

Job Humble and Content

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

¹ Then Job answered the LORD:

² "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³ "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴ "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me."

⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

⁶ therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

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 there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; 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 gold ring. ¹² The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶ After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, old and full of days.

Thank God for happy endings. Hats off to the editor of Job for ending his O'Neillean *Long Day's Journey into Night* with a Shakespearean *All's Well That Ends Well*. We are huge fans of happy endings—when the suspicious mass is benign, when the disgruntled church member comes to her senses and returns to the fellowship, when an unexpected check arrives at 11:00 p.m. on day the mortgage is due and saves us from homelessness. Who in his or her right mind does not love a happy ending? So, thank you, editor of Job; thank you for chapter 42; thank you for such a happy ending. Not so fast. Job may begin with a "once upon a time" tenor and close on a "happily ever after" note, but there are forty-some chapters of misery tucked in between. Remember my friend Richardo, shot

point blank while trying to protect his staff and stop a bank robbery? His health and trust will never be restored. Remember my friend Lynda who lost her oldest grandson mysteriously from a Naval carrier in the Pacific. Her precious Asanta will never be restored, no matter how many other grandchildren she has. Remember my friend Belinda who is traumatized by her and her siblings experience in our foster care system. A system that we thought protected children, but for many the experience is one that haunts them for the rest of their lives. Now, Belinda deals with the generational challenges of overcoming that experience. You and I can fill in the blanks for our own lives, the pain, the loss, the sense that what happened or is happening is not fair!

The ending of Job may leave us with a happy ending, but it does so barbed with unresolved questions. Sam Balentine writes: Having protested with such passion, can Job really be expected now to return to his previously undisturbed certainties as if nothing has changed? Does God really expect or require Job simply to pray for others, when Job's own prayers for help seemed to go answered? Job and we still want to know:

Why do the innocent suffer?

Why are "friends" oblivious to the sincere cries of those who suffer unjustly?

Why does God allow such suffering to stand and remain silent before the pleas of the afflicted? **Gary W. Charles**

From the start of the book, Job is a sinless character, "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). That means that all the catastrophes that befall the innocent Job come upon him "for no reason" (2:3). His suffering contains a totality of pain and loss; he loses his property, his children, and his health. He loses the support of his friends and, above all, he loses the comfort of his understanding of God and how things are supposed to work in life, the theology of which he was once an avid evangelist. He had "instructed many"

and "supported those who were stumbling" (4:3-4). But in the face of the collapse of his life, his dearly held understand proves hollow. It is not true that good things always come to good people, but it is true, as Job discovers, that new experience of life requires new ways of speaking of God.

In its exaggerations, its too-muchness, Job's suffering embraces a multiplicity of human sorrows, both ordinary and massive, and his responses of despair, self-pity, and outrage capture typical human experience in the midst of loss. Job's continual, confusing reiterations of his pain, his confrontations with his caring but wrongheaded friends, and his disrupted relationship with the Creator gather up the troubles and enduring fears of anyone who knows devastation. Yet across his many speeches and against the stubborn preaching of his friends, Job grows in confidence and keeps insisting on the inadequacy of his friends' views. He trusts his experience and knows that he has committed no sin sufficiently heinous to evoke these terrors. In the midst of his dark night, he dares to tell the truth of his life to his Creator. By lamenting, complaining, and shouting his discontent to God, he keeps his relationship with God alive.

In today's reading, Job utters his final words after he has encountered God in the poetry of the storm. Job utters a profound statement of faith: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear." In the past, Job knew God from the instructions of others, from his family, from wise sages, from his faith community. "But now my eye sees you" (42:5). Now Job meets God in his own life, on his own recognizance, in the thick of the storm that is his life. Instead of being forced into submission, Job speaks of firsthand experience, a personal meeting, a kind of seeing that surpasses known speech about God. From Job's viewpoint, this encounter overwhelms and honors him and transforms his life. The encounter in the storm calls Job to a new kind of knowledge; it summons him beyond himself to a heightened sense of divine presence in his life and in the world. His deepened

experience of God summons him to new perceptions, leads him outside of himself, and creates of him a new being in the midst of his community.

Job himself refuses to acquiesce to his friends who accuse him of sin. He refuses to deny his own experience of confusion, of divine absence, and of the inadequacy of his old understanding of God and how the world works. He insists, instead, on telling God and anyone else who will listen how miserable he is, how confused and abject he has become. He plunges deeply into despair of ever being seen and heard in his suffering. Yet in this long process, he realizes that God does not follow human expectations, that God is free.

Across his speeches Job insists that God does not follow the laws, as Job understands them, but is wildly free beyond any human calculation, yet he speaks his anger and grief to God anyway. In the midst of his abyss, Job holds fast to God; he argues, yells, and acts up in courage and fidelity. Job clings to his dignity as a human, maintains his integrity, and sets it without qualification before God. Then God praises Job and validates his resistance to the rule-based understanding of his friends, which reduced Job's suffering to cause-and-effect equations. Restoring Job and doubling his blessings, God approves of Job's protests. And now, Job receives blessing upon blessing. **Kathleen M. O'connor**

Job faithfully endured his trial and God blesses him socioeconomically. His businesses are restored and he has twice as much as he managed before. The sheep business is back, and this time the inventory is fourteen thousand sheep. His camel business is restored with six thousand camels. His oxen business now has a thousand yoke of oxen. His donkey business has a thousand donkeys. His family is also blessed. I'm sure Job still grieved his lost children for the rest of his life, but God gave him other children to raise and love. In Job's world, children comprised the nucleus of all blessing. Although his society was one in which boys took precedence, he also celebrated his daughters. He named his daughters to

honor is experience with God. Jemimah means “with God;” Keziah, means “God’s fragrance;” and Keren-happuch, means “beautifier.” The daughters also share in the inheritance with their brothers. If Job's children were the center of his blessing, then he ended his life doubly blessed, for he saw his children's children down to the fourth generation. **John Ahn**

These blessings were not some much reward, but grace.

When all is said and done, we still don’t understand why good people suffer. As readers of Job, we have been brought into the thick of it and are required to try to resolve the dilemma for ourselves. Job's testimony stands as witness to the inadequacy of traditional theologies of suffering to encompass every human experience. Job presses us, as believers, to hold our theologies humbly and to remember that new times require renewed and reformed expression for a God who transcends our understanding. **Kathleen M. O'connor**

As Christians we read Job with the cry of despair never far from our ears—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—we dare not rush to the resurrection of Jesus or focus primarily on the unmitigated happy ending of Job. We deserve more, and like the Job we meet throughout most of the book, we should not shy from demanding it. **Gary W. Charles**

Job did not get the answers he sought; nor do we get the answers we want! What we do learn is the encounter with God itself transforms us while yet in the midst of suffering. God's inbreaking empowers us to transcend suffering. God's restoration empowers us to experience suffering, knowing God is with us, and it empowers us to seek just ways of living that overcomes the injustice of suffering.

Dale P. Andrews

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