

SHOULD WE EXPECT A HAPPY ENDING?

Job 42:7–17

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Since this passage is the shortest we've had in our five-week examination of the Book of Job, I'll read the entire passage.

Job 42:7–17 (NIV)

“After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.’ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer. After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. [Isn’t it odd they never came when he was down! They gave the gifts when it was all over.] The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. [Here the text is uncertain whether we should read twice seven sons or twice seven sons and three daughters.] The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job’s daughters, and their father granted them

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an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years.”

This message is entitled “Should We Expect a Happy Ending?” The trial of Job that began at chapter 1 is over. The advice of the friends is at an end. God has laid them low. They came to suffering Job and said, “There is sin in your life. That’s why you’re suffering. You failed God in some way and that’s why you’re suffering.” Now God is saying, “You’re wrong, and Job was right. Job did not misspeak himself concerning Me.” God said this twice to underline the fact that the friends have given Job false advice.

Interestingly enough, there is no put-down to the fourth speaker, Elihu, who is either not important enough from God’s point of view to even merit mention, or perhaps there’s something of Elihu’s theology that was valid—even though he delivered it so impetuously. We’ll look at that as we close.

Many people, especially theologians, are disappointed with the ending of the Book of Job. I’ve read commentaries that indicate that these last verses are unnecessary and seem to refute the book as a whole. It’s been pointed out that life oftentimes doesn’t have the kind of happy ending where everything you’ve lost is twice restored to you. In fact, there are those who look at the Book of Job and say it rightly should have ended in verse 6, because there the situation of the contest and trial with Job is at an end. Anything after Job 42:6 really refutes what came before it. The premise of the book has been Job’s argument all along that to live right is not necessarily a guarantee of prosperity. Job has proven that. He has also proven that one can suffer the worst kind of adversity and yet hold on to his faith in God and find God ministering to him—find security in that personal appearance of God to his inner life.

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In real life, it's pointed out that things often end up in the ash heap. We never see restoration, though we want the happy ending of the television cop series that shows the bad guy getting thrown in jail and the good people having everything restored to them. Job almost reads like that kind of scenario, and some people point out that the ending weakens this argument and refutes the point it has been making all along. How are we to respond to something like that?

I have several responses to the point that says we would have been better off if Job had ended in verse 6—the place where a lot of people terminate their sufferings on earth.

I. The first thing is that nothing is restored to Job until he prays for his friends.

That is necessary for the restoration work to begin. He has been very upset with his friends, and his friends let him down terribly. But the Lord tells the friends: “Since you’ve given wrong advice, I want you to bring a rather expensive offering.” And it was expensive. They had to bring seven bulls and seven rams and offer a sacrifice. Then they had to have the humility to ask Job to pray for them.

Had Job been a person who let bitterness reside in his life, he would have refused to pray for them. He would have said, “They did me dirty when I was down and I won’t pray for them now.” But Job patterns the kind of thing that happens to any person who is down and feels kicked—that if life is to ever get back up, the process of forgiveness needs to start somewhere. Without forgiveness, nothing ever is really restored to us. We may get back possessions, but if our spirit is bitter about what people have done to us—and what perhaps we think God has done to us—we will never be inwardly well, even if we surround ourselves with lots of material prosperity. So for Job there is the necessity of praying for his friends. His prosperity is not restored until he has forgiven and interceded for them.

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II. The second thing is that from a human point of view, the story of Job really can end at Job 42:6; but from God’s viewpoint, it can’t.

While Job could be Job at the end of verse 6, God could not be God. The whole premise of the story is that God set Job up as a model experiment. In the first week of our study, we looked at how one should be careful of transposing Job across every trial of life and assume that God made the same deal with the adversary over your trial that He made with Job. That’s one of the things we have to be careful of when looking at Job. In a sense, we agree with the Book of Job in that nothing comes to us except it first passes by the hand of God. But maybe the conditions are not identical to Job’s. Therefore, we shouldn’t always expect the identical ending. But in this case, God took the responsibility for setting Job up.

It’s interesting how, in Exodus 22:4, God required that the thief had to restore twofold what he had taken. That’s essentially the position God put himself in at the end of the Book of Job. “Job, I set you up; therefore, at the end you’re going to get everything back. I’m going to give you twice as much as you lost.”

