

## 1. What is fair?

Series: Job – suffering and prayer

Date: 8 January 2023

Location: St George's Battery Point

Preacher: Jackie Law

Texts: Job 1:6-2:10

1. **there is none like Job:** the greatest man among all the people of the East

## 2. essential background

- a. **wisdom literature:** how to live well as humans in God's creation [SoS gives us subtleties and complexities of romance]
- b. **revelation of creation only:** no special revelation of God, unlike Abraham; neat laws of nature [light and darkness, growth and decay, strength and vulnerability], plus wild, random, useless beauty [ostrich], plus terror [whirlwind, Behemoth/Leviathan]
- c. **retribution theology:** God metes out punishment for sin and reward for righteousness; Proverbs [10:27ff]
- d. **for instruction and encouragement in faith of Israelites:** become bound in rigid applications of wisdom

3. **hidden drama:** only for readers; Job *never* finds out

*hassatan* 'the accuser' (like a crown prosecutor, defender of justice system)

accuses God of being only desirable because of God's blessings

'does Job fear God for nothing?' // 'a man will give all he has for his own life' (who is at the centre of creation?)

Job's verbal response settles the case [what you say when you're in shock and you're trying to avoid death]; but poetry reveals more

4. **what is fair?** innocent suffering is a threat to retribution theology [consider cultures where disability is grossly stigmatized]

29 chapters of argument between Job (I'm innocent, God is wrong) and the friends (God can't be wrong, therefore you can't be innocent)

God has freedom to operate outside of any and all earthly systems of justice; allows for grace, mercy

God's will – on earth as in heaven – is for his creatures to find full satisfaction in his personhood – i.e. active loving relationship

5. **do you fear God for nothing?**

no [first-world problems even so, my faith was massively threatened when my good life was damaged; who are you, God?; what do I teach my children?]

but one man did; the only one who makes an active loving relationship with God possible; the same one who endured the most extreme of innocent suffering

just as Job needed a mediator (16:19, 20-22) and a redeemer (19:25) to have his case heard, so do we – Jesus saves us from condemnation

## 1. What is fair? (A Bible study)

What has been your past experience of reading the book of Job? How do you approach this book now? What questions do you bring? Can someone in the group summarise the story?

Job is a complicated book. The narrative sections (chapters 1-2, 42) seem straightforward, although there's this curious 'hidden drama' involving God and the heavenly beings, and then there's thirty-nine chapters of poetic dialogue that seem to go nowhere. Even the speeches from God (chapters 38-41) don't seem to make any sense. One suggested interpretation is to view the structure in this chiasmic way:

- A: Job described as blameless and upright (1:1) (Abraham is called the same in Gen 17:1)
- B: Has much (1:2-3) Loses everything (1:13-22; 2:7)
- C: Described as a priest (1:5)
- D: On Dust and Ashes (2:8, 12)
- E: Decreation Monologue (3:1-26)
- F: Dialogues (4—27)
- G: Poem on Wisdom and Final Defense (28—31): Righteous, but not wise, like dust and ashes (30:19)
- F': Additional Dialogue/Elihu speeches (32—37)
- E': God's speeches/Re-creation (38—41)
- D': Off Dust and Ashes (42:1-6)
- C': Described as a priest (42:7-9)
- B': Restoration of belongings (42:10-15)
- A': Dies old and content (compare to Abraham in Gen 25:8)

How does this interpretation help you understand the events and message of Job?

As in many cultures, the Ancient Near East was steeped in 'retribution theology' or 'retributive justice.' This is the idea that God will judge each person according to their moral rightness, i.e. God will punish the wicked, and bless the righteous person.

Where does this idea exist in our present time and/or culture, including orthodox Christian theology?

How is this idea similar and different to the Eastern concept of 'karma'?

How do you feel about this system of justice?

Was Job's suffering justified? (Job 1:1, 1:8, 1:22, 2:3, 2:10, 42:7, 8, 10-17)

Debating 'theodicy' (the question of 'how can there be a good/loving/powerful God when there is so much evil and suffering in the world?') is usually an exercise in futility, so it's best not to go there at all. But how does the reality of 'innocent suffering' shatter a rigid 'retributive justice' paradigm? And what does this tell us about God's justice?

The *hassatan's* challenge to God is to prove that people can or will 'fear God for nothing.'

Does Job succeed in this? What does he discover along the way?

Do you or anyone you know truly fear God for nothing?

How does God make this true for us?

What comfort is the Lord speaking to you already?

Pray for one another, in light of some of the insights from Job.