

Unseen Reality

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[0 : 0 0] Now having the harmony group there was kind of, but the fruit of these meetings we have once a month and it is great to have that harmony throughout the congregation as it reminds us of just the beauty and the creativity and the marvel of God's person and the beauty that music can be for us.

Now I'd like to turn with you or if you would turn with me back to Job at the beginning of this amazing book in the Old Testament. So again we're kind of doing a second scene setting as it were because we're still in the prologue of Job.

There's a lot more to it. There's a big weighty middle section where there's this dialogue between Job and his three friends and eventually God and then there's the epilogue of the book as well but we're still in the prologue here.

And what we have here is things that we can see and things that we can't see or things that we see and things that have been revealed to us that we aren't able ordinarily to see in other words.

And that's one of the important foundational introductory truths of this book. There's things here in church that we can see.

[1 : 2 7] There's things that we know about ourselves. But there's other things obviously that are unseen and we can't see. For example if I say today, you know, because I wouldn't want in any way at any point to embarrass anybody but if I can ask you to do a really good Scottish Highland thing or maybe not a Highland, not a Scottish kind of thing, which is to put up your hands but in your heart.

So no one actually has to see you. So if you put up your hands in your heart, if you read through Job twice this week like I asked you to do last week, you see now no one can see that.

So no one's embarrassed. I can see you all put your hands up, those who were here last week. This is great, well done. But you know there's things we can see and there's things we can't see. And I would encourage you again if you haven't done it, read through the book of Job Twice.

It will not take long and it's important to get the whole of the story as you look at the book and not just kind of wait in anticipation for each chapter and each section might say.

So there's two things here. There's faith we can see and then there's a world that ordinarily we can't see but that is revealed to us here by God in His word.

[2 : 4 3] So there's a faith that we can see and in verse 8 we have God speaking to the Lord speaking to Satan. Have you considered my servant Job that there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.

Do you recognise these words? Yes, because they've already been spoken. So they've been spoken twice already in the early verses, the verse 1. This was Job who was a blameless and upright man, a man who feared God and turned away from evil.

So we've got God's summary of Job and the book summary of Job that this is the kind of person he was. He was unique in his day. He was probably in many ways unique throughout the whole Old Testament, at least on a par with one or two others, great people of faith in the Old Testament.

He had this and I'm using this word advisedly, he had a passive faith. Okay, and by that I mean that he feared God, he trusted in God, he relied on God.

He had a relationship with God that was based on our relationship with God that is on faith and on the saving work of Jesus Christ even though that was in the future to him.

[3 : 56] He still looked forward to that. Saviour who through sacrifice you could see was forgiveness of sins. He repented and he rested in God and here his faith was being trusted.

That's what I mean by passive faith he had. He was resting in God for his salvation. It's very important. But also he had active obedience in his life.

He was blameless and upright. That is, as we saw last week in his life, it wasn't that he was perfect but rather he was not hypocritical and he didn't have secret sins that he was keeping to.

At that level he took all the sins before God and he was blameless and upright. He was straight down the line and he shunned evil. So that's amazing and someone said that our city group on Wednesday night and it really was powerful that we talk about what Job was able to do in resisting cursing God and dying through the suffering he went through.

But remember also how difficult it is for rich and wealthy people to not turn their backs on God either. He had all the temptations of power and wealth and opulence and all that goes with that and yet he shunned evil.

[5 : 14] He was a holy guy. He was a holy person and he had this active obedience in his life and I think that's very important today. I think it's unfashionable to be holy and it's unfashionable to talk about obedience as if it's some kind of legalistic way of earning our righteousness before God.

And it's not that but it's because we love him that we seek to be blameless and upright and holy before him. And maybe tonight we'll see a lot more about that as we look at the Beatitudes again in Matthew chapter 5.

And this faith we can see was a faith that even Satan could recognize was blessed. You know Satan says that, you know, you've blessed the work of his hands.

He's blessed. He's in, Satan could see. And while there's no simple formula to the blessing that he enjoyed as we'll go on to unpack as we look at this book, he has already known the blessings through his life and his family and his wealth and his possessions and all that he had and he is also going to know blessing through darkness.

So as we go through Job we will need our seat belts on. We will need our seat belts as we go through Job because it's not a typical book for us to go through and it's not sometimes what we ordinarily think about God.

[6 : 45] We will learn great things about God because there's a faith here that we can see and that we can mimic and imitate. Great for us to be blameless and upright who's shun evil.

