

The Surprise of Grace

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to go back to Job chapter 42. As I said earlier, we looked at the first six verses last Sunday morning, and we're going to look at from verse 7 to the end of that chapter under the heading of the surprise of grace as opposed to the shock of repentance.

Because I know it's cheating a little bit to just go into the end of the book, but there's such a great insight into God's character throughout this book. It's a really unique book in the Bible in many ways, and very probably one of the earliest books in the whole Bible in terms of chronology, in terms of its time. And yet it's full of His grace in most surprising ways. The whole book is a surprise in many ways, because it is a book that deals with suffering and it deals with Job's suffering. But it is important, and obviously we don't have time to go into all of these things. But from the very beginning it's a surprise, because it's Job who instigates the whole experience, that's what it's God who instigates the whole experience that Job goes through. And there's this curtain pulled back to the unseen spiritual world with Satan and with God. And what we do find is that God is unfolding and unveiling His character throughout. His integrity is challenged and is at stake just as much as Job's is. And we find that God is answering the whole issue of His sufficiency for us as a Savior in suffering and in loss. And then that huge problem that confronts all of us in our lives with respect to why suffering happens, at least what we do with suffering, because we know what happens. And throughout it all, or towards the end of it, we see His victory and the mystery of His victory is revealed. And it puts out a great challenge to us in our day-to-day living, both in our relation to suffering ourselves as Christians. But specifically, we'll look at this evening how we relate to other people in their battles and in their struggles and how we respond to them and how we respond with the lens of grace at the experiences other people are going through without being judgmental. Because grace for us changes everything. It's very similar to what Grant was saying this morning about we are in Christ. We are in Christ, and that makes a huge difference to everything that we are because we belong. It's not that we try and do things in order to belong, it's we belong. We are in Christ, we are united to Christ. And the grace that has been inferred to us is grace that transforms our character. It's very easy for us to judge

God and judge other people very harshly and justify ourselves in life. And I just want to throw out a few thoughts this evening on the second half of Job 42 with respect to the character of grace and how grace changes the way we think about ourselves and God and other people. And the first thing I want to say about the character of grace that's revealed throughout the book of Job, but primarily in these last few verses, what does God reveal about the character of His grace? The first thing I want to say is that the grace of God has muscle. God's grace has muscle. I think there's a tendency for us to think of God's love and God's grace as soft and spineless. But that's not really the biblical picture we have of grace. God's grace has plenty of torque. It's strong and it has muscle. And in this passage, God takes no shame in blasting the good guys. He blasts the good guys in this story. In verse 7, after the Lord had spoken these words, Job the Lord said to Eliphaz,

My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right. He's angry with them. In His grace, as we go on to see, He seeks and looks and offers their forgiveness. But they made assumptions about God and about God's character and about God's relationship to Job and about what God was doing to Job and Job's life.

They knew God better than God, or so they thought. They were judging on a period, it's a hugely significant fact that God is revealing at this very early stage in Revelation, probably before Abraham, probably before the Covenants as they were formally revealed. God is recognizing that there is a heart knowledge that is hugely significant and that we can't judge in appearances.

[5 : 42] They had assumed that the God that they knew was a God who was made in their own image in many ways, and they had a closed mind as to what was happening. It wasn't that they were asking, remember there's been 27 chapters of them telling Job how wrong he was and how much under God's judgment he was and how he needed to repent of some secret sin that he obviously was not willing to repent of and that they were representing God in their thinking.

