

(Job: An Epic in Brokenness) 2. Where Job Went Wrong

by Roy Hession

The sermon explores Job's journey through suffering, emphasizing the themes of brokenness, self-righteousness, and the need for repentance to understand God's grace.

Duration: 54:46

Scripture: Job 11:13-14, Job 22:5, Job 23:3-7, Job 23:13-17, Job 30:1, Job 31:5-12

Topics: "Brokenness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the book of Job and explores where Job went wrong in his understanding of God's moral philosophy. The speaker explains that the ancient Oriental men had a simple moral philosophy that revolved around the belief in God as the creator of the universe and the moral arbiter of men. Job, like these men, accepted this philosophy but struggled when his own suffering seemed contrary to it. The speaker highlights how Job's friends, instead of applying their moral philosophy to Job's situation, simply repeated it without considering its application. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's moral philosophy and how it can help us navigate through difficult times.

Transcript

Now will you turn again to the book of Job, will you turn to verse, chapter thirty, chapter twenty-nine, sorry, chapter twenty-nine. Moreover, Job continued his parable and said, O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle, when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me, when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil. I told you it was poetry, and I told you the language is imprecise.

I call it beautiful poetry, washing his steps with butter. Well, you must let the poet be a poet. When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, in the court, the young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged rose up and stood up.

And he proceeds to tell of how it was with him in days past. It's a beautiful, moving, and poetic figure, picture. Chapter thirty, but now, but now, they that are younger than I had me in derision, whose fathers I

would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock.

Yea, where to might the strength of their hands profit me, in whom old age was perished? And then he goes on to, but now, but now, and he tells us, it's tremendous words, the low state to which he's been brought, and the common contempt in which he is held. And then in chapter thirty-one, which is the particular part I want to read, verse five, great protestation of his innocence as he has seen it. Chapter twenty-nine speaks of the days of his prosperity.

Chapter thirty, a graphic description of the sudden reversal of his fortunes and of his deep suffering. And now here is a great poem in which he protests his innocence. Verse five, if I have walked with vanity, with my foot hath hastened to deceit, let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.

If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to my hands, then let me sow, and let another eat. Yea, let my offspring be rooted out, if my heart hath been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid weight at my neighbour's door, then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. For this is an heinous crime, yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine iniquity.

If I did despise the cause of my manservant, or of my maidservant, when they contended with me, what then shall I do when God rises up, and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him, and did not one fashion us in the womb, if I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof? For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father I have guided her from my mother's womb, if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering, if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warm with the fleece of my sheep, if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless when I saw my help in the gate, then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone, for destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure, if I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence, if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand hath gotten much, if I have beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed to worship them, that means, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, a heathen practice, this also were an iniquity to be judged by the judged, for I should have denied the God that is above, if I rejoiced at the destructions of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found me, yea, neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul, if the men of my tabernacle said not, O that we had of his flesh, we cannot be satisfied, the stranger did not lodge in the street, but I opened my doors to the traveller, if I have covered my transgression as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom, did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out of the door, O that one would hear me, behold my desire is that the almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book, surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me, I would declare unto him the number of my steps, as a prince would I go near to him, if my land cry against me, or that the pharaohs likewise thereof complain, if I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life, let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley, the words of Job are ended, and so were the words of his three men, they couldn't stand up to him, so these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own sight. May I just go back a little over the ground covered yesterday. It's so important that our understanding of the book to get some of the concepts of yesterday firmly in our mind.

We saw that although the book of Job would at first sight to be a subject dealing with the mystery of suffering, and especially the sufferings that sometimes fall upon the godly, we saw actually that its theme was really something much deeper. We saw that in actual fact it was an epic on brokenness, the broken and the contrite heart, which in the sight of God is of great price. We saw that the man who at the first was presented to us as a perfect and an upright man, one who feared God and eschewed evil, we see him at the end saying, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

He was brought to that place, not an ostensibly wicked man, but one whom even God could commend at a certain level. And as a result of being brought to that deep place of self-abhorrence and repentance, he was brought into a prosperity and a blessing twice as good as anything he knew before. We saw that there fell upon Job, God allowed it, though Satan inflicted them, three tests and they fell in rapid succession.