Every one of us is Christians. It's a great thing to fear God. That is to worship him, to love him, to serve him, to be in repentance and rest with him.

And as we do that we seek to learn more about God and so God reveals himself here in a world that we can't ordinarily see. So we have in verses 6 to 12 we have the curtains pulled back on a spiritual world that ordinarily we don't know and we don't see.

We don't see it as we look around us. We don't see it in our day to day lives. We don't see this spiritual communication, this spiritual world that is revealed to us by faith here and revealed in Scripture.

Now many people ask the question today, is this all there is? And as believers, as Christians we have come to the place where we say no.

[7 : 50] There is much more than what we can merely see and feel and touch. There's much more than just the material. There is the spiritual and there is this unseen world.

And here at the beginning of Job we are giving this insight into the character and nature of God but also his interaction with Satan and with evil.

Now there is much and I will probably say this a lot over this series. There's a lot of mystery that remains and we don't have all the answers.

Nonetheless, we are challenged by a good God here and a good God who faces and who interacts with malevolence and with evil and also as we widen our perspective spiritually through the whole of Scripture we recognise that God is intimately involved in answering the problem.

The problem of evil and suffering. And that is something we need to deal with because probably it's the most common question that people ask who are not Christians, who are not believers.

[9 : 07] How can you believe in a God who allows evil or who commands or who oversees a world in which there is such evil?

And now again I say there is no trite and easy answers to that but we must face up to what Scripture reveals and what it says for our own individual lives and for the world in which we live.

Because there is this dramatic dialogue that is going on here primarily between God and Satan and other sons of God coming to the presence of God.

But there is this amazing dialogue. I think it's fair to say that this was unseen to Job. I think his suffering and battles and struggles would have been ameliorated somewhat if he knew that this dialogue had happened in heaven.

It was unseen to Job, presumably was revealed at some point retrospectively. But it's seen to us, we have a different story here to Job's and it's seen to us through Revelation and by Revelation.

[10 : 18] Now why does remain in the Bible and I'll mention that towards the end in a very specific way but here we have certain truth revealed and it's significant, an important truth.

It tells us about the nature of Satan and it tells us at least in part about the nature of God and therefore our understanding and our response to these things.

Because there's a similarity, there's not a great deal spoken about Satan in the Bible and that's good. But there's stuff spoken here and there's stuff spoken in Genesis 3 that give us an insight into his mind and his character and his way of working.

It helps us to understand him. And now while we don't want to give undue prominence to him, we recognise and know that he's our spiritual enemy as Christians and it is important to know and understand how he works.

We see in the first place, now I'm not great for alliteration but I didn't deliberately do it, just happened to work out. The first thing we see about him here is he's dismissive of God in verse 9 and 10.

[11 : 30] He speaks to God, God offers the life of Satan, have you considered my servant Job? And then verse 9 Satan answers the Lord and says, does Job fear God for nothing?

Have you not put a hedge around him in his house and all that he has on every side? You've blessed the work of his hands but stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face.

And so he's dismissive. He's dismissive of God's assessment of Job's character. He says basically to God, you've got it wrong. I've been here before Satan says, in Genesis 3 I was here and I didn't have to do too much to turn Adam and Eve away from you and to turn their faces from you and to tell them and to get them to rebel against you.

I've been there, I know what humanity is like, you can't trust them. He only wants to honour you because you've blessed him and because of his wealth and his riches and everything else.

I've seen humanity fail before and in that case they were perfect. He's saying to God, there's no hope for sinners. Give up on sinners, give up on people God.

[12 : 36] He says, you've got the assessment wrong. I know things better here. He's dismissive of God. Can you imagine that? God, he's tempting God. Can I use that word carefully to say, don't waste your time and your energy on trying to build a renewed relationship with humanity.

They will let you down, they will fail you completely and utterly. He's dictatorial, not only is he dismissive, he's dictatorial. He tells God what to do. He says, you know, if you stretch out your hand and touch him, my Satan's here commanding God, he is wanting God to act like he would act.

That's what Satan would do and he wants God to do the same and he is dictating to him and he's also dictating to God the kind of response the job would give you, curse you.

That is what Satan himself would do. Dictatorial and he's divisive because what he is seeking to do is bring division between God and his faithful servant and all those who believe in him by faith.

With his whole being, he hates all that God is and he hates the love and he hates community and he hates faithfulness and he hates blamelessness and he hates one who is Jews and who turns away from evil so he seeks to be divisive, to hate and to separate and he is destructive.

