I have three housekeeping items.

This is the last Sunday of Epiphany and so we conclude our series on Job. Next week is Transfiguration Sunday and then the following Sunday is the beginning of Lent.

We also are rejoicing because Pastor Jimmy, Gennifer, Gabby, Natalee, Paityn, Liam and Chloe are now here with us in Victoria. Welcome to your new home, we can’t wait to see you but we are all following the guidelines for quarantine. You will begin to see Jimmy in our online service and he will be preaching to us soon once the dust settles for them.

Also, I won’t be talking about the narrative conclusion of chapter 42 today, the restoration of Job’s fortunes. But tonight in the Chat with Pastor Dave we will explore and discuss what that seemingly Deuteronomistic dénouement has to teach us. See the link on our website vicnazarene.ca to join us at 7:00 if you are interested in that discussion.

What can a Christian Learn from Job? – thus, the title of my message today, Job for Christians

You will have noticed perhaps that we haven’t been talking about Job through a Christian lens in particular. Of the several cardinal principles of Bible reading we have been practicing in this study, the first is that we are readers. Does that seem too obvious to say? But in my number one problem in 15 years of teaching *Introduction to the Bible* to college and university students, was that most of them had never actually read the Bible. I mean really read it – I call this *rereading Job.* As though you had never seen this page before. And when you do the text comes alive in the hearts of a new generation of believers. I make people read the Bible.***[[1]](#endnote-1)***

‘Quarry the texts, behold the riches!,’ as someone once said.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The second cardinal principle is that we must always read a book with the first reader in mind. That is, we are to understand the text in its context, historical, theological, cultural. Once we posses a command of the meaning of the text in its own right, then all aspects of our interpretation are based on that. That keeps us anchored in its true meaning and protects us from nutty, self-reinforcing interpretations of the Bible.

What is so remarkable about Job is that the questions the first readers were asking, the ‘why’ of suffering, the doubts we have about the way God is running the world, the inadequacy of pat answers to see us through life’s complexity - these are the same ones we are asking today! Isn’t that amazing? That teaches us something about human nature. The really important questions of life don’t change.

As Samuel Johnson once observed, and this could well be applied to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar: “…the heartlessness which comes from the conviction that the problems of pain, death and evil can be dealt with by arguments.”

So we have read the Old Testament to hear its own voice, and now we can proceed to Christian interpretations of Old Testament.

As one author points out, for Christians to stop at a reading without incorporating their faith in the risen Christ into the process is like leaving out the last act of the play, like reading the first three acts of Hamlet as though acts four and five had never been written. Or consider, when you watch a murder mystery the second time you know all the characters already, and you know the ending. How it changes and deepens your awareness of the plot! [[3]](#endnote-3)

This morning we are going to look at Job 42:1-6 and then allow ourselves to pose the question how the wisdom of the book of Job can produce new deeper insights into the Christian faith as well.

What does a Christian take from reading Job? Well, the same thing that the Jewish reader did, or that anybody who reads the book, even the non-Christian or non-religionist, will.

What Job teaches us is that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, that is, that the tremendous mystery of God in our consciousness leads us to the sense of sacredness of God, the necessity of humility in His presence and the corresponding imperatives of moral conduct that the Presence places on us.

As we consider all this from a Christian position, as those who have received the promise of faith through the Messiah Jesus, we will find some new encouragements to faith. Tennyson once said something that I think really applies to the book of Job:

"The different moods of sorrow as in a drama are dramatically given, and my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of love."***[[4]](#endnote-4)*** Tennyson

**In the Text**

The first words from the whirlwind were

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? (38: 1)

Job, in his response to God, quotes him; ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ (42:3a) Notice that it is in single quote marks, indicating direct discourse of God. To me this resonates with Psalm 119:105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Response: Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. (42:3c)

There it is again, those three things the fear of the Lord inspires: Humility. The sense of sacred. The sense of moral responsibility. These necessary personal and communal values for living with this great God of creation.

Then, quoting God again, ‘Hear and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.’ (42:4)

Job replies:

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (42:5-6)

What does the Christian learn from Job on this topic? I have two things for us here. Repentance and suffering.

The first issue to explore is repentance….for Job it is redemption through repentance.

Certainly, the notion of repentance is one which connects with the deep tissue of the New Testament. Job repents. Peter repents. Zacchaeus repents. The sinful woman repents. The woman at the well repents. The prodigal son repents.

The first thing Jesus says in the gospel is, Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mark 1:14). Acts 10:43 says in its summation of the Christian gospel (the Gospel Standing on One Foot), All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:34)

So, firstly, we see the continuity between repentance of Job and, say, the repentance of Peter, etc.

As a sidebar, Biblical repentance is based on Lev 6:1-7 (cf Num 5:5-7). Repentance/forgiveness in the biblical story has always been relatively straightforward matter, available at all times, in all dispensations, if these conditions are met:

* Confession, the existential component. Think about Job here. What happens in 42:6?
	+ Here humility, the sense of sacred, the sense of moral failure leads us to repentance. Just like Job!
* Restitution, the material component. Israelite religion was land-based and that is why restitution was central to repentance. But even Zacchaeus makes restitution (If I have cheated anybody I restore it fourfold). Forgiveness was a communal act of restoration. The point is, forgiveness isn’t just saying “I’m sorry.” It is about acting out our turn from sin.
* In OT but not NT, a cultic offering. There is no temple!

