

Communion Service - The Shock of Repentance

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[0 : 0 0] just bow our heads briefly in prayer before returning to this passage father god we ask and pray that as we seek to hear your voice in our lives through the word the living word of god remind us that it is indeed that sometimes we read things from the old testament it seems just so very different from our lives and from our experience and yet we we know and we believe absolutely through your word that every part of scripture is god breathed and that you have chosen exactly the passages that are to be included in your revealed word and we thank you also that jesus is the word incarnate god made known and we pray that as we gather around your word that the spirit of god would take that word and would apply it to us in our own lives and hearts challenging rebuking comforting provoking and bringing us to a greater knowledge of our lord and savior jesus christ so help us we pray in jesus name amen so it's really good to be with you this evening and uh over this weekend i have to say preaching from here feels a little bit like uh being an umpire in a tennis match because of the way so i'll try my best to look and include everyone rather than just look ahead of me which would be very rude and i'll need to get used to that because it's a different it's a wider layout than i'm used to in saint columbus where we've just got everyone right in front of me so i can watch them if they fall asleep and give them a hard time but we're going to look tonight and tomorrow morning at this chapter of job it's a remarkable book it's it's my favorite book in the whole bible it's a simply a an incredible part of scripture the book of job and um i think ordinarily uh job is regarded as god's great answer to suffering and i think that's true in many ways there are some remarkable truths in job about suffering and god's response to it or the unexpected response of god to questions of our suffering but i actually think uh it's more than that it is it's actually a a book about faith and the nature of faith the nature of the gift of faith and the nature of that gift of faith that's challenged by satan at the very beginning this this man only believes in you because you've blessed him take all these things from him and he'll curse you and die and it's job challenging it's satan challenging god about the nature of faith about the gift of faith uh and suffering obviously is a huge part of that in the book and it certainly is addressed because here is a man of faith a believer an old testament believer certainly but a believer who has lost everything he's lost his health he's lost his wealth he's in reality what he has physically lost his family and uh in reality he's lost even his wife who tells him to curse god and die and he's lost his friends his friends who come to comfort him who are uh in legend called job's comforters because they're not really that comforting at all the most comforting they were they were probably when they were silent uh and then they started speaking and ruined everything uh but he even lost them and throughout

the remarkable and it's a great book if you can to read in a winner reading one go it's it's tremendous to be able to do that because it you get a a real picture of what's happening but throughout it it's as if job is coming into god's presence why me why am i going through this what why why have i to experience this i thought i believed and trusted in you and he's wrestling with all these kinds of questions feeling his own innocence and i don't i don't believe for a minute he thought he was uh righteous in himself and perfect but he didn't feel there was deliberate all his friends were telling him you're hiding something god's nailing you because you're you're hiding sin and he was saying no i'm not i'm not hiding sin and he is he's questioning god why me why is it happening and then in that chapter that we've begun to read from chapter 38 is that remarkable divine soliloquy where god speaks 30 38 to 41 the most almost the most other than in jesus the the most that god reveals about himself in in one section in the bible and it's not what you would expect it's all about animals and trees and mountains and rivers and cost constellations and planets it's a remarkable passage and so job the book is like no other book in the bible there's nothing like it and i'm cheating with you because i'm taking you right to the end and i'm sorry we don't have time to go through the whole book so there's a job spoiler happening i'm taking you right to the end um

because the end is so significant and we'll just pray that um what you don't know from earlier on or what you can't remember uh you can maybe read up on between now and tomorrow morning uh and the end of the book is remarkable because it's not the answer we expect either from god or possibly from job either but yet it is so remarkably powerful and i don't think it's a spoiler to go right to the end of the book because uh the answer of coming to know and understanding god and his character and his ways isn't scripted and it's not simply by reading this we all need to experience what job has experienced and that's what grace and salvation is all about it's experiencing to one degree or another what job has come to experience here and if you've if you've read job before and you've you've read god's answer you know job speaks about why am i stuff why am i going through all this and then you read god's uh response and then you then you read job's response to god it can seem really unsatisfactory oh god doesn't really answer the problem of suffering and he doesn't speak much about faith and and then job repents why does job repent after all that he's gone through in this very sudden way at the end of god speaking we begin to understand that when we experience god for who he is and i think this is an an amazing book of the bible if you're struggling with who god is or with difficulty and suffering in your own life or worship or doubt or anything to do with your life of faith as we we all do to greater or lesser degrees hopefully we will see as god reveals through his word and as we unpack a few words here that job's response will speak to us in our christian lives and

