher Ash. You can find it on Amazon. It's one of the best commentaries I've ever used and it's a beautiful book. I want to acknowledge my help from him as we turn to this last chapter. Most of my outline is influenced by Christopher Ash.

Let's read together the last section, Job 42:7-17. Let's worship God as we hear His Word:

⁷ After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

¹¹ Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

¹² And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. ¹⁶ And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

This is God's Word. Thank Him for it. Praise God for speaking to us in His Word.

Now, as we conclude this book together, what is there that we can learn and take away? I'm thankful that Scripture is unified. It is one book. The Holy Spirit is speaking in all of the Scriptures and we can often interpret Scripture by Scripture. In the case of Job, we have a New Testament passage in the book of James that gives us an interpretive key as to what we're to learn.

James 5:7 says, "*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.*" There's a day when God is coming and we need to patiently wait for that day. Verse seven continues:

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about

it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts [get your heart settled around this; let them trust confidently in this], for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Here we have a key to see what we should be learning from hearing the book of Job. According to the Apostle James, there are two main lessons, or themes, that we should take away from our study of this book. One is a lesson about steadfastness. The second is a lesson about the character of the Lord in His compassion and mercy. James said if we read the book of Job rightly, these are the two things we should learn from it:

- First, we should learn about the steadfastness in the life of the believer.
- Second, we should learn about compassion and mercy in the heart of our God.

Those are the two main themes we're going to look at together.

A Lesson about Steadfastness

What should believers expect now? We should expect that we have to live lives of steadfast endurance or perseverance.

First, we should live lives of steadfast endurance in spiritual warfare. Why? As Martin Luther put it:

For still our ancient foe,
Doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate.
On earth is not his equal.

(A Mighty Fortress is Our God by Martin Luther, ca. 1527)

This is the daily reality of the lives of believers. As we look at the book of Job and see how Satan went into the throne room of heaven and attacked this faithful servant of God, we should not consider this an anomaly for Christians. This is a picture of what is normal in the Christian life. We are a people who are embattled. We have an enemy who seeks to work us woe. We are the battlefield. This spiritual warfare is being waged against our lives.

This is demonstrated in the life of Jesus. From His birth until His death, He was embattled by the evil one. Remember, no servant is greater than his master (John 13:16). If we are to faithfully live for God in this world, we must be on our alert; we must be sober; we must

be watchful, for our enemy, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). We are called to resist him, being firm in our faith.

The Apostle Paul said, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.... For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:10, 12). As believers who live in this world, we are to expect trials, persecution and difficulties because we are faithful and because we believe.

Peter said, “When these sufferings come upon us, we are not to be surprised or alarmed as though something strange were happening to us” (1 Peter 4:12). Spiritual warfare is not an occasional, sporadic episode in the life of the believer. Spiritual warfare is the daily reality and context of our lives. When you wake up in the morning, you are waking up in the midst of spiritual warfare. The world, the flesh and the devil are all set against you, waging war against your soul. You must be on alert and vigilant in this battle.

What we see in the life of Job is steadfast endurance and perseverance in the midst of spiritual warfare.

Second, we see his perseverance as he waits upon the Lord. What should believers expect now? We should expect a life of steadfast endurance in waiting upon the Lord. Isn't that what we were singing about earlier? “I will call upon Your name.” We are waiting upon the Lord for fresh strength and for renewal of grace and mercy.

We see this in Job's life. It was characteristic of him. In 23:3, he said, *“Oh, that I knew where I might find him...!”* Job longed to stand before God. He did not understand why suffering happened to him. He did not know why he was covered in boils, why he lost all his beloved children or why he lost all his wealth. He did not know, but he longed and yearned to stand face-to-face with God and to bring his perplexity into God's presence.

Job's friends were not like this. His friends had everything figured out. They could theologize; they could philosophize about God. They talked eloquently about God, but they never talked to God. Job, on the other hand, continually prayed to God; he said things to God that were honest and, at times, inappropriate. In the midst of everything, Job was full of wonder, awe, longing, yearning and desire to appear before the presence of the Lord. These are characteristics that were never evident in Job's friends.

Job waited on the Lord. In the end, Job was satisfied not because his questions were answered. He was satisfied not because his material blessings were restored. He was satisfied because he got to see God. He got to appear in God's presence. God came to him and revealed Himself to Job. That was the source of Job's satisfaction and peace.

As we read the book of Job, we see the life of a believer, a life that is characterized by steadfast endurance, by perseverance in spiritual warfare and waiting upon the Lord. These two things should characterize our lives as well: warfare and waiting. It's not yet the end. Everything is not yet okay. We live in a battle. We live in the midst of hostility. We must wage war and wait on God.

What Can We Look Forward to in the End?

