



THE BRIGHTEST OF DAWNS

Job is a book, not of answers so much, but of questions. At the beginning of the book, we have this one: “When terrible things happen, will you continue to trust in God?” Which is an important question, isn’t it? And at the end of the book we’re presented with another one, an equally important one, sitting there between the lines of the epilogue (the lemonade photo is a clue!).

Let’s take a look ...

Job 42:7-17

So, Job is a book of questions. But does that mean there are *no* answers? No – just that the answers look more like lessons:

- Worship God and prove your mettle.
- Pray it all out: anger, despair, turmoil.
- Be there, but avoid simplistic arguments.
- Keep a hold of wisdom and godliness.
- Consider what God might be saying.
- Trust Him, that He is still sovereign.

And this. There are 4 things the epilogue tells us about Job, things he might never have known without suffering; and things we might never know. He’s a:

1) Man of mercy (vs7-9). God kicks off by rebuking Eliphaz and his companions. Look at what He says: "I am angry with you, because you have not spoken of Me what is right (or sensible), as My servant Job has." Now you might be wondering, "What exactly did Job get right? And what did they get wrong?" The sentence-structure in vs7 usually means to speak *to* someone, not just *about* them. The friends, in spite of all their wisdom, fail to respond to God as Job does (vs1-6). They fail to worship.

But God is a God of mercy. And Job is a man of mercy. Which is why he's willing to pray for his friends – even while he's suffering, and in spite of how they've treated him (like Jesus Himself, in Luke 23:34).

And God accepts the prayer.

The point? When someone wrongs us, our inclination is to seek revenge; to get our own back. But Job, he forgives instead. Had he never been wronged, that forgiveness would never have had to be shown.

QED: Job needed to suffer for forgiveness to happen.

2) Man of grace (vs10-11). What is happening here? Hands up if you think God is rewarding Job? For his patience and perseverance in suffering? Wikipedia thinks so, too. And on this point, Wikipedia is wrong.

You see, the point of this book is that, just as suffering is rarely a result of *disobedience*, blessing is rarely a result of *obedience*. It is a gift of God's grace – simple as that. As Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount: "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good; He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). And this is important – because if we believe that everything we have is what we've earned, we'll be less willing to give it up, either to God, or to someone whose circumstances are different to our own. We'll be less likely to be gracious.

This is God's way of saying, "Job, I'm giving you this because I want to bless you. Now go and do likewise." But in the absence of suffering, he might not have grasped that.

And neither might we.

3) Man of hope (vs12-13,16). Here's one of those 'blink and you miss 'em' bits of Job. We're told that God blesses Job with twice as much as he had before. The writer even gives the inventory (compare with ch1):

- He starts with 7000 sheep – he ends with? 14,000.
- He starts with 3000 camels – he ends with? 6000.
- He starts with 500 yoke of oxen – he ends with? 1000.
- He starts with 500 donkeys – he ends with? 1000.
- He starts off 70 years of age – he lives another? 140!
- He starts with 10 kids – he ends with? 10 kids.

Hang on. If he started out with 10 kids and lost them, he should have ended up with 20, right? Well, he kind of does. 10 on earth, and 10 in heaven.

Because when someone dies, we don't 'lose' them as such. They're just in another place, with God. As Jesus said in John 11: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die."

But to realise it, death has to be a part of the equation.

4) Man of purpose (vs14-15). Because Job knows what injustice feels like, he has the drive to eliminate it, wherever he sees it. And it starts with his own family.

In what way? He gives every one of his children an equal inheritance. And notice that the sons are not named – only the daughters: Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-Happuch. Why the emphasis? In that culture, girls never received an inheritance (unless there were no sons to receive it – like the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27).

I.e. Job is putting the world to rights. And the lesson is:

Use your experiences. To draw closer to God; to draw others closer to God. As John Piper says, "Don't let your suffering go to waste." Use your cancer, your disability, your unemployment, your ageing, your breakdown, your breakup, your neurodiversity, your grief, your doubt, your mistakes, your hurts. Be willing to serve Him, in it all.

And even if you don't understand the reason for your suffering, you might begin to understand the reason for *you*.

One Last Question

These results illustrate the positive impact of suffering, but it's not automatic. We have to *choose* the positive impact. As Christopher Reeve, the original Hollywood Superman, said after a riding accident left him a quadriplegic: "I like the person I've become more than the person I was."

I.e. when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

Which brings us to the book's final question. Here is a photo of my friend Alfonso, his wife Uli, their son Oscar, and his daughters Christina and Marta. Alfonso's first wife, Carolina, died of cancer in 2010. And I'm sure Alfonso must have asked the 'why' question. But at some point, he must have asked this one, too: a far more practical question:

"What next, Lord? What do you want me to do, now?"

That's the final point. Because yes, suffering affects us all, and it's natural to wonder why. But we need to ask the 'what next' question if we are to become the person of greatness God knows we can be. A person of mercy, grace, hope, and purpose. A person like Job.

A person, in fact, like Jesus.