

Preaching Christ from the Prologue of Job

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ABSTRACT

Even though the redemptive–historical method of Biblical Theology and Christ-centred preaching has become more common in recent years, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament is still difficult to preach. With this in mind, this paper takes a narrow focus to address the question of how we may appropriately preach Christ from the prologue of the Book of Job (1:1–2:10). First, the Big Idea (*à la* Haddon Robinson) of Job will be presented, and the contribution of the prologue towards this; second, two past examples of preaching Christ from the prologue of Job will be raised, which highlight the difficulty of preaching Christ from this text; and third, this is built upon as two further sermons are discussed, which are put forward as to what is needed to preach Christ from the prologue of Job.

Introduction

To say that Job is a difficult book in the Bible is probably an understatement. The book is long, with repetitive dialogue, numerous *hapaxes*, difficult words, and poetic figures of speech.¹ As well, the lament genre can be foreign to most readers.² Furthermore, Tim Keller in his book on preaching says that “Unless we preach Jesus rather than a set of ‘morals of the story’ or timeless principles or good advice, people will never truly understand, love, or obey the Word of God.”³ Of course, this is easier said than done, witnessed by a steady

¹ According to Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 928, about 3 percent of the Hebrew text is unintelligible. At a conservative count, there are over 100 words which occur only once and are unique to the book of Job. Additionally, the book displays some use of Aramaic vocabulary (e.g., מַעֲבָדַי *ma’ābādai* for Hebrew מַעֲשֵׂהי *ma’āšehi* ‘deed’ at 34:25), as well as words which may be explained solely by recourse to Arabic; see Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (FAT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 132-133.

² This is compounded even further when we realise that lament in Job can be understood in some ways as different to lament in, say, Psalms. Dell, for example, argues that the author of Job was aware of standard laments and was using the genre for rhetorical and dramatic purposes; see, e.g., Katharine J. Dell, *Job: An Introduction and Study Guide: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 21.

³ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Scepticism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), 22. There are some who deny that we should do this in every sermon, but, with Keller, I personally fail to see how we can avoid moralising or trivialising the text if we do not.

stream of publications released year by year in this area that presumably have a ready market. And so to the difficulties associated with understanding and preaching the book of Job, we can add that of how to preach Christ appropriately from this text without it being forced.⁴

Here I want to address the topic of preaching Christ from the prologue of Job (1:1–2:10) as a step towards lessening this difficulty. The way I want to proceed is as follows. First, I will present the Big Idea of Job (*à la* Haddon Robinson),⁵ and the contribution of the prologue towards this; second, I will summarise two past examples of preaching Christ from the prologue of Job as examples that highlight the difficulty of preaching Christ from this text; and finally we will seek to build upon this as we consider two further examples, which are put forward as to what is needed to preach Christ from the prologue of Job.

What this is, then, is an example of doing Biblical Theology on a book of the Bible, an approach that Bryan Chapell notes in the recent third edition of his book *Christ-Centered Preaching* has become something of a movement.⁶ Given this fact, here I am presupposing this approach, but suffice it to say that Biblical Theology is an approach to the Bible that seeks to understand the parts in light of the whole. This redemptive–historical approach accepts that there is a developing story to the Bible. And this story climaxes with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of those who turn and trust him. And so I want to help us think about how the prologue of Job fits within this bigger picture. How do we read and preach these chapters in the light of Jesus Christ?⁷

⁴ Forced reference to Christ is commonly called the allegorical approach, where superficial particulars of the text are taken as pointing directly to Christ. Two more common modern errors are worth pointing out: (1) applying superficial details directly to us today, or (2) correctly identifying the thrust of the text but connection is not made to Christ but rather directly to us today. Duguid calls the latter incorrect approach “moralism” and the former “allegorical moralism”. He critiques all of these misguided approaches with examples, and briefly and simply outlines the redemptive–historical approach that is argued to be how the text intends itself to be read and how the New Testament authors themselves read their Old Testament; see Iain M. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013).

⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014). The “big idea” encompasses the subject—what the text is about—and a complement—what the text is saying about what it is about. David Cook, who was principal of Sydney Missionary and Bible College for many years, also preferred to summarise a biblical book in such a fashion for preaching purposes; see David Cook, “A Method of Preparation,” in *How to Speak at Special Events* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2007), 53-62.

⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), xiv-xv.

⁷ So as to be clear regarding what I am presupposing here, what do I mean when I say “preaching Christ from the prologue of Job”? Because, to state the obvious, Christ is not mentioned. What I mean is this. The Bible comes to us as one book made up of many books. The Bible’s own claim about itself is that though there are lots of individual books, one divine author—God—stands behind them all (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Now if this was not the case, if there was not ultimately one single author, then we would be led to expect a randomness and no unifying theme or story. But if the Bible as a whole has God as its ultimate author, then that leads us to expect a book that holds together. That is why we can have the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture—this is one book—and we are led to search for a unifying theme and storyline. Jesus’ claim was that he himself was that unifying theme and the climax of the storyline. Between his resurrection and his ascension, Jesus taught his disciples this, which we read about in the often-cited passage of Luke 24:44-48. The language here is comprehensive—Law, Prophets, Psalms—the entire OT. Not just a few scattered texts, but all of it is a message about him, Jesus claims. And specifically his death, his resurrection, and gospel proclamation. That is what I mean when I say we should “preach Christ”. It is not just facts we are telling people. It is facts, but it is more than bare facts. We preach a real, living person, Jesus Christ. We urge people to recognise him, to trust him, to submit to him. He is their Lord and Saviour. We preach this risen

The Big Idea of the Book of Job

The Prologue as Setting

In his commentary on Job, David Clines helpfully presents three complementary ways of looking at the shape of the Book of Job. One of those ways is what he calls “Exposition, Complication, Resolution”, which he diagrams as follows:⁸

1:1–2:10	God afflicts Job	exposition	new character: Job
2:11–31:40	Job challenges God	complication	new characters: 3 friends
32:1–42:17	God challenges Job	resolution	new characters: Elihu, God

This way of looking at the book immediately helps us to see that there is a plot that develops. The book could have ended at 2:10 (I will get to this in what follows below) and yet the narrative continues. A complication arises between Job and the friends and between Job and God. This complication is then resolved at the end of the book.