God was interestingly in the whole, if you read the whole book of Job, go through the whole book of Job, you'll find this challenging because you'll want to agree a lot of time with them. You will, I guarantee it. You'll want to agree often more with them than you will with Job. And yet interestingly here, God's is justly angry with them and not with Job. There's a complete turnaround in God's revelation of his character. They're the ones who needed a mediator. They're the ones who needed to offer sacrifice. They're the ones who God asks Job to pray for. And that's interesting and that's challenging for us. God is working in each of their hearts to change their attitude to God but also their attitude to Job. And that's hugely significant and hugely important. And within that, we see that God is also working in Job's heart. Not only is God revealing that he wants his grace to change them but

Job also has to recognize that he's been worked on by the living God as well. He's not allowed to gloat. He's not allowed to say, well, I told you so. Or say, well, I was right all along. And isn't that our natural response when we find ourselves being justified by someone maybe greater than us and other people being exposed as being wrong? We kind of want to say, well, I told you so. Or to be angry or vitriolic against those who have spoken against us. Would that not have been our natural reaction to the three friends of Job for the 27 chapters of relentless opposition that they offered to him? Job is not allowed to gloat. Job is asked to pray for them. Huesily significant and important and interesting command by God for Job. Job is to pray for them and to recognize that he not only has repented, they must repent and that they are actually all in the same boat together before they're living God. It's so easy for us, isn't it, to think it's just other people in the battles and struggles and oppositions that we face. It's easy for us to think that it's other people, if only other people recognize their need of forgiveness and their need of a Savior. And yet God always brings grace to play in our hearts, even when we're wronged, even when we're the ones who are innocent before each other. It's also easy for us to know better than God or presume we know better than God to judge the motives and intentions of the hearts of other people. We do it all the time. We judge people's motives and intentions all the time. We make snap judgments and we come to a conclusion about why they have done what they have done. And when we're wronged, we also have to recognize that God will be dealing and needs to deal with our own hearts. So there's a great sense in which grace has muscle here in this chapter. It's also a recognition for us that grace and the grace of God as

He's dealing with these characters is something that sees our God in His grace, sees into our hearts and recognizes who we are in our hearts. It's interesting that twice in verses 7 and 8, He speaks about Job and reveals what He knows of Job in His heart. He says twice, He says, Job, my servant, my servant, Job, the one who's mine. He's my servant and He's spoken. He says, He's spoken of me what is right. God is revealing Himself as the one who looks into the heart of Job and He's spoken of me what's right, which is very interesting because He's all, what does that mean? Because He's already challenged Job in chapter 38 saying, Who is this that speaks to me with words without knowledge? So it seems to be contradictory, doesn't it, that God is exposing Job for speaking without knowledge and then here He says, Job is the one who has spoken of me what is right. How can we deal with that? It seems in contradiction here. Well, we know that Job is already repented before

God because he realizes who God is and how little he does actually know. But the reality is God is reminding us here that He sees into the heart and He sees the trust and faith that Job has expressed even in the ignorant cries of his anguished heart. He is see and he understands that Job took his doubts and his questions and his ignorance to the living God in prayer and in cries and in frustrations. And that revealed a heart that had faith towards the living God. It's not here when he says that Job spoke of me what is right. It's not talking about perfectionism. It's not saying that Job was faultless. It's saying that Job was honest and trusting. He takes his wrong words to the right place. He repented.

[12 : 20] And it reveals that the job here as a disciple, as a learner, that's what a disciple is, it's just a learner. And that's a hugely significant recognition for us in our own understanding of our relationship with God, is that we don't hide anything from Him. We don't take to Him perfectionism, but we recognize that we will speak right in God's presence when we take all our doubts and fears and cries into His presence with acts of faith and trust and of repentance when He reveals to us His character, His grace and His goodness. And it reminds us that others are learners too. We are quick to often associate ourselves with Job and being learners and making mistakes, but slow to recognize the same characteristic in others.

We're all learners in this kingdom following Jesus Christ, and therefore we reflect that in our attitude towards the failure of others. Grace sees into the heart, and grace also we see restores, it's the great passage of verse 8, now therefore take seven bowls, seven rams, go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, my servant Job shall pray for you, and I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly, for you have not spoken of me what is right.