There is no difference between the repentance of Job and the repentance of Peter when he falls at Jesus’ feet (Luke 5:8; see also Lk 7:38; 15:21; 18:13; 19:8). Oh Lord, please leave me, I am a sinful man. (Luke 5:8)

The path to salvation has always been the same from the point of view of our anthropological experience, repentance is repentance. Turning from the wrong to the right. That never will change and it will never go out of style.

At the very end of this whole drama here is how it plays out: Now Job says… I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes… It is not self-hatred. The Bible has no place for that destructive emotion.

* New Living Translation: I take back everything I said
* The Message: I’m sorry—forgive me. I’ll never do that again, I promise!
* The NASB: Therefore I retract and repent!

The second issue for Christians is the meaning of suffering. Does our understanding of human suffering change in light of the life, death ad resurrection of Jesus? Job didn’t have that in his life.

But why do we suffer? There is the real issue that we bring and ask over and over. The book has offered us little in the way of a satisfactory explanation.[[5]](#endnote-5)

And yet, suffering is a major theme of the gospel.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31ff – ff means ‘and following verses’). We’ll treat this passage in the 16th week of Pentecost on September 12, so I promise to come back to this and give it the attention it deserves.

The risen Jesus said to the men on the road to Emmaus: Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”  (Luke 24:26; see also Acts 17:3) Perhaps you feel, as I do, the mystery that remains in the ‘why’ of suffering – the declaring of it without explaining why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer.[[6]](#endnote-6)

So let me talk about the suffering of Job and Jesus.

The early church saw the connection and Job was read during passion week.[[7]](#endnote-7)

They both are “innocent sufferers.” Of course, sometimes we suffer because we sin. We suffer because someone else sinned.

But sometimes we too are innocent sufferers[[8]](#endnote-8) – and I think this is where Job speaks to us. We suffer because the world is broken. We suffer because death takes loved ones. Because illness or tragedy overtakes us. It’s not our fault.

Job is our Old Testament exemplar of Christian holiness. He remains faithful to God in his pain.

Job’s suffering also serves the purpose of liberating himself from his arrogance. His suffering humbles him and so he makes his way to his epiphany of God. I think the point is that he would not have gotten there without his suffering. So at least one thing we can say is that suffering as Christians can also humble us and draw us close to God, stripped of our various faces we present, entirely dependent, entirely naked to the divine essence.

But neither we nor Job ***chose*** to suffer. Here is the difference with Jesus. He ***chose to suffer***. To redeem those bound under the law of sin and death, to set in process the mighty resurrection from the dead of which we now become participants.

And I ***think*** this is where we land in our Christian reading of Job. I just feel that anything I say can’t even begin to do justice to whatever we might finally take-away from this series. Still I struggle to see the wisdom of the Lord.

Christ is our example in his innocent suffering. Job is our example. And we like these two live out our faith in fidelity to God by suffering in faith in trust in Him.

We don’t walk in faith out of self interest, because of reward or punishment, but because our understanding of who God is, the “fear of the Lord,” that is, the very character of God evokes our loyalty. It’s ironic isn’t it? If you look at our faith through the lens of selfless devotion to God we don’t need an answer to the ‘why’ of suffering.

It is our wisdom which assures us that God is our all-in-all, that in these days of strain and suffering God is with us, keeping us safe. In God we trust.

It is fitting that we move now to the Lord’s Table where we can celebrate together our life in Christ and our hope in God.

Amen

1. If we do this we are able to construct a biblical theology in our hearts, rather that the oh-so-common method of using the Bible to reinforce what we already think. There can never be a revolution of the soul with that method, but round and round we go into ourselves. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Thanks Tony. Also, from Samuel Johnson: "'I do not mean to reproach this author for not knowing what is equally hidden from learning and from ignorance.  The shame is to impose words for ideas upon ourselves or others.  To imagine that we are going forward when we are only turning around.'" And also, “…the heartlessness which comes from the conviction that the problems of pain, death and evil can be dealt with by arguments.” [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Longman, *How to Read Job*, p. 148. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Tennyson wrote commenting on his poem Memoriam [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. There is, in fact, no mystery as to why Job suffers. It’s a wager. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This is how Paul presents his teaching on Christ to king Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea in Acts 26:23: “…that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

It is the book of Hebrews which attempts to explain the suffering of Jesus most clearly: …but we do see Jesus…now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Heb 2:9).

In Matthew 20:22-23 the mother of James and John comes to Jesus asking that her sons sit on his right and left hands: But Jesus answered by saying to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?” “Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!” Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup.  [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See Longman, *How to Read Job*, p. 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Those who suffer persecution for the faith are innocent sufferers. The NT also talks a great deal about the experience of persecution. Suffering for Jesus through persecution is the very first thing that happened to the first followers. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)