

Job 20-21

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Date: 05 August 2026

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[0:00] I hope you're ready tonight. I don't ask you to stand when we read on Wednesday nights or Sunday nights, and you'll be thankful for that. For we are looking at chapters 20 and 21. And yes, we will read them in their entirety because it has to be read together, I believe, in order to really see it in the weight of it.

So we're in Job chapter 20, and we will read through chapter 21. There will be a number of verses, but it will read very quickly. And this will bring to a conclusion, by the time we finish the 21st chapter, what is commonly referred to as the second cycle of discussion, the second cycle of arguments.

There are three cycles of arguments within the book of Job. They begin when Job opens his mouth after his three friends sat in silence for seven days.

And then they begin to respond to what Job has declared. That's the first cycle. He closes that one in chapters 12, 13, and 14. And then it begins immediately the second cycle of arguments as they are responding to Job's refutation of them.

And he brings it to a close in chapter 21. And then we will go right into the third cycle in which the third friend, Zophar, will not say a word. You will understand, hopefully, by the time we get done tonight, why Zophar doesn't say anything the third cycle through.

[1:22] And I'll go ahead and tell you, it's probably because he is just mad. And actually, after Job responds to him here, there is no response that anyone can have. After that, we know that the fourth individual will stand up and talk, and then God himself will speak by the time we get to the end of the chapter, or end of the book.

But we are in chapters 20 and 21 tonight. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the day you have given us. We rejoice in the opportunity of being together.

We realize as we come and we open up the pages of your word that what we're seeking is to have an encounter with holy God. And we know that by the limitations of this world, and even in the limitations of our flesh, that is an impossibility without your empowerment and without your presence.

So we ask that you would join us as we come together and we read your word. We pray that you would speak to our hearts, and we pray that you would speak truth into our minds.

We pray that what we hear would be received and applied in our daily lives. We pray even as we are challenged through some of the harder portions of scripture, and we are challenged in our understanding of wisdom and our worldview, that what we would be challenged to do would be to lean into you and to draw closer to you in all of our ways.

[2:39] So, Father, we pray that any hindrance, any distraction, any cause for stumbling would be removed from this place tonight. And, Lord, that we as your people would have an encounter with you. We ask that you would be with those working with our children and our students.

We ask that you would equip our teachers, and, Lord, that you would speak through them, that truth would resonate with the youngest to the oldest, from the nursery to the youth house.

We pray that the truth of the gospel would be declared in action and in words. And we ask that Christ is magnified throughout this place tonight for the glory of the Lord God Almighty and for your glory alone, and we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. Job chapter 20 says, He says,

He says,

[5:48] Then Job answered,

Job 20 and 21. I want you to see this evening confronted with reality.

If there are two chapters within the pages of the book of Job that deal with some intentionality of the struggle that is going on between Job and his three friends, it is the two chapters that are before us. It is here that we see the conflicts of the two differing worldviews. Worldviews that share a lot of commonalities but come to a differing conclusion.

Worldviews that can be similar in some ways but yet very strikingly different in other ways. It is one worldview that is fashioned by thought and opinion and even a perceived understanding and another worldview that is fashioned and formed by experience and knowledge.

[9 : 27] It is that trial, And it is that trial, that struggle, that struggle, that is revealing not only the character of Job and the character of his friends. God is also revealing the character of the Almighty.

And he's calling them to lean into him more than leaning into their own understanding. It is the reality that there are some matters which we cannot do. Matters which are beyond us. Matters that go far, far beyond that we could ever accomplish in our own strength. And it is this that is really coming to a head in these two chapters.

Job gives such a sufficient answer in chapter 21 that Zophar has nothing to say, probably because he is so angered. He is so angered. He is so moved by indignation that he does not even know how to respond.

As a matter of fact, the responses that we do see from Eliphaz and Bildad in the succeeding chapters after 21 are hopelessly vain efforts to try to refute what Job has just said in chapter 21.

[10 : 31] Because Job asked a question that still ponders mankind today. As far as we know historically, Job is the first to ask such question. And it is the question that deals with reality, not suppositions.

It is the question that deals with what we actually see, not what we believe, not what we think we understand. And it is here that we see this confronted with reality that the individuals are forced to deal with how they perceive it.

Some would choose to close their eyes and to continue believing the world operates exactly the way they have always assumed it does. Others now have to deal with this reality and say, well, maybe there's something else, something I haven't figured out yet.

Maybe there's something even the sages and the wise people before me have not known. Maybe there's something that we have not perceived. Maybe there's someone that we need. By the way, I believe that is the intent of the book of Job.

