

Job

Knowing God in Pain



Lesson 7 ————— Job 28:1-31:40

The Defense Rests

*Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my
signature; Let the Almighty answer me!
—Job 31:35*

I don't know about you, but that verse truly makes me want to duck for cover.

Have you ever served on a jury? In my experience, it's tougher than it looks. During the trial a lot of information is thrown at you. You're not always sure who or what to believe. Testimony can be contradictory and evidence can get confusing. Fortunately, at the end of it all are the closing arguments. In the best of worlds, this is when both sides present the facts as they see them in a clear and organized manner with the goal of making the truth of the matter evident.

Imagine we've been in a courtroom for the past seven weeks, listening to the case of "Affliction versus Job." There have been three prosecutors—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. At the defense table, covered in ashes and sores from head to toe, Job sits alone with no one else to plead his innocence. The case has been bewildering at times. Speeches have rambled on. Rhetoric has been heated and difficult to understand.

At last the prosecution has rested and Job takes the floor. There is a sense of excited tension as the moment of truth finally draws near. No longer is Job speaking to his three prosecutors. Now he speaks to himself, to God his judge, and to all who will hear his defense down through the millennia... to you and me. Now is the time for him to lay out all of his cards in a reasoned, organized fashion, one last time.

In chapters 28-31 Job is going to tell us the truth as he sees it-

- about life in general (chp. 28) — *Wisdom is with God alone*
- about his life before his affliction (chp. 29) — *I was blessed by God*
- about his life since his affliction (chp. 30) — *Now I am cursed by God*
- about his own heart and soul (chp. 31) — *I didn't do anything to deserve this!*

After twenty-seven chapters, you probably think you know a lot about Job, but chapters 29 and 31 actually give us more detailed information about the real life of Job than any other

portions of the book. Here we see fleshed out the life of a man God described as "blameless and upright, fearing God and turning from evil." And we see him at his worst.

In the end, Job states his case, signs his name, and calls for God to answer. The defense rests. *Brace yourself, Job. It won't be long before you get exactly what you asked for.*

DAY 1

- 1) Read Job's interlude on wisdom in Job 28.
- 2) Focus on 28:1-11. These verses describe man's quest to retrieve treasures buried in the earth through mining technology. What minerals and mining methods are mentioned?
- 3) Focus on 28:12-22. Compare this passage to Proverbs 2:1-6. To what does Job compare the search for treasure?

According to Job, where can't wisdom be found?

- 4) Focus on 28:23-28. According to these verses, where is wisdom found?
- 5) Record the definitions given in verse 28 for the following words:
Wisdom—

Understanding—
- 6) Read Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 8:13, 14:26-27, 19:23. What is "the fear of the Lord"? You may want to use a commentary or other Bible study aids to help you fully understand this term.

Selah

Imagine something that could guard your every step in life (Prov. 2:8), ensure your ability to make the right decision at every turn (v.9), provide understanding in every situation (v.11), and even affair-proof your marriage (v.16). What do you think such thing would be worth? Priceless!

All this and more is ours if we seek, ask, and fear the Lord above all. But where do we usually turn when faced with difficult situations and decisions? Friends, family, talk radio, self-help experts, the latest book...? Often the last thing we do is fall on our faces before God, put His ways first *no matter what the cost*, and seek His Word for guidance like searching for hidden treasure.

If you could have wisdom for anything in life at this moment... any decision, any relationship, any struggle... what would you want to know from God? One more question: What are you waiting for? Seek Him now "for the Lord gives wisdom" (Prov. 2:5).

DAY 2

- 1) Read Job's monologue in chapter 29. This is a close up look at the life of a man God describes as "blameless and upright" (1:1, 8; 2:3). As you read, count the number of times you find the words *I*, *me* or *my*. Record the total: _____
- 2) Job remembers the glories of his former life—when he received blessing from God, honor from men, and showed benevolence to all in need. Describe the details of Job's life in each of these categories.

Blessing from God—29:1-6, 18-20

Honor from Men—29:7-11, 21-25

Social Benevolence—29:12-17

- 3) Imagine a Christian holding a position of status and leadership in our modern day that would merit the title "greatest of all." (For some of us, this will require setting aside the cynicism that often pollutes our perceptions when thinking of wealth, power and politics.) Using Job's life as a template, what would this person be like? How would they behave? What pursuits and interests would they be involved in?

Why do you think people of exemplary character are so hard to find in positions of leadership? Do you agree or disagree with this observation?