if you're not a christian that he will speak even more powerfully into your need for god and coming to faith in god and accepting his great gift of faith which is what uh job speaks about or the book of job speaks about so i want to just to note one or two things this evening it's a friday night you've had a busy week uh it's really warm in here i've had to take off my jacket uh so i'll be brief uh and i hope that i'll be focused as well not ramble on for too long but i just want to note one or two things about these early verses in chapter 42 if you keep that open in front of you then that may help also just i want to note in the first place that at this point in the book of job uh there's no change in his circumstances okay job is going to respond to god but there's been no change in job's circumstances he's still at this point sitting in the gutter he is has all kinds of suicidal realities around him he's lost everything it's not that anything has changed in his life he's lost everything including his dignity you know and we maybe don't appreciate as much as maybe the original readers would have in the ancient near east uh the job was a really dignified character dignified man a patriarch a leader sat at the city gates respected by everyone and all of a he's lost everything and he's scraping the sores in his own arm and everyone's rejected him and he's lost everything that he could ever have wanted to have so his circumstances haven't changed but in his response there is a massive heart change what has brought upon this massive heart change this different response to god which the previous number of chapters have been angry or doubtful or questioning or despairing and all of a sudden he sees things very differently claiming right throughout the book his innocence here he comes to the place where he's pleading for forgiveness and repenting before the living god he sees himself differently now he sees himself in dust and ashes needing the forgiveness of forgiveness of god and that's a huge change in his in his response to the living god and i think that's a very significant and important point for us because the big change for job is not in his circumstances it's in his own heart and isn't it so often that when we are complaining or bitter or angry against god about his dealings with us we question his goodness we question his judgment we question if he loves us or if he cares it's not it's often our circumstances we want to change lord if you truly love me will you not change what's happening make things better take away my illness show me that you love me through this experience by changing it whereas we find here that everything is focused into his own heart and it's a heart change that it is uh reflective of his life of faith it's a huge challenge for us to see that god's dealing with us will always primarily be wanting us to look into our own hearts and our relationship with him not primarily looking to change everyone else or to change our circumstances but he's saying what about your heart what is in your heart what needs to change in your heart and that is the great challenging truth of the gospel for all of us at every point uh i was preaching on sunday on jeremiah 17 about the the tree and the roots the tree planted by a river and what's important for the fruit bearing is not great weather uh and good circumstances outwardly it's what's happening under the ground it's the roots it's being sent out towards the water so that the tree can bear fruit even in in drought and that's a supreme picture of faith is that faith deals with what's what we are under under the surface what you are in private what you are in your own heart not we are in public and in church and whatever else but your relationship with god in your heart what nobody sees where your roots are

where your strength and your nourishment and your hope comes from and that is something between you absolutely and entirely and your god so job changes from accusing god and being angry with god and and being frustrated with the circumstances to being repentant and sensing his own unworthiness and his own speech uh i repent in dust and ashes i spoke he says of things i didn't understand you know the whole of job is about being his speech what he says and there's great eloquence actually what he says is amazing uh what he does say but then he says well you know i didn't i didn't know i didn't understand so what brought about the change what is it that brings the change into job's life and into his heart and into his attitude well obviously it's what's recorded in these three chapters of of god's response but why does god's response that speaks about ice and snow and the storehouses of hail and the conies in the mountains and all these things why would why did why does that change job's attitude why should it make a difference god doesn't sit down and give a philosophical discussion about suffering he doesn't even say to job i love you in so many words but it what it does seem to be is that it was much more about god's presence than persuasion it's much more about god's presence towards job than um some kind of apologetic uh persuasion about the nature of suffering and and the nature of the world and the problem of sin there's been 33 argument sorry 33 chapters of arguments to and from between job and his three comforters and it gets more and more bitter and entrenched and the three guys get more and more frustrated and angry with job it's great to read because they just get ah this guy and they make more and more outrageous claims against them as time goes on more there's all kinds of arguments going on and these arguments are not insignificant i think what's interesting about these arguments is that as i read them particularly the the three comforters i think well that's actually that that seems pretty fair what they're saying they seem to have got it right about job yeah he seems to be pretty mean and nasty and uh questioning and his faith seems to be very weak um and that's interesting as we we move forward but these words and these arguments are not insignificant but what job craved was a personal revelation of god not to know about god and about what god does with suffering

