

Job Repents

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like this morning to go back and look at the passage that we read together, that short passage. I'm sure you know it well. And if you've been part of the congregation over these last number of weeks and months, you've probably read it a couple of times as you've read through the book and as you've sought to understand this great book. I have to say that this last week I've wrestled with really deep frustration. Quite often wrestle with frustration. But I wrestle particularly with frustration in relation to this sermon and in relation to this passage. On two counts, at least two counts, but I'm only going to tell you two counts. On two counts I was wrestling with this passage. The first is how flat the page seems. The page scripture sometimes seems frustratingly flat and two dimensional, one dimensional maybe even. And how difficult it seems with the mere word of scripture, the word of scripture, the mere words to convey the change that Job goes through here.

You know we're reading this passage, we read about it last week and we read God's response and you look at what happens to Job and you look at where he's come from and you look at what he turns to in his words and the page seems flat. It doesn't seem to make clear.

We can't see visually or clearly what makes the amazing change in Job's response and reaction that page seems flat. There's a powerful, if this is not a paradoxical thing to say, there's a powerful intangibility here. We don't seem to be able to see clearly, well at least I don't, at first glance, what would make Job repent so much and change so much over in such a short space of time and the page seems flat. Does that ever happen to you? Do you read the Bible and it seems flat? How can such a change happen? How can such a miraculous event be happening when we read it and it seems so flat? That was one of my frustrations. The second one that was more common was how dull the commentators were.

The books that I use when studying the Bible, the commentators that speak on this book of the Bible and give tremendous insight normally, they were all rubbish when it came to Job's response. None of them had anything of any value really to say. None of them said anything that I didn't know anyway, that you would all know anyway. Simple things. It was so frustrating. Job repented, that's what we expected. Let's carry on and go home. That seemed to be the way that most of the commentators dealt with it. This is what was expected, this is what happened. Job repented and everyone went back and lived happily ever after and they didn't. For me it seemed that the whole page was flat, that their response was flat, that they didn't work into the text and look and see and find out why Job was like this.

What could make the change so radical and powerful in his life and that was frustrating. Really? Really is that all we have to offer from this passage? That kind of clear cut response to God, repent and carry on. I think Job himself, if he'd been a commentator on this book, which is a stupid thing to say of course, but I think he would have looked into it more and I think he would have argued and wrestled with and looked at why he responded in this way, but that silliness because it is him. So anyway, just occasionally ministers have to get their frustrations out and the pulpit seems like a good place as any when it's related to the sermon. Just to know that you're not the only one that gets frustrated, that we all get frustrated in life and that was particularly frustrating this week. So I want to note two things from this passage and we need the Holy Spirit. I guess in many ways that is where my frustration finds its response in God and in the need that we have for the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 39] But can I note two things that I think are significant here in Job's response and also in why he responds the way he does. The first is to note, can you note this? There's no change in Job's circumstances. Okay. So we come to this section towards the end of the book and nothing has changed for Job. He's still lying in dust and ashes. He's in the gutter. He's got nothing. Everyone has abandoned him. Nothing has changed for Job in his circumstances.

He's still in exactly the same place. He has lost everything and yet for 33 chapters, 34 chapters, he's grumbling and moaning and complaining about God in these circumstances and now he's not. Now he repents and dust and ashes and his situation hasn't changed. There's nothing that has changed in Job's, we haven't got to the end of the story. Job doesn't know the rest of this chapter. He doesn't know what's going to happen. He's still sitting, scraping his sores. Nothing in his circumstances has changed. But there's a huge change in his heart and a massive change in his outlook and his attitude. He repents here in dust and ashes. Now I'll talk about dust and ashes because it was a sign of mourning and a sign of turning back. You know, you covered yourself in dust and ashes. I don't think that's what he's doing here. I think he's saying I repent because I'm sitting in dust and ashes. I'm actually in there right now. He didn't need to put any rubbed dust and ashes on him. He was there. He didn't need to symbolize any sense of sorrow or loss or pain. He was there.

So his circumstances remain absolutely unchanged. Please note that. And well maybe if I remember, yeah, we'll come back to that a little bit later in the sermon. His circumstances hadn't changed. And the second thing I want to note is that this change in Job is more about God's presence than about God's persuasion. Okay, so we did have four chapters of God's speaking.

But I would postulate that the change in Job is not as more than Job's meeting God's arguments.

It's meeting God himself. There's been 33 chapters of arguments, not all from God of course, but a lot of them from God, laterally from God, but also from others. But he's changed when he meets God. It's when he meets God. Now, I don't know exactly how he met God.