I think the fact that they fell in such rapid succession made it quite clear to everybody that it was God. And when things do happen like that, that's to emphasize this isn't just a chance, this is God. First he lost his wealth in a day.

Then he lost his seven sons and three daughters, a yet more grievous blow. And then he lost his health and he was covered with boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. And that was a pain that didn't cease day or night.

He could perhaps forget for a moment the loss of wealth and the loss of family, but the loss of health was ever with him. They were three very grievous tests indeed. And falling upon him in succession, it was a stunning thing, not only to him, but for those who beheld.

And we saw the wonderful way in which Job accepted those sufferings. He didn't attribute them to some chance happening, it was God. And he said, the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away.

Naked came I out, naked I go, blessed be the name of the Lord. And yet again he said, shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not receive evil? He surrendered his own will and natural preferences to God, even at such cost. They were sublime words indeed.

And he came through those tests, it would seem, wonderfully. And you would say, if ever there was a broken man, it was this man. But there was a fourth test to come and he didn't do so well on the fourth test.

And that was the coming of his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. And they sat down and they began to philosophize about the situation in front of them, this man's unexplained sufferings. And just to summarize briefly, their theory, their outlook was, as they saw it, that only the wicked suffered in a way like this.

And the inference becomes increasingly plain as they speak one to another and with Job. Therefore Job, in spite of all outward appearances, must indeed be a wicked man. If not outwardly wicked, somewhere he's wrong and he's one big hypocrite.

And as Job argued it out with his friends, as they kept on coming back, he found himself being stripped of what was his most precious possession. Every man's most precious possession, his righteousness. It is a precious possession.

Every man must somehow prove himself to be right in his own eyes. You cannot live with a man whom you know to be wrong. You can only live peaceably with yourself if you can persuade yourself that that man is right.

And anybody who suggests otherwise is stoutly refused. It's an automatic reaction on the part of everything. But he found himself with these imputations of wrong which he knew to be untrue.

He knew he was innocent of those implications. And there he was suffering this crowning suffering. And he ends up by saying in his argument with them, I will hold fast my righteousness.

I will not let it go. I will insist that I am right. And that, I say, was his fourth test and his most painful one.

It occurred to me of a parallel case. As you know, years ago, my first wife Revel lost her life in a car crash. Immediately after the end of a holiday conference like this, but it was held at Clevedon.

And I was in hospital with various fractures and into my room there came a long succession of precious brethren to offer their love and fellowship and sympathy with me in that great test and trial. And what a blessing that time was, just because I tasted afresh the love of brethren. It occurred to me, how would I have felt if one brother came in and after offering sympathy and fellowship, said, you know, brother, I really have to say, I believe this had to be.

Some of us had been very concerned about your relationship with Revel. We thought it wasn't right. We felt you were acting in a wrong way toward her.

And we feel that you've grown cold and there's been compromise and maybe this is God really catching up with you. And supposing, which was indeed a fact, I knew it not to be true. I knew that our relationship had been sweet right to the end.

Now how would I have felt had that been said? I want to tell you that would have been the most severe suffering I could have gone through. After that brother had left, I would have thought of nothing else. I wouldn't have thought of the loss of Revel.

I wouldn't have thought of my personal injuries. I would have been thinking about that. And as I tried to go to sleep, I would be having mental arguments with that and other people who thought likewise.

And I tell you, in my bed I would win every argument. And I would tell you that that would be my far bigger suffering than anything else. Because this is the citadel of everything.

My love of being right, my hatred of being wrong and especially of having to accept an imputation of wrong which I know not to be true. Now you know that's right. That would have been suffering indeed.

That's what Job had. That was his fourth test and he didn't do so well under that fourth test. He said, I'm going to hold fast my righteousness.

I will not let it go. This book is an exposure of this basic sin in every one of us, self-righteousness. This automatic reaction always to justify ourselves.