There's this great restoration for both parties here, or both parties, Job and his three friends, because at this point Job's identity almost seems to have been obliterated in his suffering, but he's immediately given dignity and purpose and belonging as God restores him into this place where he hears God saying, this is my servant, and where he sees this is my mediator for these people, please pray for these three friends of yours and be the one who mediates on their behalf, and I will hear your prayers on their behalf, and I'll accept your prayers even though they've done what's wrong. His prayers therefore are powerful and effective and restorative, as is the task he's been given by God, restoring identity and significance to him. And in many ways, in this act Job himself becomes a type of Christ. He becomes a mediator, pointing forward. We remember everything as an ever-present to the living

God, and we know that God knew what was to lie ahead with the Savior, and that this is a whisper into Job's own plea for a mediator in Job 930, who will mediate between me and God. And Job becomes a mediator here, but pointing forward to the role of God the Son who himself without sin becomes the sacrifice and a great high priest, and who now lives to, in the same way he lives to intercede for us through our suffering and through her sin. And there's that great restorative character to God's grace, both in the dignity that he gives to us, in the work that he gives us to do, in the inheritance that he gives us, but also in the work of prayer and restoration of others. We speak about grace being restorative and God's grace being restorative, but that isn't something that is hyper-spiritual. It's something that involves the body of Christ, and it involves you and it involves me in the way that we deal with and treat others who have wronged us, so that we see a restorative power through suffering and through darkness and through opposition. Because we often talk about Job, the book of Job as being a book that speaks about the suffering that he went through, and that's right, because we say he lost his wealth, he lost his family, he lost his income, he lost everything that he had, his dignity, his position. But we often forget not just that suffering, but the great hurt that he experienced from the rejection of his friends and from the wrong diagnosis spiritually that they made in his life. So there was a huge relational element to it. Now I would say to you, the vast majority of churches and Christian communities are broken and divided and often separated relationally.

Not always about how God has dealt with us, but very often where we are wronged and have been wronged individually within a Christian community, and that's a huge part of our experience.

[17 : 40] And yet we need to recognize and see our role in being restorative and our role in being mediators to bring restoration and bring harmony within the Christian community. So Grace restores, you're always looking to restore the lives and the hearts of those who are Christ. And Grace we also see is beautifully profligate. It's profligate. The end of Job's life, which there are quite a lot of difficulties in understanding exactly the blessings he receives, but the end of Job's life or the latter part of Job's life was uber-blessed, more so than his earlier life. And it was real. It was real blessing, but I would suggest again it's almost typological. It's pointing forward to a bigger picture of the end game of Grace in the life of every believer. That for every... It prefigures, I believe, spiritual truth about

God's plan for all His people beyond this present veil of tears. I know it was physical and practical and real for Job, but I do think that there's a spiritual dimension that is pointing forward in the same way that the land flowing with milk and honey was a real land that they entered, but it spoke forward to greater and new heavens and the new earth within dwells righteousness. And there's a sense in which the blessing of Grace that Job receives here is a whisper of life to the fool in God's purpose and plan for us in Him. The joy, the community, the wholeness, the sweet touch of God's unbroken love. I don't think this speaks into a health, wealth and prosperity gospel which some would take it maybe to refer to.

That's far too small a vision of what is being spoken of here. But it's encouraging us to point forward to something far greater that we can look forward to and ought to be looking forward to more and more in this life. And it's an old quote I've probably used it here before. If I haven't other people I'll see. As Lewis in the weight of glory, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what it meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. Far too easily pleased. We don't see what lies ahead.

We don't grasp the great unimaginably wonderful future that we have in Christ that this speaks of the movement from suffering and difficulty into blessing and joy that is spoken of here.

So grace is beautifully profligate. Very briefly then, what does grace mean for us specifically as we consider it in our own lives, as we consider God's working in our lives? Again, just to reiterate what we've done, I think God's grace warns us about being surfers on a sea of faith and no offence to my aquatic friends. But the danger is that we're just living on the surface in a similar way to the... I think a similar way to the comforters.