- 4) Read 29:18-20. Job had his retirement years all mapped out. What did Job imagine the end of his days would be like?

Selah

The term "social activist" has taken on a negative connotation in many circles today. But this is exactly what Job was—he used his wealth and position to actively benefit those who couldn't help themselves. How actively are you impacting our society here in Corona? How are you reaching out to the poor, the orphan, the dying, the widowed, the blind, the lame, the needy? How are you working to promote justice in our society?

Think of one way you can impact one of these areas in our society this week. Take action. Be ready to share your experience with your small group.

DAY 3

- 1) Read Job's monologue in chapter 30. Referring back to Job 29, note at least 5 specific contrasts between Job's past and his present. One example is provided for you.

- *Young men hid from him in honor (29:8) Now they mock him (30:1)*

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- 2) In this chapter Job rehearses the agony of his present situation—he receives no honor from men, no blessing from God, and no benevolence from anyone. Describe the details of Job's life in each of these categories.

No Honor from Men—30:1-15

No Blessing from God—30:16-23

No Benevolence from Anyone—30:24-21

Selah

Though Job had provided help and comfort to many, there was none to answer his own desperate cries in time of need. Who can you depend on to stand beside you no matter what? Who would list *you* as someone upon whom they can depend in difficult times?

DAY 4

- 1) Read Job 31—the climax of Job's final defense before God. He opens by naming a covenant which exemplifies his life of integrity. What is this covenant (vs. 1)?
- 2) Job goes on to make 14 oaths of loyalty to God. Job lists the evil things he has not done and calls down curses on his own head if his words are proven false. Read the verses below and record the oath expressed. The first one is done for you as an example.

vs. 5 *Has not practiced falsehood or deceit*

vs. 7

vs. 9

vs. 13

vs. 16-17

vs. 19-20

vs. 21

vs. 24

vs. 25

vs. 26-27

vs. 29-30

vs. 31-32

vs. 33-34

vs. 38-40

Selah

Job 31 gives us a detailed look at a man "fearing God and turning away from evil." Look over Job's oaths of loyalty. Are there any oaths you would be unable to make before the throne of God? Any curses you would be afraid to call down on your own head?

Colossians 3:1-17 tells us how to live out the new lives we have in Christ. Meditate on these verses allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse and renew your heart.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

In Search of Wisdom (chp 28)

Chapter 28 provides a literary apex in the book of Job, a transition between the dialogues of Job and his three friends and the monologues still to come. The calm, meditative tone and literary structure of this poem are unique to the rest of the book, so much so that some suggest it was interjected by the writer rather than spoken by Job. (It is interesting to note that when Job is again identified as speaker in 29:1, he is still locked in his struggle with God.) Whoever the author, the philosophy of life presented is clearly characteristic of Job. Compare God's description of Job to the definitions of wisdom and understanding given in this chapter.

Job 1:9—[Job is] a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Job 28:28—Behold the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

The content and placement of this chapter in the book of Job is important. The dialogues have reached an impasse. All the well-reasoned words of the three counselors and Job himself combined have proven utterly powerless in penetrating the secrets of the problem of pain. This beautiful poem paints a poignant picture of man's unending quest for priceless wisdom and understanding. It answers the question, "Where can wisdom be found?" Its only source is God. "God alone has the answer or better is the answer to the mystery Job and his friends have sought to fathom" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Mine! Mine! Mine! (28:1-11)

They say diamonds are a girl's best friend, to which I say: *What about sapphires, emeralds, rubies, amethyst, London blue topaz, smoky quartz...?* I'm fascinated by gems—the amazing array of colors, the brilliance of the sparkle, the variations in texture. Revelation lists God's building materials for the New Jerusalem: streets of gold as pure as glass, gates made of single giant pearls, and walls "adorned with every kind of precious stones" (Rev. 21:19), a rainbow of glistening gems to take our breath away for all eternity.

Is it any wonder that mankind has demonstrated an innate sense of the splendor and worth of precious stones and metals from the beginning of time? It's one of the ways God gives us a glimpse of His glory here on earth... an aspect of His majesty that only humans can comprehend (vs. 7-8). Job draws on this universal understanding, using images from mining and treasure hunting to describe the search for wisdom. It is a word picture used repeatedly in scripture particularly in the book of Proverbs (see Prov. 2:3-6).

