

# Job's Trials and Mercies

by William Plumer

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*The sermon explores Job's trials and mercies, highlighting his character, afflictions, and patience, and ultimately his restoration and blessing by God.*

**Scripture:** Job 1:20, Job 13:15, Job 19:25, Job 29:8, Job 29:21, Job 29:25, Job 42:10, Proverbs 18:19, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 16:23

**Topics:** "Suffering And Faith", "Divine Providence"

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## Description

William Plumer preaches on the profound story of Job, highlighting his unwavering faith and patience amidst extreme suffering and loss. Job, a man of great piety and wealth, faced unimaginable afflictions, losing his possessions, children, and enduring painful physical ailments. Despite the misguided accusations of his friends and the lack of sensible religious comfort, Job remained steadfast in his trust in God, setting a remarkable example of patience and submission. Ultimately, after fervent prayer for his friends, God restored Job's fortunes twofold, blessing him with even greater prosperity and a long, good life.

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## Transcript

The book of Job is the oldest and the best epic poem in the world. The people prominently before us are Jehovah, Satan, Job, Job's wife, his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and that remarkable person Elihu. Much of the book is a discussion of the principles on which the speakers suppose God's providence to be conducted.

Some have surmised that Job was a fictitious character; but this is surely a mistake. The prophet Ezekiel clearly proves that he was a historic personage -- as much so as Noah or Daniel, Ezek. 14:14, 20. He was a man, and a very good man.

The course of providence towards him is full of instruction. In his life we find lessons of much value. Instruction by example clearly points out the duty to be performed, shows that it is practicable, and awakens in the virtuous the desire of imitation.

Among mere men we seldom find a striking example of more than one grace. Abraham was distinguished for his faith; Moses, for his meekness; Daniel, for his courage; John, for the tenderness of his love; and Job, for his patience. If we would find perfect symmetry of character in any portion of history, we must go to the man Christ Jesus.

It may aid us to pursue a method in our reflections.

I. Let us consider the course of providence towards Job, and his character and circumstances, before his great afflictions. Job was a man of great piety. The Scriptures say that he was upright and perfect. He was not double-tongued, nor double-minded, but sincere, free from hypocrisy, and had respect to all God's commandments. "He feared God and eschewed evil." This character is given by God himself. His reputation among men was both fair and high. "When the young men saw him, they hid themselves." In his presence "the aged arose and stood up. The princes refrained talking and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth." Job 29:8-10. Probably no man ever received more marked attention from great and small than did Job. "Unto him men gave ear and waited and kept silence at his counsel. After his words they spoke not again. And they waited for him as for the rain." Job 29:21-23.

He was also esteemed wise, and possessed great influence by his eloquence. He was a sound advisor. Speaking of his influence over men, it is said, "He chose out their way." Job. 29:25.

Job was also a great captain. His military skill and prowess were such that he dwelt as king in the army. Job 29:25. "He broke the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth." Job 29:17. He was also a philanthropist. He was not indeed ostentatious in his charity, yet such a city set on a hill cannot be hid. "When the ear heard him, then it blessed him; and when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him; because he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him; and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. He was eyes to the blind, and feet was he to the lame. He was a father to the poor." Not only did he do good and relieve the distressed in cases which others brought to his notice; but he sought out the necessitous and afflicted. "The cause which he knew not, he searched out." Job 29:16. In his labors of love he was both diligent and disinterested.

Before his afflictions Job was a man of great wealth. He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she donkeys, and a very great household, that is, numerous servants. Job 1:3. In wealth he excelled all the rich men of the East. So abundant were his possessions that "he washed his steps in butter, and the rock poured him out rivers of oil."

In his own family, Job enjoyed domestic comfort. Although he had his fears about his children, yet it does not appear that they were either profane or licentious. He loved them tenderly and they were respectful to him. His wife seems not to have shown her grievous want of piety during his prosperity.

To crown all his enjoyments, the candle of the Lord shined upon his head, and by the light of the divine countenance he walked through darkness. The secret of God was upon his tabernacle, and the Almighty was yet with him. Job 29:3-5. It is in God's light that we see light. When he smiles we are blessed. When he gives comfort, who can afflict?

All this prosperity begat confidence in his own continuance, and led Job to say, "I shall die in my nest and I shall multiply my days as the sand. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand." Job 29:18-20.

II. Let us consider his afflictions themselves and his patience under them. A descent from such unusual prosperity awakens very different sentiments from those entertained by men who have long lived in humble circumstances and been unexpectedly raised to greatness. Let this thought be remembered.

