

Tab 1

Week 9: The Words of Job are Ended

THE BOOK OF JOB - "THOUGH HE SLAY ME"

Job 29-31

Introduction

We are at the end of the third speech cycle in Job, which signals the end of the back and forth challenges from Job's 3 friends, and his rebuttals.

What we will be looking at this morning is Job's final response to those attacks, which is both a defense, and one final prayer of complaint to God.

That final complaint will be an emotional climax that reads more like an outburst of emotion than a reasoned plea.

I Wish My Life Was Like it Was

Chapter 29 is Job remembering his life before it all went wrong.

READ Job 29:2-4 (ESV)

*2"Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me,
3when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness,
4as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent,*

Notice in this chapter that there are very few periods, and almost all commas. The words are kind of tumbling out of him. One memory after another of life before all of this pain.

He remembers his children all around him, he was respected and loved in the community, he was able to help the poor and the widows, he was able to enjoy all the benefits of a righteous life, he fought for justice for others around him, he was blessed with riches and a big family, he was an encouragement to everyone, and he comforted the mourners.

I think everyone who has been through a difficult time has experienced this. You don't have any control over the present, and you can't change what has happened yesterday, so your mind wanders back to a time when things were easier.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

But Now...

Then in chapter 30, Job turns to another prayer of complaint to God that is as intense, or more, than any before it.

The first three sections begin with "But now", comparing his present circumstances to his past.

In Hebrew poetry, the main idea is often placed at the center-point of the poem. (unlike in English, we tend to put the main idea at the start)

In this case, the centerpoint and main idea is 30:20-23

READ Job 30:20–23 (ESV)

20I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me.

21You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me.

22You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.

23For I know that you will bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living.

Job says to God that he has cried for help, and God has not answered him. Instead, God has crushed Job and now he is sure that he will die.

If I am Not Righteous, Then Curse Me

In this last chapter before Job goes silent, Job is going to take the Retribution Principle that his friends have aggressively used against him and he will turn it on its head.

READ Job 31:3–4 (ESV)

3Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity?

4Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?

You can see there in verse 3 he summarizes the retribution principle, in the way that his friends have tried to use it against his lament.

What you have here is a cascading series of If-Then statements. They get pretty intense as he goes along.

In each one, he is basically saying "If I am NOT righteous, then go ahead and curse me." He is asking Yahweh to test his friends' theories about why this has happened to him.

The curses he comes up with are so extreme, it shows how confident he is in God's declaration that he is righteous and blameless. "He fears the Lord and has turned away from evil."

READ Job 31:5–12 (ESV)

5If I have walked with falsehood and my foot has hastened to deceit;

6(Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!)

7if my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands,

8then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out.

9If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,

10then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her.

11For that would be a heinous crime; that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges;

12for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.

Job is not wishing for these things to happen, nor would he say that he is even risking it. Such is his confidence in his righteousness.

Let the Almighty answer me!

READ Job 31:35–37 (ESV)

- 35 *Oh, that I had one to hear me!*
(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)
Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!
- 36 *Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;*
I would bind it on me as a crown;
- 37 *I would give him an account of all my steps;*
like a prince I would approach him.

Job is once again crying out for Yahweh to hear him, and come speak to him. Job wants to hear from God now, and not these friends who have afflicted him instead of comforting him.

At the end of this section, the narrator chimes in with one simple, but important line:

Verse 40

The words of Job are ended.

There is a play on words here in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for "ended" is *tamam* (taw-mam). It means "completed" or it can be translated as "blameless".

"Completed" (ended) is the right translation here, but I think there is a poetic play on words here that both translations apply.

Job is done speaking. He is done complaining. He is done lamenting to God. He is done arguing with his so-called friends.

Now he waits, anticipating Yahweh's entrance to speak to him.

Lament That Ends

The fact that Job chooses to cease his lament, is an important detail.

Lament is not a state of mind, it's an activity. Lament is an act of worship that you do or do not do.

If lament becomes a state of mind that goes on without an end, then it becomes self-pity.

Self pity is self-referential grief. It's like a snake eating its own tail. It doesn't go anywhere, and never ends.

Self-pity must maintain that state of grief in order to keep itself alive. It wants the pain to end, but it also doesn't want the pain to end. Being in pain becomes a part of your identity.

People with chronic illness talk about this. The pain and illness becomes who they are.

Lament without end risks the same problem.

Before Yahweh speaks to Job, he decides it's time to stop lamenting.

We need to be careful here. I cannot tell you when that moment is for you. There are too many stories of well-meaning people telling grieving people that they should stop grieving and move on as though everyone grieves in the same way and on the same schedule.

I am not trying to do that here.

What I am saying is that lament should not become a lifestyle, or a way of thinking, or part of your identity. At some point, there will be a moment when you will need to make a conscious choice that your lament to God is complete.

God has not sinned against you, so He does not need to be forgiven. However, all of us at many points in our lives need to make a choice to **trust** God with our grief, and the circumstances that caused it.

What we are reading here is Job teetering on the verge of self-pity. But instead of crossing into that trap, he makes one last appeal and then stops.

Verse 40 is Job stepping out past his grief, into the chasm of trusting God. Job is not trusting God to stop bad things from happening to him. That ship has sailed. Job is trusting God to come answer his lament.

Conclusion

Knowing that lament must come to an end, how does that affect how you think of your own relationship with lament?

The overwhelming message of Job is that complaint to God is good. It is itself a type of worship.

But unending complaint to God is not. That isn't good for you, and if it doesn't end in trust in God then it ceases to be an expression of worship.

I want to end with communion, and a song that Sarah wrote about this very thing.

.PRAY

.GET ELEMENTS

.SARAH SONG

.TAKE COMMUNION

For Discussion

Read **Job 29:2-4; 30:20-23** together.

- 1- When times are hard, do you find it tempting to wish you were still living in an easier time in your past and compare it to your present?
- 2- In what ways can this be healthy and encouraging? In what ways can it be unhealthy and discouraging?

Read **Job 31:3-4** together.

- 3- How does verse 3 summarize the belief system behind the friend's bad advice to Job throughout the book?

Read **Job 31:5-12** together.

- 4- How do these statements show Job's confidence in his innocence?

Read **Job 31:35-40** together.

- 5- What is Job asking God to do, specifically?
- 6- In verse 40, Job stops his lament and rests in anticipation of Yahweh coming to speak to him. Have you ever experienced this in your life?