

Job - An Introduction

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[0 : 00] Friends, I want to introduce you to a certain man. We will call him Alfred. Alfred is a Christian man.

He's a stalwart of a Christian congregation. A well-known man, he's about 40 years old. In his working life, he's an entrepreneur. He's succeeded in his business, he's made money, and he's done well.

And while other entrepreneurs are being found out for crooked business dealings and for misaligned alliances, and so on, nothing can be found out about Alfred. He has a reputation, you see, for honesty and integrity.

Now, he's also well-respected in the broader general community. He's well-known and respected in the business world. He's known to be a Christian of conviction. Everyone in the local church looks up to him.

He's godly, honest, generous, faithful. He's got a solid family life. His kids are Christians. They're well-involved in Christian activities. He's a man who has sacrificed financially, has given sacrificially and financially to many good Christian and gospel causes.

[1 : 09] He's constantly and anonymously helped out the poorer members of his congregation. He's an elder in the church, a Bible study group leader, an occasional preacher. In the church that he's in, many young men and women have chosen him as a model of Christian living.

And discipleship. And then the crunch comes. The bottom falls out of his key market area. Interest rates rise. The stock market crashes. His kids are killed in a small plane crash on the way home from Central Australia.

He contracts AIDS. He can't himself work out how it's happened, but he suspects it was while he was in Africa, helping out at a hospital a few years ago. Others are sure that it was contracted in some other way.

In any case, the church begins to ostracize him and his wife. His wife suspects he's been unfaithful or worse. And she herself finds it hard to continue being Christian in the face of criticism within the church.

Finally, she gives up her faith and tells him to do similarly. Then his business partner leaves the business. And when he does, Alfred finds out he's actually embezzled the company on his way.

[2 : 22] He's forced to sell everything that is Alfred is, even the family home. And within 12 months, he finds himself penniless and in hospital. He still tries to read his Bible and pray, but he finds the whole experience barren and frustrating.

He's convinced, you see, that God has deserted him. Finally, the minister turns up with a few of the church leaders. They talk to him about presentries for the first little while of the conversation.

Then the conversation turns to his relationship with God. And they accuse him of being homosexual. They charge him with being financially corrupt. And they explain to him that what has happened to him is the judgment of God upon his sin.

He's to acknowledge his wrongdoing. He's to repent. And until he does so, no member of the church will be allowed to have contact with him. Now, friends, in my mind, this imagined story of Alfred is a contemporary equivalent of the situation that is portrayed in the book of Job.

And the question posed by the book is this. How would you feel if it was you in this situation? How would you react?

[3 : 37] What would you do? Well, in the next few weeks, we're going to have a look at the book of Job. It's a long book. We're just taking three weeks or so to do it. This week, I'm going to introduce you to the book and give you an overview of it.

In the subsequent weeks, I'm going to look at two specific passages within the book. This week, I need to tell you, is the heaviest of the three, even though it's not a long sermon. It's just a meaty. It's got lots to do.

This week, I'm going to just take you all the way through the book, as I said, telling you its main themes and drawing out some applications for our day. Because it's pretty heavy going, I do suggest you take notes.

And they're often a way of helpfully cementing things, taking you back to remember things later on. Cements in the mind what I've said engages in different learning styles and so on.

It's just generally helpful to take notes. If you've never got into the habit, you might like to start. Anyway, that's why I give you outlines every week. Let's get down to work, though. Have your Bibles open at the book of Job with me.

[4 : 40] Easy to find. You open your Bible in the middle. That'll take you to about the book of Psalms. And then you flip back a book and you get to the book of Job. The book of Job is a book from a certain breed of scholars within the Old Testament, within ancient Israel.

These scholars are generally called wise men. Although, if you read the Old Testament, you'll find that there are lots of wise women mentioned as well. But we'll call them the wise ones then. This group of people who had a particular interest in this thing called wisdom.

Now, these wise ones had a few premises, if you like, undergirding principles. The first one of those is that God is the creator of the world.

They believe that that fact must undergird all of life. Life must operate within the boundaries of this fact. The concept of God as creator and the one who undergirds all of life could be summed up in a little saying that they had.