[7 : 31] Did God appear to him? We're not told. God certainly spoke to him. And it was very clear that he was meeting with God. But he says, I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. And that is a very significant reality for Job that it's more about God's presence, I think, than God's words or his words in the context of his person.

That's very important here. Hugely significant. So yeah, what God says is important, but it's because it's God who says it. And it's God who's speaking here that's very important for Job. I think there's biblical precedent for thinking that, because there's various times in the Bible where people meet with and recognize who God is, and they kind of fall at their feet and worship an adoration, something we never do. Something that seems flat on the page of Scripture, because usually we're just so important, and we're on a throne, and we're significant, and we're the bee's knees, but God is small. So we don't repent and dust and ashes very often in our lives. But we find these occasions in the Scripture where Peter, for example, when he'd been fishing all night and couldn't find anything, and then God, Jesus in the shore, and says, you know, put your net over the other side, and he realizes that, and he comes to the shore and he large catch a fish. When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet and said, go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. That's the same kind of response. Or Daniel, you know, we studied Daniel not that long ago.

Daniel had this amazing vision. It's amazing vision of God. And he says, so I was left alone gazing at this great vision. I had no strength left. My face turned deathly pale, and I was helpless. Same kind of response. Or John, in the great revelation that he gets at the last book of the Bible, in Pachmas when he's on the island, and he meets with the living God. And God says, John says, when I saw this, I fell at his feet as though dead.

You know, we don't drift into the presence of the Almighty in that spectacular way. I say, go and God, because he is worthy of our worship. And the page for us seems flat, doesn't it? Because very often in our lives, we can't see that. But Job here clearly senses God as God. That's what he senses. I'm not sure how he sees him, or what it is he perceives.

We're not told that as such. But he knows he's in the presence of God as God. There's glory, there's power, there's God's will. And yet, at the same time, the same time as that greatness, he also senses God is close. So there's God's thunderous words, and yet there is intensely personal interaction with Job. Theologians have a word for that. They say there's the transcendence of God. He's transcendent. He's great. He's mighty. But they also shrunk it down to his immanence, his closeness. So there's this paradox about the character of God that he's transcendent. He's glorious and great, but he's also intimate and close. That's the uniqueness of God, is that this inexplicable presence, that God who reveals himself, who subsumes the universe in his character, in his being, and who cradles it is also the one who is beside Job here. Isn't that remarkable? There's a paradox in the character of God that's being revealed here. That he's transcendent, but he's also close. And Job senses that. It's the God who creates the universe, but who also walks in the garden with Adam and Eve. Strange paradox, isn't it? That we struggle to understand or comprehend. It's the God who is transfigured in Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[11:34] So he's shone brighter than the sun, but then who touches the disciples and says, don't be afraid. I'm with you. And that is actually, interestingly, what God says in these other amazing accounts that I mentioned, Peter and Daniel and John. God's response when his glory is revealed, don't be afraid. It's his touch. It's his closeness. So Job understands or senses God as God in that paradox of his greatness, but also of his closeness. And he also therefore, I think because of that, because the Spirit makes clear to him and he knows and meets God, he understands God's voice. So the reason Job changes here is because he gets it. He gets what God has said to him. And it is, it's intangible. It's not easy to see from the passage. This amazing change is he gets it. He gets that what God is doing is right. He, he can sense in God's response, God's mercy, as well as his power and his creativity and his justice and his understanding. He gets that he's got his own choices. He gets that he needs to respond. He gets all of that. And he sees that for the first time that this God who reveals himself doesn't have a plan B either for Job or for the world.

It's plan A or nothing. That's what he sees and he knows. And for the first time he understands his place within that and he can, he can satisfy himself that God knows and that God loves and God cares and God's purpose is good and God is defeating evil. And that includes the evil that is in his own life and that he's experiencing and so he can trust him. So there's this remarkable change in his life that is almost kind of just scanned over. It's just state, it's not even stated. But here we have Job changing massively. Have you thought how much he changes in these few verses so that he can come to trust God? And as he meets with God and gets it, he responds to God. So he gets it and he responds to God. He responds in two ways. He responds by coming to his senses and then he responds by returning to