Sometimes it's pretty patent. I'd say we are wrong, but we still go and justify ourselves. But how much more painful it is and how much more do we want to justify ourselves when as far as we can honestly see that imputation is wrong.

We're not going to have it. I remember years ago at Clevedon there was a tremendous rumpus in one of the houses and the man who was in charge of that house from the point of view of the school staff, he was the caretaker, he told me what a tremendous noise it was and it really couldn't continue. And so we had to take a little disciplinary action and the boys in that room, of course it was boys, though perhaps not always so.

And I said, now look, I'm afraid we'll have to put an embargo on you coming again or something like that. And whatever the disciplinary action was I can't remember. And there was one boy who belonged to that group who didn't happen to be in the room at that time.

And he was included in the common condemnation of his friends. You would think he'd had an awful mortal blow. He got so worked up and it wasn't true, it wasn't me.

Isn't that true? You can't bear it. This is something deep in human nature. You see, we are basically moral beings.

Even the prostitute, the woman of the street is at pains to tell you it's all right. There's nothing wrong with the oldest profession in the world. She must prove herself right, even when quite ostensibly she's wrong.

How much that those who, on all sorts of practical grounds, feel they are right, how much must they prove themselves right? And this was the point at which Job failed. And it's a story of how God dealt with him and brought him to penitence, not with regard to the fancied sins that his friends suggested he committed, but with words, to his attitude. As I said yesterday, he says, wherefore I pour myself marginal reading, I pour my words, my words.

He didn't repent of things he hadn't done, but he did repent of his words, his attitude, his unwillingness to lose his righteousness if God should decree it. We're on something very basic and very important here. Now I want with you to look more closely at what these three friends said, and especially where Job went wrong.

In fact, if I had to give a title to our study this morning, I would entitle it, Where Job Went Wrong. First of all, I must say a word about the moral philosophy or theology which was current among these ancients, these early oriental men. Their moral philosophy was very simple.

It was the basis on which they judged everything. First, they had a complete conception of God as the creator of the universe, and they worshipped him as such. They lived very near to nature.

They were out in the open air, slept sometimes under the skies, and they saw the wonders of creation, and it was accepted as absolute basic that God was the creator of all that, and all that was under his control. And then there was a second factor in their moral philosophy, and it was that God was the moral arbiter of men, absolutely basic, very simple, that God through his providence would not tolerate wickedness but overthrow it, and he would establish the righteous. That was their moral philosophy.

Indeed, it's the moral philosophy basic to the whole of the Old Testament. There was, however, grace in their concept of God. It wasn't merely right and wrong and holiness and unholiness at issue, but there was grace shown by the fact that the things they charged Job with doing was at bottom a failure to be gracious.

Eliphaz charges him with not having given water to the weary, or clothing to the naked, or having sent the widows away, and having oppressed the fatherless, in chapter 22, verse 5. And if they charged him with

being ungracious, if they felt God was charging him with failing to consider the poor and the needy, that meant that God was like that, and God was gracious. There's not a lot about grace in their concept of God, but there is that there, an element. Moreover, when at some points they counseled Job to repent of whatever he might have done, then they promised him all sorts of wonderful blessings from God, which was another sign of wonderful grace.

But at bottom, their concept was God the moral arbiter, overthrowing the wicked, establishing the righteous. Moreover, in all this, their concept was limited to this life. God's providence was going to do that in this life.

They had little or no vision of life beyond. Job had no vision of life beyond. Job said, if a man die, shall he live again? If only I could be assured of that, then I would wait, I could bear all that I'm having to bear.

But he didn't realize, he had little or no knowledge or revelation of the life beyond. The three men hadn't, and Job hadn't. And so it is these moral judgments of God had to take place in their concept in this life.

I believe what they said was true in the long term, because we know that it's appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment. Not always are the wicked overthrown in this life. In the short term, it isn't true, and this is one of their problems.

As far as they understood it, their concept was to see this happening in this life. Did you know that? Have you ever realized how inadequate was the concept of Old Testament saints of a life beyond death? David has some things. He expects to be saved in the life of the land of the living in this life.

