

“The LORD Restored the Fortunes of Job” (Job 42:7–17)

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I love it when Easter comes later in the year, because it feels more like spring. Actually, I don't think we *really* get to the heart of spring until May, but even now, we can see that new life is breaking forth. And that's very appropriate for Easter. Spring means newness of life. After a long winter of bare tree branches, when everything seems dead and bleak, spring breaks forth. Perhaps this is a sign that God implanted within nature to show that life after death is possible.

The great hope of Christianity is eternal life, life after death. There is resurrection, renewal, and restoration. Though the world is broken now, Christianity says that one day God will fix it. God will restore everything that was lost. God will repair everything that was broken. God will resurrect everyone that is dead.

Some people think Christianity is all about going to heaven when you die. That's partly true. But it's misleading. Christianity really teaches that, in the end, God will restore the earth. And Christians will live forever in a real, material world, much like this one but only perfect. We won't be like angels, floating on clouds. We will enjoy physical life in a physical world with physical beauties and pleasure. We'll have rewarding work to do. We'll feast. We'll celebrate.

Before I move on, I want you to think about something for a moment. What would a perfect world look like to you? What would you be doing? Who would be there with you? What would they be doing? What would your idea of paradise look like?

That's something to think about, because Christianity promises us that paradise waits for those who trust Jesus. And Jesus' resurrection promises us that God is able and willing to restore his creation.

Usually, when it's Easter, I would preach a more straightforward message on Jesus' resurrection. But today, I want to do something a bit different. I think it's helpful to consider the resurrection from a different perspective. Sometimes, the story of Easter is so familiar that we don't think about it much anymore. Or, the basic facts of the story are told, but we don't understand how the resurrection fits into the big story of the Bible, and therefore we lose its meaning and significance. If you don't know the story of the resurrection, you can go to a webpage I created. You'll find the link in the article that's inserted into the bulletin. It's

wbcommunity.org/resurrection-resources. But today, I'm going to take a bit of a gamble and do something a little different.

Here's what I want to do today. First, I'm going to finish one story of loss and restoration that we've been looking at over the last two months. Second, I will connect that story to the Bible's larger story of loss and restoration. I'll show how the key to that story is Jesus. And, third, I'll show why we need Jesus.

Over the last two months, we've been looking at a book of the Bible found in the Old Testament. It's called Job, which is the name of a man. Let me tell you his story. We don't know exactly when he lived, but it was probably sometime between 3,500 and 4,000 years ago. He lived somewhere in the Middle East, east of Israel, probably near Edom, in modern-day Jordan. What's important for us is that Job was a man who worshiped God. He had a proper respect for God and God had blessed Job. Job was a wealthy man and he had a large family. Life for Job was nearly perfect.

Early in the story of Job, the audience is shown a scene in heaven, something that Job couldn't see. In that scene, God speaks to Satan. Now, if you're not a Christian, talk of God and Satan may seem odd. But the Bible tells us that there is more to reality than what we see. In fact, what we see on earth is often the result of what happens in the unseen supernatural realm. We believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer of everything, and he is omnipresent, but we also believe we can't see him. Yet we see clues of God everywhere. God is the source of life, light, love, beauty, and order in the world. The existence of God therefore accounts for things that are important to us: the existence of an objective moral law, which is based on God's character; the idea of human rights, which comes from the Christian teaching that all human beings are made in God's image and therefore are valuable; the idea of love; the idea that the world is an orderly place created by a supreme intelligence, which means that we can engage in science to discover order in the world. The existence of God makes sense of our greatest values and hopes.

We also believe in a supernatural evil being, the devil, called Satan, who is opposed to God though he is not God's equal. God is uncreated, but Satan is a creation. He is the source of rebellion, chaos, confusion, lies, and murder. I think the existence of Satan best explains why there can be terrible evils in the world like genocidal dictators and child abusers. But the existence of Satan and evil is a bit of a mystery. The Bible tells Satan exists, but doesn't tell us

why God would create him. And the Bible says a bit about how evil entered the world, but it doesn't answer all our questions.

