

## February 3, 2019 Sermon Manuscript

### Job 38:1-5, 40:15-18, 23, 41:1-2, 8-10, 42:1-17

38<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>2</sup>“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup>Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. <sup>4</sup>Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup>Who determined its measurements—surely you know!...

40:<sup>15</sup> “Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. <sup>16</sup>Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. <sup>17</sup>He makes his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. <sup>18</sup>His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron... <sup>23</sup>Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth...

41:<sup>1</sup> “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? <sup>2</sup>Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?... <sup>8</sup>Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again! <sup>9</sup>Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him. <sup>10</sup>No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me?...

42:<sup>1</sup> Then Job answered the LORD and said: <sup>2</sup>“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup>‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. <sup>4</sup>‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ <sup>5</sup>I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; <sup>6</sup>therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

<sup>7</sup>After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. <sup>8</sup>Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly.

For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” <sup>9</sup>So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

<sup>10</sup>And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. <sup>11</sup>Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

<sup>12</sup>And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. <sup>13</sup>He had also seven sons and three daughters. <sup>14</sup>And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. <sup>15</sup>And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. <sup>16</sup>And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. <sup>17</sup>And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

### John 9:1-7

<sup>1</sup>As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup>Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup>and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

## **Job, part 2: On suffering, or Nuancing the Retribution Principle**

### **Introduction**

This morning is the second half of our mini-series on Job, drawing from the work of the scholars John Walton & Tremper Longman.<sup>a</sup> Last week, for the first half of this mini-series, we introduced the book of Job as a piece of Wisdom Literature similar to the Parables of Jesus. This means that it's not necessary for us to think about it as historical, but rather as a sort of thought-experiment to explore some particular theological questions. The first two chapters of Job, which we

<sup>a</sup> John H. Walton & Tremper Longman, *How To Read Job*, IVP: 2015.

read last week, provide the set-up for this thought-experiment. And just to review that briefly... Job is introduced as a man whom God had blessed in many ways. He had a large family of ten children and enough livestock to make him the wealthiest man in his region. But the book also establishes Job as a *righteous* man, saying he was {quote} “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” And yet, after establishing this, the book then describes an interaction between Satan and God that results in Job being stripped of all of his wealth and the death of all his children.

Well, in part 1 of our mini-series, last week, we considered how what followed in the story of Job challenges us to consider our motives for righteousness and loving God; to consider whether we love God for the benefits and rewards<sup>b</sup> we hope to receive from Him or do we love Him with integrity; that is, simply for who he is. And I suggested that only Christ has truly loved God with an impure heart, but that through relationship with Jesus we have forgiveness for our mixed motives as well as a means for our hearts becoming progressively purified.<sup>c</sup>

So *that* was last week. But today, in this second part, we’ll be considering what we can learn from the book of Job about the human experience of suffering.<sup>d</sup> Now, when we talk about suffering, what do we mean? Well, Walton & Longman do a good job of delineating wide the range of suffering humans can experience:

“It can be physical: from minor but chronic pain to significant debilitating pain, from conditions like migraines to the results of an injury... It can also be psychological: from separation from a loved one to the deep grief of loss, from the shame of guilt to the anxiety connected to fears, from living in an abusive relationship to coping with broken family relationships. (Suffering) can be circumstantial: living with an eating disorder, HIV or a neurological disease. It can be surrogate: trying to care for the aged or the terminally ill, suffering because those who are near us suffer. Finally, it can be systemic: from those whose lives are threatened by repressive regimes and those who have become victims of human trafficking to those who live under circumstances in which hunger and disease are taking lives daily. Suffering can break us, and it is characteristic of the broken world in which we live.”

But because no one enjoys suffering, our human tendency is to have a two-fold posture toward it. #1: we’re inclined do whatever is in our control to avoid suffering. And #2 when we experience we’re often prone to seek comfort by seeking cognitive answers to the question of ‘why?’: such as “Why has this happened?” or “Why would God allow this to happen?”.

Well, because the book of Job offers a story of someone who experienced an almost unprecedented level of loss all at once, it’s not uncommon for believers to look to the book of Job for any clues as to how they might avoid suffering in the first place or for solace when they’re in the midst of suffering. However, I bet most who have come to the book of Job for either of these reasons will tell you that it was left them frustrated, or feeling uncomfortable. And this is likely because the book of Job offers no reasons for the suffering we may experience.<sup>e</sup> Instead, it is useful for calibrating our *expectations around suffering – namely, that suffering is to some extent inevitable – but also to inoculate us (in advance) from some of the crises of faith that commonly arise for those in the midst of suffering*. So the book of Job is actually more suited to training us for crises than comforting us in the

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<sup>b</sup> Note that such manipulation toward future benefits (which lacks integrity) is very different from expressing gratitude for benefits already received (which does not conflict with integrity).

