

“I Put on Righteousness, and It Clothed Me” (Job 29–31)

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We’ve been looking at the story of a man who has experienced tremendous loss and suffering, a man named Job. Today, we look at his last speech. He will say a few more words before the book ends, but not many. This is his last discourse, his last testimony, his last defense.

Job has suffered much. He has lost his wealth and his ten children. He has lost his health. He has a skin condition that is so bad it might be fair to say he’s dying. And, worst of all, he senses that God has removed his blessing from his life. He feels like God is absent. And he feels like God is his enemy. So, he makes one last plea.

As we look at Job’s words, I want us to think about last words. What if you had one last speech to make in your life? What would your last words be? What would you want to say to others? What would you want to say to God? What would you say as you approach death?

And think beyond that: What last words would you want to be said about you? At your funeral, how would people speak about you? What would your eulogy be? How would people describe your way of life and what kind of person you were?

And think even beyond that: After we die, we will stand before our Creator and give an account for our lives. What will you say to God then? What will be your defense? Will you tell him you’ve lived a life that deserves his blessing? Will you tell him you’ve lived a good, meaningful life? What will your testimony be? What will be your last plea?

Those are always important questions. They’re ones that we should think about as we read this part of the book of Job.

If you haven’t been with us over the past several weeks, we’ve been looking at this ancient book of wisdom, the book of Job. As I said earlier, Job is a man who is suffering. Before he suffered, God had given him many things: great wealth, a good standing in his community, and a large family. Job worshiped God and feared him, which is to say he had a healthy respect for who God is. But something happened that Job didn’t know about: In the supernatural realm of heaven, God and Satan had a discussion. That may sound strange to non-Christians, but God has revealed that there is more to reality than meets the eye. Beyond the physical world is a realm of spiritual beings. There is God, the ultimate source of goodness, beauty, truth, and life. And there is a mysterious figure known as Satan, who is not God’s equal. He is not eternal. He

cannot create things out of nothing. But he is powerful and he is the source of evil actions like lies and murders.

Satan questioned whether Job actually worshiped God for right reasons. He assumed that Job only worshiped God because God had given Job good things. Satan said to God, take away those good things, and Job will curse you. So, God allowed Satan to afflict Job. All of Job's wealth was destroyed or stolen. And his ten children died. Then Job developed a painful and even deadly skin condition. His life was in ruins. But he did not curse God. He continued to worship God.

Then three men who were supposed to be Job's friends came to comfort him. They started off well. They simply sat with him in silence. But after Job started lamenting, wishing he had never been born, the friends tried to correct Job. They assumed that since Job was suffering, he must have done something wrong to deserve what he was experiencing. But they were wrong; Job wasn't suffering for some specific sin he had committed. Still, they pressed their case and made false accusations. They told him to repent and agree with God, and all would be well.

But Job knew he was innocent. He also knew God is in control of the whole situation. God, after all, is the sovereign Creator. Job had a hard time processing what was happening to him. Why was God attacking him? Why was God out to get him? Why was God now his *enemy*?

Job demanded an audience with God. He wanted God to explain himself. He knew that God was behind what was happening to him and he knew that his only hope was to have God vindicate him, to declare that he was in the right. That is what Job wanted, more than anything else. He didn't ask for God to return his wealth or to give him more children.

Today, I'm going to focus mostly on chapter 31. But we will quickly look at the content of chapters 29 and 30. So, let's begin.

In chapter 29, Job remembers what his life was like before everything turned bad. I'll read through the chapter. Most of it is self-explanatory. Before Job suffered, God's light shone on him. He was an elder in his city, a leader, a man whom people respected. When he spoke, they listened. He cared for the poor and the oppressed. He cared for the needy. He cared about justice. In short, Job lived a righteous life.

Let's read chapter 29:

¹ And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

² "Oh, that I were as in the months of old,

as in the days when God watched over me,
3 when his lamp shone upon my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness,
4 as I was in my prime,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent,
5 when the Almighty was yet with me,
when my children were all around me,
6 when my steps were washed with butter,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
7 When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
8 the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
9 the princes refrained from talking
and laid their hand on their mouth;
10 the voice of the nobles was hushed,
and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.
11 When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
and when the eye saw, it approved,
12 because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to help him.
13 The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
15 I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
16 I was a father to the needy,
and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
17 I broke the fangs of the unrighteous
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.
18 Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest,
and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
19 my roots spread out to the waters,
with the dew all night on my branches,
20 my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.'

