

Seven Lessons from Job In Times of Trouble

Richard Harris

Seven Lessons from Job in Times of Trouble

The Book of Job

8 December 2019

Job's Time of Testing

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

My dear brothers and sisters, we're going to read, or continue to read, from the Book of Job this coming month, how he was tested, tested in ways which touched every part of his life, we'll be reading of the effects of the trials given to Job and the various discussion debates from his friends.

We read in the opening account as we see, a seemingly successful, God-fearing, obedient man, who had clearly been blessed by God, and then the account of how his life disintegrated in a very short period of time. And we reflect upon how fragile all of our lives are. And we should like this morning, to look at seven simple lessons from Job's experience, and in some cases compare the trials and the reaction to them with that of our Lord, all of which may help us examine ourselves and focus our minds on the perfect example of our dear Lord who died for us, that we might have forgiveness, and ultimately, life unending.

God's Perspective on our Suffering

But what is God's perspective regarding the trials and tests we all experience? The simple, indisputable principle is that 'whom the Lord loves, He tests'. None of us are exempt. Whom the Lord loves, He tests in different ways, and the evidence? In James 1, we read yesterday verse 12:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

If we're suffering right now, just look at those words:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

evidence in Hebrews 12 verse 6:

For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.

The evidence in Proverbs 3 verse 12:

For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father, the son in whom he delights.

If we're feeling tested or chastened right now, hopefully these are relevant to us. The book of Job then presents, as it were, a parallel universe almost, a behind the scenes account of the trials and the temptations of a man, and as it were, a wager on how he'd respond if or when given certain tests.

Now we all know that 'all Scripture is given by inspiration and is valuable for direction in righteousness' and as such Job is no different as the book provides a number of clear lessons to help us with *our* lives, *our* trials, *our* tests.

1. We are Never Alone

We are *never* alone. We are never alone when we are tested. The Almighty knows exactly what we're going through with every trial, and if we acknowledge Him and understand that the trial has been selected, especially for *us* from the Almighty, if we acknowledge this and accept this, He will strengthen us.

And we need to accept the trial is given to develop us and perfect us, not for us to fight or resist or resent or complain. Not easy, but we look to our Lord's example. Following the earnest prayer of our Lord at Gethsemane, the Almighty permitted His Son to be strengthened, to cope, and more than, to *persevere* so that he might fulfil his purpose. Luke 22:

and the angel appeared to Him [our Lord] from Heaven, strengthening Him

We are never alone in our trials. If we share them, if we share our feelings, our concerns, our fears. The Lord *will* comfort us and strengthen us, for He is a God of mercy and compassion. But is this what we do? Do we take our trials to the Lord and ask for the strength, for the guidance, for the wisdom that we need to deal with them? Or do we complain and feel sorry for ourselves? Or do we think '*Why* is this happening to me?'

2. God Controls and Limits our Trials

God controls and limits our trials and testings. We will *never* be tested beyond our strength. When we read the book of Job, we know that God permitted Job to be tested, but limits were set and kept to, Job's health was not to be touched, but later in his life it was not to be endangered. It's interesting how Job was tested to a certain point, and when he got to that point and could cope with it, he was then given a further test.

The key point for Job and for us in our trials, is we never know how they will end, as we are not privy to the full extent of the trial *until* it has passed, and clearly this is where faith needs to engage, having trust in the Almighty to take care of us. In the first of Corinthians 10 we read:

no temptation has overtaken you, such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that you are able, and with the temptation will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it

What mercy this demonstrates, what benevolence and what love, and we do well to keep this close to us when we are tested. Do we believe that the Almighty controls the extent to which we will be tested? And if we do so, can that knowledge prevent us from worry, from despairing? Do we accept that God controls the extent of our testing? Both the severity and the intensity? For this is what He has said, the Almighty restricted the initial trial from hurting Job's health, and later, once he had grown in stature, from not endangering his very life.

3. The Trial is for Growth, not Vindication

The trial or test is designed for growth, not vindication, and to understand this, to appreciate that this is one of the hardest lessons, Job wanted God to vindicate him, prove him right before his friends, having suffered as Job did, to then be *ridiculed* by his so-called friends (Job 30. 1,9) this must have been especially hard to take. Have we ever been ridiculed in front of others? No one relishes this, no one enjoys being mocked or humiliated. Elihu suggested Job had been wrongly focused during his trial and confirms that the Almighty was testing Job in various ways, but God has reasons for doing this testing: to develop him in the same way that he develops us, to round off those sharp edges, to help us grow in faith and trust, to become more like our Lord, to be more like our Father Himself. Which leads us to lesson four.