He gets experience of God's mercy in this life. He says, what profit is there in my blood if I go down to the grave? Can the dead praise thee? It's only in the New Testament that you get the full revelation of that fact that this life is only a tiny portion, that there's a life beyond. It's in Timothy, is it not, where it talks about God has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And that revelation is not fully established. There are hints, of course, of it in the Old. It's not fully established save by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

What we have in the Bible is a progressive revelation. A progressive revelation. So much is revealed and men lived then by that which was revealed.

But there was more to come and more to come until the final and full revelation of God is made known in Jesus Christ. And the fact that they only had part of the revelation was something which created a problem for them. Now, when I talk about a progressive revelation, I need to make two qualifications.

That does not mean that any revelation in the Old Testament is contradicted at any point at all by a bigger revelation in the New. Everything in the Old is true, eternally true today. It's not all the truth, but it's true.

And the New Testament bases on what's already been revealed and takes the revelation further. If there wasn't to these men a very full revelation of grace, that comes later in the Old Testament. What revelations of a gracious and merciful God there are later! Even at Sinai, when Moses went to plead with the people, the Lord passed before and displayed his name, merciful and gracious.

And then, of course, finally and completely in the Lord Jesus. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. But nothing in the Old is contradicted by anything in the New.

Indeed, the New is based on it. And then, another thing that needs to be said is that it's only the revelation which is progressive. It doesn't mean to say that God is more gracious today than he was in the Old Testament.

He hasn't got more gracious. He always was. Great God of wonders, all thy ways are matchless, God-like and divine.

He always has been a God of grace, always has been a God of holiness. He hasn't, doesn't change. It's only the revelation that gets bigger and bigger and more glorious.

And we discover who God always has been in the face of Jesus Christ. So then, that was their moral philosophy. God, the moral arbiter, overthrowing the wicked, establishing the righteous, and doing so in this life.

Now, that philosophy posed problems to these men, especially when it came to a man like Job, who, according to their philosophy, should be rewarded in this life, and indeed had been rewarded, and now he has these reverses. Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast-wind it in either direction.

And indeed had been rewarded, and now he has these reverses. They were quite sure their moral philosophy was right. It could only mean, somewhere along the line, Job wasn't right.

And of course, it posed problems for Job. Job accepted this moral philosophy as much as they did. If it was a problem to them, it was a bigger problem to God, to Job.

How in the world has God done this to me? It was contrary to the light that he had. Well now, what did these three men do? Well, they first of all just kept repeating their moral philosophy. They didn't apply it at first, they just kept on repeating it.

Whether or not it applied to Job's case, they felt they must just go on. For instance, you get much of what Eliphaz, the first man, had to say in chapter 4, verse 7. Without applying it to Job, think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? Bildad, he sums up what he's got to say in chapter 8, verse 20. God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers.

This is merely summarising. They expatiate on these things at great length and they let their poetry really go. Especially when they describe the end and the troubles that fall upon the wicked.

They're not necessarily at this stage saying anything about Job. But of course the implication becomes increasingly obvious. And so far, what he has to say can be summed up in chapter 20, verse 5. That the exalting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment.

Someone has said that Eliphaz bases his observation on experience. As I see it, he says. In experience, he's seen that his moral philosophy does actually work out that way.

And in many cases it does. But I'm afraid not in all. Bildad, he draws his deductions from the words of the fathers.

He goes back to tradition. They've always said this thing. This is the thing that must apply here.

And so far, he appeals to morality. He says, God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquities deserve. This theme, this theory, this philosophy has to be so morally.

Morally, the wicked must be brought down. Morally, the righteous must be established. But of course, the implication was pretty obvious.

But as I say, fair is fair. These men didn't immediately go in to bat against Job. They just kept on restating that which they knew.

Though of course, the implication was very much bound up in it. Actually, what they did, first of all, was to give him very encouraging counsel. Chapter 4, verse 6, reading from the Revised Standard Version.