21 "Men listened to me and waited
and kept silence for my counsel.
22 After I spoke they did not speak again,
and my word dropped upon them.
23 They waited for me as for the rain,
and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain.
24 I smiled on them when they had no confidence,
and the light of my face they did not cast down.
25 I chose their way and sat as chief,

and I lived like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners.¹

In short, Job had lived a good life. Though he is speaking these words about himself, these are the kind of words you would want to hear someone say about you at your funeral. Who wouldn't want to hear from others that you were a good person, a person who cared for others, a person whom others respected? Job was a father to the needy, and he even took up the case of people he didn't know (v. 16).

But things changed quickly after Job lost almost everything. Once Job was respected. And, in verse 4, Job even said that God was his friend.² Now, instead of being respected, Job is mocked. Instead of feeling like God is his friend, he feels like God is his enemy. Look at the first verse of chapter 30:

¹ “But now they laugh at me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.³

The dregs of society now mock Job, the man who once was at the top of the social ladder.

And then look at verses 9–11:

⁹ “And now I have become their song;
I am a byword to them.
¹⁰ They abhor me; they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.
¹¹ Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me,
they have cast off restraint in my presence.

Job is a hated man. And he holds God responsible. In verses 16–23, Job describes his pain and he says that God is treating him cruelly. Notice how in verse 20, he starts speaking directly to God.

Let's read those verses:

¹⁶ “And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
¹⁷ The night racks my bones,
and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
¹⁸ With great force my garment is disfigured;
it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Famously, Abraham is called a friend of God: 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23.

³ Compare Job 30 to Psalm 38 to see some interesting similarities.

- 19 God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
- 20 I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;
I stand, and you only look at me.
- 21 You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
- 22 You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
- 23 For I know that you will bring me to death
and to the house appointed for all living.

In a sense, this is nothing new. Job has lamented his position before. He has said such things about God before. But chapter 31 is somewhat new. In this chapter, Job basically says, “If I have done bad things, let me be cursed.” He then describes a number of sins that he is innocent of. Job is swearing an oath of innocence. He is saying, “If I’m guilty, I’ll pay for my crimes. But if I’m innocent, God needs to acquit me.”⁴

I want us to read through chapter 31 a few verses at a time. As we do that, I’ll point out the sin that Job claims to be innocent of and how that relates to what the rest of the Bible teaches. Let’s begin by reading the first four verses:

- 1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I gaze at a virgin?
- 2 What would be my portion from God above
and my heritage from the Almighty on high?
- 3 Is not calamity for the unrighteous,
and disaster for the workers of iniquity?
- 4 Does not he see my ways
and number all my steps?

Job claims to be innocent of lust. He says he made a covenant with his eyes. In other words, he made a promise not to look lustfully upon young women. In that way, Job obeyed the seventh commandment in the way that Jesus interpreted it. In Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount, he said this (Matt. 5:27–30):

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to

⁴ Compare this to Ps. 7:3–6; 137:5–6.

sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Jesus says that merely desiring to have sex with someone who is not your spouse is adultery. Lust is enough to damn someone. The problem isn't only the external action; the problem is rooted in a wrong desire. The problem that all of us have is that our desires are disordered, out of whack. Just because something feels natural doesn't mean it's the right course of action, or even the right desire.

That's why lust is one of the so-called "seven deadly sins." One Christian philosopher, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, says that they should be called "capital vices."⁵ Vices have to do with desires behind sinful actions. And "capital" refers to "the head." Vices like lust, envy, and greed are the head or source of our sinful actions. Job is so conscious of his own righteousness that he claims not to even have wrongful desires.

In the next few verses, Job claims that he is innocent of dishonesty. Let's read verses 5–8:

⁵ "If I have walked with falsehood
and my foot has hastened to deceit;
⁶ (Let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity!)
⁷ if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,
and if any spot has stuck to my hands,
⁸ then let me sow, and another eat,
and let what grows for me be rooted out.

