

Introduction

In a context where James exhorts Christians to patience (5.7, 10), the NT looks back to examples from the OT, especially the example of Job:

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful (Jam 5.11).

James mentions some things that his readers have heard and seen as reminders that ground his exhortation to “be patient.” What they heard and what they saw refer to their knowledge of the account of Job in the OT. To hear and see means to understand, grasp and perceive. Thus, the text directs us back to Job as NT Christians, standing in the footsteps of the readers of the book of James. Hence the title for today’s study is “James (and us) looking back at Job.” When we look back at Job we also look there at the Lord, so my outline will cover two things: look at Job and look at the Lord.

1A. Behold, Look at Job

The author begins by telling us to “behold” the fact that “we consider those blessed who remained steadfast” (Jam 5.11a). He is referring both backward and forward. That is, he refers back to the example of the prophets who exemplify “suffering and patience” (v. 10; we can look for how this is the case as we go through the OT survey). He also refers forward to the example of Job (cf. “Behold...you have heard...and seen”). Looking forward has Job in view and it has the Lord in view.

The claim made by James makes me wonder what is going on. We have three reasons to question the steadfastness of Job. 1) First, in his lament, Job emphatically and powerfully curses the day of his birth. He wishes that that day perish from history (3.3, 6), become darkness, gloom, cloudy, black, and thick darkness (3.4-5). Thus, he asks the “why” question as he suffers in misery and fear feeling hedged in by God (3.20-23). He sighs and groans in fear and dread (3.24-26). This sounds like someone who is not patient or steadfast. Thus, we probably feel like Eliphaz and want to say to him, “**if I try to speak to you will you be impatient?**” (4.2). We may say, “**You instructed others but now you are impatient**” (4.3-5; cf. we want to say, “**it is for you, for your good,**” 5.27 and **blessed is the one God reproves** so do not despise His discipline, 5.17). Moreover, Job admits to being impatient: “**why should I not be impatient?**” (21.4; impatient is literally, “my spirit is short,” Hartley, 311).

2) Second, clearly Job over emphasized his uprightness to the point of self-justification that led him, 3) third, to fault the Lord as unjust (if I were weighed in a just balance then God would know my integrity, 31.6; later, God faults Job as the faultfinder, 40.1-2; 7-8). The signs of impatience are here in his exaggeration and anger with God.

Nevertheless, Job *was* steadfast. That is, he persevered over all, even if at times he became impatient. It helps to think of his patience from different angles: he was patient overall, (when all the dust settles, we can see it), he was repentant, having patience in tension, and he was steadfast, which means that he persevered with regard to the main ingredient of patience.

The main ingredient of patience that He held on to was the sovereignty of God. He held his ground in a way that is commendable. He held tight to the Father’s hand in all the darkness and in all of his pain and struggles. We should read the key verses for all their power in the context of Job’s loss of possessions, family, and health:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ **And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”**

²² **In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (1.20-22).**

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.⁸ And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (2.7-10).

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (42.2).

He acknowledged that God is sovereign and active in human history. Even the evil acts of men (murder and theft) are within His control serving His will. The "evils" that befall us from the created world (such as windstorms) are in His control so much so that when people die, we worship the Lord and say, "this too is from His hand."

Job does not infer from these happenings to God's injustice. He worships and praises God as the sovereign Lord of all things: the earth, the sea, and all in them from all the properties of matter to all the actions of men. Job affirms that God's purposes are irresistible; no one can thwart a single purpose of the Lord (42.2). Paul and Moses agree. (cf. Eph 1.11, God works all things after the counsel of His will, and Gen 50.20, in the case of Joseph's brothers, even the *evil acts* of men are *things that God intends* in His purposes for a good end, Gen 50.20).

Job's right speaking about the Lord causes all readers of the book to behold the Lord. We do not lose sight of the suffering theme but it is now in the background. James picks up this cue and directs us to some specifics to aid us in patient endurance of suffering.

2A. Behold, Look at the Lord

James tells us to consider the Lord's purpose, compassion, and mercy (Jam 5.11).