So the prologue of Job 1:1–2:10 sets the scene for the chapters of complication and the resultant resolution. These chapters are the context into which the complication is introduced and from which we as readers have the right perspective to understand the complication. The way in which we as readers are given perspective is by the literary feature of dramatic irony, where we are privy to more information than some of the characters and which consequently drives the narrative tension. That is, we as readers are taken into the very courtroom of heaven itself and we get to overhear God’s dialogue with Satan, but Job and his friends never get to hear this or have it explained.

saviour—the Word of God—from the written word about him—the Bible. This is what the Apostles did. We see this, for example, in Acts 26:22-23; 1 Cor 2:2; 1 Pet 1:10-11, amongst others. Dennis Johnson has shown how the Apostles’ preaching was a grace-driven message that was Christ-centred, redemptive–historical, and missiological (Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* [Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007], 62-97, 167-238). In seeking to do the same, we are simply following their lead, and the lead of Jesus before them. See also, in different ways, Allan Chapple, *God’s Plan for Salvation* (Sydney South: Aquila, 2013); Tim Chester, *From Creation to the New Creation: Making Sense of the Whole Bible Story* (2nd ed.; Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2010); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1988); Iain M. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013); R. J. Gibson, ed., *Interpreting God’s Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor* (Adelaide: Openbook, 1997); Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester: IVP, 1991); *Christ-Centred Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2012); *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981); *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006); *Jesus through the Old Testament: Transform Your Bible Understanding* (Abingdon: BRF, 2017); *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Trent Hunter and Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018); Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God’s Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2013); J. Alec Motyer, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2015); Vern Sheridan Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1991); Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Nottingham: IVP, 2002); Mark Strom, *The Symphony of Scripture: Making Sense of the Bible’s Many Themes* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

⁸ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989), xxxvi.

As a result, the first two chapters are crucial for reading the book. They help us to see that the book is not about suffering *per se*.⁹ Even when God turns up in the final chapters, he still does not explain to Job what is ultimately going on in his suffering. Rather, the Book of Job is about some other issues that it takes to be even more important—such as whether God is worth loving, and whether the faith of God’s people will endure. The prologue aids us in arriving at this perspective and helps us read the rest of the book. It is to this we now turn.

Job Lives in Relationship with God Based on God’s Revelation (Job 1:1-8)

At the outset the prologue in 1:1-8 presents Job as living in relationship with God, which is itself based upon God’s revelation. Job probably lived sometime during the patriarchal period of the OT.¹⁰ The precise location of the land of Uz is unknown, though likely to be situated somewhere in Edom (cf. Lam 4:21).¹¹ In other words, Job is presented as a non-Israelite, who nevertheless is a wise man who worships the God of Israel: it is none other than Yahweh that he fears and so turns from evil (1:1). He enjoys the blessings of being in relationship with God (1:2-3), but does not take these for granted (1:4-5). His regular practice (1:5) is conducting sacrifice by acting as priest as head of his family. In this way Job is aware of the atoning nature of sacrifice. It would seem to be this that forms the basis of his blameless status before God, not absolute perfection, since elsewhere Job admits he is a sinner (7:21; 13:26; 14:16-17). Elsewhere too Job states that he knows some words of God (Job 6:10; 23:12) and he may even be aware of the events of Genesis 1–3 (31:33, 40).¹² Job is therefore presented as living appropriately in response to God’s revelation at that period of time. God is rightly pleased with his servant (1:8), holding him up before Satan as an example of redemptive grace that he takes delight in.¹³

⁹ Meredith G. Kline, “Job,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1962), 462 puts it this way: “That the heavenly scene and the transactions of the heavenly court are not disclosed to Job is in keeping with the fact that this book is not intended primarily to answer the question, Why do the righteous suffer?”

¹⁰ Some details that Waltke (*An Old Testament Theology*, 927 n.1) puts forward that suggest this are as follows: “Job lives to be 140 (240 in LXX) (42:16); the unit of value is the ancient *qəšîṭā* (42:11; cf. 33:19; Josh. 24:32); wealth is measured in terms of cattle, slaves, precious metals (Job 1:3; 42:11, 12; cf. Gen 12:16; 13:2-6; 24:3, 5; 26:12-14; 30:43), not coins; religious practices are simple (i.e., no cult; Job 1:5); Job’s name is as legendary as Noah’s (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3); he uses the archaic divine name (*Shadday*). The references to ‘iron’ may be an anachronism—smelting of iron was not known until about 1200 BC (cf. Job 19:24; 20:24; 28:2; 40:18; 41:27).”

¹¹ The point of specifying Job’s homeland is not so much to situate him exactly in the ancient world as to indicate to the Israelite reader that the book is set outside of Israel. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 10 says: “The importance of the name Uz lies not in where such a place is, but in where it is not. Israelites themselves may not have known its precise location, but they will have known, as we do, that it is not Israel.”

¹² Referring here to the Adam of 31:33 and the weeds of 31:38. For details and argument, see Kline, “Job,” 482.

