

Job's Last Defense **Job 29-31**

Last week we saw the full range of Job's emotions as he cursed his three friends and also spoke of the importance of finding true wisdom from God. This week, in chapters 29-31, Job continues his emotional roller coaster as he struggles to understand why he is experiencing such difficulty. He fondly remembers his days before his recent loss and compares them to the troubles he experiences today. To Job, none of this makes sense as he views himself as being treated as a wicked man, which he is not. He agrees with some of his friends' views that the wicked are punished by God, but Job also believes there must be more to it than that as he seems to be experiencing some type of punishment even though he is not wicked. That is the root of Job's frustration and confusion. Job closes out his lengthy speech in chapter 31 by mounting one more defense that appears to be aimed at both his three friends and even more so at God.

Ch. 29 – The Good Ole Days

I. When I Was Blessed

Job begins chapter 29 by looking back fondly on the past. He is tired of the predicament he is in and longs for better days. "Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me."

Job is essentially saying here, I miss the good ole days – back when God watched over me. He goes on to say that was a time in my life when God felt near, he lit my path as we were in close communion. This is a direct contrast to how Job feels presently. It is as if God is far away. Job certainly misses the benefits of his previous life but we must also note that he misses communion with God.

He goes on to lament that prior to Job chapter 1 & 2, he was in his prime. He was productive. We all long to be useful and productive and Job is saying he was that once – just not today. God was around him (this seems to infer that his productivity was a result of God's favor) and Job even laments that during those days his children were around. Job still feels the sting of the loss of his children, that is something that he will carry with him forever. If you know anyone that has lost a child, it's not a situation you ever can fully shake. That is the predicament Job is in.

In those days, Job was prosperous – things were good (reference to butter and oil/fat). When he went out into the town square – the place of business – he had standing, influence, and authority. He meant something – now he means nothing (He will speak of this shortly).

Back in these days people would listen to Job – nobody would question him. It is clear that Job is comparing those days with what he has experienced recently with his three friends and one can assume the many who have passed by.

The importance of these verses is not their complete accuracy. There is no doubt that Job had it better prior to the events of Job 1 & 2 but it is also possible that Job is embellishing a bit here. We are all guilty of that. It's similar to a fish story. The further away you get from the day you caught the fish, the bigger the fish gets. Similarly, the more difficult Job's days become, the more appealing the days of old appear. What these verses do tell us is how Job feels – he is hurt, confused, and frustrated. There is no doubt about that.

II. Why I Was Blessed

I don't want to put words into Job's mouth or apply the wrong context to his speech but the end of chapter 29 appears dangerously close to a declaration from Job as to why he was blessed.

Job clearly states that when his actions were seen and known and when the words he spoke were heard, he was blessed and called blessed... BECAUSE is the key word

Notice all the I's as well from Job

- I delivered the poor who cried for help and the fatherless who had no help
- I put on righteousness like clothes
- I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame
- I was a father to the needy
- I even helped those I didn't know (I wasn't just helping my friends)
- I even dealt with the unrighteous

Job is definitely trying to work through his own frustration and confusion but this appears to be another pushback against his friends as well. Remember he was accused of oppressing others and yet here he declares he did exactly the opposite. He was a friend to the poor and needy. Job is equating all of these actions with the reason of his blessed life. I did these things and therefore God blessed me. This belief (rather selfish and contractual) has only led to his confusion and frustration.

He goes on to say that he truly believed he would enjoy his blessed life forever. He compares himself with a tree by water (Psalm 1?) His roots stretch deep which led to flourishing. The dew on all of his branches imply prosperity in everything he touched.

Again, notice "my roots" and "my glory"

In verse 30 he circles back around to the idea that men used to listen to him and genuinely seek his counsel – they didn't talk back. He is clearly frustrated with the way he has been treated by his supposed friends.

Where have those days gone? Now where is my comfort?

