

Job's Repentance: Job 40-42
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This morning we're going to talk mainly about Job's repentance, and I want to start by asking you a question. When you evaluate your own life, can you see anything wrong with yourself? By what standard do you evaluate yourself? Our tendency is to think of ourselves far better than we actually are. We want to think of ourselves as good and righteous. We might point to certain things we've done to help others, or ways in which we've demonstrated love toward those around us. We may point out that we haven't committed any major crimes. We're good, law-abiding citizens. We work hard at our jobs. We try to do the right thing. We're basically good people, right? Wrong.

We're not good people. At least, we're not naturally good. If there's any good in us, it's not from us but from God. By His grace, He produces good spiritual fruit in our lives. But apart from His grace, as human beings who are descendants of Adam, we are wicked sinners. This is what we are by nature. We are rebels. Just as Adam and Eve disobeyed God, it is now our natural inclination to run away from God and disobey Him and seek to make ourselves god rather than submitting to Him. We sin in so many ways—some subtle, some blatant.

What makes the problem even worse is our reluctance to acknowledge our sin. One of the ways that sin is so deceptive in our lives is by whispering to us that we're not very sinful. The sins of self-righteousness and pride blind us from seeing our self-righteousness and pride. We assume we are perfectly justified in what we do, what we think, what we feel. Maybe we'll admit minor shortcomings, but we're blind to the deep and damning sinfulness within our hearts.

This is especially true of those who do not know Christ. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian—you're not a follower of Christ—then you need to know what the Bible says about our sin. The Apostle Paul writes in the New Testament book of Romans that "None is righteous, o, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12). The Bible also teaches that the just punishment for sin is eternity in hell. That's how serious our sin is. That's the punishment that we deserve.

Therefore we cannot treat sin lightly. God doesn't! God does not treat sin lightly. The cross is where we see the seriousness with which God dealt with sin. God did not simply look the other way when He saw our sin. He did not sweep our sin

under the rug and forget about it. He did not minimize the gravity of our sin in any way. To do so would be unjust. It would be like the rapist going free without any penalty simply because the judge was feeling gracious that day. It would be unjust. Rather, God upheld His justice by sending His own Son to receive the penalty for sin. On the cross, the wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus Christ. And for all those who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus, their sin is forgiven. This is the wonderful news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I want us to come to a deeper understanding of this glorious Gospel this morning by coming to a deeper understanding of repentance. God certainly takes sin very seriously. We must take sin seriously as well. To do so requires true, biblical repentance. What we've seen already in the book of Job is how suffering reveals our sin. God uses suffering in our lives to reveal our sin to us. In Job's life, it was not sin in his life that brought on the suffering. That's what the three friends assumed, but Job relentlessly defended his own integrity. But in the process of defending himself, the sin of pride and self-righteousness became evident in the things he was saying about God. Job was so concerned to clear his own name that he was beginning to impugn God's Name. He had questioned God. He sought to put God in the dock.

Finally, though, God speaks to Job in the whirlwind. As we saw last week, God demonstrates how big He is and how small Job is, and Job responds in 40:4-5 by saying, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." This morning we'll look at the Lord's second speech to Job, which begins in 40:6 and goes through the end of chapter 41, and we'll observe Job's repentance in 42:1-6. We'll spend almost all of our time considering Job's repentance, which was the result of what the Lord said to him. But I'll first say a few things about what the Lord said.

Speech #2 from the Whirlwind

God launches into a second speech here in 40:6, and we may wonder why this was necessary? Was Job not sufficiently humbled by the first speech? Apparently God thinks that further humbling is needed in Job's heart to bring him finally to repentance. So God begins another lengthy interrogation. As in the first speech, there are again many rhetorical questions that are powerful and convicting, coming from the very mouth of God. Chapter 40:6-14 contain some very strong words.

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you

make it known to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? “Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.”

In the Lord’s first speech, and in the verses following these in the second speech, God emphasizes the point that He is the sovereign Creator and sustainer of the whole universe. He is the One who laid the foundation of the earth and controls the sea and the clouds and the sun and the animals and the birds. God is so big that all of these things are under His control. And Job is so small in comparison. He does not have the power that God has.

The point the Lord makes in these verses is closely related. Not only is Job very small in comparison to God when it comes to the sphere of nature, he is also very small in comparison to God when it comes to the sphere of justice and morality. God alone is the Almighty judge. And God alone can save. God makes His point to Job by saying that if Job can do these, “Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you” (verse 14). Job has no right or authority or ability to judge or to save. Only God can do this, and therefore Job had no right to question God.

Next God describes two more creatures that demonstrate God’s creativity and power, and also demonstrate again how small Job is. They are the Behemoth and the Leviathan, and there is much speculation as to what exactly these are (or were). The behemoth is most commonly assumed to be the hippopotamus, or possibly the elephant. The leviathan is most commonly assumed to be the crocodile. It has also been argued that the behemoth could have been a dinosaur, with its tail that was like a cedar as it says in 40:17. Another line of interpretation takes these as mythical creatures that represent evil. The leviathan would be a kind of dragon, which would account for the description of it breathing fire in 41:18-21.¹

Whatever these creatures are, the point is clearly made again that God is a great and awesome God who made these animals and controls them, while Job has no power over them. Indeed, for Job or any of us, it would be a terrifying experience to come face to face with one of these creatures. As 41:8 says, “Lay your hand on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!”

¹ See Isaiah 27:1

In other words, if you live to tell to tell about it, you won't make the mistake again of disturbing a leviathan.

One more comment on these verses, and that is to point out that 41:11 is quoted by Paul at the end of Romans 11. God says to Job, "Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?" God is making the point, like He did in 40:6-14, that Job has no right to stand before God and argue his case. God doesn't owe Job anything. And Paul uses this statement in a powerful way to make the same point in the doxology at the end of the glorious chapters of Romans 9-11. Romans 11:35-36 says, "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." God is sovereign in salvation. And He gets all the glory, because He doesn't owe us anything. It is entirely by His grace that we are saved, and therefore it is entirely unto His glory.

Job's Repentance

I want to move on now to Job's repentance. There are two things I want us to observe about Job's repentance. First of all, we see that even those who are blameless and upright must repent. The very first verse of this book describes Job as a man who was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. And then God describes Job in the very same way as He pointed out this man for Satan's consideration. Look at this blameless and upright man. But that does not put Job beyond repentance. None of us are beyond repentance. We will never mature beyond repentance in this life. Our sinful nature will continue with us until we die, or until Christ returns, and until that point we will struggle with sin and therefore must continually repent of sin. No matter how long you've been walking with the Lord, no matter how much fruit God may be producing in your life, there is always going to be sin for which we must repent.

What will actually happen in our Christian walk is that the more we grow in grace, the more we will be aware of our sin. So if it's your thought this morning that you have progressed so far in the Christian life that repentance is no longer necessary, or seldom necessary, then you have not progressed nearly so far as you think. You might not even be a Christian at all, if you are not aware of sin in your life for which you must repent. As God reveals Himself to us, and we walk more closely with our Lord, we will more and more become painfully aware of the wickedness in our own hearts.

Seeing God and Seeing Our Sin

This leads to the second thing we must observe about Job's repentance, which is the relationship between seeing God and

seeing our sin. It's in the presence of God that Job finally sees his sin so clearly.

Job's response to the Lord in 42:1-6 is made up of Job's statements and quotations from what the Lord has said to him. In verse 2 he begins by acknowledging to God, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." At the end of the Lord's first speech Job felt very small and just wanted to be quiet. Here, in his response to the Lord's second speech to him, Job begins with a word of praise. The truth of God's words have truly impacted Job, and he praises God for His sovereignty.

Isn't this a glorious and comforting truth! God can do all things, and no purpose of His can be thwarted. We should praise God for His sovereignty, just as Job did here. Our God is an awesome God, a glorious God, the only true and living God. Nothing can stand against Him. Nothing can frustrate His plans. And this is comforting to us because we know that He is also good. He is a loving Father, and He is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). So in the midst of our suffering, as God reveals Himself to us and as our sin is revealed to us, we should praise God that He is a sovereign God. He has ordained these things for our good. He has plans and purposes for us that will not be thwarted. He will accomplish in us what He intends to accomplish in us. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Let's praise Him for these promises and take comfort in the truth of His absolute sovereignty.

In verse 3 Job quotes from the words God spoke to him earlier. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" That is how the Lord addressed Job in 38:2. And Job quotes these words basically to voice his agreement that what the Lord said was correct. Job had spoken without knowledge. He admits this clearly in the remainder of verse 3, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." As Job is humbled and repents, he comes to terms with exactly how he had sinned against God. He had limited God. He had arrogantly spoken of God in a disrespectful way. In his attempt to defend himself, Job had uttered things about God that he did not understand, things too wonderful for him, things that he did not know. Robert Alden, in his commentary says, "[Job] confessed that his God had been too small. He needed the theophany to remind him of the fact that the God of the universe

and the Creator of all creatures is greater, grander, higher, and wiser than a mortal can imagine, much less challenge.”²

In verse 4 Job again quotes from the words of the Lord, “Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.” God stated this question at the beginning of each speech. In 38:3 and 40:7, “Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.” Now, finally, Job responds to this request, and he does so in the only way that is appropriate—with profound repentance.