Verses 3-11 give us a detailed look at ancient mining technology that is supported by recent archeological finds. For example, researchers have found shafts deep in the earth that were excavated by lowering men in cages or baskets (vs. 4). While verse 5 could be a reference to volcanic action, there is very ancient evidence of a mining technique where fires were set

in deep shafts and burned for days and weeks in order to split rocks exposing rich ores and minerals, including gemstones such as sapphires (vs. 6).

Where Wisdom Can't Be Found (28:12-22)

Have you ever found yourself totally dumbfounded at how "stupid" some really smart and successful people can be? The scenario usually goes something like this: someone has it all, and then they do something unbelievably foolish and totally destroy everything for which they have worked so hard. The foolish thing they do is almost always a violation of one of God's simple, loving laws.

- A star athlete disqualifies himself by taking drugs to get that "extra edge" on his performance.
- A promising politician resigns in disgrace after using his high position to indulge his lowest urges.
- A long-faithful spouse trades in the stability of an enduring marriage for a fleeting moment of forbidden pleasure.

What were they thinking? In every instance, the person lacked wisdom. All man's intelligence and technical know-how, the accumulation of every degree of higher learning, the exploration of every scientific endeavor can never produce wisdom. In fact, the place of wisdom and understanding is hidden from the eyes of all (vs. 21).

God Alone is the Way to Wisdom (28:23-28)

God is the only way to wisdom because He is the author, creator, and sustainer of all. Man must look to Him alone for wisdom. God himself provides us with a definition: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (vs. 28). (See also Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7 and 9:10).

Following are a few definitions of the term "fear of the Lord."

- "A loving reverence for God that includes submission to His lordship and to the commands of His word." *Zondervan Study Bible*
- "An awesome respect for God accompanied by a personal hatred for sin." *Swindoll*
- "To acknowledge Him as God and live within the sphere of His life-giving precepts." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

God provides a corollary to His definition of wisdom: "To depart from evil is understanding." The price of wisdom is perfect obedience. In God's economy, wisdom and understanding are active terms far exceeding intellectual knowledge. So often when we ask God for wisdom, what we truly want is for Him to show us His plan so we can vote on it. We are looking for supernatural insider information *plus* the freedom to use these divine insights as we please. This is as opposed to biblical wisdom as you can get. True wisdom begins with a heart of submission and a commitment to obey God in every respect.

Job's Monologue (chp 29-31)

"I" Trouble

As we read Job's monologue, the Word reveals a righteous man who under the weight of affliction has drawn his eyes off of God's glory and onto himself and his circumstances. (In your reading assignment for Day 2, you were asked to count the number of times the words *I*, *me*, or *my* appear in chapter 29 alone. In the NASB I found 481!) After perhaps months of grief and suffering, Job has listened to his "friends" a little too long. Caving in to their repeated charge that his affliction was a judgment from God, Job determines to defend his innocence once and for all, even if it means challenging God Himself.

Ah, The Good 01' Days (chp 29)

Chapter 29 gives us a detailed description of Job's life before his affliction. "Although this stanza is idealistic—Job no doubt failed in some ways—it is to be accepted, not as self-righteousness, as some insist, but as an eloquent testimony to the tenor of Job's life as 'a blameless and upright' man" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

The Blessing of God

29:1-6 What Job missed most about his glory days was the blessing of God—His watchful care, His guidance, His companionship. He missed the blessing of family and prosperity... when his days were "bathed in butter" and flowing with "streams of oil." Job's point is that he wasn't just blessed; he was drenched in God's goodness. And of all these blessings, God's friendship was what Job prized most of all.

29:18-20 Job had looked forward to the crowning honor of a man in patriarchal times, and still today: a long life with every need provided and a loving family gathered about.

The Honor of Men

29:7-11 The honor shown to Job in these verses is not an exaggeration, but in keeping with the culture of his time. Remember that in 1:3 Job was described as "the greatest man among all the people of the East." He held the place of honor at the city gate. People stood when he walked into a room. All kept silent until he had spoken—social protocol demanded that the first word on any matter be reserved for the most honored person.

29:21-25 Job restates the extreme honor he enjoyed before his affliction. People sought him for his wise counsel and clung to his every word. Even his smile carried a blessing.

The Benevolence of Job (29:12-17)

Job knew what it meant to be "community minded." Whatever the name of his city, it was clearly a better place because he was there. He brought relief to the poor, provided for the orphan, blessed the dying, encouraged the widow, aided the blind and the lame, and acted as advocate to the needy. He fought for justice, actively stamped out wickedness, and protected the vulnerable. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* summarizes this section well.