And this saying was this. The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord. That's the first premise of wisdom. The Lord is the creator. And a wise approach to life is to live life in fear of him, in reverence of him, in respect of him.

[5 : 51] That's premise number one. Premise number two is that the fear of the Lord must infiltrate all of life. That is, it must flow down into every corner of your existence, must affect everything.

Practical, everyday skills. For example, the way that you think and act in your relationships, the way you rear your children, the way you live with your spouse and or your parents. It must filter down into the way you think about the intellectual dilemmas of life that are thrown against your belief in God.

Everything must be subsumed under the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord, you see, has to infiltrate every element of life and change it. That's the second premise of the wise ones of the Old Testament.

Third premise flows from the other two. The third premise of the wise ones is that the sensible and godly life, sorry, the sensible and successful life is the godly life.

See, follow the logic. God's the creator of the world. He created the world to function in a particular way. If we live the way that God ordained for the world to be lived in, we'll be successful in life.

[7 : 04] If we live another way, well, we'll fail because it won't be in sync with the way God created the world and the way God works in his world. Again, this could be summed up in another little saying, which goes like this.

What a person sows, that shall they reap. What a person sows, that shall they reap. So if a person lives rightly before God, does good, does God's good, God will reward them.

If a person lives wrongly before God, does God's bad, God will punish them. Sounds very neat, doesn't it? All systematic.

All a sort of clear way to approach life. All very neat. All makes sense. And many of us, I think, subscribe to this, at least in principle. That's why when we watch movies and we find the bad guys winning, it leaves an awful taste in our mouths or a sinking feeling in our stomachs, doesn't it?

I remember watching a movie that ended that way and I walked out of the movie theatre feeling awful because things ought not to be like that. The good should triumph and evil should be punished.

[8 : 14] That's the way we think about things, isn't it? Those who sow good should reap good. Those who sow bad should reap bad. Most movies are structured around that, which is why the movies that don't end like that leave a lasting impression upon us.

However, there are some quite significant problems with that approach, aren't there? Think about it for a moment. Can you identify any of the problems? Well, the obvious ones, I think, are these. The first problem is there are some obvious exceptions to the rules, aren't there?

After all, a good, God-fearing life does not always end in success, blessing and happiness. Some of you will have experienced this. We all know examples of it, don't we?

And we even have sayings that echo that very thought, don't we? Only the good die young. You see, that's an enigma. It should not be the case.

We think that the good ought to last a long time. The second problem that we have is that there's a danger that that equation might be exploited or abused.

[9 : 19] There's a danger or risk that we'll see life with God as a commercial enterprise, isn't there? That is, God, I will sow good and you will give good. I won't sow evil, you won't give me evil.

I'll be good and God-fearing simply for a commercial reason, and that is, that God might be good for me. That is because I think it pays. Can you see the risk with that equation? And that's where I think the book of Job comes in.

You see, Job was a living proof that the life of wisdom, the life of fearing God, paid dividends. First, we hear from the narrator that he's righteous. Look at verse 1 of the book of Job.

In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. Expectation, everything will go well with him.

That endorsement, that character assessment of Job is endorsed by God in verse 8. Have a look. In verse 8, God says to Satan, have you considered my servant Job?

[10 : 24] There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. Third thing we notice is that such righteousness appears to bear fruit in a life of blessing.

Look at verses 1 to 3 again and follow them. In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. What's expectation? He'll do well. And look how well he does.

He had seven sons. Seven is a very good number in the Old Testament. A number of perfection, completion. He had three daughters, also a good number. And he owned 7,000 sheep, a good number.

3,000 camels, another good number. And 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, that represents 1,000 of sheep and herds, you know, flocks and herds and so on. That's a very good rounded number.

He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. He was doing very well. He had everything one might have expected in terms of blessing from God. A good life, a life fearing God had resulted in much blessing for Job.

[11 : 28] He was in a good place. Now, of course, the question is, why? Why was Job wise and God fearing? Was it simply because it paid?

That's where Satan comes in. The term Satan actually literally means an adversary or an opponent. And that's what's going on here, you see. The Satan or Satan comes as an adversary, an opponent to God and his ways, setting out, as it were, an alternative case.

And I want you to look at his reply, verses 9 to 11. He says, Does God, does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?