1B. Consider the Lord's purpose

The text in James causes us to go back and reflect on the purpose of God in two ways at least. It is irresistible (42.2) and involves a challenge from Satan found in the prologue to the book. Both aspects call for some deep reflection. We can concentrate presently on the prologue that contains the challenge of Satan.

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"⁹ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason?¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face" (1.8-11).

Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life.⁵ But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face" (2.4-5).

The picture we have of Satan is that he is definitely limited in his actions under the rule of God. That fact is comforting. The picture is also somewhat muted but we know from Scripture as a whole that his adversarial activities include deceptive schemes. In the garden, he is "crafty" and he twists and contradicts the words of God ("Did God actually say..." and "you will not surely die," Gen 3.1, 4). Thus, *when we read the challenge to the Lord in Job we should not even trust the question*. In other words, the question suggests a number of things that reveal the purpose of God in their answers. Three claims help us see the deceptive nature of Satan's challenge. He is suggesting that autonomy is right, reward is wrong, and blessing is external.

1) First, consider how we might think we should answer the question, **"Does Job fear God for no reason?"** We want to say, "Yes he does, and so do all the people of God." However, if we serve God for no reason without *any* basis in the Lord or His blessings on us, then our serving is simply something we choose to do from within ourselves. Interestingly, this is the practical equivalent of the widespread doctrine of human free will. The idea intended in free will is that

our decisions and actions are uncaused and definitely not determined by God. A “yes” to this suggestion would mean that the claim of human autonomy is right. In this scenario, we might think that Satan tricks God into giving approval to the very core of sin, which is man’s attempt to be autonomous.

The Lord takes the question at face value but answers it in a way that denies human autonomy. This is part of the purpose of the Lord revealed in the book of Job. It is clear that Job serves God instead of going over the edge in faulting God because God comes to him, speaks to him, rebukes him, and thus reveals Himself to Job. Job does not serve God for “no reason.” Indeed, he serves God because God upholds him by His word. What keeps him from cursing God is God’s presence and voice in the whirlwind!

2) Second, another way we might think to answer the question is to say, “Yes, Job serves God for no reason, he does not serve the Lord for any reward because that would be ungodly or unrighteous.” We need to keep things clear on the subject of reward. It is not wrong to serve God for the reward that He promises. He gives rewards to us even though all of our actions have taints of sin; rewards are ultimately gracious. Just as it is not wrong to work for your wage on payday, it is not wrong to work for the Lord’s rewards that He promises us along the way and at the end of our journey. He gives us many precious promises to motivate us and give us a spring in our step as we do our work.

3) Third, we might think that external blessings are the key to having God’s protective hedge around our lives. However, the suggestion that if God’s takes away family, possessions, and health, then there is no protective hedge is incorrect. One thing that makes this clear is the fact that *the Lord Himself is the one we seek* and in Him we have the promise that “all these things” (Mat 6.33) will be ours in ways that serve His glory and our good. It is a great, a profoundly great blessing to have a sense of God’s presence even in His rebuke. When we see Him, that is, know Him in His word to us, we have comfort and desire to serve no matter what our state in life may be. Then we will serve Him in our hearts with repentance and confession of His sovereign majesty, even in the dark hours of suffering.

Thus the purpose of the Lord through Job is to teach us to depend on the Lord knowing that autonomy is not right, reward is not wrong, and our true reward, comfort, and strength is the Lord Himself present with us in His word (cf. the comfort of the Scriptures that give us hope, Rom 15.4).

2B. Consider His compassion

When we suffer and when we observe others suffer (including observing Job), we may feel unloved. Sometimes the pain, the confusion, and the unknowns will lead us to ask the “why” question. We may verge on questioning the Lord’s justice. However, what we need most is assurance of God’s compassion. How do we see that in the case of Job? It may appear that the Lord treats Job like a pawn in a heavenly chess game with Satan. That is surely too narrow of a look at the Lord in His dealings with Job. We cannot understand many things and thus we trust God’s wisdom, but regarding God’s love, we have the assurance from the book of Job that the Lord is blessing a son in reproof and discipline (5.17 w/ Heb 12.3-11). It is for our good and though painful “it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been disciplined by it” (Heb 12.11). Therefore, the entire episode comes from the hand of God in loving justice, power and wisdom (not simply in justice, power and wisdom). God shows love when He schools Job away from self-justification, self-sufficiency, and autonomy. He loves us in giving us this OT example of how He works His will in ways beyond our understanding but for our good (for our spiritual good in relation to all of life, possessions, family and health).

