

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 23 – Podcast

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Welcome back, everybody, to another Deep Dive. Today we are going to be taking on a passage that I think is one that a lot of people kind of scratch their heads at. Yeah.

We're looking at the end of the book of Job. Okay. The epilogue and specifically the part where Job gets all of his riches back.

Right. And I think the question that this raises for a lot of people is, like, doesn't that kind of undermine the whole point? Like the book is supposed to be this book that's challenging the idea that good people always prosper. That certainly raises some questions.

Yeah, it feels almost like a sitcom. You know, they hit the reset button after all this intense, like, philosophical wrestling about why bad things happen to good people. Right.

Suddenly Job's got a new family, new wealth, like new everything. New camels, new sheep. Yeah, exactly.

It's just like, never mind everybody, everything's back to normal. Back to normal. Yeah.

So help me understand this. What is really going on here? Well, let's start by remembering what the book of Job is all about. Okay.

It's like this giant thought experiment about God's policies, and you have this challenger figure who's arguing that God shouldn't let the righteous suffer. And then you have Job himself arguing it's just plain wrong. Yeah.

For good people to experience such pain. And Job was like absolutely adamant about his innocence throughout the whole ordeal. Exactly.

Like he never wavers on that. He never wavers. But then we get to this epilogue.

Right. With this sudden influx of blessings, it seems to contradict everything that we've been grappling with. But that's where the real insight lies.

The scholar we're drawing on, John Walton, points out that this ending isn't about proving what he calls the retribution principle. Okay. This idea that good deeds equal rewards, bad deeds equal punishment.

So it's not like a cosmic karma scoreboard flashing Job winner at the end. Precisely. It's more about God showing that his actions aren't limited by our human ideas of fairness.

Okay. But wouldn't that be like saying there's no justice in the world? Like if good things can happen to bad people and vice versa? Right. That's where we have to kind of shift our perspective.

Think about it this way. Before his trials, Job saw his prosperity as something that he deserved. Right.

It was like payment for his piety. Okay. But after his experience, something shifts within him.

Okay. He comes to understand that any prosperity he receives is purely a gift. That's a pretty big change in thinking.

It is a big change. Going from I earn this to I'm being given this. Right.

And this dismantles what Walton calls the triangle. This human-made framework that tries to connect God's justice, Job's righteousness, and the retribution principle. Okay.

It's like God is taking this neatly constructed triangle we've created and shattering it into a million pieces. Yeah. He's saying there's more to this than your tidy little theories.

That makes me think about how often we as people try to fit God into a box. Right. We try to define him based on our limited understanding.

Exactly. And that's what makes this ending so powerful. Okay.

It doesn't excuse suffering, but it reframes it. Yeah. When good things happen to good people, it's a reflection of God's character, not some mechanical rule of the universe.

So if prosperity is a gift, does that mean that there's no point in trying to live a good life? Yeah. Why bother if it doesn't guarantee you a positive outcome? That's a great question. And it gets to the heart of what this epilogue is trying to teach us.

Okay. It's not about earning rewards, but about understanding the nature of God and our relationship with him. Okay.

I think I'm starting to see where you're going with this, but I still have a lot more questions. Like, what about his family? Right. Like he loses his kids and then he gets new kids.

What are we supposed to make of that? Yeah. That's an important aspect that we need to unpack a little bit because it's often overlooked. The restoration of Job's family isn't just about giving him back what he lost.

Yeah. It points to something deeper about God's character. Deeper how... I'm interested to hear your thoughts.

Well, think about it throughout the book. Job's friends, they're all accusing him of sinning. You know, like he must've done something to deserve this, but God never concerns himself with that.

No, he doesn't. In fact, he actually affirms Job's righteousness. Exactly.

So is it possible that by restoring Job's family, God is making a statement about those accusations? It is. It's possible to see it that way. God is not only vindicating Job, but also showing that he cares about the well-being of his people.

Okay. Even in the face of unimaginable loss. So it's like a reminder that he's a God of compassion and restoration.

Absolutely. It's interesting because we often focus on like the material aspects of Job's restoration. Yeah.

You know, the wealth, the possessions. But like the restoration of his family is arguably even more significant. Absolutely.

It speaks to the value God places on relationships, on family, on human connection. Okay. It suggests that true prosperity encompasses more than just material wealth.

Okay. So we're talking about prosperity as a gift, and we're talking about the restoration of Job's family, but this still leaves me with like a nagging question. Yeah.

If it's not about reward and punishment, why does God allow suffering in the first place? Right. Like, why put Job through all that? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? And the book of Job doesn't give us a neat and tidy answer, but maybe that's the point. Maybe it's not about finding all the answers, but about learning to trust God even when we don't understand his ways.

