

The Shock of Repentance

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Date: 07 July 2019

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] But before we begin, I need to confess my own sins and I do that. I know that over this last week or two I've been far too busy spinning too many plates and it's not praiseworthy as sometimes we think being busy is. It's just bad planning and it's sometimes very often in our lives just pride at work. Either people pleasing or thinking that no one else can do what I have to do and that's never healthy and that's never good.

And I recognize therefore that I haven't been doing as much as I should be doing here in the congregation and so I ask for forgiveness for you for that and probably about 70% of the congregation today are not ordinarily the congregation but you can still forgive me okay even though you're not normally here. And also this time of year is an instant time because I mentally I get tired and traditionally because we're great traditionalists in the free church I use this time of year for reflection and for planning and as part of that I use old sermons rather than create new ones. Now I've been a minister for nearly 30 years so I've got a good back stock of sermons probably about 2000 or so that I've actually still got. I could barely find two sermons for this week and for next Sunday night that were worth repeating. That's what happens when you're a minister.

Why is that? Because you need to feel them you know. You can't just get up and it's not like forgive me for all the lecturers here. It's not just like a lecture okay. It's not just like you're just passing on information historically or currently. You need to feel a sermon. You need to be comfortable with it. You need to believe that it's the message that God wants the people that you preach to you on that particular day to hear. So it took a long time. I would have probably been quicker preparing new sermons. However eventually I came back to revisit Job. It's not a long time ago.

Not too old these sermons. I did them a few years ago and if you remember them then you need to just again put that out of your mind and if you haven't heard them then God be praised for that. But maybe today this is the message that God wants you to hear even if you heard it before. Maybe you need to hear it more today and I know certainly I needed to hear it more today. Because the question of suffering is a really huge issue in many people's lives and it's a question that's addressed in a majestic mysterious yet revealing way in the book of Job. Job is a great man of faith in the old Testament. He's a believer and he trusts in God and he follows God. And yet radically bad things happen to Job. He loses his health, he loses his wealth, he loses his family and ultimately he loses really his friends as well who are sickened by his challenging of God for what God has done in his life. And this book of Job in the Old Testament is all about wrestling with God.

[3 : 35] It's about wrestling with his spiritual mentors, the people that were supposed to be encouraging him and building him up. It's about wrestling with his wife and her challenge to him to curse God and die. And it's wrestling with himself about who he is and about why me? Why am I going through this suffering? I thought if I was a believer in God and I followed God that there would be blessing, life would be good, things would be acceptable and enjoyable. And that's not his experience. And what we find is that after this time of great wrestling, God answers, we looked at the little first bit of that, that God answers them in chapters 30 to 41, an astonishing divine soliloquy where God speaks absolutely not in the way you expect. He answers the question of suffering not in the way you would expect. It's a book. The book of Job is a book like no other in the world within even the Bible. And I guess we're cheating today a little bit because I'm taking you right to the end. It's worth taking time to go through the book of Job, but I'm going to write to the end. And so we're doing a Job spoiler really. So I'm taking you right to the end, to the end of the story and seeing what the answer is. And it's not what you expect. It's not what I expect. Because the answer in many ways isn't scripted in Job. For all of us, Job included here, it needs to be experienced. The answer that we get at the end of Job is about his experience of meeting with the living God. And that's something we all need to do, because the response of Job and the response of

God that he gives are really unsatisfactory until you feel it in your heart, until you meet the God that he speaks about, until you know why Job responds the way he does, and then it all begins to make sense. So for a few minutes, we're going to look at some of these aspects of particularly that last section in Job chapter 42, Job's own response. And I've called it a shock of repentance, and repentance is just another word for turning back, turning and facing God, having been turned away from God in our thinking and our lives. So if you're struggling with God, or with the thought of God, or with the thought of faith, or as a Christian struggling with suffering, with health issues, with family issues, with life, with worship, then I hope that you'll find that God's word will speak into your situation and into mine. Can I know in the first place that there's no change, absolutely no change in Job's circumstances at this point? He's still sitting in the gutter in his experiences with suicidal realities all around him. He's still lost everything, including his dignity, his health, his well-being, his prestige, his standing in the community, his respect of others. He's lost it all. But there's a massive heart change in Job that we find here.

He sees himself completely differently to how he had previously seen himself as he argued with God and wrestled with God and shook his fist at God. There's a massive heart change. He is in dust and ashes physically, but also metaphorically or spiritually, because that was a phrase that was often used for people who turned back in sorrow and in humility to the living God.