Job's afflictions commenced with the loss of his wealth, consisting of oxen, and donkeys, and sheep, and camels, and servants. The intelligence of these losses came upon him by surprise. Poverty is no sin. It may come upon us without any fault of ours. Yet every one knows that it brings sore trials on all, especially on those who are not accustomed to it. All this is heightened by the suddenness of its approach. This often produces a shock which few hearts are sufficiently stout to resist. Many who have stood calm while thrones were falling around them, who have fearlessly stormed the deadly breach, and who have manfully suffered popular rage, have sunk under intolerable anguish, when their earthly possessions have taken flight and left them destitute and dependent. Whatever bitterness is necessarily connected with such loss was the portion of Job.

No sooner had the messengers closed their respective narratives of his losses of property, than another with all the promptness attending the announcement of calamities thus spoke: "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, and behold there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell you." Thus his children were carried into eternity on the same day on which he lost all his property. Not a child was left him. His Reuben and his Benjamin, his daughter that was to him as a pet lamb, all died. And then they died so suddenly. No previous sickness gave warning of approaching death. In the morning he had parted with them, not dreaming that he should nevermore see their faces in the land of the living. Nor had he satisfactory evidence that they were prepared for this solemn exchange of worlds. Indeed he had fears to the contrary. As priest of his own house, he had been in the habit of offering sacrifices for them on occasion of their feasts, thinking that they might have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Job 1:5. But on this occasion Job had not time to offer sacrifice or prayer after the close of the feast. How must this saint of God have followed in imagination the departed spirits of his children. And how must his heart have swollen with anguish when in vain he sought for assurance of their salvation. Yet at the end of all this, Job reverently "fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, and said, Naked came I out of 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." Job 1:20-21.

But neither the malignity of Satan nor the mysterious love of God would permit Job's sufferings to end here. Satan obtained permission to afflict him with bodily disease, so that he was covered from the sole of his foot unto his crown with sore boils. This affliction makes a standing posture a rack of torture, a chair a seat of misery, and a couch a "bed of unrest." In the midst of his wretchedness, he "took a potsherd to scrape himself and he sat down in the ashes." In our suffering it is seldom that we cannot find some posture that will not give some relief. But his was not Job's case. Pain followed pain, and quiver succeeded quiver until his agony was complete. Hear his dolorous complaint: "When I lie down I say, When shall I arise and the night be gone? My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken and become loathsome. When I say, My bed shall comfort me, then you scare me with dreams, and terrify me through visions. My breath is corrupt, the graves are ready for me." Job 7:4, 5, 13-14, and 17:1.

From all this weight of suffering Job might have found some relief, had the wife of his bosom possessed a right spirit. But when she saw him thus afflicted, her heart rose in rebellion against God, and instead of exhorting her husband to faith and patience, she bade him "curse God and die." During his prosperity Job's wife may have given some evidence of piety. If so, how must such an avowal have pierced his soul; and if not, how afflicting it must have been to behold her, whom he loved so tenderly, venting her wickedness against God? She not only manifested hatred to him whom Job adored; but she became cold

and cruel to her husband. He says: "My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of my own body." Job 19:17. The appeal to conjugal affection was fruitless. Pointing to the pledges of their love in their offspring had no effect. Her marriage vows and all the kindness she had received were forgotten. Her heart was unfeeling.

Another source of distress to Job was the conduct of his friends, his servants and his neighbors. To him that is afflicted, pity should be shown. But when those in whom we have trusted hide as it were their faces from us, it is sad indeed. At first Job's friends seemed disposed to sympathize with him, but they soon began to accuse him wrongfully. They aggravated his sufferings by referring to his former prosperity. Job 4:2. They dealt deceitfully with him. Job 6:15. They scorned him. Job 16:20. They vexed his soul. Job 19:2. He says: "They whom I loved are turned against me." Job 19:19. They charged him with hypocrisy, Job 20:5; they told him God was punishing him for his injustice and cruelty, Job 22:6-9; they perverted his language, and upon his speech put a construction which he had never thought of, and a meaning which he abhorred. Job 34:9; 35:2. The great difficulty was that without evidence they believed him guilty; and such people cannot be convinced by evidence. Under these circumstances Job poured forth his complaints. Hear him: God "has put my brethren far from me and my acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. Those who dwell in my house and my maids count me for a stranger. I called my servant and he gave me no answer." Job 19:13-16. So full was the conviction of those around Job that he was a bad man, and so helpless was he, that he was held in the utmost contempt. Even "young children despised him, and when he arose they spoke against him." Job 19:18. The children of the lowest people and of base men, who were viler than the earth, sported with him and spit upon him. Job 30:1-10. If we feel great pain at even suspicion thrown on our characters, what must Job's anguish have been when old and young, rich and poor, vile and honorable, pious and ungodly, united in suspecting, condemning or despising him as a bad man! Nor had Job any means of proving himself innocent. The charges brought against him were general and vague. It was impossible for him to prove a negative. Yet he felt, as all good men do, that a good name is better than great riches and precious ointment. His other trials would have been comparatively light, had his friends been true and kind. But they were unstable and greatly misjudged him.