or about about he wanted to know god and to know that there was a god there for him and a personal revelation of the living god for him at that point even if he didn't know it was what would change his heart and mind so the words that we have the three chapters where god speaks it's not so much what he says although what he says is glorious and revelatory it's more about the words in the context of it being god who says it it's god who's speaking and the fact that god speaks to him and answers him even if it's a very different answer from what we would have expected is what job needed he needed to recognize that god was there and that god loved him and cared for him and so it's it's the words in the context of a person in luke 5 um jesus uh does an amazing miracle among the disciples and you would think it would it would make the disciples praise him and uh worship him and love him more but what peter says is get away from me lord because i'm a sinful man and there's something in what jesus has done there that makes them realize he's god and then you know the story of the soldiers in the garden of gethsemane where they come to arrest jesus this political upstart as they would have believed and they come to him in the garden and judas is with them and uh they say you know where is jesus and jesus just stands among them and he says well what he actually says is i am in most of the translations is i am he but he just says i am now many people believe and i certainly would agree with this that he wasn't just stating i'm jesus there was something about what he said there was something in that moment that revealed who he was as god i am you know the great i am before abram was born i am the great yahweh name of of god and the response of the soldiers at that point what is it they all they all stumble and fall back now these are not keystone cops these are the elite sas of the roman empire you know they're used to being surprised that you know they're ready for every eventuality but when jesus says i am they fall back and there's that sense in which what has been revealed is the living god and i think it's in the same way that as god speaks to job job hears and knows and senses the presence of god in remarkable power in his glory and his power and his majesty there's something thunderous about what god says in these chapters but it's also intensely personal one-to-one with job he addresses job he speaks to job that's what job was needing more than anything but the two you know great theological words that he used the transcendence of god in this moment is seen because of all that he says and just his presence but also the imminence of god and that he addresses his closeness he addresses job personally he speaks into his situation it's as if all of god is revealed in these moments with job the the infinite presence of god beside him the creator god the savior god walking alongside him and that's that's what changes job and it it puts into perspective who he is and who

god is

[20 : 24] and i think that's very important but i also think there's something kind of unspoken and you can shoot me down i might be wrong here um but i believe there's something in the relationship between what god says and job that job recognizes in god's voice there's a tone and an intonation and a beauty in god's voice that that probably can't be transmitted by word only by reading it because remember this is this is a real relationship between the two i think one day we will know that one day we'll experience that the voice of god and i just feel there must be something in what god says and the way he says it that changes jobs so that he's not filled with terror and fear and is scared to run away from god but there's it's loving and wonderful and amazing that draws him towards god because he repented what is repentance repentance is turning towards it's not running away from god it's turning towards god because he's worth turning to and because he's going to hear us and because he's forgiven us and so there's this remarkable sense in which however glorious and transcendent god appears here it's the voice of a friend and job knows from this point his complaints have been heard he's hearing the voice of his father who loves him and whose speech calms his fears and gives him a completely different perspective it's a paradox of faith isn't it that we come because we are come we are completely unworthy to jesus christ we come to jesus because we're completely unworthy but we're never worthless we're never worthless because he went to the cross to redeem and save us and to gift us faith so it's that paradox of recognizing awe and wonder but not so that we'll we run away from him that's that's not the kind of god that is the god who's revealed it's a god who in all his transcendence and glory puts himself into the womb of mary and is born into a gutter and lives as a nobody and is nailed to a tree because he deems us worth dying for and that comes to job as he wrestles with him and it's so significant and all of us need to do it we can't have a cheap rubbishy careless faith that doesn't work through some of these issues and doesn't shout out to god and cry and question but it must be that wrestling with god on the basis of who he reveals himself to be and as we see that at calvary it changes everything you can't be indifferent to what jesus did at calvary and isn't it sad that so often as christians we're kind of indifferent to what jesus has done yeah we know it all we've grown up with it we're born with it we've heard it before we'll celebrate at the lord's supper on sunday but as we wrestle and take time in god's presence