3B. Consider His mercy

God was merciful to Job forgiving and commending him despite the significant fact that he argued with the Lord and faulted the Lord in order to justify himself. By rebuke, He turned Job around calling him to repentance. That is mercy and grace rolled together. This is a restoration of the greatest value, a restoration to man’s true dignity and place in submission to God as His image bearer. Moreover, God showed mercy to Job in the restoration of possessions,

family, and health. Furthermore, God showed mercy to the friends who spoke wrongly about Him and stirred up His anger against them.

In showing mercy to the friends, the Lord shows mercy to us. He showed them mercy only through the intercession of Job. Through Job, we have the promise of restoration from all the effects of the fall. This is OT gospel. Job's restoration is eschatological; it reaches out beyond the suffering of *the* innocent one, Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Thus, if we sanctify the words of Job we will hear the mercy of the Lord in Christ. Recall the words of Job claiming that he can stand before God as a righteous prince (31-35-37; Christ can do fully what Job does by exaggeration). Furthermore, consider the example of Job looking to God for a redeemer (Job 19.25-26): **For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.** ²⁶ **And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.** Christ says, **"All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me"** (19.19), but He has God as His redeemer. He will stand beyond death in resurrection life to see God. Accordingly, Christ is our redeemer. By Him, we will stand in the resurrection to see God. Therefore, these words of Job are words of Christ and they are our words as well through the work of Christ as our priest.

That He is our priest means that He is Jacob's ladder (Gen 28), our mediator between earth and heaven. The ladder that connects earth and heaven is Jesus Christ on whom the angels ascend and descend (Gen. 28.12; Jn. 1.51). He is the intercessor, the betrayed Joseph and Job, the Isaac on the altar of suffering, the seed of Abraham and Eve (the book of Job presupposes the history of Genesis at least up to Abraham; definitely the fall and promise of a redeemer are part of the story presupposed by the narrator). Job is a priest to his home showing the need of sacrifice for sin. We have to read the book in light of the large story that culminates in Christ as both priest and sacrifice. He is the innocent one who suffers at the hand of God and at the hands of His friends to become mediator for the deliverance of His friends from the anger of God.

Trusting the sovereign Creator, we trust Jesus Christ the risen Lord. He delivers us from all the effects of the fall, from suffering and death, in and through suffering and death.

Now as we wait for His coming (Jas 5.7) we have a basis for patience and can look to the example of Job who was steadfast (the core of patience, 5.11) and see how the Lord is purposeful, compassionate and merciful.

Conclusions

1) My rock

I cannot see behind the scenes of human history (none of us can), but knowing the fact of God's sovereign purpose, compassion, and mercy must be my rock. He must be my rock here in the suffering I face (in dying and death, the body being subject to death because of sin, Rom 8.10a).

2) His wisdom

In my ignorance, I rest in His wisdom. I have His word of sure promise. Hearing His voice, I have all I need. I know that God is working behind the scenes (I have some glimpses per the prologue of Job). I know that He is carrying out specific purposes that reveal how He sustains His servants (sovereignly and irresistibly).

3) His assurance

The fact is that the removal of His blessings of possessions and health would lead us to doubt Him (and to eventually curse Him) if He did not give us the blessing of His word and a sense of His presence with us. Even in rebuke, the Lord reassures us of His love (cf. Heb 12 quotes Job 5.17).

4) Our ultimate resting place

Job is an example of the outworking of persevering grace. Therefore, we find our final resting place in the fact that God is perfect in all of His attributes and being. We find rest of soul in Him through Christ for time and eternity.