

Study 5: Job 42 – Faith, mystery and the meaning of life...

People like happy endings in movies. We like it when people live happily ever after. For this reason, the ending of the book of Job should please many of us. And yet it isn't without issues...

Read Job 42:1-17.

1. What is Job's response to God's speeches?
2. What does Job repent of?
3. What is God's opinion of Job's friends?
4. What exactly did Job's friends get wrong about God?
5. What happens to Job after he prays for his friends? How does his final state compare with how he started the book?
6. How do you feel at the end of the book? Happy? Confused? Surprised?

7. Are there any other things or people in the book of Job that you would like to know more about, but about which the ending doesn't tell you?

And they all lived happily ever after...

The book of Job has taken us into the world of a man who experiences unimaginable suffering. At the beginning of the book, and unbeknown to the human characters in the story, Satan claims that Job is a selfish man who only follows God for what he can get out of it. So to test Job, God gives Satan permission to make Job's life a misery, a task that Satan performs particularly well. Job loses everything.

It only adds to Job's suffering that he hasn't a clue why any of it has happened to him. Job's friends think they know why. They say it's all punishment for unconfessed sin. But both we, the readers, and Job know that this is not the case. Finally, God himself appears. God doesn't tell Job why he has suffered. Rather, God reminds Job of who is God and who isn't. God rebukes Job for demanding an answer as if he was owed one.

And so for virtually the entire book, most of us wouldn't swap places with Job for anything. After all his suffering God himself hauls Job over the coals for being disrespectful. And at the end of it all, Job still doesn't know why his life has been made a misery.

Yet here at the end, things suddenly turn good just as quickly as they turned bad. Job has another family: seven more sons, three more daughters. Job becomes wealthier than he ever was.

So Job goes out with a very happy ending—except it's also a little confusing. No reason is given for Job's return to good fortune. Is it a reward because he passed Satan's test? And what about Satan anyway? He was the one who started all the trouble in the first place! What does God say to him?

And what about Elihu? Elihu was the young fellow who had kept quiet until chapter 32. He doesn't rate a mention here at the end. God speaks to Job and to Job's three friends, but not a word to Elihu.

Job's ending may be happy, but it's also a little frustrating because of all the loose ends still dangling. We wish we were told more—which is exactly the point, because that's what life is like.

8. Think back over all the characters in the book. Every character, to some extent, doesn't know or understand something.

a. What doesn't Satan understand?

b. What doesn't Job understand?

c. What don't Job's friends understand?

d. What don't we, the readers, know by the end of the book?

9. Who in the book is the one person who does know and understand everything?

10. What do you think the book of Job is telling us about life?

Life is a mystery

The book of Job is exactly like life. Both the book and life can be confusing and surprising at times. Unexpected bad things can happen. Unexpected good things can happen. Long periods of struggle and anguish and grieving can happen. And there are times in this life when we wish God would tell us more about what is going on.

All this mystery only serves to reinforce the main lesson of the book of Job. It is the lesson we learnt in study 4—that if we want to live this life to the full, it's not a matter of knowing why things happen; it's a matter of knowing the God who knows why things happen.

The way through life is not to try to figure out the meaning of every event. That's what Job's friends tried. They wanted to nail everything down and have all the answers. In the end, God condemned their attitude.

No, the way through the struggles and changes of life is to know the God who knows everything. The way to negotiate life is to know Jesus Christ. For this

reason, when bad or good things happen to us, the main question to grapple with is not, "Why is this happening to me?" The main question to consider is, "Since this is happening to me, how can I use it to know God better through Jesus Christ?"

This is what the book of Job has been about from start to finish. It is about staying close to God, and trusting him, even when bad things happen, because staying close to God is more valuable than not suffering.

Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to discuss in your group.)

11. How we might know Jesus better when:

a. personal moral failure occurs?

b. a close friend fails us?

c. we become financially prosperous?

d. we are in financial trouble?

12. Is there any one truth which has stood out to you in Job? What changes are you going to make in your life as a result of this truth?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that we can trust in his wonderful sovereignty.
- Pray that we would value God more than the things of this world.