¹³ This perhaps requires a little explanation. In Old Testament terms, the language of “fearing God/Yahweh” is the language of a real and genuine relationship with God. In the Wisdom Literature it is used 18x in Proverbs, 5x in Ecclesiastes, and 10x in Job, with the phrase’s location significant in each book; see Richard L. Schultz, “Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective,” *TynBul* 48 (1997), 294; Jamie Grant, “Wisdom and Covenant,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 859-860. Thus the language connects with the tradition outside the wisdom corpus which describes the divine–human relationship with the same terminology (Schultz, “Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology,” 294 lists the following references: Gen 22:12; 42:18; Exod 1:21; 14:31; 20:20; Lev 19:14, 32; 25:17; Deut 4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 10:12, 20; Josh 4:24; 24:14; 1 Sam 12:14, 24; 2 Sam 23:3; 1 Kgs 18:12; Psa 2:11; 19:9; 111:10; 128:1; Isa 11:3; 33:6). Due to the Fall, human relationship with God can only be (re)established

Satan's Accusations (Job 1:9-12)

However, Satan objects and makes a number of insidious accusations against Job and against God.¹⁴ Throughout the prologue Satan is literally *the satan* (שָׂטָן *haśśāṭān*) in Hebrew. “The satan” means “the accuser”.¹⁵ It is a title like “the butcher” or “the baker”—people who butcher and bake, respectively, and whose titles capture what they do. Similarly, the satan lives up to his title as “the accuser”, and objects that he cannot agree with God’s assessment (1:9-11). Job is a fake. His seemingly righteous lifestyle is simply a performance to get goodies from God. In other words, his claim is that Job really does not love God for who he is, but rather for what he gets from him. Take away the blessings, Satan claims, and we will see who Job really is, that he is really just a self-centred hanger-on.

by God in his kindness. Of course, the covenantal obligation to fear God/Yahweh is a human response, but this is always in the context of a relationship redemptively initiated by God himself. Thus for God to deem Job his “servant,” who is “blameless and upright,” who “fears God and turns away from evil” (1:8), Job must be the prior recipient of God’s redemptive grace that has established him in this. Meredith G. Kline, “Trial by Ordeal,” in *Through Christ’s Word: A Festschrift for Dr. Philip E. Hughes* (ed. W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse L. Boyd, III; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 82, although a little verbose, puts it this way: “In effect, God was telling Satan that the ancient curse pronounced against him in Eden (Gen. 3:14, 15) was in process of inexorable fulfillment: out of mankind in its covenant of death with the Devil, God was reconciling to himself a new mankind, called to engage in holy war against the Serpent and promised in that warfare an ultimate absolute triumph. In the land of Uz lived a man who was, the Lord maintained, clear evidence that the promise of his primordial decree was sure and its word of doom on the Devil certain. Let Satan behold this trophy of divine redemptive grace, this true and faithful servant of the Lord, and admit that the enmity of the woman’s seed against him had been effected, that their covenant with death had been annulled and their covenant with God renewed.” Elsewhere he put it this way: “Since true wisdom, the fear of God, is a divinely bestowed redemptive gift, Satan’s charge against Job was actually a defiant denial of the wisdom of God, a challenge to the sovereign efficacy of God’s redemptive decree to ‘put enmity’ between the elect and the serpent”; Kline, “Job,” 461. This also means that although I agree with Tremper Longman III, *Job* (BCOT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 92 that heaven is depicted using the analogy of the ancient Near Eastern royal court, I am less persuaded that the accuser is not to be identified with the serpent of Genesis 3 and the Devil of the NT. The accuser in Job has a distinct personality that sets itself in opposition to God. This opposition is realised, as in Genesis 3, by an attack on the human party in the divine–human relationship.

¹⁴ Furthermore, I am also open to an argument made in David R. Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication: The Gospel According to Job* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 17-21. Jackson’s claim is that the phrase “the sons of God” in Job 1:6 (translated “angels” in the NIV) is a reference to the dead people of God. He argues that the phrase itself is used consistently in the OT in reference to God’s people, with the exception maybe of Genesis 6:1-4 (notoriously difficult!). Jackson says: “It is particularly significant . . . that Job 1:6-12 does not mention angels. The satan’s challenge is in fact not just a charge against Job, but against all the sons of God present in that assembly. Job is simply the test case. The satan is challenging the right of every son of God to stand before the throne of God”; Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication*, 21. What the OT says regarding the death and the afterlife of OT believers is quite a hotly debated issue; see, e.g., Desmond Alexander, “The Old testament View of Life after Death,” *Them* 11 (1986), 41-46; “The Psalms and the After Life,” *IBS* 9 (1987), 2-17; Philip S. Johnston, “The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament,” *TynBul* 45 (1994), 415-419; “‘Left in Hell’? Psalm 16, Sheol and the Holy One,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 213-222; “Psalm 49: A Personal Eschatology,” in *The Reader Must Understand: Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott; Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 73-84; “Death and Resurrection,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 444-445; *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002); Anthony Petterson, “Antecedents of the Christian Hope of Resurrection: Part 1: The Old Testament,” *RTR* 59 (2000), 1-15; Paul R. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions* (NSBT 44; Downers Grove: Apollos, 2017). On the Book of Job in particular, see David Kummerow, “Job, Hopeful or Hopeless? The Significance of דָּא in Job 16:19 and Job’s Changing Conceptions of Death,” in *Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures II* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2007), 261-288.

¹⁵ Cf. Bruce Baloiian, “שָׂטָן,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol 3 (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1231-1232.