This passage should be read as instruction, as a stimulus to our social conscience.... It is important to see that Job did not concentrate on ritual righteousness nor other

ethical or religious responsibilities but on that area where humans most often fail—in their response to the sufferings of others. Compassion that knew no bounds is what

characterized the life of the one who was truly the righteousness of God incarnate, who "took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Matt. 8:17).

So Take a Look at Me Now (chp 30)

Juxtaposed with the glorious description of his former life, the terrors of Job's present existence come like a cold slap in the face. Again Job picks up the themes of honor, blessing and benevolence—this time all in the negative. The parallels between the poems found in chapters 29 and 30 are eloquent and moving.

No Honor from Men (30:1-15)

Compare with 29:7-11, 21-25 Once honored by princes and nobles, now Job is mocked by the dregs of society. In 29:20 Job described his glory as a bow that renewed in his hand. Now God has loosed his bowstring and brought affliction (30:11). Instead of holding the seat of honor (29:7), now he is pushed aside (30:12). Verses 12-14 use the terminology of siege warfare. Like ramps built to break down walls and plunder a city, his enemies have used his affliction to bring him to total ruin destroying every path of rescue or escape.

No Blessing from God (30:16-23)

Compare with 29:2-6, 18-20 Verses 20 and 21 summarize the twofold complaint Job has had toward God throughout the book: 1) *You won't listen to me* and 2) *You act against me*. How Job missed the days when God was his guide and friend (29:2-4). This sense of alienation from God was the most devastating affliction of all for Job.

No Benevolence for Job (30:24-31)

Compare with 29:12-17 Job not only cared *for* the needy, he cared *about* them (vs. 25). Yet in his time of need, there was no one to help. In fact, they made matters worse (vs. 26). Job closes his poem of suffering with a vivid picture of joy turned to sorrow: "Therefore my harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the sound of those who weep" (vs. 31).

In the Sin Won't Fit, You Must Acquit (chp 31)

In chapter 31 Job fleshes out the details of a life of one who fears God and turns from evil. Job begins with a covenant ban not to look lustfully at a woman. He parallels this with God's all-seeing eye by which His judgment falls on the wicked whose sins He sees.

Following is a chart outlining the oaths Job made and the curses he calls down on himself if his claims of innocence are found untrue. Some of the curses call for judgment from God while others call for earthly consequences. Job's point is to show that his accusers are wrong: he indeed has lived a righteous life and does not deserve the judgment of God.

Covenant/Oath	Claim of Allegiance	Divine Judgment	Earthly Consequences
Covenant (vs. 1)	Lust of the eye	God's eye (vs. 4)	
Oath 1 (vs. 5)	Falsehood and deceit	God's scales (vs. 6)	
Oath 2 (vs. 7)	Falsehood and deceit		Loss of profit (vs. 8)
Oath 3 (vs. 9)	Adultery	God's fire (vs. 12)	Loss of marriage (vs. 10)
Oath 4 (vs. 13)	Mistreatment of slaves	God's court (vs. 14)	
Oath 5 (vs. 16-18)	Neglect of needy		
Oath 6 (vs. 19-20)	Neglect of needy		
Oath 7 (vs. 21)	Abuse of helpless	God's terror (vs. 23)	Loss of strength (vs. 22)
Oath 8 (vs. 24)	Idolatry		
Oath 9 (vs. 25)	Idolatry		
Oath 10 (vs. 26-27)	Idolatry	God's judgment (vs. 28)	
Oath 11 (vs. 29-30)	Hatred of enemy		
Oath 12 (vs. 31-32)	Selfishness		
Oath 13 (vs. 33-34)	Hypocrisy		
Oath 14 (vs. 38-39)	Greed		Loss of prosperity (vs. 40)

—Chart adapted from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Calling Out God (31:35-37)

If I was sitting at the city gates listening to Job, I'd move my lawn chair way back right about now. In 13:23 Job wasn't so sure of his innocence. Now he has made his stand, proclaimed his oaths of innocence, signed his name, and slammed them down on the divine judge's bench demanding a public response... the vindication for which he so desperately longs.

Verse 36 has been called a gesture of equality where Job approached God as a prince to force God to accept his unblemished record and prove the counselors were wrong about his being punished for his sins. Commentators have never been able to agree on whether Job was doing right or wrong. -*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

One thing we know for certain: God didn't pour out His judgment on Job. No fireballs fell from the sky. Instead, in love God set aside His majesty and stooped to answer His child. He called on Job to brace himself and prepare to wrestle with the Almighty.

Don't you just love it when a story gets really good right at the end!