This is his first approach to Job. Having heard him curse the day that he was born and express his despair, he says to him in verse 6, Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? Why? Why be so down? Can't you trust in the fact that you have had a fear of God and been right in all your ways? Does that give you hope in this hour? And then in verse 8 of chapter 5 he says, If it were me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. And then of course, once they get on a theme, they must go on and on in their poetic ways, expecting all the wonderful blessings would come.

If it were me, I wouldn't be down. I would commit my cause to God and he would arise to my relief. Therefore, he says, think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cast out? Yes, it was quite encouraging, except that it threw Job back on whether he was righteous or not.

8 verse 6, this is Bildad speaking, he says, If you are pure and upright, then he will rouse himself for you and reward you with a rightful habitation. Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great. And he's trying to encourage him.

Verse 20 says, Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers. Trying to be encouraging, though of course there was that if, if, if, if you are pure and upright. He couldn't avoid it, he had to say it.

And of course the implication was pretty obvious. And then chapter 11, verse 13, so far now he's speaking, he says, If you set your heart aright, you will stretch out your hands toward him. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tents.

Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish, you will be secure and will not fear, you will forget your misery, you will remember it as waters that have passed away, etc., etc. It's only in chapter 22, when Job doesn't seem to appreciate what they're saying, that Eliphaz really comes out and charges Job with specific sin. He can't put his finger on anything, but it must be.

His moral philosophy demands there must be something wrong there. Verse 5 of chapter 22, Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities. You have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing, and stripped them naked of their clothing.

You have given no water to the weary to drink. You have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land and the favoured man dwelt in it.

You have sent widows away empty. The arms of the fatherless were crushed. Therefore snares are round about you, and sudden terror overwhelms you.

Your light is darkened so that you cannot see, and a flood of waters covers you. That's something of what they said. Very poor comfort for a despairing, a suffering man.

And they added to his sufferings by seeking to wrench from him that which is so precious to every man, his righteousness. Job, on his part, not for one moment accepted those implications. At first he seems rather oblivious of them.

He agrees with them. Their philosophy is his philosophy. Of course the righteous are blessed and the wicked are overthrown.

He's quite sure he's one of the righteous. It doesn't seem to come home to him what they're trying to say. He assumes he is.

He's got no problem with their moral philosophy. His problem is how to find God to tell him that he is righteous. He would like to find him and set out his circumstances and his situation and prepare his case and ask God for an explanation.

It demanded one. He was in a cleft stick. He agreed with that philosophy.

But how in the world was God doing it to him, seeing he took it as basic that he was innocent, which, of course, he was. We know that. But the problem is he can't find God to tell him.

And there's some extraordinary passages here where you have Job explaining a deep predicament. Chapter 9. Bildad has been saying what he has. And then, chapter 9, verse 1, Then Job answered, Truly I know that it is so.

I know that a blameless man God will not reject. I know it. I agree with you.

But how can a man show himself to be that blameless man? How can a man be just before God? Very often we'd like to pick up that text, I think I have, to say this is the great question of the human race. How can a man be just before God? A holy God, mere sinner. How can I be just? And, of course, we pick up the answer to that question from the book of Romans where a righteousness without the law is manifested to the sinner coming from Calvary, credited to him when he believes.

But that isn't really dealing with this verse fairly. It isn't how can a man be just before God? Quite obviously from the context, how can a man show himself just before God? He may be just, but how in the world is he to prove his case? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand. He is wise in heart, mighty in strength.

Who has hardened himself against him and succeeded? He who removes mountains, they know not. When he overturns them in his anger, who shakes the earth, and so on. And so he goes on.

You can't get at him. How can a man prove himself to be wrong? God, he goes on in these verses, is infinite. How in the world do I get in touch with him? He's invisible.

Where do I find him? That's what he meant when later he said, oh that I knew where I might find him. If I knew where he was, I'd come and spread the case. But I'm not able to.

He's not only infinite, not only invisible, but he's invincible. He'll have the last say, whether you're right or wrong. It's only later that he turns in anger upon his friends.

Miserable comforters are you all. And he stoutly refuses their imputations. My righteousness will I hold fast.

I will not let it go. I don't understand why God's done this to me. I cannot believe, though I'm tempted to wonder if he's righteous, but I cannot understand how a righteous God can afflict a righteous man as me.

Well, there it is for us. This is our problem. Whether you are anything like in the situation of Job, whether on top of your other sufferings there's been any implication given that you there because of something in you, I don't know.

But I do know this basic thing is basic to us. I will hold fast, I will not let it go. This it is that makes it so hard for us to repent.

Why is repentance such a hard thing for us? Why do we stave it off? We only do it when we can't get peace any other way. Because it means I'm shown to be a sinner. I'm shown to be a wrong one.

I may be a preacher, I may be a leader, but when I repent, when God convicts me, and I've got to acknowledge it to him and sometimes it needs to be put right with another, I'm seen to be a sinner. I'm stripped. And there's nothing a man loves more than his righteousness.

As I said yesterday, Job obviously loved it more than all he lost and so do you. You do anything rather than lose it. Some people have spent a lifetime in litigation, trying to prove themselves right.

They cannot bear to pass into history as those that are wrong. And of course it's a source of many another trouble. Many marriage has broken down not just the lack of somebody saying sorry, it was me, if not in the act, in my reactions, but to have to say it is to be left stripped.

Lost your precious thing. It's quite astonishing. Sometimes a man will give a testimony.

As I heard a man, an American doctor, missionary doctor, in Interlochen at a conference recently and he held it absolutely spellbound. God had begun to work in revival on the mission field in his heart and he knew there was one person he didn't love, whom he had wronged, whom he had worked against, a fellow missionary. And God said, I want you to put that right.

And he did everything in the world to avoid it. And he found himself in San Francisco at a great missionary's conference. He said, well, I will.

He said, that's two or three thousand, he's not likely to be here. At least I'm not likely to meet him. He was in the same block as him.

Well, if we go out of the same door then. And dear me, he found himself going out the same door. And he said, all right, I'll ask him to come and eat with us and have a meal.

And if he says yes, then I'll do it. And dear me, he said, there's all the drama. There's all the drama in the world.

A man is fighting the biggest battle of the ages. He's making a biggest surrender. It's a death.

He's dying. He's losing his righteousness to take the place of a sinner. And this is what Job wasn't willing to.

But of course, that was pretty easy. You see, because this brother knew he was wrong. But Job knew he wasn't.

You will find yourself in situations like that. Perhaps on balance between you and him. You're comparatively innocent.

He's done the wrong thing. Well, how can I repent? What about your reactions to his wrong thing? And that's hard to be the first to take that place. And of course, in ordinary day parlance when implications are made, up we are in defense of ourselves.

This is our cardinal sin. This is that which makes it terrible to us. It is only for those who haven't got a righteousness, who have repented, there's good news for bad people on the condition that the bad people confess how bad they are.

And that's the crunch. And this is the thing which is the turning point. As it was for Job.

What a wonderful end it was. Glorious end. You've heard of the patience of Job we read and how the Lord is very pitiful in this place first.

Not only did Job go wrong in justifying himself, but he was tempted out of that early place of submission. He began so well. It's very easy to take a suffering well.

No squealing. But it isn't one moment only. We've got to go on in that situation.

And it's later that the squealing begins. And it was so. Because if we assert that we're right and people's implications are wrong, then I'll say, well, if I'm so right, why has God done it? Why has God done it? And Job was brought into that situation.

Look at chapter 23, verse 3. These many chapters need a closer study than I've given to them to find the actual places where he says this and that. But here's that passage I've already alluded to. Chapter 3, verse 3. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat.

I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No, he would give heed to me.

Then an upright man could reason with him forever by my judge. But he doesn't stop there and he goes on to say, to charging God with not being just, he's denied me justice, taken away my right. But, of course, he couldn't but be seeing his moral philosophy was that.