[14 : 03] We'll not really look at that today but when he is permitted to act, he is ruthless, he is vicious. He shows no mercy, he is absolutely evil.

We'll see a little bit more but as we look at what happens next week. But can we remember these things? And you see, well this is all very esoteric I'm sure in the unseen world and spiritual realities but can I ask you to consider the reality, the outworking sometimes of sinful, our remaining sinful human nature in our lives and in what we see and what we interact with and what we struggle with sometimes in our life being dismissive of God.

When we feel and sense that attitude welling up within us, dismissive against God, dictatorial God, this is how you should act, this is what you should do.

Divisive, away from God, turning from him, ignoring him, rejecting him or destructive. Even in the choices we make, the things we do, the pleasures that we seek, there's something for us to consider.

So we have there the nature of Satan but we also in this passage have the nature of God and it's one that maybe we're a little bit uncomfortable with in 21st century western civilization but it's one of unquestionable sovereignty.

[15 : 31] That's what we have here, we have God revealed as unquestionably sovereign as the king of kings and the Lord of lords. It's difficult for us, it's very clear here but it's very difficult for us because I think our mentality and our philosophical kind of underpinning is very often it's all about us, it's all about me, it's all about humanity, it's all about what we've achieved and what we can do and what we can learn and what we can understand about this world in which we live and so the idea of a sovereign God, of an all seeing, all knowing, all powerful God is one that sits very uncomfortably with us.

I think sometimes we're a little bit like the command at the end of Lord of the Rings where it was said to the hobbits, you bow to no one.

I can't quite work out how, does that make us all hobbits? But we have that mentality, we bow to no one sometimes and it's difficult for us in our Christian lives to move beyond Jesus as saviour into Jesus as Lord of our lives but here is unquestioning sovereignty, the angelic beings ushered into His presence both heavenly and those who are fallen come into the presence of God.

Do you believe that? Do we believe that unseen world that's revealed to us here? I think sometimes it can be hard for us but if we don't, well let's scrap it all.

Let's get rid of everything because if there is no unseen world then there is no gospel, there is no divine saviour, there is no cross, there is nothing for us.

[17 : 28] We are purely naturalistic and materialistic in our understanding without this reality that this is all there is.

Let's just change one word, is this all there is? I do think it's important to challenge people sometimes about that concept and that reality because I think deep down many people recognise and know that this is not all there is.

So God is unquestionably sovereign in who He brings it, it's clearly a picture of a throne room before whom they stand and it is God who introduces job into the equation.

We saw that briefly last week, have you considered my servant job? God isn't reactive here, God isn't responding to some evil plot and plan that Satan has made.

It is God who brings this test case before the audience that He has and we saw a little bit about why that might have been the case last week.

[18 : 49] God is in control, God has His purpose here and mysterious though it is, it should also for us have a degree of comfort because God is seeking to show the significance and the importance and the value of a living faith and how it can improve on as it were what happened at the very beginning and it can be something that resists and defeats and overcomes evil.

So God introduces job into the equation and God permits Satan to act. Now I think this is very difficult and I wouldn't shy from that reality but I think a God that is great enough to worship, a God that is sovereign and omnipresent is also a God who is worth trusting in the things that we can't fully understand but He permits Satan to act and I think there is an important difference here because Satan says you put your hand on job, you deal with him and remove everything from him.

God says to job all that he has is in your hand. Job is, God permits Satan to act.

God says not by my hand but it must be by your hand. God is not the author here of evil, He is the enactor. He allows it to happen.

He permits it within constraints, within restriction, within limits. He is a higher purpose that we can't clearly see at this point but evil is not sovereign.

[20 : 44] You see how important and significant that is even if we can't understand why evil is allowed to remain even though there is promises of its defeat. Evil is not sovereign, evil is on a leash.

Good overcomes in the story which is why I think it is important to know the whole story. Faith triumphs. I am saying it is not easy but in our limited understanding, in our limited understanding of goodness and in our fallibility we simply need to recognise that this is the good God who is acting here and who is constraining and restraining and keeping evil on a leash in this instance.

This is a very poor illustration, I will probably get it wrong, you know me well enough to know how bad my illustrations are but they are important unless you try and get across. The great difference between someone, a drug addict coming to you with a six inch needle and seeking to damage and destroy your life and between a nurse coming to you with a six inch needle or to your child who is on your knee to give them a life saving injection.

Now that little child on your knee might look absolutely confused and in terror up at you as their parent when they see this needle coming towards them and you have to deal with that and that is a hard place to be as a parent but you know it is for their good and you know the pain will be ultimately for their good different from it being in the hand of someone who is evil and malevolent and vicious.