Another source of sorrow was that Job had no sensible religious comfort. He cries out, "Oh that I were as in months past." Job 29:2. At no period of his sufferings does he seem to have had those transporting views of divine things, which many of the martyrs had, and which quenched the violence and fire, and bore the soul away from the consideration of personal pains to rapturous thoughts on Jesus, and heaven, and the crown of imperishable glory. Yes, not only was he tossed with tempest and not comforted, but his soul was filled with great distress. He cries out: "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit: the terrors of God set themselves in array against me." Job 6:4. The spirit of a man sustains his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? Even when alone the terrors of God may be insupportable; but when joined to so many other evils, where is the heart strong enough to bear the dreadful weight?

It heightened Job's misery that he had no sweet access to God in prayer. He says, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him. Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, but I cannot behold him: he hides himself on the right hand that I cannot see him." Job 23:3-4, 8-9. The privilege of prayer in all its sweetness remaining to God's people, they have inexpressible comfort; but when that is gone, what can the soul do?

Another aggravation of Job's affliction was, that although better instructed than his friends, he yet but imperfectly understood the doctrine of providence. This difficulty has been felt in every age. In the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations it terribly afflicted the righteous. Even under the clear light of the gospel, good men have perplexities from this source. Job had no such clear Scriptures as these: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"; "If you be without chastisement, you are not sons"; "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God"; "We know all things work together for good to those who love God." Instead of this clear light Job himself saw God's ways involved in inscrutable mystery. Job 31:3.

Hope of better days on earth seems quite to have departed from him. He says, "I shall no more see good." Job 7:7. As far forward as his vision extended, all was dark and dreary. No star of promise, no ray of joyous expectation illumined the gloom. Former greatness and happiness but showed him how low he had fallen. They gave no pledge of return. All seemed to be irretrievably gone. The great man of Uz became a companion to owls, and his harp was turned into mourning, and his organ into the voice of those who weep. Job 30:29, 31.

Under this enormous load of suffering Job set a bright example of patience. Not a word of sinful murmur escaped his lips. Job 1:22. He exhibited not the proud severity of the stoic in refusing to acknowledge himself afflicted. He had not the iron hardihood of atheism, denying God's hand in his troubles. Nor did he exhibit the sinful sinking of unbelief. He submissively acquiesced in what God ordained. He brought no foolish charge against his Maker. He meekly says: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job 2:10. He sought solace in worship and especially in praise. It is not claimed that in all things Job was spotlessly pure, but only that he was in the main, persistently upright. Near the close of the book God himself says, "My servant Job has spoken of me the thing that is right." Job 42:7. Job did indeed undertake to reason on matters beyond his knowledge. Job 38:2. But the general tenor of his feelings was pleasing to God. For a long time he bore the most trying events with a spirit of submission probably never equaled in a mere man. For this cause he is fitly held up to us as one whose example is worthy of imitation.

III. Let us consider his history after the heavy hand of God was no longer upon him. On this point the record is brief but highly satisfactory. "When Job prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes. In fact, the Lord gave him twice as much as before! Then all his brothers, sisters, and former friends came and feasted with him in his home. And they consoled him and comforted him because of all the trials the Lord had brought against him. And each of them brought him a gift of money and a gold ring. So the Lord blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For now he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand teams of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters. In all the land there were no other women as lovely as the daughters of Job. And their father put them into his will along with their brothers. Job lived 140 years after that, living to see four generations of his children and grandchildren. Then he died, an old man who had lived a long, good life." Job 42:10-17

Every foul imputation on his character was wiped away. Every slanderous tongue was silenced. The terrible storm was passed. Only the peaceable fruits of righteousness remained. Sobered and chastened he indeed was, but richly laden with the experience of God's goodness. He saw the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.