It is forever and always pushing us to someone greater than us. It is pushing us beyond our understanding. And it is pushing us to a situation where it becomes impossible.

[11 : 40] Well, we realize the impossibilities are things that cause us to cling to the reality of who God is, not how the world operates. But before we get there, what we see before us are the emotions that dictate a response.

And this is something that we have to be very guarded of in our own lives. And we see it with Zophar. Zophar, by the way, is the most pointed of Job's friends.

In his very first speech, he has no room for compassion. He has no room for concern. Zophar holds the strongest adherence to double retribution theology.

And I know you're going to get so tired of hearing that as we go through the book of Job. But it's worth adhering to. Double retribution theology is you do good, you get good, you do bad, you get bad. And he holds to that with all of his might.

When Eliphaz opens up the discussion with Job, he begins with a little compassion, a little softness. Bildad speaks secondly, and he's a little bit harsher. Zophar attacks from the very beginning.

[12 : 45] Probably because the two that went before him, he thought, were too easy. They were too soft in their answers. And here we see why that is the case. It is because Zophar, like many of us, if not all of us at some time, is driven in his response by his emotions.

He says, I think so far the name I thought I'd answer. I think so far the name I thought I'd answer. Therefore my disquieting thoughts make me respond, even because of the inward agitation I listened to the reproof which you insult me, and the spirit of my understanding makes me answer. What is he saying? I am so mad I have something to say. I am so mad I have something to say. Job, your response doesn't make sense. Your response doesn't align with what I believe.

And since your truth doesn't line up with my belief, I have to say something. Friend, let us be very careful in responding by emotions.

And I say that as one who quite often responds with emotion. I know me. I know my strengths. I know my weaknesses.

[13:55] I know that I have to take time to be still and to stop and to think through what I'm about to say. That's why I'm so much more comfortable, even though there's a holy reverent fear behind the pulpit.

Because by the time I stand up and speak here, I have been dwelling and thinking and considering these matters and praying over them for days and hours up until this moment. But in the moment of discussion, I have had to learn the discipline of closing my mouth and being still because my emotions have a lot to say.

But what we realize, especially from scripture, is that emotional responses, while they may come from the deepest part of us, are not always the most beneficial.

Zophar says, I am agitated to my inward being. Your words have disquieted my soul.

And what has Job declared? Job has declared a number of things. He's called them useless counselors, windbags, all those other things. Job hasn't necessarily been easy on them. But then again, they've just been telling Job, Job, you're nothing but a sinner.

[15:05] You've done atrocious things. They started out saying, Job, repent. Now they're saying, Job, there is no repentance for you. You're just going to die. And so it's went both ways, right? But then in the last chapter of Job's speech, right before Zophar says this, Job says this in a nutshell.

I really don't even care what you say because my argument is not with you. And he says it again in chapter 21. He says, my contentions are not with man.

Job says, I don't expect you to make me feel better because, by the way, y'all blew that a long time ago. I don't expect you to console me because my problem is not with you.

My issue is with God. Now that's what was so offensive. That Job would stoop so low as to say his problem was with God.

Now we understand God will humble him and remind him that God is sovereign and has the ability.

[16:15] See, we look at this. This is where we esagite the passage. We look back, knowing what we know about the cross, knowing what we know about eternity, knowing what we know about the resurrection.

And we look back and go, if Job could just hold on a little bit longer. Job had no perception of that. The law wasn't even given yet.

The Ten Commandments weren't even in existence. There was no Mount Sinai. There was no Passover lamb. None of that had happened yet. Right? There was a sacrifice in the garden.

There was a sacrificial system. There was, you know, the murder. And then the fall. Then the atonement. Then the murder. Then the displacement. There was all those things. There was all these.

The Tower of Babel. All those things had happened. And dispersion. And all those realities. But man was still feeling his way through what it looks like to walk with God, who is sovereign.

[17:10] And who does overrule things. But this world looks like all there is. I mean, because, you know, if great-granddaddy was living 900 years, then it seems like that's a lot of there is. Right? There's a lot of time in this world.

And the concept of eternity was so far beyond them. And so, all he is saying is either take me out or leave me alone.

And that upsets Zophar. And it leads him to make an emotional response that there really is no hiding. Though he does not declare, Job, I'm talking about you.

When you read it, you understand he's talking about Job. Essentially, what he says in the grandest part of this is, Job, you took houses that weren't yours.

You robbed from the poor. All these things happen and your end is certain. God has decreed you will die. And in his hostility that is driven by his emotions, not necessarily his intellect, the emotions are dictating the worldview.