Ch. 30 – The Difficulty of Today

I. From Worthy to Worthless

Unlike his fond view of the past, Job despises his current situation. He reminisces of how all, both young and old, would seek his wisdom and listen to his words and yet now they laugh at him. Specifically Job mentions those that are younger than him. It's easy for us to miss the significance here because our culture operates in so many ways counter to the culture of this day. The culture of Job's day placed a high importance on respect and honor. For a young person to show disrespect towards an elder would have been highly controversial and strongly frowned upon and yet that is the situation Job finds himself in. We struggle to grasp the magnitude of what Job is saying because in our day and age it is commonplace for young people to disrespect those older than them.

Job adds weight to this charge by essentially declaring that the fathers of these young individuals were worthless. So much so that Job would not have hired them for even the most meaningless task. This is another greater to lesser argument from Job. If the fathers are worthless, how much more worthless are their children and yet they are the ones mocking me. Not only do they mock me, but they even spit in my face! They have no restraint – AND WHY? – because God has allowed it. (Can you sense the confusion? Why would God allow such?)

None of this makes sense to me. Not only am I being mocked in a most offensive way but my soul, body, and mind are in anguish. No part of me is at peace!

II. Weighted Down By God's Hand

It is almost as if God is choking me (v.18) and He has thrown me in the mud (v.19). I am the lowest of the low because of Him. Job is saying that God has abandoned him and is ignoring him. *As a side note, these words seem to on some level support the argument of Eliphaz in chapter 22.

Job feels as though God is going to kill him. He can't see a different outcome. He is convinced this is his fate and what he cannot understand is why God would kick a man when he is down. Why won't God relent at all? In verse 25, Job claims that this is not the way he has treated those in a similar situation to his and yet as he hopes for good, all God sends is more darkness and difficulty. Job is begging for mercy but he isn't getting it. Job doesn't feel life could get worse. The instruments that he previously used to rejoice and praise God are now only used for mourning.

The summation of his argument here is that his life is unbearably hard and it has become clear that God is against him. Job doesn't understand why this would be the case and so he will present his defense one final time.

Ch. 31 – The Final Defense

What we have in chapter 31 is Job's final defense of himself. In previous chapters, Job has shown his belief in the power and sovereignty of God and yet here we still see that Job desires a direct correlation between his actions and how he perceives God to be treating him.

I. Job's Character and Integrity

Throughout this chapter Job is going to point to his own character and integrity. In other words, he is going to list all of the good things he has done and evil he has avoided. In the first few verses, Job declares that he has made a covenant with his eyes. Simply put, Job didn't lust after women. He committed himself to a life of purity in that regard and declares that he has been faithful to it. Later in the chapter, he makes it clear that he has not only lusted after other women – a sin of the heart, but he also has avoided any impropriety or adultery – a sin of action.

Next he declares that he isn't a liar or one who practices deceit. He has treated others fairly. He speaks of his servants and states that he has treated them honorably and with justice. Even if they brought complaints against him he listened and acted in a manner that was right.

Job also states that he has treated the poor very well. Remember this was one of the accusations that his friends made against him, that he built his estate off the backs of others by taking advantage of them. Job counters this by saying he has taken care of the poor, the widows, and the fatherless. He provided clothing and food. He went out of his way to meet the needs of the less fortunate.

Job was known as a very wealthy man and yet he argues that he didn't trust in his wealth or hold it over others. It wasn't a status symbol to him. He didn't flaunt it. In addition, he didn't wish evil or disaster on those who opposed him. It's common knowledge that those who are well off and successful naturally have enemies – Job fit that bill and yet he did not rejoice when those enemies encountered difficulty.

All of these character traits and actions are noble and valuable. They are good things and Job is confused because he has lived them all out and yet he still feels as though God is against him. He is being treated like the wicked when he is anything but.

II. If-Then

This entire chapter is built on the foundation of an If-Then structure. In a sense, Job is very confident in his character, integrity, and the life that he has lived. In some sense, he is putting God to the test almost as if he is asking – Do you really know me?

Essentially Job is saying:

- If I have lusted after women God, feel free to take it out on me
- If I have walked in falsehood, weigh me accordingly
- If I have fallen off the righteous path, let me reap what I have sowed
- If I have committed adultery, let my wife take several men
- If I have not been fair and just, then how can I ask you to be fair and just
- If I have withheld from the poor and less fortunate, then let me be harmed
- If I have put my confidence in wealth, then I have lied to God
- If I have taken advantage of the land, then let thorns grow instead of wheat

Job is saying, IF I have done these things, then let these things happen to me – BUT I haven't. Don't you know me?