You have blessed the work of his hand so that his flocks and his herds are spread throughout the land. In other words, it's paid him to be godly. But now, stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face.

In other words, you bring him evil, he'll be away from you. He'll give you up. He'll not be godly any longer. You just test me and see.

[12 : 37] Can you hear his accusation? He's saying, Job's righteous because he knows that's the way of blessing. He's righteous for what he can get out of it. He's righteous for commercial reasons. It's a commercial relationship. He's done the expectations of that relationship.

He's getting the benefits of it. He's not interested in you, God, for your sake. He's interested in you for what he can get out of you. In my view, that's what the rest of the book is about.

That is what it's fundamentally about. Oh, it does raise other significant issues such as the rule of God, the problem of evil. But the book is fundamentally about this question. Who is right?

Is God right? That is, is Job interested in God for God's sake? Or is Satan right? Is Job interested in God for the sake of what he can get out of it?

That, I think, is the setting of the book and the theme of the book. Now, with that, the contest begins. And God agrees to let Satan test Job's mettle. In effect, he's saying something like the following.

[13 : 38] If Job is in it for commercial reasons, if he is in it for what he can get out of it, if he's righteous because it results in blessing, then, if I, God, withdraw my blessing, Job has every right to stop being righteous.

Or at least, that's the argument Satan, I think, is wanting God to put. And so, stage one begins. In verses one, verses 13 to 22, Job's life slowly begins to fall apart.

He loses his property. Actually, it's fairly quick in the end, isn't it? He loses his property in a series of business calamities. He loses his sons and his daughters as a result of another calamity.

Satan comes back to God in chapter 2, verses 1 to 5 and he's cynical. He claims that it's not a real test of Job's integrity yet. You see, Job's own being hasn't been touched.

He's lost some things. He's lost even family. But he's not been touched himself. Look at verses 4 and 5, chapter 2. Skin for skin, Satan replied.

[14 : 42] A man will give all he has for his own life. Very cynical, isn't he, Satan? But now you stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones and he will surely curse you to your face.

And God accedes to the challenge. He allows Satan to continue to act and Job himself is touched in himself. He loses his own health, verses 7 and 8.

His wife despairs, verse 9. And his friends, who I think assume that the commercial approach to relationship with God is the right one, they conclude that Job must have broken his side of the deal with God.

He must have sinned. They guess he must have sinned or acted wrongly and therefore God has withdrawn his goodness and blessing. Let me show you just one of them say these sorts of things.

Look at chapter 4, verses 7 to 8. Here is orthodox dogma. He says, consider now who, being innocent, has ever perished.

[15 : 51] Were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. Can you see what he's saying? He's saying, here's orthodox dogma.

You know, if you're innocent, you don't perish. If you're upright, you're not destroyed. If you do evil, you will be. Right? There's orthodox dogma. Implication is clear, you see.

Job is reaping evil. He must have ploughed it. And as the argument rages between Job and his friends, Job hangs on to his integrity and his uprightness.

He clings to God despite God's apparent withdrawal from him. Despite the fact that he can't actually access God, he clings to God. Now, let me just take a flying run through the rest of the book and hang in there with me as we see what happens.

Chapters 3 to 26 are three rounds of speeches between Job and his friends. The arguments of his friends go something like this. God protects and blesses the righteous.

[16 : 53] He isn't protecting and blessing you anymore, Job. Therefore, you aren't righteous. It's a good syllogism. You know, the theory, in theory, it ought to work. Now, at first, Job doesn't claim to be blameless, I need to say.

He merely claims that he's suffering, the suffering he's experienced is well out of proportion to any sin he might have committed. Later on, though, in his argument, the tone changes.

He rejects the whole argument of his friends. He says, look, the facts just don't fit your argument. He says, look, why don't you just, well, shut up, basically, and merely sympathize with what I'm going through.

Finally, Job says, what I really want is a personal audience with God. And he claims God has become his enemy. He's confident that if he could actually talk with God, confront God, then he, Job, would be cleared or at least find out what's going on.

Now, of course, in all of this, we know what's going on, but Job didn't. In all of this, though, Job never moves away from his confidence in God's goodness. He never gives up his absolute trust in God.