<sup>c</sup> Last week explored how the book of Job examines God’s policy of blessing the righteous (or puts it on trial, really).

<sup>d</sup> This sermon will explore how the book of Job examines (or puts it on trial) God’s policy of allowing the righteous to suffer.

<sup>e</sup> “But the book of Job is not about suffering. If we want to find out why there is suffering in the world and pain in our lives, the book of Job is not going to answer those questions.” (160)

midst of suffering or teaching us how to avoid suffering.

### Background on the Retribution Principle

And Walton & Longman explain the book of Job does this by exploring the reliability of something called the “Retribution Principle”. The Retribution Principle is the idea that “the righteous will prosper and the wicked suffer” (and I’ve printed it in your bulletin because I’ll be talking about it a good bit today). The ancient Israelites seem to have generally believed the “Retribution Principle” reflects how life in this world works. And frankly, so did most of the people of the nations surrounding them, and it has been a common belief across most cultures throughout world history. This principle is attractive because it’s simple and it provides those who embrace it some sense of control (that is, a sense that avoiding suffering is completely within human control).

But for the ancient Israelites and for Christians today, the most compelling reason to believe the “Retribution Principle” reflects how the world works is because it *is* affirmed at various places in the Bible. For example, in the book of Proverbs, taking just chapters 10 through 12, there are 15 verses that seem to be communicating the Retribution Principle. To give you just a sampling:

Proverbs 10:3 - “The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry,  
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.”

Proverbs 10:16 - “The wage of the righteous leads to life,  
the gain of the wicked to sin.”

Proverbs 10:24 - “What the wicked dreads will come upon him,  
but the desire of the righteous will be granted.”

Proverbs 12:1 - “No ill befalls the righteous,  
but the wicked are filled with trouble.”

...and so on.<sup>f</sup> In addition, there are Psalms affirming the Retribution Principle. And Psalm 37 is probably the most famous, as it is chocked full of maxims like “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (v4) and “...the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land” (v9).<sup>g</sup> So of the Retribution Principle is a biblical concept, there must be at least some truth to it!

But even though the Retribution Principle is well-attested in certain parts of scripture, there were many occasions when the Israelites found that the Retribution Principle was *not* reflected in their life experiences, where they expected the Retribution Principle to play out in their lives or context only to be disappointed. And our Psalm this morning, Psalm 73, is just one example, as it opens with the

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<sup>f</sup> Also... **Proverbs 10:9** “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.”; **Proverbs 10:25** “When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever.”; **Proverbs 10:27** “The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.”; **Proverbs 10:30** “The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land.”; **Proverbs 11:5** “The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness.”; **Proverbs 11:6** “The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.”; **Proverbs 11:18** “The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.”; **Proverbs 11:19** “Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die.”; **Proverbs 11:21** “Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.”; **Proverbs 12:2** “A good man obtains favor from the Lord, but a man of evil devices he condemns.”; **Proverbs 12:7** “The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.”

<sup>g</sup> Also notably Psalm 55:22: “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”

psalmist expressing confusion that what he is seeing and experiencing conflicts with the Retribution Principle. He writes,

- <sup>1</sup> Truly, God is loving to Israel, \*  
even to those who have a clean heart.  
<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, my feet had almost stumbled; \*  
my steps had nearly slipped.  
<sup>3</sup> For I was envious of the proud \*  
when I saw the ungodly in such prosperity.

Down to verse 12:

- <sup>12</sup> Behold, these are the ungodly; \*  
they prosper in their ways, and they have riches in possession.  
<sup>13</sup> I said, "Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart \*  
and washed my hands in innocence."