This conclusion of the book of Job beautifully foreshadows what we can look forward to. In the end, we will be satisfied that the Lord is compassionate and merciful in all His ways toward us.

James said, "This is what we've seen in the book of Job. We have seen the purpose of the Lord, the goal of the Lord, the end of the Lord." What was the Lord aiming at with Job? He was aiming at compassion and mercy being poured out in Job's life. That is what James said we should see.

Now, as you read the book of Job, I would guess those are probably not the two main attributes you think are most evident about God. If you were to ask, "What are the key attributes of God highlighted in this book?" you would probably say majesty, mystery or sovereignty. You may even say justice because of how much we hear about it from Job's friends. But would you pick compassion and mercy as the two main attributes of God that are on display in this book?

James said we should see God's compassion and mercy when we read the book of Job. Let's highlight four ways that we see God's compassion and mercy in Job's life in the conclusion of this book. As we see it in Job's life, we will see foreshadows of what God does in our lives.

First, as we look back on our lives, we will see that the Lord has been compassionate and merciful in His humbling of us. Let's look back verses five and six, where Pastor Leeper ended last week. Job said to God, "*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*"

Here is a man who suffered so much. He had so much pain and loss, but instead of ending the book full of self-pity, he ended low, despising himself and exalting God. He repented in dust and ashes before this great God Who revealed Himself so remarkably to Job. What I want to say to us believers is that a mark of God's love, compassion and mercy in our lives is when He brings us low, so that we can see Him high and exalted. It is God's mercy when He humbles, when He causes us to see we are small. He is great and He is worthy. Apart from God working that into our lives, we would never see this about ourselves. We would see ourselves as

self-sufficient, independent and in no need of God. If that attitude is left uncorrected, it would lead us to hell forever.

Hell is a place where people who live in self-sufficiency and think they have no need for God live apart from Him for all eternity. It is God's mercy, love and compassion that cause us to see ourselves as low in view of His majesty.

When Job says, "I despise myself" in verse six, it is not something we want to say in relationship to other people. It is not a good thing to constantly compare ourselves to other people and feel inferior, carrying around an Eeyore complex and thinking, "Oh, I'm so bad in comparison to them." That is not the right attitude, but, in comparison to God, it is right to despise ourselves and exalt God.

If we don't have that attitude, what we need is for the Lord, in compassion and mercy, to bring us lower, so that He might be lifted higher in our lives and we might truly stand in awe and humility before Him. In the end, we will see that every opportunity God brought into our lives to lay low before Him and to see Him high and exalted was God's compassion and mercy at work in our lives. As an old poet said, God will "transform our wounds into worship" as we see His merciful purposes.

Second, in the end, we will see that the Lord is compassionate and merciful in His vindication of us. This happened publicly to Job in verse seven. It says, "*After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite [probably because he was the leader of these three friends]: 'My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'*"

These guys were the theologians! They were the philosophers. They knew about God. But God said to them, "In the end, you got it wrong. My servant Job got it right."

Not everything Job said was right. There were things over which Job needed to repent, but God read into Job's heart. God saw the longing and fear of God in Job's heart, and God said, "Job belongs to Me. He is Mine and I am his. He honored Job by calling Job "My servant" four times. We see it once in verse seven and three times in verse eight. It is a title of dignity that signifies a covenant relationship—the same thing God called Moses and the prophets. "Job is My servant."

What will it be like in the end to hear God say of a faithful believer, "This is My servant; he belongs to Me; she belongs to Me, good and faithful servant"? What will it be like for God to hold you up before a watching universe and say, "He has served Me faithfully; she is My child"? What will it be like for Him to vindicate you and clothe you in His righteousness and for you to stand blameless in His sight? What will that be like?

Malachi the Prophet gave us a glimpse of what it will be like. Keep your finger in Job and turn to the last page of the Old Testament, Malachi 4. Let's read a little bit of what it will be like when God's servants are vindicated. Beginning at Malachi 3:17, God said, "*They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession...*" This is speaking of the day when God vindicates His servants. "They will be Mine. They will be My treasured possession:

...and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

That's what it will be like on the day when God vindicates His people. We will be like calves leaping from the stalls. We will be radiant with the righteousness of God. Jesus said the righteous shall shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43). When that happens in the end, we will be vindicated and see the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Thanks be to God!

Third, in the end we will see that the Lord has been compassionate and merciful in His reconciling us one to another. Let's look back at Job's story. In 42:8-9, notice the Lord's priorities. He restored Job and one of the first things He cared about was Job's relationships with his friends, family and community. It would be very tempting for Job to say, "You know what, God? I just need some R&R. I am sick of people, because they have not been any help to me."