God. So he responds by coming to his senses. Again, that section you know. Therefore I've uttered what I didn't understand. Things too wonderful for me which I didn't know. I've heard of you but now I see you. He comes to his senses. That's what he does. They're in a good timing. Good church today. But he always, you were going down there. He says, he comes to his senses. He recognizes and he knows that I've completely lost my track of thought. How am I going here? He comes to his senses and I lose mine. Okay. He realises that it is not the words that he's heard in the past about God. It's not the tradition that is enough for him. Rather it's trust in seeing him. So my eye sees you. Now people argue about that, about whether he saw God reveal himself in an anthropomorphically, if you took on a pre-incarnate representation of Jesus or something like that. I'm not so sure if that's the case. I think he's using the language of metaphor he talks about seeing. It's a metaphor for faith. You know, I see. Spiritual blindness is gone. His deception is gone. But he sees. He sees what he's never seen before. And you know, the circumstances haven't changed. Come back to that again. But isn't it often we are saying, God, show me yourself. Well, you change this first. If I can get this, if I get my health back, if I can get this new job, will you show me yourself? If things are better, we look for circumstances to change so that then somehow we might see God. But job remains exactly the same place. But the deception is gone. The blindness is gone. And they can see God for who he is. And for the first time, this vision of God that he has is greater than his circumstances.

Is greater than his need to know. You know, we are, we are hungry for knowledge. And that's a great thing. But sometimes that need to know becomes greater than our need to know God. But here his need to know is satisfied because he's come to know God. His need for understanding the plan has gone because God knows the plan. His need to understand is secondary to knowing that God understands. And that has changed him completely. He comes to his senses and says, I don't need that. I don't need to be enslaved by knowledge and enslaved by the need to know and is enslaved by the need for answers. I don't need God to be in the dock and to be answerable to me. I know him and I've seen him and I understand him for who he is. He comes to his senses and he returns to God. Now this is where I was disappointed with the commentators. Therefore, I despise myself on repenting dust and ashes.

That is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. Why? Because he's not afraid. He's a disinccredible vision of God. This spectacular insight into the character of God has spoken to him personally. God of the universe has come into his life and asked him 60 questions and more about who is this that darkens my knowledge without counsel? But he's not afraid of this God. It's not all that he has that makes him fearful to run away from God. Rather, it's all that he has received from God to attract him to God. Because that's what repentance is. It just means turning around and going back to God. It's the prodigal picture. It's the prodigal son who says, I'm no longer. What am I doing here? I can go back to this loving father. And that's the most remarkable thing in this passage is that job repents.

[18 : 47] Not in some kind of religious chest beating humiliation. Oh, that he falls in his knees before God. That's not what it means. It means that he turns back to this loving graces.

And he can take all the daft words that he knows now have been daft. He can take them back. His careless word, his pride, his ignorance, his questioning of God's justice, his lack of knowledge. And he's confident to go back to God with that and just simply ask for forgiveness.

It's a safe place for him to go. It's not some kind of tyrant that he's falling on the knees before and in abject submission. It's the act of faith. It's the act of someone going back and turning to the one who accepts him for who he is with all his questions and his doubts and his confusion and his stupidity and his suffering. Takes it to God as safe and loving and good place. And remember, you're still with it. Remember, he's still in the gutter. He's still scratching his it is source. He's still rejected by his parents. Nothing's changed for him. He has not all of a sudden won the spiritual lottery. He's in exactly the same place. But he's saying, look, your company is better than anything. Your presence and who you are and who you've revealed yourself to be is better than I am. Sorry, I repent for the way I've been. But I know you love me and I know you accept me. That's what gives repentance speed. That's what gives it motion. That's what gives it energy. That's what gives it dynamism is when we're going because we'll be accepted and because we're loved and because he's a gracious God. Oh, yeah, he's the king. And we know he's not safe, but he's the king who is loving and gracious and kind. And so in returning this in many ways, maybe, maybe several times over this series, I've said this is a pivotal verse, a pivotal chapter, it's a pivotal section. But this is along with all the other pivotal important sections. But this when he says that, therefore I despise me on repent and dust and ashes, it's not he's not self loathing. He's saying he kind of despises the way he acted or the way he spoke. And he's well able to deal with that. But he's not self loathing in any way, in any sense, shape or form. But it's a hugely important when he says that, because can I ask you just to come with me quickly to the three why it matters, why this verse matters so much in light of what we've already studied, Job chapter one and verse nine. Just come with me because it's important, I think, to come with me here. And the Lord said to Satan, if you considered my servant Job, there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. Then Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for no reason? This is the answer. He fears God for no reason. He doesn't need anything from God. He is in dust and ashes. He's got nothing.

And yet he repents in dust and ashes and worships God here. So Satan's got it wrong. Because Job is able to worship God for nothing. He has nothing and yet still he worships God.

