

The Book of Job

Session 29: The Message of the Book of Job

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Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Job, John Walton, Message, Disinterested Righteousness, Trust, Suffering, Abraham, Covenant, Non-order, Challenger

Abstract

This session focuses on the overarching theological message of the Book of Job, emphasizing that the text does not explain the reasons behind suffering but instead corrects human expectations of divine justice. Dr. John Walton discusses how much of human suffering is a natural byproduct of living in a world of non-order and disorder where specific "why" answers simply do not exist. He highlights the book's central question—whether humanity is capable of disinterested righteousness—and draws a parallel to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac to illustrate serving God without transactional benefits. Ultimately, Walton concludes that when reasons fail, complete trust in God's sovereign wisdom is the only viable response.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Message of the Book of Job

A. Evaluating Expectations

1. The message of the book depends entirely on the questions being asked.
2. It does not provide answers to the past-focused "Why?" question.
3. Job was never told why he suffered, and there was no cause in his behavior.

II. The Futility of Seeking Reasons

A. Future Purpose vs. Past Causes

1. Following Jesus' advice in John 9, believers should focus on future purpose rather than past causes.
2. However, even seeking future purpose should be held loosely because it is not always discoverable.

B. The Myth of the "Reasons Booth"

1. Believers often assume they will discover the reasons for their suffering when they reach heaven.
2. In reality, there may be no reasons at all for specific suffering.
3. Some experiences are simply the byproduct of living in a world containing non-order and disorder.

III. The Limits of Confronting God

A. God's Defense

1. It is wrong to expect God to defend Himself or explain His cosmic actions to humans.
2. Job's fundamental mistake was trying to call God into court to force a self-defense.
3. God's cosmic operations are far beyond human comprehension and discovery.

IV. Disinterested Righteousness as the Central Theme

A. The Challenger's Question

1. The most important question posed by the book is: "Does anyone serve God for nothing?"
2. This topic occupies a massive portion of the narrative.

B. Application to Believers

1. While Christians receive eternal benefits (salvation, forgiveness, eternal life), these are unearned gifts.
2. Believers are called to serve God for nothing, valuing obedience over personal benefits.

V. Trust in the Midst of Suffering

A. Trust as the Sole Response

1. Trust begins where reason fails, acting as the only possible response to inexplicable experiences.
2. The more difficult the situation, the harder and more necessary it is to trust.

B. Devaluing Personal Benefits

1. God's wisdom prevails, even when His justice is not visible in daily life.
2. Personal benefits must be devalued so they do not drive our commitment.
3. Believers are called to act as partners and participants in God's cosmic plans rather than self-interested mercenaries.

VI. Biblical Parallel: Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22)

A. The Ultimate Test of Faith

1. Abraham's offering of Isaac on the altar represented putting the entire covenant and its promises at risk.
2. Up to this point, every sacrifice God requested of Abraham was accompanied by a promise of a greater benefit.
3. In Chapter 22, Abraham stood to gain absolutely nothing and lose everything.

B. Proof of Disinterested Righteousness

1. By showing readiness to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham proved his fear of God was not transactional.

2. God's statement "Now I know that you fear God" confirms Abraham was not in it for the benefits.
3. This parallel illustrates the same core question asked in Job: do we fear God for nothing?