But though Satan's accusation is against the nature of Job's trust in God, it is ultimately against God himself. God himself is the ultimate target of Satan's charge.¹⁶ In effect Satan is accusing God of being a big fool to think that Job loves him for who he is; rather, Job is in it only for what he can get out of it. God's redemptive work in the life of Job making Job his servant is ineffectual, Satan claims: remove the goodies and you will see the type of man Job really is and what a fool you have been. In this way Satan's challenge drives at the very reputation and honour of God.

So, in summary, the two rival claims about Job's faith are as follows:

Satan's claim: God is a fool because Job is a fake, who only shows God allegiance because of the good things God gives him.

God's claim: that his redemptive work in the life of Job is effective, and so Job really is his servant who loves him wholeheartedly.

Job's sufferings: the grounds for deciding between the competing claims (Job 1:13–2:10)

With this start to the book, we are therefore led to see that the book of Job is not actually a book about suffering. Job's suffering is really the necessary context to adjudicate between God's and Satan's rival claims about Job's faith. The removal of blessings and the addition of suffering into Job's life decides who is right. *This* is why Job then loses his family, fame, and fortune (1:13-19).

So Job's response to his suffering makes the "verdict" on whether God or Satan is right.¹⁷ We see this settled two times in the prologue. The first time is in Job 1:20-22. Here Job acknowledges that God is entirely sovereign, free to withdraw what he has previously given. Job settles the dispute between God and Satan decisively in favour of God. Does Job accept God without blessings? Answer: Yes!

But Satan persists. In chapter 2, he asserts much the same as previously, but since Job did not do as he expected first time around, he now claims that Job will reject God if Job suffers physically (2:4-5). However, Job again does not curse God—despite intense physical suffering, and even the urging of his wife (2:7-9). For the second time the dispute between God and Satan is settled decisively in favour of God (2:10). Does Job accept God without blessings? Answer: Yes!

¹⁶ Kline, "Job," 462 similarly puts it this way: "The satanic assault on the integrity of Job is thus ultimately an assault on the integrity of God: God has bribed the profane Job to act pious."

¹⁷ Kline, "Job," 462 says: "The opportunity given to Job by his trial, therefore, is not so much to vindicate himself as to justify God."

Reading the rest of the book, and understanding Job 42:6

Because the dispute has now been settled, the book could really in one sense have ended here at Job 2:10. However, the friends turn up to comfort Job (2:11), though when they see him, his condition seems to be worse than they expected, and so they assume the posture of mourning for him (2:12-13; seven days being the typical period for mourning for the dead in the OT; cf. Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13).¹⁸ Job then seems to be provoked by this to question what is happening to him.¹⁹ He is then forced by the friends to examine again and again the circumstance of his suffering. The discussion goes round and round for many chapters, getting nowhere.²⁰ The question then persists throughout the dialogues: Will Job *now* capitulate and curse God? And what if God gives no ultimate answers and does not remove his suffering? What then? Will Job *eventually* give way and reject God?

So the book moves logically to the chapters of theophany, the appearing of God (chapters 38–42). Here when God turns up he does not so much appear as judge—the storm being indicative of theophany rather than judgement *per se*²¹—but more as a profound wisdom teacher.²² The legal nature of the book means that God’s speech is couched in the language of contention and dispute (cf. 40:2), where God asks Job to prepare himself for a belt-wrestling match to finally settle matters (38:3; 40:7).²³ The wrestling match is a wrestle, however, of wisdom: on the earth (38:4-21), in the sky (38:22-38), and amongst animals (38:39–39:30), seeming to follow for the most part the creative order of Genesis 1.²⁴ The bout then takes a second round through chapters 40 and 41 (40:6–41:26[41:34]). God’s intention is not so much correction, but more to demonstrate that Job, and presumably the listening friends, are human and that he is God.²⁵ As God he is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise; and as a human Job is limited in power, understanding, and wisdom.

¹⁸ Clines, *Job 1–20*, 61, 63-64; Kline, “Job,” 464.

¹⁹ This idea that Job is provoked by the friends is more readily apparent in the original than in most English translations. That is, Job 3:2 reads: וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֵּעָן אֵיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֵּעָן וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֵּעָן *wayya’an ’iyyōb wayyō’mar* “and Job answered and said.”

²⁰ This is highlighted in another of Clines’ complementary structures. In looking at the book as composed of people’s “words”, we have the narrator’s words encompassing the “words” spoken in the rest of the book. Focusing on speech this way means that we then notice that Job speaks and the friends respond, with three cycles. The third speech of Bildad is short—does he run out of puff? Zophar does not even speak—has he stormed off in disgust? Job, however, seems to get new energy, whilst the arguments of the friends are coming to nothing. Chapter 28 is interesting to consider—is it an interlude for the reader helping us to see that some wisdom from elsewhere is needed to resolve the complication and break the cycle? Cf. Daniel J. Estes, “Job 28 in Its Literary Context,” *JESOT* 2 (2013), 151-164.

²¹ For example, in Exodus 19:16 the theophanic appearance of God is as a storm with thunder and lightning in a context where judgement is clearly not on view.

²² Cf. Gerhard von Rad, “Hiob XXXVIII und die Altägyptische Weisheit,” in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley* (ed. Martin Noth and David W. Thomas; VTSupp 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 293-301. Although we would want to adjust some of the less orthodox statements made about God, Habel also presents an argument for God as sage here; Norman C. Habel, “In Defense of God the Sage,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* (ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin; Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 21-38.

²³ The language of “gird up your loins” is language from the ancient belt-wrestling match; see Kline, “Trial by Ordeal,” 88-93; Kline, “Job,” 487-489; Cyrus H. Gordon, “Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World,” *HUCA* 23 (1950-1951), 131-136.