So that's very important. And then chapter two and verse nine, then his wife said to him, do you still hold fast to integrity, curse God and die? He doesn't. And that's hugely significant in this book as well. These three verses kind of scaffold the book, as it were, of Job and remind us of what's happening. And we've got the questioning of Satan and the questioning of humanity and saying there's no way that faith will be sustained through the suffering. And it's God who initiates this because he wants us to know that our faith can sustain and we can and we ought to and we should worship God for who he is.

[23 : 27] And there's this great bigger picture of what God is going to do against evil and what God has done against evil and what God will do with the gift of faith. God overcomes Satan and Job overcomes because of the faith he has been gifted and the sight that he now has. God is worth trusting simply for who God is rather than for what God can give.

And remember it's still not the end of the story. And it's a reminder to us of the danger of bargaining with God. I'll serve and follow you if. I love you if. If you will prove this, that and the next thing A, B and C, this is an argument powerfully against that. Job could repent here because God, because Jesus didn't need to in his life. And Job's faith prevailed because Christ as Savior prevailed as our substitute and as our redeemer and as our guarantee. And so we recognize that this transcendent God is imminent on the cross for you and for me. And that is what we need to see from Job. We need to see that. We need to see not just a transcendent God. And that's very important. But we need to see one who we don't recoil from because of that or run away from. But one we love and trust because he is intimate and because he is greater love is no man than this. They lay down his life for his friends.

He's our friend. Amazing truth that is spoken of here. And that's what Job sees and that's what we need to see. So in conclusion, can I say two things? Started with two things, business with two things. First is our greatest need. We've looked at Job's greatest need and we've seen that his greatest need was meeting with an encounter with God. And that's what changed him. That is the same with us. We need to be able to see Jesus Christ in the same way that Job was able to see God by faith. And I think that's why I think, I believe that the seeing here is not visible, actually seeing God, although it may have been, but it is definitely connected with spiritual sight. We have that a lot in the New Testament.

You know, Moses, Hebrews 11, he regarded this grace for the sake of Christ because he was looking forward. He was seeing. Or Abraham, your father, Jesus says, rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad. What does that mean? He didn't see it physically.

Abraham, but he could see it by faith. Or the reality of what Satan does to us in 2 Corinthians 4, the God of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel. And sin stops us seeing the light of the gospel. It plunges us into darkness.

[26 : 37] So you can't see Jesus and you can't understand who he is. It's a spiritual sight. Or Jesus complain of the church in Revelation 3. You see you're rich, but you don't know and don't realize you're poor, you're miserable, you're blind, you're blind, you're naked. And that is, I think, what is our greatest need in our lives. We know, we know that sin blinds us. We know that often we plunge into the dark and we know that that Satan's work, we can't see. See when I'm frustrated at the page shimmying flat, it's because I can't see. So I'm not dependent on the Holy Spirit and on God as I ought. Who we see God as He is, He's awesome. And that's an overused word, I appreciate that. But He is awesome, but

He's also attractive. So is that transcendence, but that closeness, that imminence. He's above question, but He loves dialogue. He's glorious, but He's close. And that's our greatest need. The reason you will go from here and I will go from here and not see Him is because of our blindness. And because we need the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts.

We need that prayer of faith. Otherwise the words on the page fall flat. It is the living word of God. It achieves what it achieves. But for us, it will fall flat unless we are dependent on God to give us faith. And can I say prayer is crucial. If you want to be active and part of this series as you are and must be then and knowing God like Job, the answer is that you will wrestle in prayer. If you have come from this last week that we have entered and you haven't prayed and you're not in dialogue with God and you're not wrestling with God and questioning God, then you will not and I will not come to our senses. We will not see things and we will never repent and turn to the living God in attraction and in love and in compassion unless we are in conversation with Him. And true transcendence from God will draw us close. And can I just say that for me that is the key. It is prioritising prayer. You're Job, that whole book. Up to this point, he's wrestling with the other guys but he's doing it kind of prayerfully. He's doing it with an eye heavenward and he's asking and praying and wrestling and doubting and questioning God. He's wrestling with God. You know there are rules out there. There's rules to relationships. We all know that don't we? Every relationship has some kind of rule and the rule with God is that we speak with Him. That's the one thing he asks. That's the one communication line that he has come to open. That's why he died. He died to... What happened when he died? You know what happened when he died, don't you? That big, thick, 80 foot, 6 foot, thick curtain ripped in two from top to bottom in the Holy of Holies so we could have access, free and full access without a priest, without a rigmarole every year for someone else going in our place.

