

Message no: AR009
Series: Appearance and Reality
Section: People
Sub-section: Understanding Job (5)
Date preached: 26 Oct 86
Date edited: 15 Aug 01 (Revised Oct 11)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON JOB

In this message, I wish to make five observations and draw some lessons from Job's experiences and the issues involved. In the process, I will clarify some issues we have touched upon in the previous messages. The five observations I will make relate to:

1. Perplexities during times of severe testing
2. Honesty and openness to truth
3. The significance of Job's deficiencies and failures
4. The posture of unwavering faith in God and humble submission to Him and His ways
5. Who we submit to

1. Perplexities during times of severe testing

When we go through times of severe testing and are perplexed by the difficulties that confront us, we tend to respond in an improper manner. Our spirit is often negatively affected and we tend to murmur and complain within our hearts even when there are no obvious outward manifestations.

We saw in the previous messages that when Job was perplexed by the trials that came upon him, he raised many questions and issues and made several improper remarks. It is helpful to note that God did not rebuke him for raising questions, but for his unwholesome posture and for the negative spirit from which the questioning arose. Of course, God also rebuked him for the improper remarks.

There is a place for us to express to God our perplexities and to ask Him to help us understand what we are going through. It is not only legitimate but also often healthy for us to do so. Going through situations of life passively and with resignation is not a mark of spirituality. There are many things that the Lord desires to teach us in the circumstances of life. It is therefore proper for us to look to the Lord, pray over the issues, and ask Him to help us understand. But we should not do so in a demanding manner and we must guard against a spirit of complaining or doubting God, or attributing deficiencies to God's character and His ways.

Instead, we should maintain a proper posture of worship, humble submission and affirmation of faith in Him. We must be prepared to submit to His perfect wisdom and to what He sees fitting for us to go through. And even if God does not answer our

questions or does not answer them according to our expectations, we must be prepared to submit to Him.

In this regard, I wish to make some brief observations based on God's evaluation of the remarks made by Job's friends.

Remarks of Job's three friends

Job's friends seemed to have many ready answers to his questions. They tried to speak on behalf of God and justify Him. This might appear commendable, but they were reprovved rather than commended by God because their remarks were neither sound nor appropriate in the context. We see in Job 42 how God rebuked them:

Job 42:7

It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

As I understand it, when God said that Job's friends "have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has", He was making a comparison between Job and his friends concerning the things that they had uttered, that what Job had said was better than the comments of his friends, which sounded appropriate but did not properly represent the truth of the situation or of God's character and ways. Some may take God's statement to mean that Job had spoken what was right of God, and they may then seek to justify all that Job had spoken throughout the Book of Job. This understanding would not be accurate. We've seen that Job did make improper remarks about God for which God rebuked him. But comparatively, Job's remarks were closer to the truth.

Job 42:8

"Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

We see in verse 8 that God rebuked Job's friends and termed their conduct and remarks as "folly". We need to take care not to err in like manner, speaking in a way that appears spiritual, knowledgeable and concerned, but in reality, it is not in line with the truth or with God's character and ways.

2. Honesty and openness to truth

Speaking from the heart

Although there were negative features in Job's response, there was also a positive aspect in that Job was honest and he spoke straight from his heart. He also loved truth and righteousness and desired to walk in them.

Job 27:3-6

3 For as long as life is in me,
And the breath of God is in my nostrils,
4 My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.
5 "Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 "I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.

We read at the beginning of the Book of Job how God expressed appreciation for Job as one who loved righteousness, feared God and turned away from evil. In the above passage (Job 27:3-6), Job said that he would continue to hold on to his integrity and would not speak what was deceitful.

Some people may use this point of honesty as a cloak for improper conduct. Honesty is good, but being honest does not mean we should express without restraint whatever comes to our mind and always give vent to how we feel. Some people may try to justify themselves for doing so by saying that they were "just being honest" when in reality they failed to exercise self-control. If they were really honest, they would have recognised that their words were improper and spoken out of a negative spirit. They may claim that they were being honest, but in reality they were not. Thus, they have failed on both counts of self-control and honesty.