So you're saying we need to embrace the mystery. Exactly. We have to let go of our need for simplistic explanations and accept that God operates on a level that we may never fully comprehend.

That can be pretty tough though. Yeah. Like we as humans, we like to have things figured out.

We want to know the why behind everything. It is tough, but think about it this way. If we cling to this rigid understanding of fairness and reward, then any deviation from that is going to shatter our faith.

Okay. But if we can accept that God's wisdom transcends our limited human understanding. Then we can hold on to faith even when life throws us curveballs.

Yeah. Even when things don't make sense from our perspective. That reminds me of something that John Walton said about this epilogue.

He says, it's not primarily for Job's benefit. Right. It's for us.

Us, the readers. The readers. Yeah.

It's about challenging our assumptions about God's policies and the way the world works. Exactly. It's like God is using Job's story as a case study to teach us this larger lesson about faith and perspective.

Okay. A lesson about trusting his goodness, even when we don't see the whole picture. So in a way, the epilogue doesn't give us easy answers.

Right. But it does offer a different kind of comfort. The comfort of knowing that we're not alone in our struggles.

Yeah. That even in the face of unimaginable suffering, we can still find solace in God's presence and trust in his ultimate goodness. That's a powerful thought.

It's not about getting all the answers, but about finding peace and hope even in the midst of uncertainty. So how do we apply this to our own lives? What does it look like to view prosperity as a gift in a practical sense? Yeah. That's a really good question.

I'm thinking about like my own life and how I tend to view the good things that happen to me. You know, it's easy to fall into that trap of thinking like, well, I worked hard for this. I deserve this.

It is. It's a natural human inclination. Yeah.

But if we shift our perspective and start seeing those good things as gifts, as expressions of God's grace and generosity. Yeah. It changes everything.

I can see that it makes you more grateful for what you have, maybe a little less likely to take things for granted. Absolutely. And it also might change how we respond to challenges and setbacks.

You know, if prosperity isn't a guarantee, then maybe suffering isn't always a punishment. Maybe it's an opportunity for growth or a test of faith. See, that's a very different way of looking at things.

Like I'm so used to associating suffering with something negative, something to be avoided at all costs. Right. But what if it's not always about avoiding it? What if it's about how we respond to it? That's where the real test lies.

Yeah. The book of Job reminds us that even in the midst of pain and loss. Yeah.

We can choose to cling to faith, to trust in God's goodness, even when we don't understand his plan. You know, that's what I find so remarkable about Job is that he goes through absolute hell, you know, loses everything. He does.

And yet he never completely loses his faith. He questions God, he argues with God, but he never abandons him entirely. That's the kind of faith that can withstand any storm.

A faith that's not based on this quid pro quo arrangement with God. Right. But on a deep understanding of his character and an unwavering trust in his love.

So maybe the real treasure that Job finds at the end isn't the restored wealth or the new family, but it's this deeper, more resilient faith. Right. That can weather any storm.

Beautifully put. The epilogue isn't just about giving Job back what he lost. It's about showing us the readers.

Yeah. What true prosperity looks like. Okay.

It's about a prosperity of the soul that transcends the ups and downs of our earthly circumstances. That's such a powerful message. Yeah.

So what you're saying is the real takeaway from the book of Job isn't the formula for avoiding suffering or guaranteeing happiness. Right. It's a deeper understanding of God's character and how he interacts with the world.

That's it. Exactly. And it's a message that continues to resonate with people centuries later because it grapples with some of life's biggest questions.

It doesn't offer easy answers, but it does provide this framework for understanding God's presence in our lives. Even when things are difficult. So maybe instead of asking why me when bad things happen, we should be asking what is God trying to teach me through this experience? Now you're getting it.

It's about shifting our perspective from a transactional view of faith. Okay. To one that's rooted in trust, surrender, and acceptance of the mystery that surrounds us.

It's a challenging concept, but it's also incredibly liberating. It is. It frees us from the burden of trying to control everything and allows us to rest in the knowledge that even when we don't understand, God is still good.

And maybe, just maybe, that's the greatest gift of all. Wow. This deep dive has really opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about the book of Job.

You know, it's not just an ancient story. It's a timeless reflection on faith, suffering, and the mystery of God's grace. And hopefully it will spark some deep reflection for our listeners as well.

Absolutely. Yeah. If we all started viewing our own good fortune as a gift, how would that change the way we live our lives? Yeah.

Would it make us more grateful, more generous, more compassionate? Yeah. These are questions worth pondering long after this deep dive is over. Indeed.

The journey of discovery doesn't end here. So until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep.