

“Restoration”

Based on Job 42:1-6, 10-17

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Today we come to the end of the book of Job and hear Job’s response to God’s response. It has been quite a journey for Job. Having lost so much and burdened with unimaginable suffering, Job has had to contend with three friends who tried to reason with him. But as each one made their case that surely Job had done something to deserve all this suffering, Job would argue back, making it clear that he had done nothing wrong. His responses to his friends were filled with angst, bitterness, sometimes with a tinge of despair. He cried out to God, demanding to be heard, to make his case, to even put God on trial.

Finally, God responds to Job’s cries and venting. But God doesn’t answer Job’s “why” questions. Instead, God details how God created everything that exists, and not just creates but sustains creation, from worlds to baby ravens. Rather than answering Job’s question of why God brought all this suffering on him, God reminds Job of who God is, the one who creates and sustains all life, including Job’s. Job still doesn’t know why he had to suffer so much. But it is made clear to Job how awesome, powerful, and providential that God is. God had not abandoned Job, but was there all along, knew everything that had happened to Job, and sustained Job even as he cried out in anger toward God. God’s grace and mercy bathed this whole terrible and traumatic experience of apparently random and unjust suffering.

So what is Job’s response? He finally has his audience with God. The One who Job was convinced had either made a mistake or who was capricious, uncaring, perhaps even cruel, the One who needed to be held accountable for what had been unleashed on Job, he finally has God’s

attention. Job now has his chance to tell God face to face what he really thinks of this whole situation. So what does Job say?

He starts by summing up his understanding of God's response. In a short and sweet summary, Job says, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job had gotten the message that God had a hand in making everything that exists in the universe. And further that God's creative activity was not done randomly, but that God did this in an ordered way, in which everything fits together. And God didn't just create everything just to set things up and then watch how everything works out. No, God's creativity was done with purpose, the purpose of demonstrating who God is, the one who cares for and provides for all that God has made. That God created anything at all, and maintains all that God has created, was done for the purpose of revealing who God is: creator, sustainer, restorer. That's what Job got out of God's response.

Job then takes the first two sentences of God's response and reacts to them. The first sentence is, "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" It's God basically telling Job, "You don't know what you're talking about." And Job admits as much, saying that he did utter things that he didn't understand. He talked about God without knowing the whole picture. The ways of God are too wonderful, too complex, for Job or any of us to fully comprehend. That is, after all, why God is God. Aspects of God will always be a mystery to us. And Job acknowledges his presumption, of thinking he understood God when he didn't.

The second sentence God spoke was, "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me." It was God telling Job, "Now it's my turn to talk. I have some questions for you and I want you to answer them." Then, as we know, God's barrage of rhetorical questions communicated to Job just how awesome, powerful, and providential God is, that everything in creation has God's fingerprints on it, that God

knows what is going on, and that God acts to provide for all that exists. Job's response is that he has heard what God was saying. But not only has Job heard God, he now sees God in a different light. His understanding of God, his perspective, has been broadened. He doesn't only know about God, he *knows* God in a deep way. Their relationship has been established because God has graciously revealed a bit of Godself to Job so that now Job more clearly sees who God is. And this new understanding, this broader perspective, prompts Job to confess his repentance.

In both of his responses, Job is basically saying that he admits to his prior ignorance. After this experience of God, Job revealed his character by humbling himself. He was willing to admit that he had made a mistake, that he didn't know everything about God. Having gained a new perspective about God, he had the capacity to repent, to leave behind his old beliefs about God and to embrace a new understanding, not based on what others have told him, but by his own direct experience of God.

Perhaps most of all, Job came to terms with the fact that, at least for now, he isn't going to get all his questions answered. Why God allowed such suffering to pour down on Job will remain a mystery for him. But even though Job's questions aren't going to be answered, he now knows deep in his heart that God cares for him and provides for him. Even when he was crying out against God and railing against God, God still cared for him and sustained him in his grief. God never abandoned him. For whatever reason, whether God was complicit or not, Job knows that God cares about him and about every little part of all of creation.

And so now, with this response of humble confession from Job, his confession of a deeper knowing of God, a deeper and stronger relationship with God, then God responds. God does not respond with

words. No, God responds by doing what God does, which is restoration. How does God do it?

The restoration of Job doesn't just fall from the sky or rise up from the ground. It didn't just magically appear. We are told that Job's family and friends started coming around. They had a banquet for Job. They consoled him in his suffering. They gave him money and rings, restoring his fortune. Apparently Job's relationship with his wife was restored because Job received more sons and daughters. In time he was able to build back up his livestock. He got his health back, able to live to a ripe old age, long enough to see his great-great-grandchildren. So God restored Job's fortune through his family, his friends, his wife, and his own efforts. With the co-operation of so many people, God restored Job. He was better off than he was when his great suffering began.

So what are we to make of Job's story? What are the lessons? I suppose there are many lessons, depending on how you understand this book. It's a complicated book. We have only been exposed to a few snippets. If you dig down deep into the speeches of Job and his friends, there are a lot of issues that are brought up. All through this book, Job is challenging the standard views of his day about God, justice, the linkage of sinfulness and suffering, and more. The big question of why bad things happen to good people runs throughout the book. But, of course, that's the "why" question that God doesn't answer. So what can we take from this story that we can apply to our lives today? I have thought of three takeaways.

I think one lesson we can take is that our perspectives are limited in comparison to God's perspective. I know that sounds obvious, but we sometimes forget obvious things. We forget how broad and deep God's perspective is. God is everywhere in the universe. God is present and aware of everything that happens, everywhere, every second, from right here to the farthest reaches of the universe. Our minds literally cannot

conceive how vast God's awareness is. I believe that God not only knows everything that is happening all the time, but God also knows every possible future happening. God knows everything that can be known. And with that kind of knowing, God's perspective is total and clear, without confusion. And this is good news for us. Whatever happens to us, either good or bad, God knows about it, God knows what might happen next, and God, through the Spirit, is trying to influence each of us to respond in the best possible way. I guess what I'm trying to say is, we don't know the whole picture, or why things happen, or what might happen in the future, but God does and God is always at work to influence the best possible response in every situation.

Another takeaway from Job is that even in times of great loss, God is with us. When we are faced with the reality that there is so much of our life that we cannot control, God sustains us. That's maybe the biggest lesson Job learned and it's a lesson that we can hold on to. It is this lesson that keeps our chins up, that empowers us to keep moving forward instead of collapsing into despair or bitterness. It is claiming this lesson that helps us be resilient when life is hard. With God, we can get through anything. That's good news.

Finally, a lesson we can take from Job is that healing and restoration can come to us when we stop trying to figure things out and instead submit to the mysteries of life. We have to make peace with the fact that there are a lot of things that happen to us that we will never understand why it happened. We will not know the reasons for everything that happens in this life. Why did he die and not me? Why am I suffering from muscular dystrophy? Why does someone get in his head that sending pipe bombs in the mail to political enemies is ok? Why does a white man, a U.S. citizen, feel so threatened by Jews that he can go into a synagogue and open fire? These are questions we will not get answers to. And even if we did, how does that help? The pain is still

there. The suffering, the brokenness, the sorrow and grief, it doesn't go away. But God doesn't go away either. God is still in relationship with us, still providing for us, sustaining life. For that we can be grateful. And we can be grateful for those people in our lives who can be with us like God is with us...no matter what. In times of suffering, loss, tragedy and grief, we don't need answers. We need friends. Are you suffering today? Please know that you are not alone. God is with you. And you have friends who will stand with you. Do you know someone who is suffering today? How can you let them know that you are there for them and will stick with them no matter what?