In such situations, the proper response is to exercise self-control and reject whatever is negative and improper in our thoughts and feelings. Yet we must be careful not to pretend and say things we do not believe in or things we do not mean. Some may think that being spiritual and being positive require them to say things that sound nice although they do not mean or believe in them. They may say them merely to please others or because they think that such words seem more appropriate for Christians to utter. But if the words do not come from our heart, we should not say them. God can see through our outward conduct and the words that we utter. He knows the reality within us.

God hates hypocrisy; He desires truthfulness in our being. Therefore, we should not pretend and say things we do not mean. If there are negative thoughts and feelings within us, we can honestly acknowledge their presence and seek to resolve and overcome them by God's enabling. If there are issues that are disturbing us, we need

not pretend they do not exist. We can honestly bring them before the Lord in an appropriate manner and in the right spirit. However, where it is improper or inappropriate to express any of these troubling thoughts to other people, we should exercise self-control and keep silent.

Openness to truth and correction

All of us do falter and it is important that we be open and teachable so that we can be corrected. Openness to truth and correction is part of being truly honest in the scriptural sense. An honest man is one who is prepared to face the truth properly.

We see such a quality in Job. Not only was he honest and one who spoke from his heart, he was also open to truth and correction. When God manifested Himself and spoke towards the end of the Book of Job, we see Job receiving the truth and responding properly. He repented and humbled himself. In the end, Job emerged a better, more mature and stable person. Though he faltered, he did learn, and in all likelihood, the *posture adopted* was of a higher quality compared to that at the beginning.

It is helpful to note that Job did not merely say sorry to God but he also recognised the truth and the significant issues involved. He knew where he had been wrong and he responded in an appropriate manner. This is the meaning of true learning. Let us see a portrayal of this in Job 40:3-4,

Job 40:3-4

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.

From this passage, we see that Job recognised his insignificance. In response to God's manifestation of Himself, Job realised that one basic problem during the trials was that he forgot his proper position and his limitations. He also realised that he had spoken rashly and in ways that were improper. This aspect is more clearly expressed in Job 42.

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
2 "I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
4 'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.'
5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;

6 Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes.”

The above verses show that Job clearly recognised the improper response in his conduct, speech and posture; he also understood his limitations. This led to his repenting and retracting the wrong things he had said. We can also see the sense of humility coming through. Repenting in dust and ashes and the words he spoke indicate Job’s recognition of God’s sovereignty and greatness and that he had spoken things that he did not understand. They also reveal his willingness to adopt the proper position of worship and humble submission to God.

We should learn from Job to be open to the truth and to the Lord’s correction and to know where we have gone wrong so that we can make progress in our lives. What we see at the end of the Book of Job is a very beautiful picture of the posture that man should adopt and of how man should respond to God.

3. The significance of Job’s deficiencies and failures

In our analysis of Job’s failures, we noted his deficiencies in the area of the spirit of humility and the *posture adopted*. There was also something amiss in the way he went through the trials. He failed to maintain his focus on God and lost the proper perspective. I now wish to make some observations in regard to the significance of Job’s deficiencies and failures.

a. Job was not significantly deficient in these areas and he did not fare badly

Although Job did falter during the trials, in reality he fared better than most people would have if they were to go through trials of a similar nature and intensity.

We read in Job 1:20 that after many calamities had come upon him, including the loss of his children and possessions, Job, manifesting a spirit of humility, “fell to the ground and worshiped”. Job fared rather well although the trials that came upon him were sudden and difficult to take. He had the right posture and his focus was on God.