And I'm guessing the Psalmist isn't the only one who found the Retribution Principle a bit unreliable; but that we can identify with some of his frustration as well. #

But before I dive further into that, I also want to point out that wherever there **is** wholesale belief in the Retribution Principle, it is almost as common that the converse of the principle is believed as well. And that is the idea that if someone is prospering it must be an indication they are righteous and if someone is suffering it must be because they are wicked. In today's gospel passage we can see how easily the ancient Jews has moved beyond embracing the Retribution Principle to embracing its converse as well. John 9 reports that one day when Jesus and his disciple pass by a man blind from birth, they ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In other words, an assumption of the disciples' worldview was that for anyone to suffer such a debilitating handicap as blindness there must be some wickedness to blame! So this passage illustrates how when one believes that the Retribution Principle is always true, it is very easy to jump to assuming that those who are blessed or prosperous are righteous and that when someone experiences suffering or hardship it must be due to wickedness.

Now, perhaps none of us would really admit to believing prosperity always indicates righteousness or that suffering is always a sign of wickedness. For us it probably applies more personally, like when tragedy strikes our own lives and we may start to question: "Did I do something to deserve this?" or "Does this mean God's mad at me?"

So what's clear then is that, the Retribution Principle's presence in scripture means there must be some way that it is true, but our experience says it is not always true, so how can we embrace it appropriately? To what extent can we count on it to be true that "the righteous will prosper and the wicked suffer" and is the *converse* of the principle true at all, that prosperity and suffering are reliable indicators of righteousness or sin?

And the book of Job is really helpful for exploring this question, because it **begins** by *stipulating* that job is righteous (1:1) only to have Job subsequently suffer tremendous losses, and yet it affirms that Job maintains that righteousness in the way he responds to those losses (1:22, 2:10). So Job is clearly a righteous sufferer, and yet, every human character in the book, including Job himself, trusts in the reliability of the Retribution Principle. So what gives?

**The RETRIBUTION PRINCIPLE:**

The righteous will prosper and the wicked suffer.

**The CONVERSE of the Retribution Principle:**

Prosperity is an indication of righteousness  
and suffering is an indication of wickedness.

## Defending the Retribution Principle

Well, much of the book beyond chapter 2 features the various characters clinging to the Retribution Principle while trying to *reconcile* what has happened to Job. And in doing so, they present us with the variety of arguments people will use to defend the Retribution Principle in the face of suffering.

So this begins with Job's friends. You remember those guys? Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (maybe not). Well, throughout the first half the book<sup>h</sup> they argue that Job must just be *ignorant* of whatever offense has caused such retribution.<sup>i</sup> So this is *their* way of defending the Retribution Principle, that Job really has done wrong but is just ignorant of it, though we the reader know this cannot be true.

But what about Job? Well, Job disagrees with his friends and maintains he has been righteous, but he believes the Retribution Principle is completely reliable. So he concludes that the problem is with God; that God has been unjust to allow him to suffer as he has.<sup>j</sup> In other words, Job believes it's not the Retribution Principle that has failed; God is the one who has failed. And he even goes so far as to confront God with this claim and accuse Him of injustice.<sup>k</sup>

But in the second half of the book, a third perspective emerges when we are introduced to a different character named Elihu (in chapters 32-37). Elihu maintains the Retribution Principle remains completely reliable and that it *has been* in the case of Job by arguing that suffering has actually benefitted Job because Job has responded to suffering self-righteously. Therefore, suffering has helpfully exposed Job's self-righteousness and therefore opened the door for repentance.<sup>l</sup>

	<b>Narrative Frame: Job 1–3</b>	
	Prologue: Heaven and earth	1–2
	Job's opening lament	3
	<b>Cycle One: Job 4–14</b>	
	Eliphaz	4–5
	Job	6–7
	Bildad	8
	Job	9–10
	Zophar	11
	Job	12–14
	<b>Cycle Two: Job 15–21</b>	
	Eliphaz	15
	Job	16–17
	Bildad	18
	Job	19
	Zophar	20
	Job	21
	<b>Cycle Three: Job 22–27</b>	
	Eliphaz	22
	Job	23–24
	Bildad	25
	Job	26–27
	<b>Interlude: Wisdom Hymn, Job 28</b>	
	<b>Series One: Job 29–31</b>	
	Job: Reminiscences	29
	Job: Affliction	30
	Job: Oath of innocence	31
	<b>Series Two: Job 32–37</b>	
	Elihu: Introduction and theory	32–33
	Elihu: Verdict on Job	34
	Elihu: Offense of Job	35
	Elihu: Summary	36–37
	<b>Series Three: Job 38–41</b>	
	Yahweh: Maintaining roles and functions in cosmic order	38–39
	Yahweh: Illustrations from cosmic order	40:6–41:34
	<b>Narrative Frame: Job 42</b>	
	Job's closing statements	(40:3–5) 42:1–6
	Epilogue: Heaven and earth	42:7–17