So, we have this scene in heaven, in which God and Satan talk. Why Satan is in heaven talking to God, we don't know. But God says to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8). Satan says, more or less, "Job only worships you because you have given him good things. Take those good things away and he'll curse you." So, God says, "Take them away, just don't touch Job."

In the next scene, back on earth, we find out that natural disasters and thieves have taken away all of Job's livestock, which was his wealth. Raiders have killed most of his servants. And a natural disaster has killed all ten of his children.

This is devastating. This is more loss than we can imagine. How does Job respond? Does he do what Satan said he would? Does he curse God? No. He mourns, of course, but he also worships. He says that "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

We then are presented with another scene in heaven. Again, God asks Satan if he has considered Job, his servant, for he has no one like him. Satan says, more or less, "Job didn't curse you yet because it was his own skin on the line. If he suffered pain in his body, then he would curse you." So, God says, "Okay, do what you want to Job. Just don't kill him."

Back on earth, we find out that Job develops a terrible skin condition. He has boils covering his body. His skin turns black. He is physically falling apart. Does Job now curse God? Was Satan right? No. Job doesn't curse God. He says it would be wrong to accept only what we perceive to be good from God. We also need to accept bad things, because God has his reasons for doing what he does.

Then, three of Job's friends come from a distance to comfort him. They sit with him in silence for a week.

But then Job bursts out in a painful lament. He curses the day of his birth. He wishes he had never been born. He thinks death is better than life.

His three friends try to help him, or correct him. Since they don't know why these bad things have happened to Job, they assume that Job has done something wrong to deserve what

happened. They wrongly assume that since he's suffering, he must have sinned in some way. But we, the readers, know that's not true.

Job knows it's not true, because he knows he hasn't done anything wrong to deserve such suffering. He maintains his innocence. He refutes his friends. But he also thinks God is his enemy. He understands that God is in control of everything, yet he can't imagine why God is attacking him. He demands to talk to God, to have God show up and declare his innocence.

After several rounds of speeches, which take up most of the book, God finally does show up. But he doesn't give Job a reason for his suffering. Instead, by asking a series of rhetorical questions, God reassures Job that he, God, is in control of everything in the universe, including things that are powerful, frightening, and evil. God is in control over death and Satan, though it's clear we're not. God shows to Job that he is infinitely wise and powerful. And God doesn't rebuke Job for questioning his character. He doesn't condemn Job. In fact, God gives Job his greatest gift. God gives Job his presence. He reassures Job.

And that brings us to the very end of the book. Today, we're going to read the last eleven verses of the book, Job 42:7–17. To help us understand this passage, "the LORD" is God, and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are Job's three friends who came to comfort him but ended up accusing him of doing something wrong. Here is the passage:

⁷ After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

¹² And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers.

¹⁶ And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, an old man, and full of days.¹

Now, let me explain some key points of this passage. First, we see that God rebukes Job's friends. They were wrong. They wrongfully accused Job. But God allows Job to intercede for his friends. Job acts as a priest.² He sacrifices animals for them, to atone for their sins, and he prays for them. One of the key concepts in Christianity is that God is a perfect judge who must punish evil. But God graciously allows a sacrifice to be made in place of the sinner, so that the sin can be punished without that sinner being punished. So, Job makes sacrifices for his friends. He prays on their behalf.

Second, we see that God restores Job. We're not told explicitly that God healed his skin condition, but I think it's safe to assume that he did. God also doubled Job's wealth. He doubled the number of animals he had, and wealth in those days was often measured in livestock. God also gave Job 140 more years. It's hard to imagine someone living that long. Clearly, this is abnormal. Elsewhere in the Bible, it is said that a typical lifespan is often seventy years, or eighty if one is blessed (Ps. 90:10). So, Job's lifespan is essentially doubled. Also, he has ten more children, another seven sons and three daughters to replace the ones he lost. Of course, the children who died can't really be replaced. But if what the Bible says about eternal life is true, then the first ten children didn't cease to exist. From what we can glean from this book, they likely had faith in the one true God and therefore they have eternal life. So, Job ends up getting ten more children, which actually doubles the total number of children he has.