Even after he had been severely afflicted with boils, he stood fast on his convictions although his wife instigated him to speak improperly:

Job 2:9-10

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

In spite of the wrong notion he had that God was behind his sufferings, his response was healthy as can be seen in his worship of God and in his spirit of humility and posture of submission to God. When his wife urged him to "curse God and die", he rebuked her for the ill-advised suggestion. At the end of the trials, although God did rebuke Job for his failures during the trials, He also commended him.

b. Although not significantly deficient, they involved significant issues

Although Job did not fail badly, significant issues were involved. These issues are vital to our lives and relationship with God. They are very important for wholesome development and the quality of our being. This is the reason God rebuked Job the way He did and also the reason for our spending considerable time reflecting on these issues.

c. The powers of darkness will take advantage of these weaknesses

Under severe testing and pressures from the powers of darkness, weaknesses within us surface and become exposed and magnified. I mention "surface" and "become exposed" because sometimes we may not be conscious that we have these deficiencies. For example, Job might not have been aware of these deficiencies in his life before the trials. The picture we see at the beginning of the Book of Job, and also the way Job recalled how he had walked before God, do not give any indication that he was aware of deficiencies in these areas. In reality, they were present and became obvious during the severe testing.

Likewise, we may be unaware or have only a vague idea of weaknesses within us, but we may not realise their extent and seriousness. When they are exposed and magnified during testing, others observing us, and even we ourselves, may be surprised that we can exhibit such ugly traits in our words and conduct.

So let us be humble, prayerful, open and willing to acknowledge when the Lord shows us our deficiencies. Let us not justify ourselves and rationalise our words or conduct and, as a result, fail to learn. This can easily take place and is a common occurrence. Let us instead take corrective measures and not allow these weaknesses to become worse.

The powers of darkness seek to take advantage of our weaknesses and cause much problems and hindrances, not only in our development and our personal walk with God, but also in God's work, thus bringing dishonour to His name. It is helpful for us to recognise our deficiencies at an early stage so that we can nip them in the bud.

d. Our vulnerability to and magnitude of failure are related to the degree of deficiency and severity of testing

How vulnerable we are to failure is related to the degree of deficiency within us and to the severity of the testing, including the intensity of the spiritual pressures. When

the deficiencies are great and the pressures are intense, we are extremely vulnerable and can easily fail badly. However, it is still feasible for us to cry out to God to help us respond appropriately by His gracious undertaking and enabling.

When we see a person failing rather significantly, we should not quickly conclude that that person has serious deficiencies in his life. There could be other contributing factors that we may not be aware of. It could be that the deficiencies are not so serious, but the spiritual pressures are very severe.

This can be seen in the case of Job. Although the deficiencies within him were not so serious, under extremely severe testing from various directions, he did falter and uttered words that were highly improper.

On the other hand, the failure of another person may appear rather mild, but in reality there may be significant deficiencies present, resulting in him failing even in the context of relatively mild testing. Let us therefore take care not to conclude wrongly.

e. To fare well in our walk with God, it is crucial to settle these issues definitely and decisively

It is crucial that we understand and resolve these issues definitely and decisively, adopting the correct posture and attitude towards God and truth, and in the way we go through situations. Otherwise, we will more easily succumb to the attacks of the powers of darkness, be taken advantage of and manipulated by them.

To the degree we are deficient in these areas, to that degree our lives will be unstable and vulnerable to the pressures and attacks of the evil one. We will be tossed to and fro and will experience doubts, fears, discouragement and even despair. We will be more easily deceived and be more likely to compromise or go astray. When this happens, we are not able to persevere well in the truth, and will become unreliable, not only to people, but also to God. This reflects on the quality of our moral character and moral steadfastness.

4. The posture of unwavering faith in God and humble submission to Him and His ways

In the second message, we spent much time considering the vital issue of the proper response, attitude and posture towards God under all circumstances, that is, the importance of attaining and adopting the posture of:

An unwavering faith and confidence in God and His ways accompanied by unceasing worship, praise, thanksgiving, appreciation and humble, joyful submission to God and His perfect wisdom, together with

steadfast love and commitment to Him and to the truth whatever the circumstances.

