

Sermon: Eyes Wide Open

New North Church, Hingham

Rev. Steven M. Aucella

24 October 2021

Based on **Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Mark 10:46-52**

In the past four weeks, we have taken the express route through the Book of Job while at the same time, we inched our way through Mark's Gospel. So far, we have seen Job lose everything when ha'Satan made a bet with YHWH that Job would lose his faith if he lost all his stuff and his children. Job complained bitterly and resolved to sue the LORD. Then, last week, the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and asked some pointed questions. Job was somewhat shocked, to say the least.

In today's reading, Job responds, in part, by quoting God as part of his defense.

God asked, 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' And Job said, 'I have uttered what I did not understand.' He admits that there were wonderful things out there, too wonderful for him, things that he did not know. He had missed the big picture, believing that it was all about him while living safely behind his fence. It took a cosmic tour from God for Job to see that it's *not* all about him.

Job also quoted God saying, 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' Bob Dylan wrote a song called *Spirit on the Water* which has a lyric that goes like this: "Have you ever seen a ghost? | No – but you have heard of them."¹

Like Dylan's ghost, Job had heard of God, and prayed to God, and lived his life according to the covenant. He wasn't even Jewish. But he had never seen God, which wasn't a problem until he really needed to know that God was out there and on his side.

He railed against the injustices done to him, insisting that it wasn't his fault. Job was absolutely sure that he would win his lawsuit against God. And then God showed up and answered Job from out of the whirlwind.

Now, after having seen God face to face, Job relented; he recanted his previous statements, withdrew his case, and repented in dust and ashes. Repentance goes a long way with God. And we'll get to that in a minute.

Let's compare Job with Bartimaeus in Mark's Gospel.

We are at the end of the transition from Jesus' Galilean ministry to his arrival in Jerusalem. We have heard a lot about discipleship and servanthood these past few weeks, and today we heard what amounts to a call story, and a faith story, all in one.

First, Mark takes the time to tell us that Bartimaeus means 'son of Timaeus,' for the benefit of us Gentiles. After that, Mark merely calls Bartimaeus 'the blind man.'

Bartimaeus is literally 'on the way,' sitting by the roadside, because he's a beggar and that's where the money is.

Where Job demanded justice, all Bartimaeus wanted from God was mercy. He called out to Jesus and correctly identified him as *Son of David*. When Jesus invited him over, he went to Jesus.

And he threw off his cloak when he did so. Why would Mark mention this? Maybe to show that Bartimaeus was throwing off his old life as a beggar, to become like the other disciples, who had left their boats and nets behind to follow Jesus. And Jesus healed him, saying, your begging days are over; your faith has made you well, which was also true for Job, except for the suffering.

Bartimaeus suffered too. His blindness was physical, and it reduced him to being a beggar for who knows how long. It also separated him from God which is what was really eating at him. How would he know if God was at work in his life while he was blind? We presume he was blind from birth, but we don't know. What might life have been like for him before he became blind?

What might life be like for anyone who is separated from God? Maybe it doesn't matter as long as you don't think about it much. But what happens when you suddenly realize that Jesus is close enough to touch? Does it unlock a fierce longing in you? Bartimaeus was ready to change everything in his life just to receive some of God's mercy. And having received it, how might life be for him now? He followed Jesus on the way not knowing where the way might lead. That's faith.

For Job, his new view of the world and God's purposes for it made him withdraw his lawsuit and repent, after which, the LORD restored his fortunes. That's the message: repentance brings God's forgiveness and God's grace, if you mean it and if you want it.

Notice a few things about Job's restoration: all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before came to him and ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him; they gave him money and gold rings.

Question: where were they when Job was suffering?

There's an old Irish proverb that says it is better to be late than very late.

Also, the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before, in terms of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. Notice that there are no slaves in Job's restoration, so maybe there is some justice here after all.

And the LORD paying double; what's with that? All along, God has not really answered Job's complaints directly. Job has heard a lot of non-answers but has now seen God's glory up close, and that was enough for him. But the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before; why? That's not necessarily good business, is it?

In Exodus, part of the covenant instructs us to pay double if we are at fault. God pays double to Job. Is God implicitly admitting guilt? If so, we can take this as further proof that our covenant with God really is a two-way street, and that's a comfort.

Then we have Job's daughters – the new ones, anyway. Job also had seven new sons, but they are not named. Job named the first *Jemimah*, which means Dove; the second *Keziah*, which means Cinnamon; and the third he named *Keren-happuch*, which means Horn of Eye Shadow. Beautiful names, and the Bible typically only names significant people.

They each received a share of Job's inheritance, which normally wouldn't happen unless there were no sons, a precedent that was set in Numbers 27.

All told, Job's restoration was impressive in its scope and in its effect. Not only did Job receive some semblance of justice, but it transformed him and his attitudes.

Why do we care so much about Job and what happens to him? First, it's an awesome and very old story. Job-the-book also gives us an easier way to confront the problem of suffering in the world – it's a lot easier to examine Job's pain than our own.

Job's story has been told and retold in different ways in different cultures, even in Jesus' time. There is one version called the *Testament of Job*, which dates from sometime between the hundred years before Jesus and the end of the first century.

In that version, when Job learns of all the things that about to happen to him, an angel visits him with these reassuring words: “If you are patient, I will make your name renowned in all generations...*And you shall be raised up in the resurrection.*”²

Those early Christians who experienced persecution looked to Job. In Rome during the third and fourth centuries, paintings often showed Job as a heroic figure, confident of his return to God’s grace and glory, not as a victim or even a complainer.

Jesus said, faith can make us well; it can heal us; it will make us whole. Encountering God is transformative in that it makes us seek a more just way of living, just as Bartimaeus sought the way of discipleship.

What are we looking for when we read Job, or even stories about people such as Bartimaeus? We might not find any immediate or easy answers, but we will find truth.

Amen.

* * * * *

¹ Dylan, Bob. *Modern Times*. Columbia, 2006, CD.

² *Testament of Job*, 4:6, 8.