Job claims not to have lived a life of falsehood and deceit. He claims that he is not greedy and that his hands are spotless. God can weigh his deeds. God knows Job's integrity. If Job is guilty, then let another profit from all his work.

Job has already claimed not to lust. But, to make his innocence explicit, he claims not to have committed adultery. Let's read verses 9–12:

⁹ "If my heart has been enticed toward a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,
¹⁰ then let my wife grind for another,
and let others bow down on her.
¹¹ For that would be a heinous crime;
that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges;

⁵ Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 33–36.

¹² for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon,
and it would burn to the root all my increase.

Job has not desired his neighbor's wife. He has not slept with a woman other than his wife. If he has, then his wife will work for another. "Grind" and "bow" are surely double-entendres. Job knows that adultery is "a heinous crime" that deserves "to be punished by the judges." He knows that adultery is like "a fire that consumes" (cf. Prov. 6:20–7:27).

Job also claims to be innocent of oppressing his servants. If he was cruel to them, he knows that they would have to answer to God. Look at verses 13–15:

¹³ "If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,
¹⁴ what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?
¹⁵ Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
And did not one fashion us in the womb?"

Job knows that God made both the wealthy and the poor. God made both the one who has servants and the servants themselves. Both are made in God's image, even from the womb. Verse 15 is one of those verses in the Bible (Ps. 139:13 is another) that show that the unborn are worthy of life and respect, because they are human beings. Job realizes that people made in God's image should not be oppressed, much less murdered.

Job also realizes that it's his duty to take care of the poor and needy. He swears that he has done that. Let's read verses 16–23:

¹⁶ "If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
¹⁷ or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the fatherless has not eaten of it
¹⁸ (for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father,
and from my mother's womb I guided the widow),
¹⁹ if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
or the needy without covering,
²⁰ if his body has not blessed me,
and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
²¹ if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
because I saw my help in the gate,
²² then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,
and let my arm be broken from its socket.
²³ For I was in terror of calamity from God,
and I could not have faced his majesty.

Job swears that he has not let the poor, the orphans, and the widows go hungry. He says this has been true throughout his life. He hasn't left people around him unclothed and cold. He hasn't oppressed orphans at the city gate, which was where cases were decided, even when he could have done that. If he's lying, Job says, then let his shoulder blade fall out and his arm be broken from his socket. The reason Job took care of the poor is because of his fear of God (v. 23). If Job wasn't merciful to the poor, God wouldn't be merciful to him.

Throughout the Bible, there are many commands to take care of widows, orphans, and the poor (Exod. 22:22–24; 23:6 Deut. 24:17–22; 27:19; James 1:27). That was true of Israel and it's true of the church. Truly righteous people care for the poor because they know that God cares for the poor. Consider Proverbs 14:31:

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker,
but he who is generous to the needy honors him.⁶

Not only did Job act righteously to the poor and needy, but he also worshiped rightly. He was not an idolater. He didn't worship money. Unlike many people in the ancient Near East, he didn't worship the sun and the moon. Look at verses 24–28.

24 “If I have made gold my trust
or called fine gold my confidence,
25 if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant
or because my hand had found much,
26 if I have looked at the sun when it shone,
or the moon moving in splendor,
27 and my heart has been secretly enticed,
and my mouth has kissed my hand,
28 this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges,
for I would have been false to God above.

Job didn't put his trust or confidence in his money.⁷ Money is often a god for people because it promises security, safety, and pleasure. But Job didn't trust his wealth. (And, since his wealth was taken from him, it didn't save him from his current predicament.) He also didn't worship the sun or moon. “He never *threw a kiss* to them as a sign of affection and devotion, a widespread pagan practice. Apparently Job is referring to the gesture in which one kissed his

⁶ See also Prov. 14:21; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13; 22:2; 29:7, 14.

⁷ “Resolutely Job disputes Eliphaz's insinuation that he has raised gold above God as his first love (22:24–25).” John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 418.

hand and threw the kiss to the heavenly bodies.”⁸ Job knew that worshiping false gods would mean he was not being true to the real God, the one who made us to worship him.

In the next several verses, Job claims that he didn’t take pleasure when tragedy struck others; he didn’t fail to show hospitality to travelers; and he didn’t hide his sins the way others do. Then he cries out again that he wants an answer from God. Let’s read verses 29–37:

29 “If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me,
or exulted when evil overtook him
30 (I have not let my mouth sin
by asking for his life with a curse),
31 if the men of my tent have not said,
‘Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?’
32 (the sojourner has not lodged in the street;
I have opened my doors to the traveler),
33 if I have concealed my transgressions as others do
by hiding my iniquity in my heart,
34 because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
and the contempt of families terrified me,
so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—
35 Oh, that I had one to hear me!
(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)
Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!
36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
I would bind it on me as a crown;
37 I would give him an account of all my steps;
like a prince I would approach him.

Job swears that he didn’t have *Schadenfreude*, which is taking joy in the misfortunes of his enemies. In other words, he didn’t hate others. Jesus likened hating others to murder. Again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Job has also not allowed travelers to go hungry or without a roof over their heads. He has not hidden his wrongdoing because of his fear of others.

⁸ Ibid., 419.

What we don't want to miss is that Job wants someone to hear him. He is ready to sign this testimony, declaring his innocence. And he wants God to answer him. He wants God, his "adversary," to write a verdict. The word that is translated here as "indictment" simply means "book" or "writing."⁹ It could also refer to an acquittal, a verdict of "not guilty." Job wishes God would issue a final verdict. In that event, he would carry it around on his shoulder, or wear it as a crown, so that everyone would know he is innocent or guilty. Job feels like he is put on trial without knowing the verdict. If only God would declare one way or the other where Job stands with him!

In the last few verses, Job again swears that he is innocent. If he is guilty, let him be cursed. Look at verses 38–40:

³⁸ "If my land has cried out against me
and its furrows have wept together,
³⁹ if I have eaten its yield without payment
and made its owners breathe their last,
⁴⁰ let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and foul weeds instead of barley."

The words of Job are ended.

Within the story of Job, the drama is heightened. Job swears up and down that he is innocent. He demands that God rule a verdict. The only way that the drama will be resolved is if God himself shows up and speaks. And, as we'll see, he does.

But for now, I want us to think about the kind of life Job lived. He was a righteous man. That doesn't mean he had never sinned. Even in this speech, we have a hint that he wasn't perfectly sinless. In 31:33, he says that he didn't conceal his transgressions. But, overall, he lived a remarkable life. His life demonstrated true righteousness: loving God and loving others with the right motivation. His innocence in terms of fighting against lust, sexual sin, and the oppression of the poor lines up with Jesus' own teachings. For all we know, Job obeyed the Ten Commandments as well as any mere mortal.¹⁰

If we were to take an honest assessment of our lives, how would we do? If we were to give one last speech, summing up our lives, would we affirm our righteousness, or would we have

⁹ סֵפֶר (*sēper*).

¹⁰ It seems that in this speech, Job claims to have obeyed the first, second, sixth (in terms of how Jesus interpreted it), seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments.

regrets? When you look back at your life, do you like what you see? If you're like me, you see a lot of failure. Perhaps you see more failure than success. (That's how I often feel.)

If someone were to give your eulogy today, and if that someone was an honest person, what would they say? Could they claim that you, like Job, cared for the needy? That you were just in all your dealings with others?

And, if you were to stand before God, who knows all your thoughts and deeds, what would you say? Would you brag about your own righteousness? Would you tell God he should be impressed with how many times you went to church, or how much money you gave, or how you're not like those other people, the "real" sinners?

The truth is that all of us will stand before God and give an account for our lives. The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:10, writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." So, in front of the all-knowing God, what would be your defense? How would you plead?

Now, for those who aren't yet Christians, they may find God's judgment to be very off-putting. Why can't a good God, a God of love, simply forgive without all that judgment stuff?

The reason why God must judge is because he is committed to his creation. In the beginning, God made a good creation, but sin entered into it and polluted it. God made the first human beings leave the section of his creation that was a garden paradise. But God wants to make the whole world a garden paradise. The problem is that he can't do that with sinful people like you and me in it. Even if we're not the worst of sinners, we still sin, and sin—the power of sin, our sinful desires, and our sinful deeds—corrupt God's world. God is patient with us for now, allowing evil in his world. But God's patience won't endure forever. There will be a time when he says, "Enough is enough!" and removes all evil from the world. And that would be bad news if we are punished for our own evil, our own failure to do good.