I know you could look at that and you could introduce all kinds of you know areas where it does not work but I hope that it gives a basic picture of sometimes what is not easy for us to understand but here we have the nature of God being revealed in a very powerful way is unquestionable sovereignty and before him we should bow because if he is only a God we have in our back pocket if he is only a God to whom who is accountable to us if he is a God who we will only follow and serve as long as he does what we want then it will be very difficult for us to worship him and very difficult for us to understand him because that takes me to where I must finish which is the astonishing reversal that is foreshadowed in these early events because it is difficult to read the book of Job and it is difficult to look at the book of Job and much of the Old Testament without the perspective and the prism of the cross of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 31] We cannot wrestle with a good God who permits and allows evil without that prism to look through without that perspective and by faith we come to know and understand how important the cross of Jesus Christ is to understanding who we are and understanding how we react to one another and how we deal in mercy with one another and how we understand God because at the cross if I can be permitted to lurch forward to the cross if you will allow me to do that we can hear as it were the words of Christ to Satan saying I am in your hands.

Can you see that? That the incarnate Son of God Jesus Christ comes and he says to Satan I am in your hands do with me your worst.

Pour out your vicious evil and brutality on me. Do it, do what you can absolutely invent the very worst for me because I am doing it for my people and I am doing it in their place.

So you have, unless you have this picture of a sovereign king who is sovereign over the universe and over life and death and over everything it makes the cross kind of puny and small and just a guy who died in a cross.

But when we have this sovereign king who says and who gives himself into the hands of Satan on our behalf this powerful one who becomes a child this pure one this holy one who washes feet, who goes hungry and thirsty, who is a vagrant and homeless.

[25 : 17] Does that not focus and maybe change our thinking about the current crisis hitting the borders of Europe? We become judgmental and distanced from it because somehow we feel it is a terrible situation that has nothing to do with us and it wasn't Christ the one who was driven out of his home.

To a foreign land but that is different, don't think so. So there is this Christ this great God, this God who comes and goes and faces the darkness of the cross and the forsakenness of the cross because He loved you and because He loves me and because He wants us to be protected and able by faith to overcome and know a future with Him where evil is destroyed and taken.

And that is the gospel and that is where we always must channel our doubts and fears about the goodness of God and about the reality of suffering in the lives of people because on the cross He suffered like nobody has ever suffered.

God enters a black hole of suffering and we mustn't minimise the cross. He does so voluntarily because our plight was moving.

You know, this is God just so different from Satan saying, I am committed to this people. Our plight moves him to act on our behalf because we couldn't make ourselves right with God.

[26 : 56] I am serious, I am being alliterative again. He was a victim on the cross in our place and he was victorious.

Evil is defeated so that his promises are that suffering while remaining is turned on its head and will one day end.

Evil has been trumped by good and he has won the victory. Now I am not saying, I am not minimising people's suffering and people's pain but what I am saying is that there is, we can hold on to Jesus Christ through it and he promises to take us through it.

Therefore our faith is educated by the revelation that God gives us of himself. Our faith like jobs comes from God and it is strong, it can resist as it did here, the strongest opposition from Satan and as we serve him we can know his empowerment and his forgiveness and his grace and his purpose but we do need as Christians to be plugged into Christ, so important for us to be reliant and dependent and learning of Jesus Christ, praying to him, not just as individuals but as people, as a community, as a church, in the engine room.

There were people who are just pouring out this transformed reality because of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 39] So we will go on and look a great deal at this book and some of the issues that are involved and seek by God's grace to know him and love him better but I do crave your prayers.

I asked for them last week and I do pray for them, I ask for them, throughout this series it is great truth but it needs God's wisdom and God's grace both in preaching and in hearing it and responding to it in our lives.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God we ask and pray that you would bless our time together, bless our time around your word, bless worship and fellowship, bless the baptism which we now look forward to and remember as we pray as we deal with these weighty issues but issues we hope we can take with us into every day that can mean something, that can transform our dark experiences even though we might not be taken from them.

They give us great tremendous sympathy and empathy for those who we know and love who are struggling with opposition, with depression, with difficulty, with struggles and may we know your blessing as a people seeking to uphold and care for one another and I pray Lord God that you would help us to learn that your Holy Spirit would fill us, would guide us, would teach us and would inspire us to worship you, not just here together but in every moment of every day that we live, living sacrifices for we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.