Look at verse 11: "*Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before...*" Where were they? This is the first time we hear about them in this book. Where were they during all this trouble in Job's life? It would be very tempting after all his suffering for Job to wallow in self-pity or for Job to respond in harshness, judgmentalism, unforgiveness and bitterness toward his friends. But God would not allow an inch of room for that.

In the next seven weeks, we are going to be talking about our life together as a community. We are going to be talking about rooting out some of the weeds that can rise up and choke out love that should happen in community life. We'll be looking at things like self-pity, jealousy, harshness, judgmentalism and bitterness. We need God to be dealing with these garden-variety sins that pop up in all our hearts.

Here in this restoration of Job, God said, "Job, there will be no self-pity. There will be no harshness. There will be no bitterness. I'm going to deal with your friends' attitudes and I'm going to deal with your potential temptations toward your friends, Job. Here is what you need to do. You need to pray for them right now. Go pray for those friends."

To Job's friends, God said, "I am not happy with you. I am angry with you for the way you dealt with My servant, Job, and at the folly with which you spoke of Me. Go make sacrifices and humble yourselves before Me."

Here is the beautiful thing. It worked. God worked repentance in the friends and God worked tenderness in Job's heart. We cannot make this happen. When we try to right wrongs in our own strength, it's like taking a large block of ice in a room that is zero degrees and trying to break up that ice with a hammer. What do you end up with? You end up with ice chips all over the place, but everything else is still frozen solid. But when God works repentance, it's like taking that block of ice and putting it out in 90-degree heat where the sun of His love just melts it. The wrongs are resolved. The offenses are removed. Warmth, joy and life are restored in relationships.

Then we understand what Oswald Chambers called "a society of enlarged friendship" (from Baffled to Fight Better: Job and the Problem of Suffering). That is a beautiful thing about suffering. After we have suffered deeply, a humbling can take place in our hearts, where we are not caring about the same petty things anymore. We see each other through the lens of compassion and mercy, and out of that arises this society of enlarged friendship.

That is the story, I believe, of the formation of this church. New Covenant Bible Church was formed out of some significant suffering in many lives. Out of that suffering came a humbling, and out of that humbling came a society of enlarged friendships. Thank God for His compassion and mercy in how He is always working to reconcile us one to another.

Forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible simply means "letting go." It's the same word that can be used for letting go of an arrow, like the one Dan Leeper let go of yesterday. A deer is forever sorry because of that letting go. Forgiveness is letting go of offenses. God in His compassion and mercy cares about that in Job's life. He did not leave Job any room to hold on to bitterness. In the end, I think that's something for which we are going to praise God. Because of His

compassion and mercy to us, we will praise God for a family of believers we share life together with and have grown to love. ,

Finally, in the end, we will see that the Lord has been compassionate and merciful in His lavish blessings on our lives. We will see that in the end. Look at the lavish blessings with which this book ends. Some people say, “This is kind of inauthentic. It’s almost like a fairytale ending.” But it’s not. It is showing us the compassion and mercy of the Lord.

We’ve previously read from Lamentations 3, where it says the Lord does not willingly afflict His children. It is not God’s pleasure to see us suffer. God delights in blessings. His blessing is not something we earn or deserve. It is the overflow of His gracious, merciful, compassionate nature.

Before we look at all the blessings Job enjoyed, notice that he first repented before being restored. Job repented and worshiped God in 42:5-6 while boils were still covering his body, while his heart was still breaking and while he was still suffering. That is when he worshiped God. He saw God and God was enough. Whether God changed his fortunes or not, God was enough for Job. But God, in His mercy and compassion, did restore Job and the restoration was marvelous.

Look at verse ten: “*And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends.*” Notice there is reconciliation first, then restoration. “*Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house.*” This is the first communal meal, the first feast, and the first party Job enjoyed for quite some time. We haven’t read of a meal since chapter one. They all came and ate with him. Think about that as you gather with your Care Groups. Perhaps some of you will share a meal together. What a joy it is to have that fellowship and those relationships within the body!

We then see there is a new and larger family—“*...all who had known him before.*” It was like a reunion, and, at the end of verse 11, “*they showed him sympathy and comforted him.*” In other words, Job did not heal up all at once. The ministry of bringing comfort is like a marathon—it is an ongoing effort. It’s not just showing up at a memorial service when it’s all over. They ministered to him and God used the community of friends to bring about healing and comfort in Job’s life. They restored him.

Job lost a lot so he could not get over it in just a day. “*They showed him sympathy and comforted him [for what?] for all the evil that [who?] the Lord had brought upon him...*” When the author of Job was writing that down, the Holy Spirit didn’t say, “Wait a minute. Correction: the Lord didn’t bring that evil; Satan brought that evil.” No, at the end of this book the Holy Spirit allowed this in God’s Word to reinforce that God is sovereign over everything. God is

sovereign over Satan. God is sovereign over suffering. God could have stopped that suffering if He had chosen to, but He didn't. His purpose in allowing that suffering was full of compassion and mercy.