[18:22] In just a moment, the worldview will dictate the understanding. But his emotions, because he does not want to accept that there is a possibility that if you do good, you still get bad.

Because who of us, which one of us really wants to accept that? That you can live your life the best way you know how. That you can be as faithful as you know how.

You can be as obedient as you know how. And to the best of your ability, you can commit your ways to the Lord. And yet, somehow or another, suffering still comes. Who wants to accept that?

We have the privilege of saying, but it causes me to long for eternity. It causes me to long for glory. And we have the privilege of knowing that Christ came and bore our shame and our sin. And the blameless, spotless Lamb of God suffered and had his face marred beyond recognition. He bore our chastisement. We know that.

[19:24] They didn't. No concept. Take Christ. I know you can't do it, because we don't ever want to do it. Try to take Christ out of the reckoning of the events of your life.

And see if you would be willing to accept it then. We say, no, it can't be. God has to bless those who does good. And he has to judge those who do wrong.

He just has to, because without it, we get angry. And even now, knowing Christ, there is the tendency in our emotions.

I mean, how many of us rejoice when we see the wicked prospering? And how often do we not shake our fists at heaven and say, God, it's not fair?

Or we mourn when we see the righteous suffering in the persecution of the believers. It's because it's an emotion that causes us to respond.

[20:33] May we ever be guarded of emotional responses. Because truth is not found in emotions.

It may move our emotions, but it's not found there. And we understand this is exactly what Zophar is doing. And because of that, he has this worldview, which leads to the bulk of this chapter.

And what we see is the interpretation that fits his worldview. Notice the interpretation. There's the emotion that decides to respond. There's the interpretation that fits his worldview.

Because he doesn't want to accept what Job is declaring to him. He interprets the world through something that would fit his worldview. And he goes through this long discourse.

He makes a number of assertions here. He actually makes some really, really poignant statements. And this is what Zophar says. There's three main things, really, what he says. He says that the prosperity of the wicked is short-lived.

[21:35] That they'll prosper for a moment, but their destruction is soon coming. That their fall will be sudden and catastrophic. And that their children will be abandoned.

In the New American Standard, it says that they favor the poor. The literal interpretation of that, if you're reading from the Legacy Standard, you actually see the literal interpretation. It means that they beg from the poor.

That they will be so stricken that they will be begging aid from the poor. And so he makes these three emphatic declarations. The wicked will prosper, but only for a moment.

Their fall will come sudden and catastrophic. It's not like they, it would just be terrible for them in the end. And their children will be cut off. There'll be nothing there for them. And these are interpretations of history that he wants to see.

And he interprets the world according to his worldview. He is filtering his perception through the lens of his worldview.

[22:41] We all do that. We perceive things through the lens of our worldview. That's how we understand them. That is the only context we have for understanding them.

And we are so shaped by that worldview that it cannot help but dictate how we understand it. I shared that recently with the group of elementary school teachers from Cascade.

How worldview dictates your understanding of the world around you. And I used the story of Martin Neumohler for that. That German priest who went around in the 50s and 60s and made his tour all through America.

And gave that great speech. And then they came for me. How he's talking about the atrocities of the Nazis. And the atrocious things that happened in the camp. And he started his speech. First they came for the Jews. I wasn't a Jew. That didn't concern me.

Then they came for the outcasts. I wasn't an outcast. That didn't concern me. And then they came for me. And you know the story. Neumohler ended up being thrown in the concentration camp. But what most people fail to understand is that while in the concentration camp, he also volunteered to re-enlist in the Nazi Navy to captain a submarine ship.

[23:51] And we say, how can he go around the world given this worldwide tour of speeches about the atrocious activities of the Nazi regime? But yet knowingly, in the middle of it, while they imprisoned him, how in the world could he volunteer to go back?

And some people excuse it and say, well, he thought maybe he could make a difference for the good. That's really not the case. What is it? He was of strong Prussian descent. And it was nation

over God.

For that was the Prussian way. Some of the most telling events that happened during World War II were that ordinary men did some atrocious things.

And it's because of their heritage, their worldview. They saw the world through their worldview. And therefore, they permitted things which were unspeakable. Every one of us will see the world through the lens of our own reality.

And we will interpret right and wrong and how things should be through that very lens. And that's what Zophar is doing. And Zophar so desperately wants the wicked to be judged that he says it will happen.

[24 : 58] But is his interpretation true? There's one small nuance in there that we will miss if we're not careful.

That even in his interpretation, Zophar says the wicked prosper. He says only for a moment. But still the question begs to be asked.

Why do they even prosper? Why does it even happen to begin with? Why does God permit that? Which is when Job responds.

