

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 33 – January 16-22

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalms 97-99

Matthew 9-12

Readings in Class:

Job 1-18

Introduction to Job

The book of Job is a curious one in the canon of Scripture. It tells the story of a man named Job who probably lived sometime before the Exodus. While some believe that Job was not a real person, the Bible is quite clear that he is. He is also mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14 and James 5:11 as a real person. The book of Job was probably not written until anywhere from the time of Solomon to the exile, though most likely from an earlier oral or written account.

Job, who is portrayed as a righteous man, is made to suffer. The first two chapters set-up the story. Then we get the speeches of Job's friends who are arguing over why Job is suffering. Their understanding is that a person's suffering is proportional to their sin. This is the thinking that the Jews had in Luke 13 and John 9. If Job is suffering, it must be something he did. However, Job knows that he has been a righteous man (though not wholly without sin). In the end, God himself speaks and Job is restored to his former health and wealth.

A brief summary of Job

1. Prologue (ch 1-2)
2. Job's Opening Lament (Ch 3)
3. First Cycle of Speeches (Ch 4-14)
4. Second Cycle of Speeches (Ch 15-21)
5. Third Cycle of Speeches (Ch 22-26)
6. Job's Closing Discourse (Ch 27)
7. Job's Call for Vindication (Ch 29-31)
8. Elihu's Speeches (Ch 32-37)
9. God Speaks (Ch 38-42:6)
10. Epilogue (42:7-17)

Theodicy

One of the main questions in the book has to do with theodicy: the justice of God in the face of suffering. It's the "why is their evil in the world if God is good" question. Job wants to know why he's suffering. His friends' arguments are coming from the worldly logic of if you are good, good things happen to you, if you are bad, bad things happen to you. Essentially they are arguing the same thing the accuser is in chapter 1, that people serve God only for the temporal benefits. It is a works based idea of righteousness and does not allow for the idea of justification for sinners.

Elihu's argument (ch 32-37) diverges from the other three friends. While he still assumes the sufferer must repent, he brings in the idea that God allows suffering in order to strengthen faith. Suffering saves a person from pride and reveals God.

It is interesting to note that we the reader know why Job is suffering. We are given a behind the scenes exclusive. We know that Job is right. God himself says that Job is blameless and upright. He is allowing the accuser to test Job to prove that Job does not serve God for earthly blessings. If Job does just serve God in order to be blessed, that would make piety a great sin. Doing good for selfish reasons makes a good work not a good work.

When God does finally speak to Job, he doesn't actually answer the question of why Job is suffering. He essentially says "I am God. You are not Who are you question me?" He makes Job see that God alone is in control of all things.

In the end Job repents of calling God unjust to allow him to suffer. Job realizes that he is completely at God's mercy and has no right to expect anything from God. God chooses to give out of his divine mercy. Which God does at the end of the book, giving Job back more than he had before.

Christ in Job

There is a good amount of Jesus in the Book of Job. Job himself is a type of Christ, the righteous sufferer. Despite his suffering, Job still trusts in God. There is also the theme of mediator and redeemer. Christ is the mediator between God and man. He is also, of course, our redeemer. It is from Job 19: 25 that we get the Easter hymn "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."