Look at verses 5-6. These may be the most important verses in the entire book, for they show the outcome of what God has been doing in Job’s life. God has revealed two very important things to Job. He has revealed Himself—who God is, how big God is, and holy and sovereign. And God has also revealed who Job is, how small he is, and ignorant and sinful. These are the two all-important truths that Job has learned, and that each of us must learn. Job has seen God and seen himself. First, he has seen God. Verse 5, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” There is a vast difference between hearing about God and seeing God. I fear that some of you have heard a lot of things about God, and yet you have never seen Him. You have listened to sermons and had discussions with friends and you think that you know who God is. But you have never really come to know Him. You have never truly seen Him for who He is. You have not seen His greatness and His glory and His holiness.

We can observe from this very text how to know if we have seen God or if we have merely heard about Him. Verse 6 gives us the answer. Job says that he now sees God, “therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” That, friends, is how we know if we truly see God and know Him. If genuine repentance is not present in your life, then maybe you’ve heard some things about God, but you have not yet seen Him. The eyes of your heart have not yet beheld the one true and living God of the Bible.

When we see God as He is, repentance will inevitably follow. There’s no way to stand in the presence of God and not see your sin. In the darkness of our own lives we may be able to conceal or ignore various sins, but in the blazing spotlight of God’s holiness every sin becomes visible. The Christian life, then, is a continual process of seeing more of God and seeing more of our sin, seeing more of who God is, and in the light of that having a more accurate understanding of our sinfulness. And therefore this process of sanctification will continually involve repentance.

Think of Isaiah’s vision of the Lord in Isaiah 6. He saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and he saw the

² Robert L. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), pg. 408.

seraphim who were calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And do you remember Isaiah’s response? He said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:1-5). You see, this is the inevitable response of being in the presence of God. This is what happens when we truly see God. We don’t say, “God, look at how great I am!” We say, “Woe is me! I’m so filthy. I’m unclean. I’m so small and weak. I despise myself.”

Let me ask you, have you come to the realization in your life that you are a sinner? Have you come to see that God is holy, that He hates sin? And in light of that reality have you come to see how despicable your sin is? I want to warn you, friends, if you are blind to the seriousness of your sin, you are probably blind to the true nature of God. It may be that you have never really seen God, but have only heard about Him.

What Is Repentance?

Job repents in dust and ashes. The dust and ashes are an outward display of the repentance that is happening in his heart. I want to ask at this point, what is repentance? We’ve seen some aspects of it here in this passage as Job acknowledges his faults before God and humbles himself before God and despises himself. When we look at the Bible as a whole, how would we define repentance?

A helpful place to go is the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, which is part of our church’s Statement of Faith. In the chapter on repentance it says, “This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavor, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things.” So repentance involves godly sorrow. We are deeply saddened by our own sin. We detest it. We hate it. We despise ourselves for our sin. And then repentance also involves turning away from sin, renouncing it, and pleading for God’s mercy to forgive our sin and to give us the grace to kill sin in our lives. We also see in this statement that repentance and faith go together. They always go together, because they are two aspects of the same thing. Repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus Christ are two sides of the same coin. Repentance is turning away from sin, and faith is turning toward Christ. Repentance and faith are two aspects of the same action. Thus, John Murray speaks of “penitent faith” and

“believing repentance.”³ As we come to hate our sin and mourn over it and realize the hell that we deserve for it, we look to our Savior Jesus Christ who died to absorb God’s wrath against our sin. And as we come to hate the deceptive lies of sin, we turn to Jesus and the sure promises of joy and peace that He holds out to us.

The next sentence in the Statement of Faith says this: “As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof, so it is every man’s duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly.” Two points here. First, repentance is a continual process. It’s not a one-time thing. It’s not something that happens once at the beginning of the Christian life. It *is* the Christian life. Penitent faith, believing repentance. This is what it means to be a Christian. To renounce sin and trust in Jesus Christ—this is the ongoing struggle of the believer in this life. Although we are now new creatures in Christ, we still have a sinful nature. Therefore we will struggle, and must struggle, against sin every day, every moment. And we must continually repent of our sin. 1 John 1:8-9 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Secondly, we must repent of our particular known sins particularly. We can’t just repent generally, admitting that we have sinned against God. More than that, we need to identify specific sins that come to light, and we need to humble ourselves before God and acknowledge how grievously we have rebelled against Him in these specific ways—how we have distrusted Him, dishonored Him, turned away from Him to cherish other things. What sins have you been intentionally overlooking in your life? Maybe there are sins of bitterness or anger, and you feel justified in holding onto that bitterness or anger because of how badly someone has treated you. Maybe the sin of selfishness is evident in your life, but you feel that there are certain things that you are entitled to. Maybe you have justified the sins of lust or gluttony or greed or immodesty, because you look at other people and say, At least I’m not as bad as that person. Brothers and sisters, we need to stop making excuses for our sin, and repent of it.