[18 : 01] His conclusion is that this can only be sorted out through a direct and personal encounter with God where God could sort it out. But God is inaccessible. He can't be got at, as it were.

And then we come to verse chapters 27 and 28. Job hands over his case to God in these chapters and he gives a meditation on the nature of wisdom. We're going to look at that next week so we won't go through that in detail today.

Chapters 29 to 37, we meet a new person we've not encountered before. His name is Elihu. It appears as though Elihu is a younger man who's been present throughout all the previous speeches but has not spoken, he's just been observing, which is a wise thing to be doing.

His speeches represent the final human comment before God speaks. And I need to say, he does say some things more than the previous speakers have said, but basically he too has no answer for Job.

Job will still need to sort it out directly with God. Then in chapters 28 to 41, God does what Job had requested. He comes to Job in personal encounter.

[19 : 12] He reveals himself in his majesty. He asserts himself in a display of almighty power. And it comes by, and he comes to Job in two speeches.

The implication of first speech is this. God's saying, look, I don't always work in a way that human beings can always understand.

And I don't always display everything to human beings. You human beings will not always know what factors are at work in my dealings with you.

You will often see the what happens, but you'll not know the why of it. And in chapter 40, Job responds, he's quite subdued. He confesses ignorance, but he does refuse to confess sin.

And then God speaks to him again. And the implication of the second speech is this. Job, you can't control the natural world, can you? Since you can't control the natural world, who do you think you are to make proclamations on the spiritual or the moral world?

[20 : 18] Why don't you leave that in the hands of someone who really is God? And you are not. The complexities of life are in the hands of God. You have come very close, Job, to provoking God.

This is my paraphrase. Stop before you go too far. Then we come to chapter 42, 1 to 6. Job responds to God's speech. And he's convinced, he realizes he's been out of his depth and acknowledges that.

Verse 6 indicates that God is in the right and that Job is in the wrong. And so Job needs to repent and he says he needs to do it and he does it. It's not that he did wrong and therefore suffered.

No, it's that in his suffering he spoke out against God and assumed prerogatives that belong not to him, Job, but to God alone. The point is clear. You see, what Job is saying in his final speech is you're in the right.

You're God, I'm not. Your justice is just. You're the creator. You're the only ruler of the world. And the final section comes in chapter 42, 7 to 17.

[21 : 25] The contest that began in chapter 1 is concluded. And God declares Job to be in the right. In other words, he, God, is in the right.

Job's friends and their friend, the Satan, are in the wrong. Job has experienced suffering in its extreme and persevered with God.

He's demonstrated, you see, that he serves God from a pure heart. He doesn't fear God and put his trust in God for commercial reasons. No, he doesn't love God for what he can get out of it.

He loves God for the sake of God himself. He clings to God when he's got nowhere else to go. He fears God and trusts God solely for who God is. Now, friends, there's my overview of the book.

What I'd like to do now is make just some very sketchy theological observations and reach a conclusion. So here we go. Here are some headings.

[22 : 26] First observation. This book makes clear that the presence of evil in our world cannot always be explained. We can't always diagnose it and say it's here for this reason.

We don't always know behind the scenes. We cannot tell. God knows. So it cannot always be explained. Two.

We therefore need to avoid coming up with, that's finite beings, we need to avoid coming up with simplistic solutions and making simplistic pronouncements about what God is or isn't doing in his dealings with individuals.

Do you hear that that's what the friends do? they've analysed it all. They've said this is what God's doing, that makes you in this position Job, and actually they're in the wrong. Friends, I hear Christians doing this all the time.

They're saying this has happened to you because of this. This has happened to you because of that. And they're making very often, they're making pronouncements about things that they may not know about.

[23 : 27] Third point, we need to recognise that God is not bound by our answers to life's enigmas. He alone knows all and He alone determines all.

Fourth, God alone is sovereign. He is closely in touch with His world, He's in control of His world, but He's not bound by it, He stands above it. And He stands above all the spiritual doers of evil as well.

Fifth, God can be trusted, even when everything seems to point against His trustworthiness. He alone is in control. He alone is trustworthy.

And sixth, Job's request and God's response is finally found in Jesus. Think about it for a moment. Let me explain. Job's request of God is come down.