it changes us and reminds us of who he is so it was more i think about his presence than persuasion and then his response i think is a great response for us all he comes to his senses doesn't he oh you know you ask me who is this obscure of my plans without knowledge surely i spoke of things i didn't understand things too wonderful for me he says my ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you that's a great that's a great description of faith it's much more than just simply hearing about jesus or knowing about god faith the eye of faith is seeing god by faith and recognizing that he's real it's not knowing about someone it's knowing him and it's knowing him in your heart and knowing him in your life

i always use this illustration in Edinburgh and it's an old and tired one and my congregation are fed up of hearing it but i because it shows how out of date and old i am but i would say if David Beckham walked through the door this evening i could tell you lots of things about him and about his football and about his career and about the names of his children i probably couldn't tell the names of his children but if i was a real fan i could tell you all these things about David Beckham i should probably have a much more up to date footballer or star to do that but if i said hello David how are you he would look at me like i was a madman because he doesn't know me he doesn't know anything about me and we don't have any kind of relationship we've never met before we've never had coffee together we've never met i know lots of things about him but i don't know him and that's very true i think in a in a spiritual context we can know lots of things about God and about Jesus but Jesus will maybe say on that line depart from me

i never knew you and you knew about me but you never entrusted your life to me you never allowed me to be your saviour you stayed away and he had come to his senses because he saw that his eyes or his ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you and there's that great recognition of of faith being something much more than knowledge it's entrusting our life to Jesus Christ and so he returns to God with probably the most remarkable verse in many ways in the Bible bearing in mind what's gone before it therefore i despise myself and repent in dust and ashes truly expensive testimony that's given here by Job it's remarkable what he says here and he feels free he feels free to confess his wild words and his raging doubt and his lack of knowledge and he is

confident in the mercy of God he can say I repent

I repent in dust and ashes not in fear not some kind of insurance policy but there's something about what he has known of God and what he knows of God that he's confident of God's mercy and he knows the forgiveness he receives will be full and free it's a safe request to go into the living God with it's a great redemptive verse one of the greatest redemptive verses in the Bible he's still in the gutter physically but even there it's the company and the companionship of the living God that is transformative for him that's what he needed to know most and he turns from his arguments and from his circumstances and he now recognises his need for forgiveness and repenting before the living God and he does so not for philosophical reasons about answering the questions of suffering but because he knows he's still loved and that God is his maker and redeemer and saviour and repentance is one of the greatest things that we will ever do in our lives on a daily basis turning back to God confessing our need recognising that we've done why is it so great because his open arms will forgive us when we come to him by faith and because of the gift of faith that is ours as believers and I want to finish with that speaking a little bit about the gift of faith because as I said at the beginning

[29 : 28] I do believe that that is one of the really core themes of Job not just suffering but faith just go to the beginning of Job if you have your Bibles with you Job chapter 1 because it takes us right to the beginning I maybe should have read this at the beginning Job chapter 1 verse 9 does the devil speaking does Job fear God for nothing Satan replied sorry God asked remember it's not Satan that comes into God's presence it's God that initiates the whole thing and that in itself is very remarkable God says does Job fear God for nothing Satan replied have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has you have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land but now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your faith to your faith and then 2 verse 9 his wife said to him are you still maintaining your integrity curse God and die and so God is the one who initiates the whole of this book and he's the one who speaks to

Satan and he's the one who asks Satan about Job and about his faith and there's this great sense in which God is setting out for us the nature of faith and the gift of faith and the perfection of faith even in the deepest and most mysterious sufferings no one has really suffered ever like Job in life and the answer is that what God is doing at least and I know there's a lot of mystery there's a lot I don't understand about Job but at least partly what he's doing he's saying to Satan Job's faith is my gift and my gift of faith will always keep him and my gift of life by faith will always be what enables him to trust and believe faith is God's gift to us it's not about

Job doing his best it's not even about Job working through his suffering it's nothing we can do it's God's gift and he says if you receive that gift it will overcome all the fiery darts of Satan including our guilt before God and the just death that all of us face and that's the remarkable thing about this book is it speaks about the amazing nature of faith and all very simple level all that God requires of us is to entrust repent and believe that's really what the book is about ultimately repent and believe Job's experience of God is a God who's worth trusting even in the bleakest of situations and there's a beautiful bit that we read in Job chapter 9 which I think