He's our high priest so that we can have free access to God so that we can pray when everything seems flat and two dimensional which is for us by nature. And we can begin to see things differently. So the alternative to that is... The alternative is you gamble with God and you say I'll serve you as long as you give me, you know, the kind of thing that Satan said right at the very beginning. He doesn't fear you for nothing. You only fear God because you know that if you do the right thing morally you'll pass your exams and you'll get the job you want or the wife you want or the husband you want or the money you want. And that's the moralism that is in the place of seeing God or the alternative is you curse God and die as you don't believe, as you don't serve and don't fall. These are the alternatives for us but can I say if we are not praying we will never see. The person next to you can't pray for you. I can't pray for you. I can barely pray for myself but that's what we must be doing. We must be in relationship with God with that relationship rule you've got to be in it to win it. You've got to be in relationship with God to recognize and see and know who God is and to begin to appreciate Him in the miraculous way that He did here.

And it's open for us just as much as it was for Job. So our greatest need and lastly and very briefly and this is the 11th of 12 sermons I think probably going through the whole time I've never mentioned this and it's strange because the Bible mentions it and also so does the world mention it. People who aren't Christians often speak about it. James in the New Testament chapter 5 verse 10 as an example of suffering in patients brothers take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold we consider those blessed who remain steadfast or patient. You have heard of the steadfastness or the patience of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

[32 : 33] You've heard that haven't you people say that the patience of Job which had the patience of Job. Oh they've got the patience of Job. We haven't mentioned that and yet that is one of the important biblical lessons which God was teaching Job through his suffering that willingness to trust. That's what patience is spiritually speaking. It's willingness to trust when everything is hellish. When you've got nothing. When everyone else is saying curse God and die. That's what spiritual patience is despite our circumstances trusting and holding on to the living God because you've seen him. You've seen him at the cross. You've seen what he's done for you. You love him for who he is and therefore you can because James speaks about it. Not grumble against God and interestingly not grumble against one another. So it's all interrelated. We learn from Job and when we learn from Job we learn to be better at not grumbling about one another because what's grumbling about one another usually means other people aren't doing what I want them to do. When I want them to do now. And we're impatient. We're impatient that people won't think like me.

They don't act like me. They don't live their Christian lives like me. We're impatient. We're impatient with God for putting these people in my path. We're impatient with them because they're not living as they are. And of course we're not looking at ourselves. Patience gives us time to look at ourselves first. And there's usually a large beam in our own eye that needs to deal with before that speck of dust that's in everybody else's eye. So patience is this amazing act of trust in God. It's that act that enables us to come off the throne and climb onto the altar and be living sacrifices rather than be gods in our lives. He knows us. He loves us. We don't have all the answers. We absolutely don't. But what we need is to see God and to worship Him. And to return to the very beginning my frustration lies in my impatience and my blindness, the flatness of not only my words but my life and the lack of change towards God, which is what repentance is, change towards God. And we can only seek to persevere and by His grace and in His power to trust in Him and to ask that He will help us to see who He is. You in your life and me in my life need that. And prayer for us is the absolute non-negotiable. So we must, if you take nothing from the series, nothing from the sermon, nothing from your day to day worship in St. Columba's or week to week worship, nothing from the Bible. Take this. I must be a praying person. I must make time to be in the presence of the living God and wrestle with Him with my doubts, my anxieties, my blindness, my deceit, my joy, my worship, my praise, whatever it is we take, take it to Him and let Him wrestle. Let Him wrestle with our souls so we can come to this place.

And He is transcendent but He is also imminent. And He will. That's His glory. That He is powerful but He is loving. Amen. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand you better. That you would take away the cobwebs that often are in our lives and sometimes simply just the tiredness of being human, of being fallen in a fallen and broken world, the tiredness of everyone's arguments against you, the tiredness that comes from the unbelief that we're surrounded by and the relentless arguments against you and the seeming impotence of God to act. Help us to take our weirdness or our fear or our struggles to you. You're well able to deal with them. You know them and may we not have this idea of you as one to whom we are to be afraid and stay away from. Forgive us when we think that. When we think we are so bad or so stupid or so sinful that you wouldn't want us to repent. You wouldn't want us to turn. Crazy lie from the hell, the pit of hell and Satan himself. Help us to be able to hear you and see you by faith like the father running from his house to meet his prodigal child. And may that influence us and change us and know that we have this great potentate who is also the refugee on our behalf and who is the one who loves to hear our cries and loves to hear our voice and is grieved when we are silent. And may we take that from here as our responsibility and our privilege to be praying people. May we be excited and surprised by joy and by the living God for Jesus' sake. Amen.