[21 : 17] They had an intellectual and a philosophical knowledge of God but they didn't allow the mystery of God to penetrate into their own hearts and into their own needs. They had a programmatic response to the suffering of others. They tended to be impatient, judgmental and increasingly frustrated with Job rather than reflecting grace and they were probably their best when they were silent. But let's not be harsh on them because we're all like that. That's how we are naturally. We're much more like Job's comforters than we are like Job himself. And it's a warning to us not to keep our relationship with Christ skin deep. God doesn't just want our minds and our knowledge and our intellects and our ritual and our attendance. He wants our hearts. They're dirty, broken, selfish and damnable. And that's what He wants. That's where He wants to shine His light. He wants to shine His light into the depth of our hearts to live like that matters, that that's important and not just to live thinking, if only everyone else changed. He's saying, no, no. Look at our own hearts.

That's part of the conception we have here of God. It is God too wonderful for us. I doubt that for most of us. Is our hearts at our hearts no go areas for the living God?

Is the light of Christ shine too deeply and we just don't go there? Is our faith simply a worldview or should repentance as spoken of here be a way of life for us? It should be as we allow His heart, His grace into our hearts because His grace probes deep into our beings that there isn't, there can be really such a thing as cheap grace, grace that doesn't work into your core, isn't going to change you. And when you're wanting to get fit physically, you need to work on your core and to allow that foundational physical part of your body become fit. And so it is spiritually, we've been gifted life, but within that life, there is the pain of His healing. There's idols to be smashed. There's pride and security and power and bitterness and grace as it's revealed in Job is all about us changing and even in suffering, molding us towards Him rather than away from Him.

But we also need to remember that His grace as we saw is also profligate. It's overwhelmingly good for us. It's full of His blessing and His generosity. Job had three named daughters, new named daughters here and their names, I mean peace, fragrance and beauty. And he, we presume, broke with convention, certainly convention that later became part of ancient Near Eastern convention where property was left to the sons and he shared his inheritance with his daughters and all his family. He shared what he had, his blessing. It was something that he embraced. Even it talks about his brothers and sisters who probably hadn't been terribly sympathetic to him and yet he embraces them all back and his grace is poured out to all those around him. He's not embittered and he's not merely surviving as a believer.

He understood grace. Holiness, holiness is never aligned to meanness. Financial, social or attitudinal. Grace is profligate and outrageous and I think we've often tamed it far too much and made it far too mean. We often serve with a grimace and we allow ourselves to be bitter and angry and mean and small-minded and yet hold on to salvation as if it's ours by right and our God is a miser. We've kind of got a, sometimes we can have a miserly God and that's reflected in the way we think and we live.

[26 : 18] So we have here an amazing picture of grace in many ways. So early in Revelation history God puts down a marker about the reality of, and the mystery of suffering yet reveals his sovereign presence and victory in and through it. And who could have envisaged even at this early point in humanity that his ultimate and complete answer to the suffering was he himself nailed to a tree? Experiencing the suffering that unbridled and defeating the power of hell and death on the cross. Who could have ever have imagined the God of Job, the God of chapters 38 to 41, being the same God who'd been nailed to a tree in order to be a redeemer? So please walk with Job for a week or two, reread the glorious book from beginning to end, particularly the conclusion, and ask the Holy Spirit to let the prayers and the revelation of God and of the characters involved be something that continues to transform you and me and allow it to sink into our lives. I mean, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that you would teach us to learn more from the mystery of your word and not come to our own conclusions based on our understandings and our presumptions about you. We recognise and the book of Job certainly doesn't minimise and treat tritely or loose lightly the reality of suffering. It devotes a whole book to the mystery and the brutality of it. And yet we find that it is moulding a picture of grace that is only finally understood on the cross for us and a God who enters into our suffering in order to redeem us ultimately from it.

And as we battle in this world, mixed between what we already have and what is yet to come, He promises never to leave us or forsake us and indeed to use the bleakness and the battles to transform us and to renew us. And we pray that we would always look into our own hearts and allow His grace to transform us. Huge battle. It's huge to how much easier, Lord, we confess it is to challenge you and to find fault with others than to sit or to kneel or to lie prostrate and simply ask you to deal with our own hearts. Give us the courage and the strength and the grace to do that and to see our union with Christ and all that it means in this world. Amen.