And so there's something very important there, even just by way of introduction, is that the big change in his life is not circumstantial. It's not on his out what's happening outside of him. And that's very important because so often we look for changes in our circumstances to change the way we think about God. And yet what we find here is that Job's circumstances at this point haven't changed. The huge change is internal. It's in his own heart. And as God spoke to him and he turned and faced God, he saw things very differently. He sensed his own unworthiness. He sensed that his own speech had not been right before God in his own eyes. What brought this change? Why did he change?

What brought this radical transformation in the attitude and the thinking and the heart of Job? And the answer is it was all about knowing God's presence rather than persuasion of facts.

[8 : 33] It was all about meeting with the living God. It was about the presence of God. See, there's been 33 chapters of arguments to and from between Job and the three guys that come and try and persuade him, this is what's happening. You must have done something wrong, God punishing you. And all these things, the theological arguments that they go through and the right and the wrong and the yes and the no. And these arguments are really not insignificant. They have their purpose.

But what he craved, what he needed was a personal revelation of the living God. What he needed was to meet with the living God as God spoke to him, the words that God spoke in the context of coming from the person of God, the reality of God. We see that in different places in Luke chapter 8, 5 verse 8. We see it with Simon Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, depart from me, for I am a sinful man of Lord. It was just meeting with Jesus Christ in his power in a miraculous way that changed his whole concept. We see also with this, a lot of these are manly men, okay? Job was a manly man. So was Peter, a fisherman. And now the Roman soldiers in John chapter 18. Remember in the garden when he was about to be, Jesus was about to be arrested, Jesus knowing that all that would happen to him came forward and he said to them, who do you seek? And these soldiers, professional guys, these killers, they answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to him, I am he. Judas who betrayed him was standing with him. When Jesus said that, I am he. They drew back and fell to the ground.

Now these are not Keystone cops we're talking about. These are the elite army of the day. And they were ready to arrest Jesus Christ and they fall back to the ground because there was, it seems that there was this just revelation of who he was in front of them. And Revelation 117, also at the end, when I saw him, John said, I fell at his feet as though dead. He was right on me saying, fear not, I'm the first and the last. It's that sense of God as God, overwhelmingly powerful that changes how Job sees his experiences. Because I believe he also understands, this is slightly conjecture, okay? But let me go with it, because I think it's significant. He understands God's voice that we have in this chapter 38, 41. When we read, excuse me, when we read Scripture, we don't get the tone, we don't get the intonation, and we don't get the beauty that must have been revealed in God's voice. We miss that. One day we will.

But it's significant that when these sections where God speaks, it doesn't strike terror into Job, it strikes wonder and amazement and humility. And that must be something to do not just with what

God said, but the way he spoke as a father to his child. In other words, Job's big question was, why isn't God answering me? Why isn't he speaking to me? Where is God if God is real? And in God's response, Job knows his complaints have been heard. He's hearing the voice of a father whose love and whose grace he senses, and who by his speech in these chapters calms his fears and gives him a new perspective. That's what happens when by faith we wrestle with God. He's not a tyrant, he's not a distant, disengaged creator God. He is our father, as believers, we come to him, and in our wrestling he speaks to us, and he assures us of his love.

And that changed, because that changed Job because it was about presence more than persuasion. And therefore, his response is one that shocks us and challenges us in our understanding of God.

[13 : 08] He comes very much to his senses. He recognizes who God is and who he is in relation to God.

I have heard of you by the years, but now my eye see you. He's saying that he's come to his senses. He's heard who God is, and he's heard what God has said, and he's saying, now with the eye of faith, I can see God differently, and I can hear God differently.

And that's so significant in our spiritual lives. It's not just an audible hearing and a visual seeing of God, because, you know, we can't see God, and Jesus is risen to heaven. But it's with the eye of faith that we are to see things differently, and it's with a spiritual hearing that we hear things differently. There's different senses, in other words. It's not just about what we hear with our ears physically and what we see with our eyes physically. Life is more than just the physical, the auditory and the visual. There is a spiritual dimension, and Job very clearly is coming to see God by faith in this response that he gives. And therefore, he returns to God.

I despise it. I repent in this nation, and repentance is simply that word for turning back towards God. It's the most remarkable verse in the Bible, I think. It's also one of the most expensive verses in the Bible that he turns back to the living God, having lost everything.