Third, we also see that Job's daughters gain an inheritance. This may not seem remarkable, but in the law of Israel, which most likely came sometime after this event, daughters could only inherit land if there were no male heirs (Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–13).

Fourth, I just want to make a note on something that the text says. In verse 11, we're told that Job was comforted "for all the evil that the LORD had brought up on him." The word translated as "evil" could be translated also as "injury" or "distress." The book of Job teaches that God is in control, and that nothing can happen in this world without his deciding it or, at the least, allowing it. But there's a bit of mystery. We don't know why God would allow every

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

² Job had earlier acted as a priest for his children (Job 1:5).

single distressing event to occur in the world. But we do know that it is ultimately for good reasons.

Fifth (and finally), we see that Job is reconciled not only with his friends but also with his brothers and sisters and everyone else who had known him before. We have no idea where Job's brothers and sisters were when Job was suffering. Perhaps this illustrates the truth that people often avoid those who are suffering. But we do see that they came to Job, comforted him, and gave him gifts. They also ate with him.

Now, what in the world does this have to do with the larger story of the Bible and the resurrection? Well, consider the basic plot of Job. It started with a man who was blessed, a man who was righteous. It seems as though things were almost, though not quite perfect. Likewise, the Bible begins with God creating a good world that he blessed. There was a time when the world wasn't full of evil.

Job's downfall occurs when Satan shows up and wreaks havoc. Again, Satan's origin is mysterious. Why is he talking to God in heaven? Why does God allow him to do anything? Why did God create him in the first place? But the same can be said about the beginning of the Bible. The world becomes broken—though not completely ruined—when Satan creates confusion, when he lies. It's all a bit mysterious, but the effects of Satan's work, as well as the sin of the first human beings, were devastating. We call this event the fall.

In the story of Job, there is an expectation that God himself must show up to make things right. And he appears and speaks. The same is true of the biblical story. If God's creation is going to be fixed, God himself must come. And that's what he did in the person of Jesus. God--—specifically God the Son—became a human being. He lived a perfectly righteous life, and he revealed more of who God is through his teachings.

Job wasn't completely perfect and sinless, but he was relatively righteous and he suffered for reasons other than his sin. Jesus is the truly righteous, sinless suffering servant. And just as Job offered a sacrifice for his friends, so did Jesus. But in his case, he offered himself as a sacrifice. That's what we remembered on Good Friday. This is redemption, when Jesus paid the price for our sins. Like Job, Jesus also prays for his friends.

And at the end of the story of Job, there is restoration. Job's fortunes are restored. He receives back what he lost.

At the end of the story of the Bible, which hasn't occurred yet in history, Jesus will return to make everything right. Everything will be restored. He will remake the world into a paradise. He'll fix everything that was broken. It will be a great feast, a giant celebration, and the nations will bring their wealth to God, just as Job's family and friends brought him gifts. All God's children, men and women from all different countries, will receive an inheritance.

So, the story of Job and his restoration is a picture of the larger story of the Bible. Job's restoration foreshadows the end-time restoration of the world, which we are still looking forward to. Obviously, we still live in a broken world. Why hasn't God recreated the world yet?

Well, to recreate the world, God has to remove all evil from it. We have to ask ourselves, what would happen if God removed all evil? What would that look like? Where would we be?

To have a sense of how the world should be fixed, and why God hasn't fixed it yet, we need to think about what's wrong with the world. What really is broken?

Earlier, I asked you to think about a perfect world and what that would look like. Did you do that? If you could ask God for a perfect world, what would you ask for?

Recently, I read that Augustine supposedly said the following in a sermon some sixteen hundred years ago. I couldn't find the original source, so maybe it wasn't Augustine who said it. It really doesn't matter.

Augustine supposes that God proposed to you a deal and said, "I will give you anything you want. You can possess the whole world. Nothing will be impossible for you. You will have infinite power. Nothing will be a sin, nothing forbidden. You will never die, never have pain, never have anything you do not want and always have anything you do want—except for just one thing: you will never see my face." Would you take that deal? If not, you have the pure love of God. For look what you just did: you gave up the world, and more—all possible worlds, all imagined worlds, all desired worlds—just for God." Augustine asks, "Did a chill arise in your heart when you heard the words 'you will never see my face'?" That chill is the most precious thing in you; that is the pure love of God.³

Would you take that deal? Would you take a world without pain and death, a world of great pleasure, or would you choose God? The reality is you can't have that world without God, so this is just a hypothetical test of the heart. But it's telling. If you had to make a choice, would you choose infinite wealth or God? If you had to choose, would you choose perfect comfort or God? In our natural state, we don't have that pure love of God.

³ Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 94–95.

In the world that we would create, there is no room for God. Oh, maybe there's a little room. Maybe you'd let him have his own house somewhere. But that's not giving God his due. God should be at the center of this perfect world. Everything should revolve around God the way our planet revolves around the sun. That is because God is the greatest being. There is no one better, more beautiful, more powerful, wiser, more knowledgeable, more loving, and more perfect than God. There really is no comparison. But our problem is we tend to ignore God. We think he is someone we can turn to when we're in a bind but neglect when we're feeling good. We think we can use and manipulate God. But that won't do. And that is why we're evil. We're what's wrong with the world.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking: "What do you mean I'm evil?" You may think, "I'm not that bad. In fact, I'm a good person."

There's a great illustration that by a pastor and author, Tim Keller, that I would like to read. This is what he says:

Imagine a widow has a son she raises and puts through good schools and a good university at great sacrifice to herself, for she is a woman of very slender means. And as she's raising him she says, "Son, I want you to live a good life. I want you to always tell the truth, always work hard, and care for the poor." And after the young man graduates from college he goes off into his career and life—and never speaks to his mother or spends time with her. Oh, he may send her a card on her birthday, but he never phones or visits. What if you asked him about his relationship with his mother, and he responded: "No, I don't have anything to do with her personally. But I always tell the truth, work hard, and care for the poor. I've lived a good life—that's all that matters, isn't it?"

I doubt you would be satisfied with that answer. It is not enough for the man to merely live a moral life as his mother desired without having any kind of relationship with her. His behavior is condemnable because in fact she gave him all he has. More than just a moral life, he owes her his love and loyalty.

And if there is a God, you owe him literally everything. If there is a God, you owe him far more than a morally decent life. He deserves to be at the center of your life. Even if you are a good person but you are not letting God be God to you, you are . . . guilty of sin. . . . You are being your own savior and lord.⁴

As I said, we often ignore God. Though he has given us life, and though we exist to know him, love him, worship him, and serve him, we take him for granted. That is wrong. And because

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life's Biggest Questions* (New York: Dutton, 2013), 36–37.

we do this, the world is cracked. We fight, we argue, we're selfish, we're greedy. Things are not the way they ought to be.

And that puts us in a bind. If God is going to fix the world, he has to remove all evil. If we're evil, God would have to remove us. Is there a way for God to remove the evil from us without removing us?

That's where Jesus comes in. Jesus lived the perfect life that we don't. He always put his relationship with God the Father first. He was never selfish. Yet he died as a criminal. He was literally regarded as sin (2 Cor. 5:21), so that when he died, God could destroy sin without destroying all sinners. And if you have a right relationship with Jesus, your evil has already been punished. And God has given you the Holy Spirit to start changing you from the inside out, to start replacing evil desires with good ones.

I want to look very briefly at one chapter in the New Testament. That's Romans 8. Here are the first two verses:

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

The main point is that those are united to Jesus, who love him and trust him and obey him (even though imperfectly), will not be condemned. They are freed from guilt and sin and death. And God has given the Holy Spirit to Christians to help them focus on the things of God and not on themselves.

In verse 11, we read:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

If you are really a Christian, if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you, then you will one day have a resurrection like Jesus had. Jesus didn't just die to pay for sin. After being sealed in a tomb for a couple of days, he rose in a body that can never die again. If you are united to Jesus, you will die (unless Jesus returns soon). But one day, you will have an indestructible, immortal body.

In verses 18–21, we read:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The whole creation was put under a curse when the first human beings rebelled against God. God then put a partial punishment on the world, one which keeps us from completely destroying the world and ourselves. The world is groaning to be set free from this state of futility and bondage. And one day, it will be.