We saw that for this to come about, it is needful for us to have sufficient knowledge of God and confidence in Him as the perfect Almighty God. I would like to elaborate on this point. It seems to me that at this stage of God's progressive revelation, it is not so difficult for us to have sufficient knowledge so as to adopt a proper posture, provided we are *open and seeking, and have a deep love for truth, goodness and righteousness*. This is because, apart from general revelation in creation, God has clearly revealed Himself concerning who He is and His greatness, goodness and perfection. He has done this in many ways, including the following:

a. In the Scriptures

God has clearly revealed in the Scriptures who He is, His greatness, goodness and the perfection of His being. All who have access to the Scriptures can study, reflect upon and absorb the truths into their lives.

b. In sending the Lord Jesus into the world as our Saviour

The Lord Jesus came to reveal to us who God is by the way He lived His life, through His teachings, and especially in the way He died for us at the Cross. Together with His resurrection, ascension and Second Coming and the meaning and implications of these events, we can be significantly helped to understand and appreciate who God is, His love for us, His moral character, greatness and perfection, and what ought to be our proper response to Him.

c. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

We are living in the period after Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit has been poured out. The Spirit of God comes into our lives to reveal, teach and convict us of the truth. Although the Scriptures is available, without the Holy Spirit helping us to understand what is presented in it, it is difficult for us to really appreciate who God is. However, if we are willing to respond to God deeply, the Spirit of truth will work in us, grant us insight into the truth, strengthen and guide us through all situations of life, and help us in our personal relationship with God.

d. Fellowship of the brethren and church life

God also provides us with an environment, that is, church life, where we can learn and grow together and support one another.

e. Testimony of others

Whether through the Scriptures, through the reading of church history and Christian biographies or through personal contact, as we come to know of people who have

lived for the Lord, who have committed their lives to the Lord fully, and who have found God to be faithful and true, we begin to realise that such a life is not only feasible but also truly enriching and satisfying.

The various areas (a to e) that I have mentioned are very helpful towards a growing understanding and conviction of who God is, what He has done, His plans and purposes and what our response to Him ought to be. If we are open to the truth and if there is a personal response to God, we will move towards a personal experience of the fullness of life in the Lord Jesus Christ that arises from commitment to the perfect Almighty God. As we do so, increasingly we will find that God is true to His word and true to what He has revealed Himself to be. We will also find that our walk with Him will become increasingly meaningful and the posture we are able to adopt will increase in quality.

Contrasting Job's context with ours

With regard to adopting the correct posture before God, let us contrast Job's context with ours. Job lived very long ago, before the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he was not from Israel, but from the land of Uz (Job 1:1). He did not have the Bible or church life as we have, and good fellowship appeared lacking in his context. He also did not have the whole background of God's dealings with Israel. The Book of Job contains no reference to the laws of Moses or God's mighty works in Israel's history, for example, the miracles in Egypt, the Exodus, the years of wandering in the wilderness, the Crossing of the Jordan or the Fall of Jericho. It could very well be that the accounts recorded for us in the Book of Job occurred before these major events in Israel's history.

During the trials that Job went through, he had little positive encouragement from others to live well but instead received discouraging remarks and treatment.

However, although Job's context is vastly different from ours, God has other means of meeting the needs of people like him in ways that we may not fully appreciate or know of.

In contrast to Job, we are in a privileged position. But with this privilege comes responsibility. God will hold us responsible and accountable for the light, knowledge and opportunities that are available to us.

Some people have the notion that since more knowledge means more responsibility they would rather know less though opportunities for knowing more are available. This of course is an erroneous and dangerous notion to hold. The truth is that God will hold us accountable not only for what we know, but also for the lack of knowledge due to our neglect to avail ourselves of the opportunities He has provided. To spurn such opportunities is a very serious matter. Are we guilty of having such a notion?

Ultimately, the crucial issue has to do with what is in our heart. Is there a hunger for the truth? Is there the willingness to pursue the truth? Is there openness to the truth? If these are present in our lives, then it is not difficult for us to come to a reasonable degree of knowledge of God because the avenues are open to us. We can then meaningfully adopt the proper posture of unwavering faith in God and commitment to Him. *The real issue is: do we want to live out the truth?*

We need to spend time to prayerfully reflect upon the kind of posture we should adopt even before we encounter difficult situations. We will then be more ready to go through them. In the end, it has to do with our recognition of who God is, who we are, and our relationship with Him. *It is the quality of our response to God that matters, which is a reflection of the attitudes within our hearts, our moral longings and what we really want in life. Do we really long for what is good and true?* If we do, we know that they are found only in God and in a wholehearted commitment to Him and His ways.