I wonder if Job kind of knew what he was saying he said I wish there was someone I wish there was someone who could mediate between me and God because I can't reach him I wonder did Job understand I doubt it that actually the mediator was to be God the son God the son would be the one who would take that and there's a shadowy glimpse there moving forward into the reality of Jesus and the cross being the one who stands between us as sinners and the living God what Job couldn't really truly have understood at that point even though he knew God was his savior he wouldn't have understood the mechanics of what lay ahead in terms of what God would do not even the angels knew that yet he could repent and believe on that day because Jesus didn't need to repent and yet he took our sins and bore our guilt and he remained silent on the cross so that Job could cry out and question and be in God's presence in that way and so there's this remarkable link towards the cross and towards Jesus Christ and I hope that this communion weekend is a weekend that we can think obviously about that and I think that's why he gives us the Lord's Supper to constantly take us back to that place where the transcendent God who is creator of the universe is nailed to a tree so that he can gift us a faith that nothing can break and it's not our faith it's not our ability it's his gift and if it's his gift it's absolutely perfect for us so I think it's good to remember as we look at a book like Job the importance of living as

[35 : 15] Christians with the eye of faith and that's very different from simply knowing about God it's knowing and putting our trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour it's reaching out to him and asking to be as blind people to be able to see so much we don't see there's so much that we need the eye of faith to understand and it's about coming to God seeing him as awesome but attractional in the way that Job was able to and to freely repent of our sins we don't just repent once and come to faith it's a daily exercise it's about turning it's about where are we sending our roots where are we sending our roots where are we getting our nourishment where do we get our identity what drives us what motivates us what's important to us that will be what we do in our private lives it's where we find our significance and importance and he says constantly with the eye of faith underneath the surface of our lives to be going to God he loves our questions he loves when we shout and cry and search and dig deep beyond the words of the page and as we see him we repent because of who he is and above all because in our weakness and need he accepts us in grace and in love and I think the last thing and I'm not sure what to say about this but James chapter 5 verse 10 speaks about the patience of Job and if you read through

Job I don't think that's the first thing you would think about Job the anger of Job the grumbling of Job the suffering of Job yes but the patience when we think of a patient believer sorry when I think of a patient believer I kind of think of someone that's very calm that doesn't question that has deep and unshakable faith and always believes in the amazing goodness of God but yet here is Job full of questions and who goes into God's presence kind of boldly as it were and doesn't seem that patient but you know why he's patient because right through the book he's going to God he's not going anywhere else he's wanting an answer he's looking for God to he pleads with God he keeps going back to God and he's waiting and waiting and waiting for the living God and I think that's what the patience of Job speaks about even when the heat comes he's going to

God and he's it's not saying that we have we find suffering easy or we find suffering no problem easy no problem God's there it's keeping going to him with all our doubts and questions and fears and waiting on him because it's a bit like the disciples said when the hard sayings of Jesus were revealed and lots of disciples left him and Jesus says to Peter are you going to leave me too Peter says where else can we go you have the words of eternal life and I think waiting on the Lord is a bit like that for us sometimes that's what patience is saying where else can we go because God is good God is good and he will take us through the storm and the drought even when we can't see why and that is the greatest thing ever and it is really what marks us apart as believers and what enables us to live in this veil of tears because it is a veil of tears it's not that we think once we become a

Christian there will be no more suffering but rather that he will never leave us I am always with you and that one day he wipes away every tear that's the eye of faith and that is the greatest thing about being a Christian and if you don't have that then you have nothing let's pray Father God we ask and pray that you would help us to understand more from your word as we find it challenging sometimes just the safe and easy view we have both of faith of grace and of God give us that courage and that boldness and the eye of faith to bring everything before you all our sins all our weaknesses all our struggles all our doubts all our anger and frustration and everything that sometimes separates us from you and makes us question you but may we always do it through the prism of the cross and understanding that our lives are precious to the living

God in that reality and his promises will always come to pass and that he may not end our suffering in this life but he will never leave us and there is something much better to come give us that perspective we pray may we never be trite and naive and shallow in thinking about this either for ourselves or for other people may we never brush people's sufferings and grief and sadness aside with a quick rendition of a verse in the Bible to them but at the same time Lord remind us of these truths that are a great comfort and a great strength and may we be challenged to think about our own relationship with Jesus and where we are sending the roots of our lives what's significant for us where we get our nourishment where we get our joy our pleasure our satisfaction our identity and may it be in the living waters so that we may bear fruit even in drought we ask and pray that in

[42 : 17] Jesus name Amen