That's what Jesus' resurrection promises. If God can raise his Son from the dead in a body that can never die, God can raise all his children in bodies that can never die. And if God can do that, God can renew and restore the world. Jesus' resurrection is the first installment of a new creation. In a sense, the world itself is going to be resurrected. But that can only happen because Jesus took on the sin of all who find shelter in him. If Jesus didn't come, no one could be reconciled to God. No one would be credited with his perfect life. No one would have their sins punished without being removed from God's creation. There would be no one in the new creation except God, and what would the point of that be? God doesn't need the world, but we need God.

Here is the very, very good news of Christianity. In verses 31–34, we read:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

If God is for us, who can be against us? If God has given us his own unique, beloved Son, how will he not give us all things? Jesus incarnation, death, and resurrection show that God is for us. And these things show that one day God will fix everything.

There's a great line toward the end of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In the last book, *The Return of the King*, Sam says to Gandalf, "Gandalf? I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue?"⁵ If you've seen the movies or read

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (New York: Ballantine, 1965), 255.

the books, you know that Gandalf, the wizard, had his own death and resurrection. And when the Ring is destroyed, so is Sauron, who is much like Satan. It's interesting that in the story, Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn and the others form the Fellowship of the Ring at a place called Rivendell. They leave on their mission to destroy the Ring on December 25 and the Ring and Sauron are destroyed on March 25, which was a date used long ago for Easter.⁶ For Jesus, his mission started on Christmas and he secured a victory on Easter. We look forward to his return when all things will be made new and when everything sad will come untrue. In that day, all who have trusted in Jesus will begin to live with God in a perfect world, one which is hard to imagine completely. This gives us great hope. Christians will have a restoration far greater than Job's, and it will last forever.

In closing, I want us to see that the resurrection changes everything. It shows that there is life after death, and that one day God will restore the world. It means that this life isn't everything. This life matters, but there is a life to come. And the only way to be part of that perfect world, where everything sad comes untrue, is to be united to Jesus. We do that by acknowledging that he's God and we're not, that he is perfect and we're not, that he is the Savior and we're in need of salvation. There's a lot more to it, but that's a start.

Some of you will shrug your shoulders and forget everything I've said. You may think it's a nice story, but not *the* true story of the world. I urge you to inspect the evidence. I have found that most people who reject Christianity hardly know anything about it, even when they think they do. This is a matter of life or death—eternal life or death. I would die for this truth. That's how much it matters. There's simply too much at stake not to investigate—and investigate seriously—the claims of Christianity. Next week, I'm going to talk more about the claims of the apostle John. He writes that he and others saw, heard, and touched Jesus, who is truly God and truly man. Come back to find out why we can believe this is the truth. Read the insert in your bulletin. Study the Bible. Talk to Christians.

Some of you will say, "Oh, I believe all that." But then you'll go and live like most everyone else lives. You won't live as if God is the center of your life. And you won't be part of a church. Jesus says that the way you treat the church is the way you treat him (Matt. 25:31–46; Acts 9:1–4). If you're not part of a church, contributing to the mission of making Christ known, making disciples, and encouraging and serving your brothers and sisters, I have to wonder if you

⁶ Ibid., "Appendix B," 426, 428.

are part of the body of Christ. It's hard to obey Jesus apart from being a part of a local church. There's no such thing as a fair-weather, casual fan of Jesus. You are either a follower or not. Truly knowing God is more than just knowing facts about him. It means having a real, abiding relationship with him. Perhaps today is the day for you to examine yourself to see if you really trust Jesus.

For those of us who already know Jesus and are following him, I trust that this message brings us great hope. We look forward to the day when all things have been restored, when we gain everything valuable that has been lost, when all diseases are cured, when all pain is eased, when all tears are wiped away, when death itself dies. We look forward to seeing God, whom we don't see now. We look forward to being in his direct presence. We don't have to choose between God and paradise. If we focus on God, we get paradise thrown in. But if we focus on paradise and forget God, we will get neither.

Let's turn our eyes to the one true God. Let's be thankful for the gift of resurrection. Let's let this great hope shape the way that we live now and forever.