Let's talk. Let's meet up. Let me see you directly. Let me encounter you directly. Why don't you come down and experience my lot, see what it's like for me?

[24 : 36] Well, friends, of course, that is what God has done in Jesus, isn't it? In Jesus, God has come and suffered as a man, the righteous for the unrighteous. He has experienced that ultimate enigma, the ultimate righteous man experiencing the worst of evil.

In Jesus, God joins us in our human situation. salvation. But by way of conclusion, I want to ask you to, along with me, do some thinking about yourself and your relationship with God.

You see, I wonder how some of us would fare if we were placed in Job's situation. If Satan were to front up to God and accuse us before God, he is still the accuser in the book of Revelation which speaks to us in our situation.

If he were to stand up in front of God and accuse us before God, if he were to say to God, look, I think Andrew Reid is merely interested in relating to you because of what he can get out of it.

Look at him. He loves you because he's scared of hell. He fears you because he wants to go to heaven. He likes you for the prestige it brings him.

[25 : 48] He worships you because of the gifts you bestow on him. He sticks with you because of the warm feeling of security. He's not interested in you, God, for your sake. He loves you because he's self interested.

He fears you because he knows that it works. He's exploiting you. He's using you. If Satan were to accuse me of that, how would I stand?

And if he were to accuse you of that, how would you stand? Friends, I want you to ask yourself this seriously. how would you stand up?

How do you measure up? Why are you here today? Why do you bother being Christian at all? Well, let me give you an illustration. I have a friend, and at the time I'm speaking about he was a wealthy friend.

And because he was wealthy, because he was generous, and because he loved giving to others, he lived in perpetual danger. The perpetual danger he lived in is that his friends would be his friends because he was wealthy, not because of him.

[27 : 01] His friends also, let me say, live in perpetual danger, don't they? They're in perpetual danger of loving him for what they can get out of him. The friend who's really a friend is a friend who is a friend for friendship's sake.

A friend who's really a friend is one who will continue to love whether gifts are given or not. And of this particular man, he in the end lost all his money, and he now lives with a friend who has given him a place in their household.

A friend who's really a friend, you see, is the one who goes out of their way even when there's nothing to get back. Goes out of their way to make contact with that person, who serves the other person, who's not waiting to be served, but is waiting to give.

Friends, let me say that there are many people who are not friends of God like Job was. That is, they're in it for what they can get out of it. Being a Christian is good.

It brings friendships. It brings spiritual highs. It at times makes you feel cozy and warm and secure. It promises you the warmth of heaven, not the heat of hell.

[28 : 20] It promises you security and happiness, which is what we all want, isn't it? But you can tell those people that are not real friends. You can tell by the fact that when things get tough, they bail out.

And as a pastor, I see it happening all the time. When things get tough, people say, I'm out of here. I don't say it in those words. Some do in those words, but some just drop out.

It's got two, when things go wrong, they blame God. When other relationships intrude, they choose them rather than relationship with God. When the same blessings can be gained more easily, they choose the easier way.

So let me ask you again today, what sort of friend of God are you? Are you in it for what you can get out of it? Do you love God for self-interest?

Or are you in it because you just love God? The disciples of Jesus, as others are leaving, Jesus says, are you going to? He says, and they say to him, where can we go?

[29 : 30] For you alone have the words of eternal life. It's not that they're saying because we can get back from you. They say there's nowhere else to go. Having met you, there's nowhere else to go.

You see, it's that sort of friend who'll be welcomed by Jesus on the last day. See, are you into being Christian for the sheer heck of just being related to God?

Because you cannot think of any other place to be, any other relationship to be in. It's that sort of friend that he'll welcome into his presence and shower with generosity, even though the person would just be happy to live in his presence forever.

Let's pray. Now, Father, we know that often we enter a relationship with you commercially or think about it commercially.

Father, we pray that you would then cause us to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Father, we gave up everything for us and who loves us with a love greater than any other love that shows us your love for us.

[30 : 45] For you sent him. Please help us to love you, Father. Help us to love you, whatever comes, even when we can't understand it. Father, we pray for our friends, particularly those who appear to have jettisoned faith in the Lord Jesus because it all got too hard.

please turn them back to your son, we pray. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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