Let me explain it this way: Imagine you have a nice family in a nice home. You have peace. Everything is, well, pretty much perfect. And then your Uncle Joe calls and says he needs to crash at your place. Uncle Joe has always been a colorful character, but he's family and he's in need, so you let him stay. At first, things seem okay. Then some of Joe's little habits get a bit annoying. He makes a mess. He doesn't put the toilet paper on the toilet paper holder the correct way. That sort of stuff. But then things get a lot worse. You and the family go away for the

weekend, leaving Uncle Joe alone. When you come home, you find that he's had a wild party with his friends. Some of them are passed out on your beds and couches. When they finally leave, you realize that some of your things are missing. Then you find out that Joe has a bit of a drug problem. He's shooting heroin and then passes out, leaving his drugs and syringes in plain view of your children.

At some point, if things keep going that way, you're going to kick Uncle Joe out. It's not because you stopped loving him. It's because his ways not only damage him, but they're posing a threat to your family. And if you love your family, you can't tolerate it when people make them unsafe. You won't let someone do them harm.

According to the message of the Bible, we're all a bit like Uncle Joe. Our sin hurts us, it's true. And it causes a rift in our relationship to God. But it also hurts others. And God will only tolerate that for so long. God wants to restore the world to be perfect, but when that happens, he won't let in a bunch of sinners. Unless . . .

Unless there's a way for those sinners to be regarded as clean. Unless there's a way for those sinners to have their bad habits changed. Unless there's a way that Uncle Joe could become the prized son, and not the black sheep, of the family.

And that's what Jesus does for us. I think the book of Job is meant to point us toward Jesus, the true innocent sufferer. Job's righteousness is hard to imagine. He seems almost perfect. And perhaps his innocence is highlight to make us wonder how there could be such an innocent, righteous sufferer.

If we're honest, we can't claim a righteous life like Job's. If we look at Jesus' life, we *know* that we don't measure up to his standards. And if we read the Ten Commandments or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), or many other passages in the Bible, we realize that we have real problems. We don't do what is right. We often do what is wrong. And, worst of all, we simply ignore God. And if God is going to restore his good creation, that means we'll be left out of the party. Unless . . .

Unless we have someone who did live a perfectly righteous life be our advocate, our champion, and our substitute. If someone who is perfect could lend us his perfect status, then we'd look perfect in God's eyes. And if someone could pay for all the wrongdoing we've committed, then we would truly be innocent in God's eyes. The fact is that we are not righteous in and of ourselves. We need to be clothed in someone else's righteousness.

The good news is that is exactly what Jesus does for us. He is the only perfectly righteous person. He is the only person who has ever walked the earth who has never sinned, who has always done the right thing. He is the only one who can stand before God and swear that he is perfectly innocent. And he died for people like you and me. He died to pay the price for our wrongdoing. When we put our trust in him, our crimes are paid for, our debts are paid. And when we trust in Jesus, his righteousness is credited to us. His riches are considered ours.

If you're relying on yourself to stand before the perfect, holy God, the Creator and Ruler of all things, then you won't make it into the eternal paradise of the new creation. If you're trusting in your family, or your church background, or the fact that you're an American, you won't make it. But if you realize you have nothing to offer God other than your plea of "guilty," if you put your trust in Jesus and swear your allegiance to his kingdom, then you'll make it.

And we should all keep in mind that when we come to Jesus, he gives us the Holy Spirit. He starts to transform us from the inside out. We then start to live more righteous lives. We should desire to live rightly. We should obey what Jesus and his apostles command. We should do that out of thanksgiving, and out of a sense that the way of Jesus is the best, truest and most beautiful way to live. We should put off the old self and put on the new self (Col. 3:5–17).

But the reason we should do this is truly because the Son of God came and took our guilty indictment and bore it on his shoulder. It was bound to his head as a crown. If you trust Jesus and follow him, then he has already cancelled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14).