Even in the areas where I have fallen short, I have not concealed my sin. That is what wicked men do. That is what Adam did in the garden. When he sinned against God, he hid. Job declares that confessed his sin before God, even when it cost him something in regards to other people. He wasn't afraid of the multitudes and what they thought – He wanted to make sure he was in right standing before God.

But where has that gotten him???

III. Challenging God

All of these words appear as a challenge to God. If we go back to verse 4, Job asks the question, “does not he see my ways and number all my steps?” Perhaps this is a rhetorical question but on some level Job feels as though God is mistaken.

He feels as though he is being punished by God and he doesn't know why. It just doesn't make sense to him. Even his recent actions seem like lunacy because here Job is defending himself but from what? He hasn't even been charged with anything yet – at least not from God.

That is what Job says in verse 35:

- Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Hear me God)
- Oh, that I had an indictment written by my adversary (Why am I being punished, what's my charge?)

As we have heard before, Job is confident in his innocence. If God would hear him, he is confident in his success. Job would give God an account of all of his steps and approach him like a prince (confidently) because he is sure of his innocence.

The problem is that Job sees God as his adversary – that is how he references God in verse 35. It is not God that is his adversary but Satan. He isn't being punished by God. While that is true Job doesn't know it and his perception of the events that have taken place are what causes him to be frustrated.

Personal Implications

- 1. It is unwise to long for the “good ole days.”**

Ecclesiastes 7:10 tells us that it is not wise to look on the past as though it was better than the present. The author of Ecclesiastes tells us that this is born from an impatient spirit that leads to angry. It is a proud position and that is what we see with Job to some degree – I deserve better.

It is also true that often the “good ole days” had just as much difficulty as the present day – even if it was better for you. Again, this points to a prideful and selfish position that limits what God is doing in the present. I’m certainly not trying to make light of Job’s calamity because he dealt with some very difficult things. However, God was working through them and to navigate them selfishly discounts God’s purposes and often misses the opportunity to grow. Trials often produce character and equip a man for what is to come. In times of difficulty we should not dwell on the perceived better days of the past but instead should be on the lookout for the lesson that God is providing and the way in which he is equipping us for the days ahead.

2. God’s purpose is always greater than my purpose

As a follower of Christ, his purpose must be greater than mine. John 3:30. When we focus inwardly, we begin to limit the ways that God will move through us. Not because He is incapable but because a selfish disposition refuses the things of God. Galatians 2:20 – Not me anymore, but Christ that lives in me. Job is in a tough spot because he doesn’t know the purpose of God in what he is experiencing. Often, we can find ourselves in that same situation. The problem is found not in our failure to understand God’s purpose but in our failure to trust that He has one. When we do that, our desires and our purposes begin to take precedent.

3. We must train ourselves to see with a heavenly perspective

4. Obedience as a form of worship

Job’s primary argument parallels the argument that we have seen from his three friends. The righteous are blessed and the wicked receive judgement. Job argues that he is righteous and thus the suffering that he perceives as punishment from God is unwarranted. In chapter 29 alone, we see several “I statements” that essentially convey the message – I did all of these good things and as a result, I am due something better. If we found ourselves in a similar situation, we would most certainly want to defend ourselves just as Job has. I don’t want to be too harsh on Job but his words should on some level cause us to pause and reflect about the condition of our own heart.

Why are we obedient or better yet, why do we strive to be obedient to God?

John 14:15 – If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Not, if you keep my commandments, I will love you.

James tells us that good works are the evidence of true faith but they don’t guarantee an easy life full of material blessing. To some degree, that appears to be Job’s argument – Are not my good deeds worth something? They absolutely are – they are an act of worship to our God who gives us what we don’t deserve. We must not allow our thought process to become twisted. We don’t act in order to be blessed, we act in order to bless the one who has already blessed us with salvation that is far greater than any material blessing or earthly comfort that we are after. Our obedience is a form of worship and we reorient our hearts to see it as such.