God did not apologize for the suffering Job went through because, in His compassion and mercy, He did a great work in Job's life and will do a great work in our lives through it. Job experienced material prosperity. Verse 12 says he has to once again oversee 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. He was richer than before and even gained seven more sons and three more daughters. They were daughters of legendary beauty, who, unlike the norm in patriarchal society, shared an inheritance among their brothers.

Job lived for 140 years and saw four generations of grandchildren. He died an old man and full of days (Job 42:16-17). That is just a way of saying, "I've had so much of God's blessing in my life, my cup runs over. My cup overflows." That's the end of Job's story.

Be patient, brothers and sisters, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Establish your hearts, for He is coming again (James 5:8). When He returns, there will be real joy, real prosperity and real restoration. Everything will all be okay in the end. It will be even better than okay; the new creation will be magnificently glorious for all of God's people. This foreshadows that glory, that delight. There is a land of pure delight. There is blessing to be had in God.

Christopher Ash describes that blessings and prosperity like this:

The blessings we get now are just a tiny foretaste of the blessings to be poured out in the end. The blessings God will pour out on the believer at the end will be every bit as real as the blessings of Job. The blessings of the new heavens and new earth will be rock-solid real. We look forward to beauty that makes the most beautiful woman in the world seem dull. We look forward to fruitfulness that will make the most abundant family in the world seem barren. We look forward to prosperity that will make the Forbes list of the world's billionaires seem poor. We look forward to celebration that will make the best party in the world seem like a quiet glass of apple juice.

That's what we look forward to, but, for right now, it's a life of steadfast endurance. It's a life of suffering with Christ in order that we might reign with Him in glory. It's a life of patient waiting, for these blessings are what come when the Lord comes, when He brings about the new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells.

We have to wait in some ways for this, but, when it happens, we will see that God perfects every recipe for disaster by adding His mercy to it. I just heard that from a pastor today. I thought, "That's perfect." God perfects every recipe for disaster by adding His mercy to

it. That's what God did in Job's life. To Satan's recipe for disaster, God said, "I am going to sprinkle My compassion and mercy." In the end, everything is okay. Not totally, though, because Job did die. Job is waiting with all the saints, for the coming of the Lord, for the return of our Savior and for the new heaven and new earth.

I want to finish by asking this question: Does all of this have to wait for the end? Of course, I am saying, "Yes, we do have to wait for the end." However, there is a sense in which we who are in Christ should begin tasting these blessings now in our life together as a community. We should be a community where we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, where He is exalted and we bring ourselves low before Him. We should be a community in which we repent daily of our low views of God and our sins; where we exult in His mercy to us; and where every member of the community lives a life characterized by repentance—the best and most godly, like Job, and the ones who have a longer way to go, like Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

We all should be living lives of repentance. We should be a community in which there is powerful and effective intercession for one another—intercession resulting in restoration of relationships with God and one another. We should be a community that is characterized by jubilant celebration, joy, healing, restoration and liberation for the oppressed. We should be a community that reflects the fact that we already belong to a Kingdom. We have already received in Christ a Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

I want to close by reading a beautiful passage. I don't know how many of you have ever read Dostoyevsky's book, The Brothers Karamazov. It is quite a feat to get through, but it is well worth the effort. In this book, Father Zossima is an old man and is reflecting on his life. He is talking about why he has learned to love sunsets more than sunrises. He reflects on reading the sacred tale of Job and he says, "I've never been able to read it without tears. Oh Lord, what a book it is! What lessons it contains!" Then he talks about the miracle of restoration at the end of the book and asks this question: "Good Lord, how could Job love those new children when his old children are no more, when he has lost them? Remembering them, how could he be so completely happy with the new ones, however dear they might be? But he could! He could." And then he explains why. Listen to this:

The old sorrow, through the great mystery of human life, passes gradually into quiet, tender joy, the fiery blood of youth gives way to the gentle serenity of old age. I bless the rising sun each day, and my heart sings to it as of old, but now I love its setting even more, its long, slanting rays and the quiet, gentle, tender memories that come with them, the dear images from the whole of my long and blessed life—and over it all, divine truth, tender, reconciling and all-forgiving!

You have seen the purpose of the Lord, how He is compassionate and merciful, tender, reconciling, all-forgiving. Father Zossima says:

My life is drawing to a close. I know that. I feel it. But I also feel every day that is left to me how my earthly life is already in touch with a new infinite, unknown, but fast-approaching future life, the anticipation of which sets my soul trembling with rapture, my mind glowing and my heart weeping with joy.

Let's pray together, that that would increasingly be our experience.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

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