He still trusts in God's goodness and God's grace. There's no recoil as he responds to this amazing, powerful revelation that God gives in these chapters, but it's an awe that attracts him to God. He feels free, in other words, to confess his wild words and his raging doubt and his lack of knowledge. God isn't attired to him, and he doesn't need to be nice and polite and correct and theologically astute and full of faith to go into God's presence. He knows that God is pleased to hear all his complaints and his cries and his doubts and his fears and expressions of lack of knowledge, because he's come to recognize and is confident in God's mercy. That as he goes to the living God, he knows that he can turn back to God and God will accept him, that forgiveness for him is full and free. He's in a safe place. You know, we talk about that today a lot, you know, safe spaces. You want a place to be a safe space where you can save what you want.

[16 : 08] Well, he knows that in God's presence it's a safe space. It's where he can express himself, but also where he knows that in his folly and his weakness and his sin and his doubts and his struggles, he can come back and realize there's forgiveness, full and free. He's confident of that. There's a real redemptive reality here. He may still feel in the gutter physically. He may recognize that his arrogance as he sees it is misguided before God, but he also knows the company here and the companionship of the living God and that's transformative. That's what he needed most, and that's what in our suffering and in our lack of understanding of why we suffer and struggle in battle with different things, that's what we need most. I'm not saying there's not lots of arguments and for the atheist the problem of suffering is just as real as it is and more real than it is for the Christian in many ways. However, it's not simply philosophical reasons and arguments that will persuade us through battles and struggles. It's to know that we are still loved.

That's what really matters. It's to know that we are loved through that and that he is not left us or abandoned us, but there is a reason for what he has done, but he will not let us go and he willingly speaks as a father into our experience for our great good.

So he returns to God and we recognize and we see through this almost template reality of suffering that is expressed here. What God, a curtain is pulled back into the unseen things in many ways of suffering, but what we see is right from the beginning of the book to the end of the book, God is showing himself not only to be a father, but also to be the one who gifts a faith that overcomes suffering and death into eternal life.

That's what we see here. It's a kind of template for much of the mystery and many of the questions we ask about suffering and about the chaos of the world in which we live as Christians.

He's saying that, okay, you don't need all the answers to that suffering right now, but what you do need to know is that my gift of faith to you to take you through it is stronger and bigger and better than the suffering and the love that surrounds you will take you through to eternal life because of the challenge isn't there in chapter one, curse God and die. That's what Satan says to God, Job doesn't follow you for nothing. You've lined his pockets, you've made him blessed, you've given him a great life, no wonder he believes.

[19:19] And that's the challenge that Satan lays out and then his wife lays out, well curse God and die. Go on, what's the point of believing in God? And that's the natural response, isn't it? Curse God and die. And here's the answer, that God's gift of faith to Job is miraculously and divinely gifted to take us through and to enable us to see things differently and to see his fatherly love even in the midst of suffering. And that faith of Job is the same gift of faith for every single believer. Job is not a superhero, Job is not different from anyone. Job has that gift of faith that is the same gift that can take us through battles and struggles and suffering. It's not saying it's easy, it's not trite, it's not insignificant, but there is a clinging to the living God through this. It's his gift. It's not, God is not saying here at any point, well, you know, you need to have a, you really work up your own faith to be strong enough to take you through the battles. You need to really perk up, you need to do your best, you need to fire on in there and have a faith in me. You know, he's saying, look, I gift you what you need to survive and to come through and to learn from and to grow by. It's counterintuitive, absolutely, but it's the kind of relational trust in the divine God that he wants us to enjoy. Job experiences a God worth trusting because he is God and because he is merciful. And of course, it transcends the Old Testament because what we don't see and what Job didn't see, although he asks about it in Job 9, verse 33, about whether there is an arbiter or a redeemer between us who might lay his hand on as both.

There's that hint towards a suffering God, a suffering redeemer, a suffering savior who is indeed the one who arbitrates and who reaches out between heaven and earth and who dies in our place, not as a distant, disinterested God, but as a God who suffers in order to redeem us ultimately from our suffering. Job believed in God as a savior. I don't think he would have known the mechanics of what lay ahead for God coming in Christ, yet he could repent and be forgiven because the Christ came and didn't need to repent and yet suffered as a sinner bearing our grief. He remained silent so that Job and you and I can shout out to the living God. You know, we say that in Isaiah, where he says, before the shears is silent, he took all the injustice of the cross in order to be a redeemer so that we can cry out and shout and scream about all the injustice to the living God who hears us and who redeems us and who ultimately reminds us of a great future we have in him.

So I just want to conclude with two points, two remarkable gifts that we need to recognize and see in this veil of tears which is life for many of us at different times, maybe not just now, but often that it is a veil of tears and suffering. First is I think we need to recognize the eye of faith as Job speaks here about my eyes seeing him. Now you might have 2020 vision today, you might have great eyesight, but this is not physical sight. This is a spiritual sight. Revelation 3.17 speaks about the minds of believers being blinded. You know, God speaks to one of the churches that says, you say, I'm rich, I prospered, I need nothing, but not real is it, you're wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. And these are spiritual pictures and we can be spiritually blind, not seeing God, not seeing His grace, not seeing His mercy, not seeing His help in our lives and His salvation. But the eye of faith enables us to see that and that comes through prayer and reaching out to the living God from our heart and asking for the gift of faith, asking for the vision to see Him in the same way the job sees Him as awesome and attraction. Someone not to recoil from, but someone to go to as our Creator, as our Lord, as our God, as our Savior, as the one to whom we will stand before on that last great day. One who loves our questions, who loves when we talk, shout, cry, search, dig deep into His revelation in the Bible and find out something far deeper than merely the words on the page. And that means that we turn to Him.

It's something we should really, we do on a daily basis actually, but it's basically what prayer is, is repentance. It should be turning to Him all the time, looking to Him, asking for His grace and help. And there we see the mystery, the simple and wonderful mystery of His love and of His grace. His voice is strong, but His voice is merciful, and there is a depth in it far beyond ritual and far beyond religious observance. We need deepest heart honesty before the living God. All of us, you need it, I need it. We don't want to be perfunctory.

You know that word? We don't want you to be going through the motions. We don't want to be religious. We want to be people who are exposing our hearts to the living God and our needs and our unbelief and our fear and all that we are and asking for the faith that enables us to live our lives as believers or to be gifted faith if you are not a believer, to see Him in His great grace and salvation.

[25 : 54] So the eye of faith is really important. You need that. You need that to know Jesus. You need that to know heaven. You need that to know meaning and purpose in suffering. And even when you don't have meaning and purpose in suffering, you need it because the answers aren't always guaranteed. But we know God is at work and gifts His faith to take it through it.

And the other thing I think that we can learn, among many other things, the eye of faith, but also we can learn from the patience of Job. James chapter 5 speaks about the patience of Job and the importance of learning from His patience. And as we understand God's grace, we will be more patient in our experiences of suffering and difficulty. Because very often, suffering and difficulties expose where our roots are found. If our roots are found in Christ, then that great verse in Jeremiah 17 which says, if your roots are in Christ, it doesn't matter even if the drought comes, you will still bear fruit because the roots go down and are fed in the relationship and person of Christ. So where are your roots found in life? In other words, in whom do you trust? Who is your God? In times of difficulty, what do you lean on? And we find

Job leans on the living God and his roots are exposed for where they are there in God. And therefore, he bears fruit from that because he patiently, interestingly isn't it? He waits patiently and the Bible speaks about the patience of Job and yet he rants and he raves and he shouts and he complains and he accuses. But God doesn't find any fault with that. And next Sunday night, we're going to look at the way God responds to Job and the remarkable things he says in the last few verses of this passage. But patience, we don't often talk about patience, but patience is a hugely significant response of faith to particularly battles and struggles in our lives because it reveals who is our Lord. Usually, we're impatient because we want to be in control. We want the answers. We think we should do what we want. And it's difficult for us to be patient and wait for the living God. And yet he promises to bring peace in the storm. So Job is a remarkable book and it's a remarkable character. And it is a deep seated dealing with the reality of trouble and battle and suffering. Here, we've looked at it very briefly in a personal way with Job. There are huge lessons to learn. If you do have time, take time prayerfully to look through the book of Job and see what it says about the living God and challenge yourself to speak to him and ask him to reveal himself to you, particularly if you're suffering and struggling and battling as a Christian. Or if you don't believe that you would challenge God to reveal himself to you because it really is significant and important. Let's pray. Father, God help us, we pray, to know you better, to understand you more clearly, to wrestle with some of the real issues in life and not to be superficial and trite about what we say and what we do. We pray especially, we haven't dealt with this today, but we pray especially that we would not be like Job's comforters in the judgmental and ignorant and ungracious response they had to Job's sufferings.

May we learn to be far more like Jesus than them. But we do pray that you'd help us today, that you would speak into our needs and into our hearts and that you would also bring this truth to us as we look at it again next Sunday evening, God willing. Bless us, bless your word to us, may your Holy Spirit take it and apply it into our hearts and lives for Jesus' sake. Amen.