Figure 2.1. Structure of the book of Job

<sup>h</sup> Cycle One: chapters 4–14 Eliphaz 4–5 Job 6–7 Bildad 8 Job 9–10 Zophar 11 Job 12–14

Cycle Two: chapters 15–21 Eliphaz 15 Job 16–17 Bildad 18 Job 19 Zophar 20 Job 21

Cycle Three: chapters 22–27 Eliphaz 22 Job 23–24 Bildad 25 Job 26–27

\*See the end of the manuscript for a full chart\*

<sup>i</sup> Walton & Longman: "(Job's friends) come as representatives of wisdom and are dismissed as misguided fools... As we review all these human pretensions to wisdom, we see that they all fall short. None of them get it right. We know right from the start that Job is not suffering because of his sin or because God is unjust. Therefore all their diagnoses and remedies are deeply flawed. Only God is truly wise, and that is his point when he confronts Job from the whirlwind in Job 38–42, a conclusion that is anticipated in Job 28 and that is recognized by Job when he sees rather than simply hears Yahweh." (68)

<sup>j</sup> For example, from Job 9: "19 If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?... 22 It is all one; therefore I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' 23 When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. 24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges—if it is not he, who then is it?" And then explicitly in chapter 27: "2 As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter..."

<sup>k</sup> "Since Job believes that God does not discriminate between the righteous and the wicked, he asserts that God does not do what is right (mishpat, the word for justice). God's rebuke of Job in Job 40:8 makes it clear that Job has considered God to be unjust. Job claims in Job 19:7 that there is no mishpat and in Job 27:2 that God has withheld mishpat from him (cf. Job 34:5)." (141)

Job 9:33, 16:19–21, & 19:23–27 indicate that Job wanted someone who would arbitrate between himself and God. (151)

<sup>l</sup> "In Job's speech (in chapters 29–31) he documented his fall (Job 29, his prosperity; Job 30, his deplorable current circumstances) and then concluded with an oath of innocence. In that oath he declared his innocence across a wide spectrum of behaviors. This represented a strategy to demonstrate that he is indeed a righteous person and not a wicked one. By swearing an oath that he did not engage in these wicked practices, Job obligates God to act in punishment if the oath is false. God's silence would be tacit

Now, none of these attempts to defend the Retribution Principle's complete reliability will ultimately hold up when God gets His say. But before we get to Him, I should mention that a final common argument for maintaining the complete reliability of the Retribution Principle is the defense that it will always prove, but it often takes time. And an example of this is when Christians point to the promise of God setting everything to right at the judgment and in the afterlife. Now obviously this argument couldn't have been made in Job, because as we said last week, our concepts of heaven and hell hadn't really developed in Israelite thought at the time it was written. But Christians are certainly justified in looking to the afterlife for encouragement. However, this argument still fails to defend the Retribution Principle as something that can always be counted upon in this life. ##

### Nuancing the Retribution Principle

So after the characters in Job have presented their arguments to maintain that the Retribution Principle remains completely reliable, the Lord finally chooses to chime in. And this is where our passage opens today, in chapter 38. Now recall that **Job** had taken God to task for being unjust, so God begins His response by highlighting the absurdity of humans standing in judgment of Him. We're told God...

“answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>2</sup> ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. <sup>4</sup> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup> Who determined its measurements—surely you know!’”

Now, God's response to Job here is essentially “I am God and you are not”, and people often take as another way of God saying “Mind your own business” or “I can do what I want” (30). But Walton & Longman note that what God is particularly highlighting is His wisdom, specifically the wisdom he exercised in creating, in setting up the world to work the way it does.

So obviously God is *rejecting* all of the explanations of Job's suffering that have been put forth so far, by saying their wisdom is nothing compared to His, that the friends and Job and Elihu are not actually wise at all.<sup>m</sup> But what is much easier to miss is that God is that by highlighting the role of His wisdom in setting the world / creation up, God is revealing that the world ultimately functions according to God's wisdom, not His justice. In other words, God is revealing that in this world we should not actually count upon God's *justice* to reign, but only His wisdom.