²⁴ Kline, “Job,” 487.

²⁵ Given that God later explicitly says that the friends have misrepresented him (42:7-8), it is possible that the divine speeches of Job 38–41 are already a challenge to the friends. Jackson even argues that God is doing exactly this and establishing Job before the friends; see David R. Jackson, “Who is This Who Darkens Counsel?: The Use of

It is then into this setting that Job states what he does in the quite climatic verse of Job 42:6.²⁶ God has responded to him not with answers but with questions that demonstrate that Job is human and God is God, that Job will never fully comprehend the intricacies of everything since he is a creature and not the creator. With this impressed upon him, the struggle between God and Job—the struggle which will settle the primary dispute between Satan and God—comes into sharp focus: will Job accept God for who he is and not because of the good things he can get from him?

Here is the verse in question, with a sample of a few translations that highlight differences (square brackets are used around words the translator is taking to be understood though not linguistically present in the Hebrew):

עַל-כֵּן אָמַס וְנַחַמְתִּי עַל-עָפָר וְאַפָּר

MT	'al-kēn	'em'as	wənihamtī	'al-	'āpār wā' ēpēr
NIV	Therefore	I despise [myself]	and repent	in	dust and ashes
LXX	διὸ "therefore"	ἐφάλισα [ἐμαυτὸν] καὶ ἐτάκην "I despise [myself] and melt"	ἤγημαι δὲ [ἐμαυτὸν] "and I consider [myself]"		γῆν καὶ σποδόν "dust and ashes"
van Wolde ²⁷	Therefore	I have changed [my mind]	and turn away	from	dust and ashes
Clines 1989 ²⁸	Therefore	I melt [in reverence before you]	and I have received my comfort	[even while sitting] in	dust and ashes
Clines 2011 ²⁹	So	I submit	and I accept consolation	for	[my] dust and ashes
Jackson ³⁰	Therefore	I melt	and I am comforted	on account of	the dust and ashes

As is readily apparent, the differences essentially boil down to how to translate the two verbs. (The LXX even offers a double translation of the first verb.) Cline's 2011 commentary

Rhetorical Irony in God's Charges Against Job," *WTJ* 72 (2009), 153-167. Fox demonstrates that by using rhetorical questions rather than statements of fact, God seeks to remind Job of what he already knows to be true without overwhelming him completely, that is, God is ultimately pastoral and restorative here; see Michael V. Fox, "Job 38 and God's Rhetoric," *Semeia* 19 (1981), 53-61.

²⁶ David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 2011), 1218, says: "This crucial verse ... forms the climax of the whole dispute between Job and Yahweh."

²⁷ Ellen van Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1997), 137. This is further updated in: Ellen van Wolde, "Job 42, 1-6: The Reversal of Job," in *The Book of Job* (ed. Willem A. M. Beuken; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 223-250.

²⁸ Clines, *Job 1–20*, xlvii.

²⁹ Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1205.

³⁰ Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication*, 218.

presents a careful weighing of the options, which I take to be convincing.³¹ In summary, the analysis of the two verbs is as follows.

The first verb is **אָרַן** *m*'s. There are two homophonous **אָרַן** *m*'s verbs in Biblical Hebrew, recognised by BDB and DCH (but not by HALOT).³² **אָרַן** *m*'s I is a transitive verb and so takes a direct object. It means “to reject [something]”, “to refuse [something]”, “to despise [something]” (e.g., Lev 26:44). **אָרַן** *m*'s II, taken to be an allomorph of **אָרַן** *m*ss “flow, melt,” is an intransitive verb and so takes no direct object, as in this verse. It means “to melt” or “to dissolve”. Psalm 58:8[7]; Job 7:5, 16 are examples.³³ Clines takes this to be a metaphor for forced submission, but his negative understanding of Job’s attitude towards God is pushing him in this direction.³⁴ Instead, if Job does not abandon positive trust in God, then Job’s melting submission is not resignation but reverence, as would seem to be represented in Clines’ earlier translation.

The second verb is **נָחַם** *nhm*, which means “to repent” or “to change one’s mind,” as well as “to comfort”. **נָחַם** *nhm* is not the word for repent used elsewhere in Job (i.e., **שָׁב** *šwb*; cf. 22:23; 36:10). Elsewhere, **נָחַם** *nhm* in Job is used consistently with the meaning “to comfort” (2:11; 7:13; 16:2; 21:34; 29:25; 42:11).³⁵ For example, in Job 2:11, it is where the friends come to “comfort” (**נָחַם** *nhm*) Job.

Most OT scholars even if they still translate **נָחַם** *nhm* as “to repent” here, nevertheless note that Job is not repenting of any sin.³⁶ And recently, some evangelical OT scholars have argued that the verb should be translated as “comfort.”³⁷

³¹ See Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1207–1209, 1218–1221.

³² For a fuller treatment, see David A. Diewert, “Job XXXVI 5 and the Root *m*'s II,” *VT* 39 (1989), 71–77.

³³ Thomas Krüger, “Did Job Repent?” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005* (ed. T. Krüger, M. Oeming, K. Schmid, and C. Uehlinger; ATANT 88; Zürich: TVZ, 2007), 224–225 provides discussion on the verses from Job and adds Job 36:5 to the list.

³⁴ For a critique of Clines’ and others’ views that Job’s ultimate hope is not in God himself but his own affirmation of innocence which acts as his witness, see, e.g., Kummerow, “Job, Hopeful or Hopeless?” 261–288; Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* (NSBT 12; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 42–43.

³⁵ Krüger, “Did Job Repent?” 223–224 discusses the verses in the flow of book. He arrives at the conclusion: “In all these instances the verb **נָחַם**/*nhm* is used with the meaning ‘to comfort’. Of course, it is not impossible that 42:6 would be the one and only exception within the Book of Job where the verb means ‘to repent’ or ‘to regret’ instead. But this seems to me quite improbable, the more so as 42:6 fits very well in the thematic thread of desired, failed and successful consolation in the Book of Job: Job in his distress looks for consolation; his three friends cannot comfort him; but finally he finds consolation with God and with his relatives and acquaintances”; Krüger, “Did Job Repent?” 224.

³⁶ For example, Andersen says: “It is ... important not to misunderstand the word *repent* by reading into it too many conventional notions of penitence for sins which weigh on the conscience. The whole story would collapse if this is the outcome. Job would have capitulated at last to the friends’ insistent demand that he confess his sins. Job confesses no sins here” (Francis I. Andersen, *Job* [TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1976], 292); and Wilson says: “[T]he context neither demands nor suggests that Job is pictured as repenting of sin. Instead, vv. 7–8 endorse Job as God’s servant and as the one who has spoken of God what is right. Furthermore, Job acts as an intercessor for the friends, who urged him to repent in order to receive God’s forgiveness (vv. 8–9). If Job had repented, there is a curious avoidance of any declaration of forgiveness from God that would normally follow such repentance. Indeed, the view that Job repents seems not to have grasped that Job’s complaint to God are cries of faith, not unbelief, and therefore do not require repentance” (Lindsay Wilson, *Job* [THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015], 206).

Accepting this, a literal translation is as follows: *Therefore, I melt [in reverence] and I am comforted upon dust and ash.*³⁸

I take it, then, that Job 42:6 forms an *inclusio*, or book-ends, with 2:11.³⁹ The friends come to comfort Job, but ultimately it is only *God* who provides Job comfort. Job is comforted by God upon dust and ash, that is, while actually still in the very circumstance of suffering and when there is still no prospect of better days. Job 42:6 is therefore the resolution of the disputes, where Job humbly accepts God even in the condition of “dust and ash”. There are neither forthcoming blessings at this stage, nor promises of such. Even with no real answers to his suffering, and where, from his perspective, his immediate future would seem to be one of “dust and ash,” Job has the courage to entrust himself to the comfort of God.⁴⁰ Job here essentially demolishes Satan’s accusation and settles the dispute between Satan and God decisively in God’s favour. Job does exactly what Satan said he would never do: Job accepts God for who he is and not for what he can weasel out of him.⁴¹ Though Job is unaware and is never told, his response to his sufferings is invested with the dignity of ultimately demonstrating that God is truly worthy of honour and praise, and that God’s redemptive work in is people is effective.⁴²

³⁷ E.g., Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication*, 218; Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Fearn: Mentor, 2006), 118-119 n.18.

³⁸ I take the preposition לַעֲלֹא *al* as specifying the location of where Job is comforted, that is, he is comforted upon dust and ash (cf. Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, 119 n.18). It is the location and not what he is comforted of, though this is of course presupposed. Alternatively, לַעֲלֹא נְחִמָּה *nhm al* may function idiomatically as “comfort concerning x”, which is what Clines argues on the basis of examples such as Job 42:11; 2 Sam 13:39; Isa 22:4; Jer 16:7; 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 32:31 (Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1209). “Dust and ash” could be taken as poetic reference to human mortality in this case (cf. Job 30:19). Nevertheless, it is still possible that לַעֲלֹא *al* functions spatially here to indicate the location and not what he is comforted of, though, as mentioned, this is presupposed. Further evidence that supports this view is (1) Job presumably is still in such a state later in verse 11, where his family and others offer him comfort; (2) “everywhere where the idiom *nhm al* unambiguously occurs the object of the preposition is a noun denoting a mental construct (thought, plan, idea), never a physical object (even a physical object employed as a metaphor)”; and (3) “[b]y placing the *athnach* where they did, the Masoretes clearly did not see in 42:6 an instance of the *nhm al* idiom”; Charles Muenchow, “Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6,” *JBL* 108 (1989), 609-610 n.53. In the end, I think there is not much difference between the idiomatic and locative understandings because one rendering essentially presupposes the other.

³⁹ I have previously made the same statement in Kummerow, “Job, Hopeful or Hopeless?” 287.

⁴⁰ Longman, *Job*, 456 puts it this way: “Though the term ‘fear’ is not used in Job’s speech, fearing God is precisely what strikes him silent and submissive before God. He preserves his integrity to the end and—this is important—before he has his prosperity restored. Job is not told by God that he will restore Job; nonetheless, Job fears God. In this, Job demonstrates to all ... that he will worship God in spite of an absence of prosperity. Indeed, he will worship God even in the midst of his suffering.”

⁴¹ I find this a much more satisfactory reading of the verse in the context of the book than that of the recent proposal of Troy W. Martin, “Concluding the Book of Job and YHWH: Reading Job from the End to the Beginning,” *JBL* 137 (2018), 299-318, who argues that Job is even here still pressing his legal case and that it is *God* who is the speaker in 42:5-6 and who is repenting upon dust and ash. For helpful discussion of the elliptical nature of the text of 42:1-6, albeit understanding Job’s responses differently to that taken here, see Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; London: SCM, 1985), 576-583; van Wolde, “Job 42,1-6,” 227-242.