I can tell you that God’s been dealing with me on this, because I know that I’m not as aware of my own sin as I should be, which means I don’t know God as well as I should. I can certainly admit that I’m a sinner, and I can point to specific areas of sin

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pg. 113. Quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pg. 714.

which God has exposed. But I need to see more clearly. I need greater perception. I need more light. You can pray for me in this, and I encourage you to pray for yourself and for our entire church. I believe that true revival, if we should experience it in some measure, will involve these very things that we've been considering this morning. Seeing God for who He is, and seeing ourselves as we are. Seeing the glory and the holiness of God, and realizing our utter depravity and repenting of our sin. Let's pray for these things to happen, by God's grace and for His glory.

I'll read you one more sentence from the Statement of Faith. It says, "Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers unto salvation, that although there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation, yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent, which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary." I love how this emphasizes the seriousness of our sin and also the immensity of God's grace toward those who repent. There is no sin so small but it deserves damnation. In other words, even the sin that we might think is so insignificant, we deserve to go to hell because of it. But then it says, yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent. In other words, if you're here this morning and you think there's no way God could forgive you for the horrible things you've done, there's hope. There's hope because through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, there's forgiveness. Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient to atone for your sin. If you repent of your sin and cry out to Jesus for mercy, you will be forgiven.

Lessons from Job 40-42

Let me summarize now with several points. Many of these I've already mentioned, but I just want to reiterate these things that we ought to take from these chapters.

1. Be grateful for the trials that God providentially places in our lives. He is working for our good, and one of the ways He works for our good is by revealing our sin to us through trials.
2. During trials, and at all times, pray for God to reveal Himself. Pray for the grace to see God as He is. Study His Word to better understand His holiness and righteousness and power and goodness.
3. During trials, and at all times, pray for God to reveal your sin. Against the backdrop of His holiness our sin will appear very clearly.
4. Repent of that sin, and repent of it in a detailed way. Don't just repent generally, admitting that you have sinned against God. Rather, repent of specific sins.

5. Repent continually, and always be fighting sin! C. H. Spurgeon said, “The devil never sleeps; your evil nature never sleeps; you ought never to sleep.” Repentance of sin and the fighting against sin is not something that we can ever take a break from.
6. Lastly, if you are an unbeliever, I want to plead with you to repent of your sins. What might God be doing in your life right now to show you Himself and to show you your own sin? Are you in the midst of a hardship of some kind? Could it be that the suffering you are facing right now is actually a profound display of God’s mercy to you, in order that you might see that you are a sinner in need of His grace? And could it be that God guided you here today to hear this message, so that you might know what biblical repentance is. Repent, friend, for there is forgiveness in Christ. I would love to talk to you more after the service if God is convicting your heart and showing you your need to repent.

The Fury of the Wind, the Raging of the Sea

I want to close by reading a hymn that was written recently by a pastor named Eric Schumacher, who spent some time in Biloxi, Mississippi following hurricane Katrina. I knew Eric in seminary, and he now serves at a church in Iowa. He wrote this as he was meditating on these chapters in Job and seeing the suffering that was taking place in the wake of the hurricane.⁴

The fury of the wind,
 The raging of the sea,
 How small a whisper do we hear
 Of our God’s majesty!
 The thunder of His pow’r,
 O, who can understand?
 Before the fullness of His wrath
 O, who of us could stand?

“Shall man find fault with God?”
 He asks of man below.
 “Now, gird yourself to answer Me.
 And tell Me, if you know:
 Who made the earth and sea?
 Who speaks and stars obey?
 Who plays with creatures of the deep?
 Who gives the beast its prey?”

⁴ <http://www.reformedpraise.org/songs/hymntexts/the-fury-of-the-wind-the-raging-of-the-sea/>

You, Lord, can do all things,
And none can stay Your hand.
I uttered what I did not know
And could not understand.
Before Your greatness, Lord,
I fall upon my face.
And, by such glory stripped of pride,
I cast myself on grace.

The raging wind and sea
Cause me to flee to Christ,
Who bore the tempest of God's wrath
To be my sacrifice.
Though in the storm I'm blind,
I trust my Sovereign's plan.
I know that my Redeemer lives
And with Him I shall stand.