5. Who we submit to

In regard to the posture of unwavering, unquestioning commitment and submission to God and His ways, one very important qualification to bear in mind is that *this posture and attitude is towards the true and living God*. If we are not careful about this qualification, we can expose ourselves to serious danger.

We should not submit ourselves to just any mighty and supernatural being. When we have an unusual or supernatural experience or when we receive an impression of guidance, we must not passively and uncritically assume that it is of God. This qualification is especially important for those of us who desire earnestly to fully commit ourselves to God.

We must make sure that our posture is towards God and that whatever may happen to us, we will always continue to maintain the proper attitude and posture of submission to the true and living God. At the same time, we should also take a definite stand to reject and resist whatever is of the powers of darkness.

If we are uncertain whether an experience or impression of guidance is of God, we should not act on it, thinking that it is an act of unquestioning submission to God. However, we can still affirm and tell God that we are fully submitted to Him, but because in this particular spiritual experience, we are unsure of its source, we are not going to move carelessly, rashly or quickly. We must be slow to open up our hearts and lives to receive such experiences and impressions unless we are clear they are of God.

Likewise, when we go through trials, we should not passively accept them, thinking that this is what it means to adopt a correct posture of submission to God and His ways. Rather, as we continue to worship God and affirm our commitment to Him and

submit to Him and His ways, we should at the same time take the stand to reject and resist all that comes from the powers of darkness. ¹Job did not and could not take such a stand because, as far as we can see from the record in the Scriptures, Job was unaware of the existence of Satan and the powers of darkness and their activities.

We should also seek God's help to understand accurately the situation and the issues involved, to know the steps we should take, and to strengthen us to act accordingly. At the same time, we should learn well the spiritual lessons and principles that God desires to teach us through such situations. One important lesson is that of developing the quality of endurance. This quality is vital when we face times of trials. By this, I do not mean merely "gritting the teeth" and surviving the situation. Rather, true endurance is expressed in a lively looking to God for wisdom, for enabling, and in learning the precious things that God desires to teach us and to remain faithful to Him.

Besides the quality of endurance, during such times, God also desires to help us have a clearer recognition of the deficiencies in our lives and what to do about them, the attitudes and behaviour of men, the realities in the spiritual realm, the activities of the powers of darkness, and of who He is and how we can glorify Him through it all.

Personal reflection

Let us examine our lives. Do we easily become disturbed during times of testing? Do we doubt God and complain against Him? Or is our commitment to God of a sufficiently meaningful degree that whatever may come, we would submit to Him because of who He is, the perfect Almighty God? Are there areas that hinder us from adopting this posture?

Although Job's attitudes and ways were generally commendable, it seems that he did not think through these issues adequately and therefore did not adopt such a posture to a sufficiently high degree though it was feasible for him to do so in his context. It resulted in serious problems when he went through very severe testing. How about us? Will we fare well? Let us learn from what Job went through and look to the Lord to help us resolve this issue deeply. Let us also identify and deal with the weaknesses in our own lives.

¹ The stand we should take and the way to discern and counter the attacks of the evil one are covered in greater detail in other messages (for example, AR202-217) posted on the website www.godandtruth.com.

Question for reflection and discussion

What are some lessons we can learn from the story of Job?

www.godandtruth.com

Copyright

The content of this message is protected by Copyright © 2011 Lim Kou. Permission is given to print and reproduce part (where the meaning intended is retained and the part is not quoted out of context) or all the content, for personal use or for distribution, on condition that there is proper acknowledgement, no changes are made and the content distributed free of charge. Please be prayerful and discreet in distributing or making the content available to others. *This paragraph and that below should be included in any and all content reproduced for distribution.*

Scripture Quotations

Scripture quotations unless otherwise stated, are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD Bible ®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.