⁴² Consequently, in the Book of Job wisdom themes are the context in which a question of salvation is settled; Job is about whether redemption is effective. This has some bearing upon the hotly debated issue of the relationship between the salvation–historical books of the OT and the wisdom books, though I cannot enter into this debate here. See also the stimulating studies of Grant and Rogland, who both present cases for covenant being both present in the book and significant for the overall message: Jamie A. Grant, “When the Friendship of God Was upon My Tent’: Covenant as Essential Background to Lament in the Wisdom Literature,” in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (ed. Richard J. Bautch and Gary N. Knoppers; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 339-355; Max Rogland, “The Covenant in the Book of Job,” *Chriswell Theological Review* 7/1 (2009), 49-62.

The big idea of the book of Job

So, with this, we are now in a position to state in one sentence the big idea of the book of Job. This is the idea that would form the thrust behind a sermon series or Bible study series on the book.

Big idea: God's redemptive work in the lives of his people is effective, as proven by the life of Job, who continued to trust God even when the blessings of God had been removed, which demonstrates that God is sovereign and supremely worthy of his people's worship.⁴³

Preaching Christ from the prologue of Job

The question we come to now is this: If we accept the premise, that when we come to read and understand this text that we should ultimately do so in the light of Christ, how is this to be done?

The way that I think we might helpfully proceed towards this is to look at sermons on this passage, and ones that are overtly aiming to do this. Though there are not many examples in print, what I will do is utilise the two I have found, as well as interact with two sermons I have preached myself on this passage two years apart. I want to move from the two examples that I consider have not quite done enough, to the two that do a better job, noting the progression in my thinking because I preached it rather differently the second time. My aim in proceeding this way is that it will bring into clearer focus how it is that we preach Christ from this text.

Two sermons that highlight the difficulty

In his book *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*, Douglas O'Donnell has a sermon entitled "The Devil's Question."⁴⁴ O'Donnell's concern in this sermon is to show how the book renews "our vows, so to speak, reminding us that we are to be faithful to God—'for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health'—that we are to love God, to cherish him as he does us, whether he gives or takes away."⁴⁵ He says that this is easier said than

⁴³ If we want to repackage this as the big question that the book addresses, we could put it something like this: Is God's redemptive work in the lives of his people effective and is God worthy of worship? This is what the big idea then answers in the affirmative.

⁴⁴ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom: Preaching Christ from the First and Last Chapters of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 91-103. This sermon is on Job 1:1-12, but really covers the whole of the prologue and does a great job of situating the prologue within the whole of the book itself. O'Donnell has an amazing ability to communicate effectively, and draws from an extremely wide range and variety of secondary literature.

⁴⁵ O'Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*, 93.

done. And so he puts forward three theological foundations that held Job up through his trials, which forms the pastoral application of the sermon.⁴⁶

At one point, O'Donnell explicitly makes the connection between Job and Jesus. He says:

Despite this great hardship [of losing family and possessions], Job's immediate response was not to take it out on himself, others, or God ... but, rather, in sorrow and humility and faith to prostrate himself upon the earth and worship his sovereign sustainer. There is nothing quite like this in the whole Bible or in the whole world—this extraordinary response to the sovereign will of God—other than our Lord Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane.⁴⁷

Now this is a very important point, and a key insight in O'Donnell's sermon. O'Donnell is seeing here that Job in the story of the Bible anticipates the suffering faith of Jesus.⁴⁸ This point is only stated within the sermon and could have been developed much more.

In my own case, when I came to preach this text the first time, my main aim was basically the same as that of O'Donnell's—to show that God is worthy of praise no matter what the circumstance. The main point of connection between Job and Jesus that I made was a typological connection as well. That is, in the story of the Bible, Job is a type of Jesus, pointing forward to him. I observed that Job's choice to choose to love God over everything else anticipates and points to Jesus' same choice to put God first before anything else. In the redemptive plan of God, it is this faithful obedience of Jesus that is connected to salvation. To quote from the sermon:

Jesus put God before easy blessings. His way would not be the easy way to success offered by Satan. He could not avoid the suffering of the cross if he was to be faithful to his Father in heaven. He chose to suffer for us. He chose even to die for us. It is only because Jesus chose to love God more than himself that we have salvation.

There can be no forgiveness of sin without the death of Jesus, because we need a

⁴⁶ O'Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*, 99-103. The three theological foundations identified are: (1) Job knew that suffering can be good, and he suggests that Job in this regard "anticipates the Christian necessity of cross bearing (Luke 9:23)—of persecution for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5:10), learning obedience from hardships (Heb. 5:8), and sharing the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 1:29; cf. 3:10)" (p. 100); (2) Job trusted in God's providence; and (3) Job believed in the resurrection.

⁴⁷ O'Donnell, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*, 95-96.

⁴⁸ Technically this would be called typology. Some want to restrict the use of a typological hermeneutic so as to "not make typological connections where the NT chooses not to do so, and Job is not referred to by any NT writers in a typological way"; Wilson, *Job*, 317. The assumptions of this view seem to be (1) that the NT authors did not do so because they chose not to, i.e., they made a considered decision; (2) the NT authors together make the *entirety* of typological connections that are possible and legitimate; and (3) for these reasons we are consequently bound not to make further such connections ourselves such as seeing Job as a type of Christ. I am unpersuaded by this.

Typology, properly done, does not make random connections (cf., e.g., Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*). Instead, we learn a method of reading Scripture from the NT authors that can be applied to OT texts beyond those that receive explicit treatment in their writings (so Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 249-261). Longman, *Job*, 68-69 is one Old Testament commentator who is willing to see Job as a type of Christ.

perfect substitute to stand in for us and take our punishment. We should be ever thankful to Jesus because he put God first.