Because God had opened Job's eyes through his personal experiences.

Now, we must assume. That prior to. Job chapter 2 and 3. And all the suffering that happened in Job's life.

[26 : 04] That Job saw the world very much the same way as his friends did. Why else would Job consecrate his children? Offer sacrifices for them.

Pray for them. What other motivation would he have for his own righteousness. Of defending the widow and the orphan. Why would he help us? He said, well it's out of the genuineness of his own heart.

Right. The genuineness of it. But the genuineness that really believed these things. This was his world view too. He has said elsewhere. Do I not know these things? These are realities that he has known for some time.

What has changed? Now, Job's eyes have been opened because of the experiences God has permitted him to go through. And so what we see is an observation that challenges belief.

Notice the observation that challenges belief. Because when the eyes are opened, he can observe. Job asked one simple question. He says, listen carefully to my speech.

[27 : 08] His admonition to his three friends are to listen carefully. I do not believe that he assumes they will. Because he says, this would be my consolation. You would actually console me if you'd quit talking and just listen a little bit.

You said you want to console me. But all you really want to do is judge me. And all you really want to do is put things on me. But you would console me if you would just listen. He says, listen carefully to my speech. I don't believe he thinks they will because he says, because after I've spoke, then you can mock me.

So he anticipates the mocking to return. I think it is that line right there that keeps Zophar from speaking the third time. Because he is so mad and so agitated that Job is declaring, so whenever I talk, all I'm doing is mocking you.

And that's a true statement. But as Job says, really my contention is not with you. My contentions is with the Almighty. He says, even when I consider you, he said, look at me and be appalled when I consider myself. I put my hand over my own mouth.

And then Job asks the question. That's the observation that he spends the bulk of the chapter in 21. And it is a question that has been asked ever since Job declared it.

[28 : 14] And it's a question in verse 7. Why do the wicked still live, continue on, and also become very powerful? There it is.

That's the question. That's the number one question. That is used to confront Christianity and the existence of God. If God is true, why do the wicked exist?

And it's the very thing Job wants to know. Because life has shown him that no matter how much he wants what Zophar said to be true, when he looks around, it's not.

And then he goes on to describe their existence. Zophar had said that they would prosper for a moment and then come to a sudden end, that their children would be begging bread from the poor, that their destruction would be atrocious, that even though they loved sin, there's some statements in Zophar's statement, by the way, in his declarations that are true.

He had said in there that they love sin and sin is tasteful to them, and once they taste it, they can never get enough of it until the end it finally kills them. That is an absolute reality. Sin is something that is appealing to the palate initially, and then all of a sudden you want more of it, and you can never find that same high, because that sin never meets that high again until you continue to keep going at it and going at it and going at it and going at it, and eventually the wages of sin is death. [29:49] We understand that those are true statements. There's some truth in conventional wisdom and understanding, but it is the application of that that we have to be careful of, because Job says not only do the wicked live and exist, but he said, but their houses dwell in security.

The rod of God is not around them. He's already said that God's rod rested upon him. He said there is no discipline, no judgment in their life. Their children are skipping about in the fields and dancing to songs and having a wonderful time.

Where are my kids? My kids are dead. They're animals. They're multiplying and prospering. Do not fail to give birth. Where are my animals? They're gone. He said their house is secure, even though they say we have no need for God.

Even though they say what benefit would God have to me? This verse, by the way, is left out of one of the old manuscripts because it seemed so offensive.

And that is verse 15. It says, they say, who is the almighty that we should serve him? And what would we gain if we entreat him? The question is, why would we even pray?

[30:55] Look at what we have. Now let me ask you a question. Is that not a reality that we can observe today? Can you not consider those who say, why do I need God?

Look around me. And yet in the oldest book in scripture and quite possibly the oldest writing in history, we find the same question being asked.

Because this is an observation of living in a broken world. And this confronts the worldview that God blesses the good and judges the wicked.

And Job just asked a question. Nobody has an answer for it. He said, oh, well, you say it's because God stores up wrath for his children. He said, what does that matter to that? Let God discipline him. And by the way, that is anti-scriptural.

God says the sins of the father should never be put on the children. And the sins of the children should never be put on the father. But each would bear the weight of their own sins. So not as unscriptural, it's impractical.

[32:06] Job said, he's dead. What does he care? What does he care what happens to him after he leaves? Let him feel the weight of his own sin. But so your argument that God is storing it up for his children makes no sense whatsoever.

He said, and you told me that his end comes to an abrupt end, but it doesn't. Look, there's no suffering. And if he just goes to Sheol suddenly, so what? Look at me.