And this is **key** for unlocking the Retribution Principle, because those who believe it is completely reliable – that the world will always work this way – base that upon an assumption that because God is just and God created the world, therefore the world will be just. But God is saying, “No, the foundation of how I set up the world to operate is according to my wisdom, not my justice. So while, (in my justice) I *delight* blessing the righteous and sparing them from suffering, that will not

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admission that Job is righteous, thereby highlighting in sharp relief the problem of righteous people suffering... (Elihu) contends that Job's self-righteous defense of himself is serious enough to justify punitive action against him. His logic departs from the standard way of thinking, in which offense is committed and judgment is then carried out. The Elihu variation is that judgment may precede offense since it can have the purpose of drawing out the offensive behavior... God is going to agree with Elihu that Job's self-righteousness exceeds acceptable levels, but he is not going to accept Elihu's belief that he has justified Job's suffering and thereby validated a modified retribution principle as an explanation of why righteous people suffer.” (71)

<sup>m</sup> Walton & Longman: “Among the most difficult decisions about the structure of the book is what to do with Job 28. Opinions vary, but one of the most common views, and the one that we are most persuaded by, is that this wisdom hymn is best regarded as coming from the narrator rather than from any of the characters... In Job 4–27, we presume that we have been listening to the wisest men in the world. However, Job 28 indicates that we have not yet heard anything resembling wisdom.” (20-21)

always be the case! And I have my reasons, but that wisdom will generally be beyond your understanding or more than I can share with you.”<sup>n</sup> ##

### The Retribution Principle as Proverbially True

So what this means for the Retribution Principle is that we should understand it to be *typically true*... in other words, the Retribution Principle reflects both a desire of the Lord and general trend for how things go, but it is not a guarantee.

And the story of Job ultimately bears this out, because in chapter 42 God ultimately restores Job’s fortunes – demonstrating and reiterating God’s desire to bless Job for his righteousness – and yet the fact that Job went through all of this at all just goes to show that in this life justice is never guaranteed.

And this is why it is so fitting that to find the Retribution Principle most prevalently in the book of Proverbs, because the Proverbs were never meant to be promises or guarantees. Rather, they are wisdom literature that teaches what is *typically true* in general: the righteous will suffer less.

And similarly, in verse seven of our Galatians passage we see Paul using the Retribution Principle proverbially when he says “God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” He’s not presenting this as a promise, but as a proverb, as a warning of how things *typically* go, that in general the wicked will suffer more.

### The Unreliability of the Converse

But one consequence of the Retribution Principle only being typically or proverbially true is that this means its converse cannot ever be relied upon as true. We cannot conclude that any instance of human suffering is a result of wickedness, nor that prosperity is a mark of righteousness.<sup>o</sup>

And this explains why Jesus responds to his disciples in our Gospel passage the way that he does. Jesus denies that the man’s blindness was caused by anyone’s sin, saying in verse 3, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” essentially saying that God – in His wisdom – has His reasons, which, until Jesus heals the man in verse 7, had been known only to God alone. ##

### Conclusion

So, the book of Job’s revelation that humans being allowed to suffer should be attributed to God’s wisdom, not His justice, should discourage us from seeking to comfort ourselves by seeking understanding or answers why, since His wisdom is generally beyond our grasp. But it should also relieve us of any suspicions or anxieties that our suffering means God is against us.<sup>p</sup>

Furthermore, the book of Job is meant to calibrate our expectations to understand that some level of suffering in this life *is inevitable*. In His wisdom the Lord created us with nervous systems that enable us to experience pain, emotions that enable us to be hurt. Therefore we should expect suffering to be a normal feature of life. And though we may tend toward avoiding suffering at all

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<sup>n</sup> “The book of Job is going to make the case that God’s justice is not the foundation of how the world operates... instead of trying to understand everything that happens as a reflection of God’s justice, we should learn to trust His wisdom.” (19-20)

<sup>o</sup> Walton & Longman: “God is not capricious; God’s judgments are not extreme beyond what has been earned. We also must remember that God in Christ has done all that is necessary to pay for our sins. We know that God, like a good parent, disciplines those whom he loves. After all, the author of Hebrews tells us that God disciplines us like a father disciplines his son (Heb 12:4-13). But as we have learned in the book of Job, we must not be too quick to conclude that when things go wrong in our lives, God is disciplining us. Discipline is not very instructive or effective if sufferers do not know why they are being disciplined... God is not petty; he is a God of grace who knows our frailty and has arranged for our sins to be addressed. He disciplines in love and punishes guided by wisdom.” (180-182)

<sup>p</sup> “The book of Job offers relief from the quest for explanations and from the suspicion that God has let us down or even become our enemy. This will not reduce pain or resolve our grief. But it may ease some of our fear and anxiety.” (171)

costs, this is not God's intention for us.

In other words, we should prepare ourselves to walk *through* suffering and grief, not avoid it. And this is what God is suggesting when he makes mention of Behemoth in chapter 40. Both the Behemoth and the Leviathan were mythical creatures representing "the most potent creatures imaginable", Behemoth on the land and Leviathan on the sea.<sup>q</sup> Verse 23 depicts the Behemoth as being stable in the midst of the surging waters of the river Jordan.<sup>r</sup> So God is encouraging Job to emulate the security and trust of Behemoth even in the face of life's painful challenges.<sup>s</sup>

And how can we have such stability in the suffering that may await us in life? Through our relationship to Jesus and the fellowship of His church. Not through having all the answers, but by trusting in His wisdom and seeking daily to enter into His rest.

Amen.

### The Serenity Prayer

*attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I

cannot change;

(the) courage to change the things I can;

and (the) wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;

enjoying one moment at a time;

accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

taking, as (Jesus) did, this sinful world as it is,

not as I would have it;

trusting that He will make all things right if I

surrender to His Will;

that I may be reasonably happy in this life

and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Amen.

	Cycle 1: Exhortation and Advice	Cycle 2: Fate of the Wicked	Cycle 3: Accusation
Eliphaz	Appeal to God and admit your offense.	Recognize your guilt by comparing how God treats the wicked to how he is treating you. You have nullified your own piety.	Repent, be restored and go on the lecture circuit.
Job	Stop treating me as guilty. Rather than appeal to God with false humility and trumped-up offenses, I will confront him with demands for vindication.	I need protection from God's attacks and call for an advocate to take up my case.	Look around you! Who can think about self when the world is so out of sync?
Bildad	Take the traditional retribution principle seriously and recognize the inevitable conclusion.	Give up the pretense; the wicked are doomed. You are among those who do not know God.	Face the fact that tradition knows best.
Job	I know the traditions are true, but I am not ready to admit the conclusions are inevitable. Yet I am without recourse.	It is God that has messed up my life, not me. A defender will arise and vindicate me from your insinuations.	God's immense power has brought order to the cosmos but not to my life—I am God's victim and you will be too. Here I stand with only my righteousness to cling to.
Zophar	Devote you heart to God and put away sin.	Your sin is pride, and God has judged you as wicked.	None
Job	You are badly misrepresenting God and me. I hope I can get my hearing and restore my relationship with God before I die.	The system (God's policies) is broken.	None

Figure 8.1. Summary of speeches in the dialogues (Job 4–27)

<sup>q</sup> "Most commonly (the Behemoth & Leviathan) are identified (incorrectly) as known zoological species. The placement of Behemoth among the lotus plants in the river (Job 40:21-24) has conveniently suggested the hippopotamus, a creature of mythical proportions that was feared and hunted in Egypt. The described habitat would make that reasonable enough, but the description of the tail as "like a cedar" (Job 40:17) eliminates that possibility. In similar fashion, Leviathan may well share some physical features with the Nile crocodile, but other features refute that option: crocodiles neither breathe fire (Job 41:18-21) nor have multiple heads (Ps 74:14).<sup>1</sup> And besides these points, the hippopotamus and the crocodile are animals that humans can kill or control, so if they are such animals, then God's argument of his sole ability to control them does not have much punch." Instead, "Behemoth and Leviathan would then be quintessential creatures whose abstract characteristics are shared by the known animals. This would put Behemoth and Leviathan in the category of chaos creatures or, perhaps preferably, anti-cosmos creatures. Such creatures are part of the ordered world but serve as agents of non-order by virtue of their mindless nature. They are not morally evil, but they can do serious harm. They are not enemies of God, but they can wreak havoc among humans. In other words Behemoth (which is the plural of the word for "cattle") means the most potent land animal imaginable, while Leviathan would be the most potent sea creature imaginable." ... "God is not treating Job as if he were a chaos creature as much as he asks Job to step into the role of Behemoth. Likewise God is not acting like a chaos creature; instead he is far superior to Leviathan and should be recognized as such." (82)

<sup>r</sup> This is actually the only point made about Behemoth (in 40:15-24) after he is described.

<sup>s</sup> In contrast, God presents the Leviathan (chapter 41) to Job as a creature so large and powerful that no human would consider challenging it. Here God is saying to Job: "I am even greater than the Leviathan, so why are you challenging me?"