Some say that Job even got back twice his seven sons, but he didn’t get twice his daughters. But the daughters all had names. In the Near East it was very uncommon to name girls in the listing of children. And it’s extremely unusual for boys not to be named and all the girls named. Job’s daughters were such special people that they’re named and have property rights. In biblical days the sons inherited the property. The daughters did not inherit property rights unless there had been no sons. But here the Book of Job is saying that Job’s daughters were also regarded with the same full legal status as the sons. So Job had it made up to him in that regard as well. God is determined to make it up to His people for their sufferings.

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I would submit that this is a very New Testament thought. The fact is this: God is not always committed to making it up in this life as He did with Job, but God always makes it up to His people.

Think about this. We fell because of our sin and lost the stature that Adam had when he was created. But when God gives us the Kingdom, he doesn't simply restore us to the level that Adam had. Instead, we have an eternal existence with Him as His sons and daughters, made not after the first Adam but the second Adam. In Him we are given an unparalleled inheritance and riches and glory and joy and eternity. God is committed to making it up. One day we will, in our flesh, stand before God and see the bottom line of our story as the sons or daughters of God made well also. God has instilled a principle in all the earth, and it runs through all of our stories. We expect a happy ending. There is such a thing as the good ultimately triumphing. Job bears witness to that, and throughout the New Testament, God bears witness to that.

While Job can be Job and the story end on the ash heap, God cannot be God without restoring Job and giving him prosperity.

III. Just as God never explains to Job the reason for his trouble, so he never explains to Job the reason for his prosperity.

We have to accept the fact that sometimes bad things happen to us for no reason and good things happen to us for no reason. They simply happen. God is sovereign and things happen in a kind of way that often, from our vantage point, we call random chance. We may even call it coincidence. However, if we think more about the Lord's ways, we should perhaps call coincidences "God-incidences." But there is mystery to life. Life does not always proceed by set rules. We think if we keep certain kinds of laws then certain kinds of rewards or returns will happen to us as a

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result. The unexpected is always happening in life, both the good and the bad. That's part of getting through life.

IV. The fourth response that I would have to this ending of Job is that it provides us with insight into the New Testament.

We have seen the counselors of Job: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Had Job had the advantage of knowing the one whom he anticipated—the Redeemer, the umpire that he talked about—we would have some additional perspective to share with him from the New Testament. I believe legitimate helps can be given today to anyone who finds himself in a situation—a place of suffering for unexplainable reasons—like Job.

I point you to two passages in the New Testament that are linked close together: Romans 5:3–5 and Romans 8:18–39. Both of these passages of Scripture have four important things to say about suffering. Romans 5:3–5 says, “And we rejoice in our sufferings.” That's something that Job never really develops. Who is masochistic enough to rejoice in their sufferings? There must be a reason for rejoicing in suffering.

A. Paul tells us why we rejoice. “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (NIV). There is a fourfold process, Paul says, regarding suffering. We rejoice when we see suffering coming, because we know as Christians that suffering is never God's last word. It may be the beginning part of a process that God is attempting to work out in our life. Suffering develops within us perseverance or endurance—staying power.

The word *endurance* in the noun form in the Greek language can be used to describe a basement, something that is underneath something. Staying power—suffering—produces that. Anyone who has gone through adversity in their life and that adversity has not picked them off the track of

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their own character and their walk with God has found that they have emerged from that time of suffering and trial a stronger person because they stood the test. Endurance is produced.

Endurance then makes the kind of character that we are. We find that there are situations in life where God does not change our circumstances, but He changes us in the middle of our circumstances. This changing in the middle of the circumstances produces character.

Then the fourth stage is hope. We go through the process and discover that suffering produces endurance which produces character which produces hope. We see that trial has good results to it. When we go through another cycle, we can look with confidence at the suffering and say, “The last time I went through this it worked endurance; it worked character; it produced hope.

Now I’m going through it again; therefore, I can anticipate the same result.”

The dilemma that hits many of us when we discover suffering for the first time is that we don’t see anything past the suffering. We can’t possibly see what good God may be accomplishing, so we despair rather than rejoice. Paul meant to give us a little pattern by which to face our suffering. He is saying, “When it happens, rejoice, because certain things follow.” If we let it, suffering is a marvelous character builder. We wish there were some other, cheaper way to build character, but suffering does it. Job’s character is revealed in suffering. Suffering shows us for the person we really are.

B. Romans 8:18–39 gives four steps in helping us when we’re walking through difficult times. I wonder, had Job known these, what kind of difference it would have made in his perspective of life from the ash heap.

The first perspective in verses 18–25 is that the present suffering does not compare to the future glory that is waiting for us. Verse 18 says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (NIV). It’s as though Paul were saying,

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“Think of a scale. On one side you have your suffering, and on the other side you have the glory that God is going to give to you—either in this age or most likely the age to come. Suffering seems so heavy now, but in the future glory it is like a feather; it is of no consequence.” If you could see things as they really are, you will find that the future glory far outweighs any suffering and pain you’re going through now. You won’t realize how the scales right themselves and come out at the end until you stand in God’s presence. But in the midst of going through the suffering, keep this in mind: no matter how intense the suffering, so much greater is the coming glory.

The second thing Paul says to the person who is going through a Job experience is in verses 26 and 27. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our down times. Paul says, “We do not know how to pray as we ought.” There are times we don’t know. Yet there are things we do know. We don’t know how to pray as we ought, but we know we have an Intercessor.

Job was crying out for help. “I wish,” he says, “that I had an advocate in the heavens.” The New Testament is telling us that we have two Advocates. We have an Advocate in the heavens—Jesus Christ—who is seated at the right hand of God and ever lives to make intercession for us. And we have an intercessor in the heart—the Holy Spirit praying through us with signs that cannot be articulated. The Spirit takes over the automatic control of our life when we do not know how to pray for ourselves and cannot intelligently pray because the situation is so beyond us. Paul is saying we have assurance in times like that.

C. The third thing Paul says as perspective on suffering is in Romans 8:28–30: namely, that God is working everything for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. That means for the saints, the believers. God is working for the good. On the one hand Paul says we don’t know how to pray as we ought. Then he turns around and says we know. That describes our journey with Christ. There are times we honestly don’t know. But there are some things we

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will always know in the midst of our not knowing. In the midst of our not knowing the whys, we will always know that God is working things for the good.

As the classic example, we have the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, who is always the model for our life. Even as the strong arm of the Lord raised Jesus out of the dust of death and brought Him into living immortality and life eternal, so God will take every crucifixion of our life and bring it around for a resurrection. And God is working for the good to defeat the design of the enemy in our life. In Job's case, certainly God was working for the good. Even before everything was restored to Job, he knew when he got to the end of his trial that his faith had stood the test and he was God's special child.

D. The fourth thing that Paul is saying to a Job-like experience is that nothing can really separate us from God. Note Romans 8:31–39. God has a grip on us. Nothing—things high, things low, the depths, the heights, angels, principalities, powers—nothing can separate us from God's love. This carries with it the idea that God has His strong hand upon our lives. We're not going to become separated from Him in the midst of our suffering.

When we think of becoming separated from God, I like to picture myself as a small child in a department store holding on to my mother's hand. I'm afraid to let go lest I become lost in the crowd. But with all those big people around, someone might jostle me and I might let go because my grip may not be all that strong. It's more secure if my mother has her hand around my hand rather than my hand around hers. Her grip is such that she won't let go.

That's the idea Paul is giving here: God is not going to let us go in the midst of our suffering, and nothing can separate us from Him. Paul is wise enough to know that there are times in our life when our faith fails and we feel like we are losing our grip on God. We're losing our grip on spiritual reality. And very well we might. But God is not losing His grip on us. That's the whole

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point of Romans 8. In the midst of our suffering, in the times we don't feel close to God, God nevertheless has hold of us and is bringing us through.

I think these are enduring lessons from the New Testament that can well be applied to the Book of Job.

V. Now I'll make sort of a last summary—a look back at the Book of Job.

I present to you three abiding and enduring lessons that I want to close this series with.

A. One enduring lesson from the Book of Job is that God himself is sufficient. The true ending of the Book of Job is when Job felt assured that God knew him and had heard him and ministered to him in his time of need. For Job, that is the real nugget of the problem—to be in a state of approval with God and have God speak to him.

Job needed God. All along in the book he's been saying he needed God and wished God would speak to him. When God spoke to him, Job was satisfied. Nothing less than God could meet Job's need. When Job met with God, his need was met. He really had need of nothing else, although God graciously restored an overabundance, because it's always been God's plan to heap His generosity of grace upon His children. But Job learned God himself is sufficient.

There are people in this congregation who are finding that out. Stripped of health and stripped of a lot of things, they are finding in a very precious way that God is sufficient. It is a mystery for well people to understand, and maybe only those who are intensely suffering can understand how it is that God is truly sufficient. Maybe that's an aspect of our spirituality that we never see developed in us until we come to that point where we literally have nothing to rely upon except God. When there is nothing under us but God himself, we, like Job, find that He is enough.

B. The second enduring lesson from the Book of Job is its prophetic longing for a rescuer and a redeemer. There are moments in Job's suffering where he cries out for one to come to his help.

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When we open the pages of the New Testament, we find that Job’s longings are matched and fulfilled. In Job 9:33 Job is concerned that no one in the heavens is hearing his case and wishes that he had a mediator, an umpire who would represent him to God. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:5,6, answers Job 9:33: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (NIV). We have a friend in the heavens.

Job 16:19 says, “Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high” (NIV). We’re not exactly sure by looking at Job what he had in mind when he said that—what he thought or who he thought was his advocate. But we know from Paul’s statement in Romans 8:34 who that Advocate is. “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (NIV). Could it be Christ who condemns? Paul’s thought is clear. No, Christ would never condemn because Christ is interceding for us. He is that Advocate in the heavens on our behalf.

Also, Job cries out in 19:25: “As for me I know that my redeemer lives and at the last He will take His stand upon the earth.” Paul says, “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:22–23, NIV). We have the security and an understanding of what Christ has done for us—that He indeed lives and will stand at the last upon the earth. Job’s desire and knowledge that the redeemer would stand is fulfilled in the Lord. So in Job there is the truth that God is sufficient. There is the fact that the longing for a rescuer and redeemer is met in Jesus.

C. The third and last enduring lesson of the Book of Job is the point that Elihu made with great pains: there is profit in serving God. I raked Elihu over the coals a little bit when he was giving his impetuous speeches of youth. He was telling Job that Job couldn’t possibly be right, because

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God rewards those who are His. If Job is saying that God doesn't reward the righteous, then Job is saying there is no profit in serving God. And everyone knows there is profit in serving God.

What Elihu didn't understand is that in an ultimate sense, God has the opportunity to display the profit in serving Him either in this life or the life to come. Elihu's mistake was he tried to move all the profit into this age. But the witness of Scripture is very clear on this matter: there is profit in serving the Lord. In Mark 10:29,30, Jesus said, "In that day, to you who have left family and mothers and fathers and houses and kindreds and lands it will be added to you a hundredfold in this life and in the age to come." He said, "I will appoint you to judge the twelve tribes and you're going to rule and reign with Me" (Luke 22:30). The promise that Jesus makes to everyone who suffers with Him is that they shall also reign with Him. And to everyone who dies in Him, they will be raised with Him.

Jesus' bottom line is this: to those who follow Him, they will be given a name. They will be given a banquet invitation to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. A beautiful promise in the Book of Revelation says, "To him who overcomes...I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it" (2:17, NIV).

We know that in Asia Minor, that reference to a stone with your name engraved upon it could represent an invitation to a very lavish banquet. Or it could mean admission to an important sporting contest that everyone wanted to go to, but only the people who had their name on the stone were invited. That stone was an admission ticket to something very important that people wanted to go to. The Lord says, "In that day you get the admission ticket to the Messianic banquet of the Lamb. There is profit in serving God. I'll make it up to you."

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We err if we think that God's profit to us must always be extrinsic and temporal in nature. The reward may be intrinsic. It may have no manifestation physically in the outward sense in this life.

It may be eternal rather than temporal. But there is reward in serving God.

Eternal life is ahead. We have the privilege of being made an heir, of being sons and daughters of God. As 1 Peter 1:3,4 says, we have an inheritance laid up for us, undefiled and unfading. The reward is there, kept and guarded in heaven for you.