I'm begging to die, and I haven't died yet. Where's his suffering? Where's his misery? Where's his pain? But yet he passes suddenly. That's a blessing.

He says, if you don't believe me, ask the wayfaring man. Ask the traveler. And he'll tell you that it's like that all over the place. Would you not listen to his witness? And you know what he's doing is he's challenging their interpretation of the world by the observation around them.

What you think is true doesn't seem to fit with what we see. He says, so answer that for me.

[33:19] Who can answer that? And they can't. They won't be able to answer it in the chapters ahead. And by the way, our desire is to answer verse 7.

God's will is to make us ask verse 7. And not give us the answer. And I'll show you one in just a moment. God never gives Job an answer.

But if we don't ask the question, we don't come to the place that God wants us at. If we don't look around and say, wait a minute, this doesn't make sense.

This doesn't line up with what I thought it would be. Then we're not asking the right questions. And the reason is, because the fourth and final thing, there's a realization that something bigger is needed.

There's the emotions that dictate the response. There's an interpretation that fits your worldview. There's an observation that challenges that truth. And then there's the realization that says, wait a minute. Job gives two individuals here.

[34:33] He says, one man dies and he's fat. His sides are full of fat. The marrow of his bones is moist. He's eaten all the delicacies of the earth. And yet he dies. The other man beside him dies.

He's never even tasted anything tasty. He's never even had anything good. But when they die, they lay them in the ground beside one another. How are you going to tell me which one was righteous and which one was wicked?

Because in the end, they both are dead. What does it matter if God blesses or God curses?

Because in the end, they're both laid side by side.

They're in the grave. And even the wicked man, he says, he is led away in his death. There's a funeral procession. People are guarding his bodies. They lay him in the valley. And I love the image you're hearing. It says, and the clods of soil gently cover him.

What difference is that in the righteous? And now there's a realization that something greater than this life is needed. We know it.

[35 : 38] We understand it. But what Job is saying, and Job is asking a question that never gets answered. Job says, how then will you vainly comfort me?

If they both die, what comfort can you give me? How can you help me? I've alluded to it time and time again.

Now I'm going to ask you to turn to it, and then we'll be done. Turn to the book of Psalms, Psalm chapter 73. Because in Psalm 73, Asaph asks the same questions. As a matter of fact, he has the same feelings that Job.

But Asaph gives us the answer. Psalm 73 is a very powerful psalm. And I will read it so that you will understand exactly what we're going to here.

The answer is found near the end. But it bears the repetition of the first part of Psalm 73 so that we can see the resounding of Job's questions in the psalmist Asaph.

[36 : 40] Surely God is good to Israel. So that's a declaration, right? Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. We would almost say that's conventional wisdom. But now look at what it says. But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling.

Now let's stop right here. It is okay to say that God is good in conventional wisdom terms to those who fear him. But there are some realities that cause me to struggle. I can affirm conventional wisdom is normally true.

But there are things in my life every now and then that go, I don't know if I can handle this. Surely God is good to Israel. But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling. My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw their prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind.

Therefore pride is their necklace. The garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges with fatness. The imaginations of the heart run riot. They mock and wickedly speak of oppression. They speak from on high.

[37 : 42] They have set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore his people return to this place and waters of abundance are drunk by them. They say, how does God know?

And is their knowledge with the most high? Behold, these are the wicked and always at ease. They have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence.

For I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, behold, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. Do you see what Job is saying here? Same thing. Asaph is saying the same thing Job did. I looked around and what I observed did not match what I was aiming at. This brings us to this realization.

Here's the answer. When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight. Until I came into the sanctuary of God.

[38 : 37] Then I perceived their end. There's the answer. Until I came into the sanctuary of God. Then I perceived their end.

Surely you set them in slippery places. You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment. They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors. Like a dream when one awakens. O Lord, when aroused, you will despise their form.

When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within. Then I was senseless and ignorant. I was like a beast before you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You have taken hold of my right hand.

With your counsel, you will guide me. And afterward, receive me to glory. Who have I in heaven but you? And beside you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail.

But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you will perish. And you have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good.

[39 : 37] I have made the Lord God my refuge. That I may tell of all your works. There's the realization. The answer is not found in this world.

It is when we enter into the sanctuary of God. And the only good we seek is the nearness of God. And God is so much closer in the moments of trial and suffering.

Because we cling to him there. This worldview sees good as material possessions. When we can move beyond that and challenge that with the truth.

And confront it with reality. We see that the greatest good we can ever have is the nearness of God. So praise him for the moments he draws us near.

And we see that in Job 20 and 21. Thank you, brothers. Thank you.