Concluding Observations

1. How vain are all merely earthly possessions! How unstable is popular favor! How uncertain are riches! How soon our pleasures may be followed by pains! When parents rejoice at the birth of a child, they know not how soon they may weep over his dead body without an assurance that his soul is saved. Solomon thoroughly tried the world. His sober inspired judgment was that all was vanity. The sooner we reach that conclusion ourselves, the wiser shall we be.

2. Let us always be more afraid of sinning against God than of offending our nearest earthly friends. Job instantly repulsed the wicked assaults of his wife, saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks." Job 2:10. To his own disciple, Peter, Jesus was compelled to say: "Get behind me, Satan: you are an offence unto me: for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Matt. 16:23. No human friendship may for a moment interfere with our fidelity to God.

3. Although God generally chooses the poor as his children, yet he offers mercy to the rich, and receives all such as humbly seek his grace. Job's riches did not debar him from the kingdom of heaven. By reason of depravity riches tend to alienate the heart from God; yet sovereign grace can remedy that evil. He, who is rich in this world's goods, and also rich in faith and good works, is loudly called to sing the praises of Jehovah. Nothing but almighty power could thus make the camel go through the eye of the needle, or preserve the soul from the burning flames of insatiable covetousness.

4. Weight of character and a high order of talents are by no means confined to the enemies of God. Why should they be? Piety is wisdom. Who ever stood higher for wisdom in council, for soundness of judgment and for prowess in war than did the man of Uz? In proportion to the number of consistent professors of religion, there cannot be found any number of men who surpass God's people for calmness of inquiry, soberness of mind and practical wisdom. True religion is worthy of the most earnest and solemn attention.

5. Good men are not always good in proportion to the degree of light which they enjoy. Job is supposed to have lived before the time of Moses, under the obscurity of the patriarchal dispensation; yet he was a burning and a shining light. He neither saw nor heard many wondrous things well known to us. Yet how far did he and Abraham and Enoch and other ancient worthies excel the great mass of even good men of these latter days. Truly we ought to blush for our short-comings. Guilt is in proportion to light. Surely then we must be very guilty for our sad deficiencies.

6. When malice, or envy, or suspicion, or evil surmising exists, no established reputation, no lack of evidence of guilt can "tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue." By a long and holy life Job had given incontestable evidence of the purity of his character. His friends could bring no proof of his criminality in anything. Yet they charged him with cruelty, avarice and hypocrisy. Such wickedness has not yet left the earth. It is no new or rare thing for the best men to be charged with the basest plans, principles or practices. It will be so until grace shall reign through Jesus Christ over all hearts. A propensity to evil thoughts and evil speeches is among the last faults of character from which even good men are delivered.

7. If friends accuse us falsely and act as enemies, let us not forget to pray for them. Job set us the example: Job 42:8. Enmities arising between old friends are generally more violent than others. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle." Prov. 18:19. But we must not yield to passion. We must forgive and seek blessings on those who falsely accuse us and cruelly treat us. It was not until Job prayed for his accusers that God turned his captivity. Let us never carry a load of malice in our hearts. It is worse than any evil we can suffer at the hand of man.

8. When our characters are assailed, we are at liberty to use Christian measures to remove an evil report. It is then best to leave the whole matter in the hands of God. Lawsuits for character may be lawful and sometimes expedient. But when bad passions are excited, no character is so unspotted that malice will not spew out its venom against it. We may deny our guilt; we may call for evidence against us; we may bring evidence of innocence; but with men of heated imaginations and strong prejudices, evidence never has its just weight.

9. It is very dangerous to become involved in a labyrinth of reasoning concerning God, his character and providence. Things which are revealed belong to us and our children. We may safely follow wherever revelation leads; but we are no judges of what is proper to be done under the government of God. The attempt to criticize the divine proceedings is always a failure and iniquity.

10. It is important to study the Scriptures and learn all we can concerning the plans and providence of God. Had Job clearly known what we by patient study may learn, it would have removed much of the pungency of his grief. God's word is a light and a lamp. Let us walk by it.

11. What is the grief of each one? Is it poverty, poor health, loss of reputation, loss of spiritual comfort? Whatever it is, take for an example of suffering affliction Job, the narrative of whose trials was written for our comfort. Like him, let each one say of the Almighty, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job 13:15. Never was pious confidence in the Lord misplaced. Never did any trust in him and was confounded.

12. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him. The greatest secret God ever reveals to his people is the mystery of redemption. Of this Job was not ignorant. By this he triumphed. His own language is explicit: "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" Job 19:25-27

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