

Job 42.7-17

How do we keep going to the end?

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 27 August 2023

Job: Out of the Storm [11]

Looking back

I was 11 when I went on my first – and only – rollercoaster. It was **J** Disney's Big Thunder Mountain, and I hated it. As you can tell by the fact I haven't been on one since.

It starts with the queueing. Who here has been to a theme park? There's nothing quite like the queues. You're lucky if you do half a dozen rides on a busy day at Alton Towers – some of the queues can be two or even three hours long. I'm not a patient person so standing around in queues all day is not my idea of fun – especially if the thing at the end of the queue is a massive rollercoaster!

Then there's the cost. I looked this morning and it would cost £78 for Jess and me to go to Alton Towers tomorrow – and that's with an 'advance ticket' saving of £58!

A costly rollercoaster that requires a lot of patience... see what I did there?

Today we reach the end of the book of Job. It has been quite the rollercoaster. We've had the down of Satan being given allowed to take everything away from Job and Job wishing he'd never been born. We've had the up of Job's vision of life beyond death – **‘I know that my redeemer lives’** (19.25). We've had the down of the arguments going round and round between Job and his friends. We've had the up of the wonderful poem about Wisdom – **precious beyond rubies** (28.18) yet completely unobtainable. We've had the down of Elihu warning Job that he's gone too far in what he's said about God. We've had the up of God speaking to Job **out of the storm: ‘Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?’** (38.1, 4), and seeing God's ultimate power over death and evil through the pictures of Behemoth the Beast and Leviathan the Dragon.

If you've stuck with it – well done! My hope is that through it all we have learned to trust and focus on God a little more, for:

“The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding.”

Job 28.28 (NIV)

Living the life

When I was growing up I didn't always get on with my sister.

I never actually hit her, but sometimes I wanted to because she drove me crazy. Perhaps some of you can relate to that...

Now imagine I stole her favourite doll, Daisy, that she had loved and hugged for years, stamped on it, ripped the head off, set fire to it, and chucked it in the bin. Would giving her a new doll without even an apology make it ok? No!

Yet that's what apparently happens at the end of Job. God doesn't mention Job's awful sufferings that he had permitted. He doesn't answer any of Job's questions. At the beginning God allows Satan to take everything away from Job – now at the end he gives him everything he had before and more besides (42.12-13).

What's going on? Is the message of Job really that if we keep going as faithful believers, God will give us 14,000 sheep (42.12)? Now I like woolly jumpers as much as the next vicar, but surely there's more to it than that?

Of course there is. As we head back to school or work, restart things that had a break in August, or simply carry on – Job tells us what to expect as we try to live as God's children day by day.

Warfare

The first thing is that it's war.

Jess and I went to see **J** Oppenheimer last week – a film about the development of the atom bomb during the second world war. The story – and the film – are astonishing.

But that's not the kind of war I mean. Job doesn't fight on a battlefield – he *is* the battlefield.¹ We are surrounded by so much that distracts and tempts us away from God. God's children are called to be different, in the world but not of the world. It's a battle. And all the while Satan is there whispering lies and half-truths. In Luke 22 Jesus prays for one of his friends **J**:

| 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail... When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'

Luke 22.31-32 (NIV)

Jesus doesn't pray for the sifting to stop – but that Simon would stay faithful through it, and then help his friends. Do you actually share your struggles with Christian friends or family? If not, how can they strengthen you when you need help? The battle is real – but Jesus is on our side, so the victory is not in doubt.

Patience

I had to close my study door the other day because Jess was home and watching *Call the Midwife* – I found the noises of labour coming from the TV rather off-putting!

That's how Paul describes the world in Romans 8.22. Like Job in chapter 19 we hope and long for the labour to be over, for the struggle to end, so we can see God face-to-face. It isn't a vague hope, a wish that things would be better, but a confidence that Jesus will return to take us home. So, Paul says, **we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently** (Romans 8.25).

Humility

When Job repents **in dust and ashes** (42.6) he isn't admitting his friends were right all along. No: he's listened to what God has said – quoting him twice (42.3-4); he's realised that God is bigger and the world is more complicated than he thought (42.3); he's realised he can trust God because only he can restrain evil (42.2).

At the root of all sin is the pride that thinks we know better or can do better than God – or don't even need him at all. It's there in all our hearts. And the antidote is humility: putting God and others before our own interests or desires.

Forgiveness

Do you find it easy to forgive someone who's hurt you? Or do you find yourself thinking about it often? Or forgetting for a while, and then when you remember you get all cross and knotted in your stomach?

There's a lot of forgiveness in Job 42. Job is forgiven by God for some of the things he'd said about him. Four times God calls Job **'my servant'** (42.7-8) – he's forgiven. But God also forgives Job's friends. ¶ He's angry with them (42.7) but they said sorry to God for what *they* had said, and are forgiven too (42.9).

But also Job forgives his friends. He prays for them (42.9-10) – that is true forgiveness: not forgetting or overlooking that someone has really hurt you, *but praying good for them*. Perhaps this week you ask God to help you forgive someone like this.

Blessing

And finally, blessing. Notice when Job's blessing comes – at the very end. When he says sorry to God, when he's forgiven, when he prays for his friends, ¶ he's still on the ash heap with his piece of **broken pottery** (2.8). Job reaches the point where he trusts God and knows God is with him *even while he is still suffering*.

The blessings Job receives from God do not let God off the hook (42.11). They don't excuse or explain what's happened. Instead they – and the blessings *we* receive in this life – point towards and are a **tiny foretaste** of what is to come:² Jesus' return and the glorious life we will have with him forever where pain, tears and sadness, evil and death will be no more.

But did you see what Job does? He gives his three daughters **an inheritance along with their brothers** (42.15). In those days it was unnecessary: either they would marry, or their brothers would look after them. I think it points us to the way God calls us to share *our* inheritance with others – not the value of all we own, but the life and blessings we have in Jesus.

Job tells us **J** God's children can expect a life of warfare, for which we need to grow in patience, humility and forgiveness – not only in the quiet times of prayer or in church, but in all we do.

Job tells us we can trust God, even when we don't understand why things are as they are: we can trust him to lead us safely *through* the valley to the **J** glorious blessing that awaits his children.

¹ Christopher Ash, *Out of the Storm*, 101.

² Ash, 107.