It was a wonderful act of blind, dumb surrender. But when he thought into it, and this, of course, gave the friends more ground to charge him with being wrong. Listen to what you're saying, lifting up yourself against the Almighty, uttering words such as this.

And it made them even more sure that this man is suffering because he's wrong. Listen, he says, in one place it's all equal whether you're righteous or wicked. The same thing happens.

And so it is with us. Not only do we justify ourselves and hold fast our righteousness and feel we've been treated wrongfully and accused wrongfully, but God, in allowing what's happened to happen, he's done wrong too. And we come to the place where if we so insist that we're right, we have to say, God then is

wrong.

It says in that passage we read, he was righteous in his own eyes, he goes on to say, he justified himself by saying, if Job is right, he's in effect saying God is wrong. And so he came really out from that blessed place of submission to God which he demonstrated first of all. And it'll be the same with us.

If I'm not willing to let go of my righteousness, if I'm not willing to bow to him and take a sinner's place, then I'll soon be charging him, God made me thus. And these were the things that ultimately Job had to repent of. He didn't have to repent of sin that led to suffering, but he did have to repent of sin that arose as a result of suffering under the test, under the test.

He loved his righteousness and he found himself in the presence of God and questioning God. But as yet, though Job may know he's doing that, he doesn't see the sinfulness of it. That has yet to be revealed to him.

To close with, may I remind you of another man in the New Testament who loved his righteousness every bit as much as Job loved his, the Apostle Paul. When he was Saul of Tarsus he was so proud of things that stood to his credit. Pharisee of the Pharisees, circumcised the eighth day, touched the law of Pharisee, you know it in Philippians 3, all those things that he, they meant so much to him.

Woe betide anybody who would challenge them. Woe betide anybody who tried to put Paul in the wrong. They would have met as big a reaction from Saul of Tarsus as these men met from Job.

He was indeed an up-and-coming man, going up, getting more well-known, adding to his store of reputation and righteousness. But one day on the road to Damascus this man going up met another man coming down. And this man not only gave up much else, his position, place in glory, to become a man, to humble himself among men, but he gave up his righteousness on the cross and took a sinner's place, though he wasn't one.

He didn't complain. He didn't justify himself. And when the up-and-coming man, the man going up met that other man coming down, it broke the Saul of Tarsus.

And do you know what he said? What things were gained to me, in Christ? What were the things that were gained to him, the things to do with his righteousness? He dumped the lot. He said, there's so much dumb. He was dropped out of polite society as a result.

And I don't covet it to be otherwise, said Paul, because I've gained Christ. I'm found in him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is credited to me from Calvary, the righteousness of God in Christ. I've gained the enjoyment, an up-to-date, current experience of justification, save as we are willing to let go our righteousness and take the sinner's place.

And by the way, justification is not a thing for the notebook. It's a current, up-to-the-minute experience, being justified with God, declared right, having this other righteousness counted to us when we've let go our own. We have peace with God and joy and much else.

I'm not suggesting your justification varies from moment to moment, but your experience of it may. And if you stand on your high horse and insist you're right, you will lose experience of it. I'm not saying again that you're in and out of it, but you don't have the peace of it.

But as I go back to that place where it was first revealed to me, I get it again, being justified as a sinner. I have peace with God. I have peace with people, even when the bad people happen to be converted, but all on the condition that I confess that I'm the bad person.

And if I haven't got anything else to repent about, I need to repent of insisting that I'm right. Many a time, one brother's gone to another, forgive me, brother. Many a time amongst brethren, a wife has gone to the husband and said, forgive me, hallelujah for something to repent of, brother.

Hallelujah! It gives you your title to come into his banqueting house through the blood of Jesus. Amen. Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being the man coming down for us. Lord, forgive us for coming to be the man going up. Forgive us for our unwillingness to join Thee in the way down, which always ultimately leads to a far better way up.

Lord, we thank You for all that we are learning from this holy portion of Thy Word. Interpret it to us, each one individually, for Jesus' sake. Let's sing the chorus then.

Number 12, To God be the glory, great things He hath done. For His blood He hath saved me.

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