4. The Reason is not Always Clear

The *why*, *why* the testing, is not always clear. Eliphaz, the first of Job's friends declared:

remember no one who ever perished being innocent, or where were the upright ever cut off

All three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar all believed that Job was being punished for some dark secret that he was hiding from them, to be served up *such* a catalogue of calamities and troubles. Job though, was confident that this was not the case, but could still not explain why such calamity had befallen him. He was rightly defensive in the face of his accusers. Here was the contrast to our Lord, who elected *not* to be outspoken in his defence. But Job though, still wondered, '*Why* is this happening to me?' Do we question the *why* in our trials and ask, '*Why* is this happening to me?' When we are tested are we able to get quickly to the state of mind, which can *accept any* testing is from the Almighty, and it's because He loves us and it's because He's developing me, because He wants me to be in His kingdom. Can we sometimes cut out that natural human reaction: 'Why is this happening

to me?’ and go straight to the ‘this is of the Lord’, so that we don’t *need* to understand the *why*, as God is in our lives, as we clearly and confidently know, He will never leave us, and he will never test us beyond we can cope, and remain patient. Deuteronomy 31 and Hebrews 13, God is recorded to say:

I will never leave you nor forsake you
and just think of our Lord’s example.

5. Trust in the Face of Anguish

Lesson five. Trust in the face of anguish. Job was in despair and the effects of what had happened touched every part of his life. His whole life had been turned upside down. Let’s remember that, when things go wrong for *us*. Job had lost his wealth, his family, his everything in a series of tragic calamities, and then his health had gone. Job must have felt very alone in human terms, just as our Lord must have felt at Gethsemane as he looked a little way distant at his disciples, succumbing to their fatigue, and yet our Lord knew what was ahead of Him.

Yet in the depths of his perplexity and despair Job made one of the most profound declarations of faith recorded in scripture, Job 13 verse 15:

though He [God] slay me, yet I will trust Him

What strength of character, of conviction, this must have taken. How difficult do we find it to say this at the zenith of our testing, he was almost saying, ‘I still have my life, but even if I don’t, there’s a reason for that’. In a similar tone, our Lord, towards the end of his communion at Gethsemane, we see our Lord shift from

if it be possible, take this cup from me
to a *total* trust, a progression of thought in the words

not *my* will, but *yours* be done

whatever it might be. What a selfless transition. How can *we* develop our mindset in this way, this week?

We see the conflict, although Job did trust in God, his humanity kept asking ‘why’ and we can perhaps identify with that. Job did not make any sense of this, how would *we* feel in the same situation? If *we* had been tested in this way, what would *we* think, and then what would we do, would our faith depart us? ‘God has left me on my own’, or would we feel ‘though He slay me yet I will trust in Him’.

In Job 19 we read the words of great anguish:

know that God has overthrown me and put me in wrong and closed His net
around me, my kinsfolk have failed me and I am repulsive and loathsome to my
family

Yet even at this point of despair, we read Job declares his heart-felt trust in the Almighty, Job 19 verse 25:

For I know that my Redeemer lives and He shall stand at the last on the Earth,
and I will see God when I shall see for myself.

True trust in the Almighty in the face of anguish indeed, which leads us to our penultimate lesson.

6. God Will Reward Endurance

God will reward endurance of trials in the end. Life can often seem unfair from human terms, some make no pretence of serving God yet seem to just sail through life, but Job also noticed §21.30:

for the wicked are reserved for a day of doom. They shall be brought out on the
day of wrath

Even if it might seem that life is not fair, we have confidence that God is a God of justice, and at the judgement or resurrection God will reward our endurance. Job understood the truth about the resurrection and went on to record in the 14th chapter verse 14

all the days of my appointed time I will wait till my *change* come

and what of our Lord, the Apostle Paul represents this, Hebrews 12:

looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that
was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on
the right hand of the throne of God.

what encouragement to us, to know that our Lord and master understands, both our trials, and he too endured with a hope of the great reward.

7. We Emerge from our Trials when we Learn

Finally, lesson seven. We emerge from our trials, when we *learn* what God was teaching us. We know the Lord wants us to become like Him. Job was an exemplary man, but had a flaw, as we all do in different degrees. The scriptures say Job's problem was, Job 32. 1,2: he was righteous in his own eyes and that he justified himself rather than God. But Job emerged from his ordeals with a far deeper understanding of the way the Almighty thought, as well as a deeper understanding of himself, and appreciated his own human nature.

Can this be said of *us*? Testing and trial has no value if we cannot learn from it and develop, but first, we must recognise our weakness, trust in the Almighty by understanding how He thinks and what is expected of us in such trial or test. We read at the end of the book, Job 42.6, these words:

therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes

here was an acknowledgement of the true state of humanity and how far we are from the Lord's perfection, but this is the beginning of learning.

In conclusion. As we approach these emblems of the One who truly understood the trial, and relied on the Almighty for support, we have verse 12 of Chapter 42, a glimpse of the reward for Job's endurance and of ours:

for the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning. After this Job lived 140 years, and saw his children and grandchildren, for four generations, and so Job died old and full of years

Our Lord waits for his return to be *king on Earth*, the reward for *his* personal privation on the cross, which we are about to remember in the taking of the emblems.

We though, are right now enduring *our* individual trials, selected, as we've said, to develop us into acceptable citizens of a new order, shortly to be revealed when our Lord returns. Remember our Lord's words of outstanding encouragement:

So Jesus answered and said, "assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers and sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospel's who shall not receive a hundred fold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children with persecutions, and in the age to come, Eternal Life"

Richard Harris