Now this has gone a little further than in O'Donnell's sermon. There has been an explicit connection made between Jesus' suffering obedience and salvation. But it is also very under-developed, and the conclusion to the sermon can be read as if it is urging people to try harder, though that was never my intention.

However, this does highlight the crucial question—do we love God above everything else, or do we not? O'Donnell says this is easier said than done. I myself was putting this on people the first time around. But on reflection, we begin to see that Satan raises a very good question—do God's people put God first in their lives? But what is more, Satan is at the same game in the NT, still playing his role of accuser. In Luke 22:31 Jesus told Simon Peter that “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.” The “you” is plural (ὕμᾱς *humas*). Peter is just the example. Satan has asked to sift all of the disciples as wheat, and, by extension, us. He still thinks no-one loves God before himself. And Jesus prays that Simon Peter's faith will show itself to be real, that it will not fail (Luke 22:32). Jesus in effect prays that we all will love God more than what we get from him. Because God really is worthy of honour and glory over any physical blessing.

To put this issue another way, how is it that God can answer Jesus' prayer—that Peter's and our faith will not fail? Because Peter said to Jesus that he thought that he would be able to follow Jesus to prison and even death (Luke 22:33). But Jesus told him that far from dying or even going to prison, Peter would three times deny that he even knew him (Luke 22:34). Peter would fail, just as we all fail at some point. We need to be restored, just like Peter was, over and over again. And only in this way having a faith that does not fail.

So do we love God more than anything else? Or does family or fortune or good health rank higher than God? If we are honest, they often do. We are often tempted and often failing. Because having a particular car, or a certain income, or good marks, or popularity, or a renovated house, or a specific level of health or physical appearance, can all be things that we get our value and worth from rather than God himself. We easily follow the idols of our heart, clutching them tightly because we think that these things will make us happy.

Consequently, Satan seems to make a good point. He seems right to make the accusation that God's people do not always love him. They are often much more interested in family, money, and health—the things Job *lost*—and lots of other things besides. Job passed this test with flying colours, but Job has just learnt more quickly the lesson we all must learn.

So how is it that God can answer Jesus' prayer, and restore failing people to himself? How can he dismiss Satan's accusation with the likes of us? For in all honesty, we do not measure up to Job!

Two sermons that preach Christ

So we come now to two further sermons on the prologue of Job. We are now starting to feel the weight of this text. I really felt the weight of it when I had the chance to preach it a second time. Essentially what we are beginning to realise—just as it stood out to me on the second occasion—is that we need *Jesus*. We need him to fulfil this passage. Not just as someone we should *refer* to in our sermon, but as someone who *embodies the message*. This passage shows us again that we do not just need an example—we need the gospel. We need Jesus Christ, and his life, death, and resurrection for us. The more we sit with this passage, the more we see how this passage drives us to him as our only hope in life and in death.

So, again, how is it that God can answer Jesus' prayer, and restore failing people to himself? How can he dismiss Satan's accusation with the likes of us? How can he do this without tarnishing his honour and reputation and looking like a big fool?

Christopher Ash has a published collection of sermons on Job, with one on the prologue that addresses this matter explicitly.⁴⁹ Ash articulates well the issue Satan has with Job: "why does Job fear God? Is it because God is God, because God is worthy of his worship and loving obedience?"⁵⁰ Hence, Ash notes that the honour of God is tied to the testing of Job.⁵¹ He says:

Satan, for all his malice, is doing something necessary to the glory of God. In some deep way it is necessary for it publicly to be seen by the whole universe that God is worthy of the worship of a man and that God's worth is in no way dependent on God's gifts.⁵²

Already towards the beginning of his sermon Ash foreshadowed this idea, but there he also connected Job to Jesus, by saying:

In this drama we shall see that it is necessary for it publicly to be seen that there is in God's world a great man who is great because he is good, and yet who will continue

⁴⁹ Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 37-56.

Technically, the sermon is on Job 1:6–2:10, however the previous sermon on 1:1-5 for the most part sets up this second sermon which then preaches Christ very well.

⁵⁰ Ash, *Job*, 43. He also says on the same page: "He is pious not because he actually loves God, honors God, or believes God is worthy of his worship; he is pious because piety results in prosperity, and for no other reason. That's Satan's argument."

⁵¹ Indeed, Ash says: "the only way to find out is to take away Job's prosperity. ... Now although the Satan's motives are 100 percent aggressive and malicious, his argument is correct. There is no other way publicly to establish the nature of Job's piety"; Ash, *Job*, 44.

⁵² Ash, *Job*, 44.

to be a good man when he ceases to be a great man. Ultimately, in the greatest fulfillment of Job's story, we will need to see a man who does not count equality with God (greatness) as something to be grasped but makes himself nothing for the glory of God (Philippians 2:6-11).⁵³

The foreshadowing of the connection to Jesus is then further elaborated towards the end of the sermon. Ash says:

However deep our suffering, it is unlikely that our experience can ever do more than very approximately mirror Job's. We have neither been so great as Job, nor so fallen, neither so happy, nor so lonely, neither so rich, nor so poor, neither so pious, nor so cursed. All of which points to a fulfillment greater and deeper than your life or mine. Job in his extremity is actually but a shadow of a reality more extreme still, of a man who was not just blameless but sinless, who was not just the greatest man in a region, but the greatest human being in history, greater even than merely human, who emptied himself of all his glory, became incarnate, and went all the way down to a degrading, naked, shameful death on the cross, whose journey took him from eternal fellowship with the Father to utter aloneness on the cross. The story of Job is a shadow of the greater story of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

With Ash we therefore witness a greater and more deliberate preaching of Christ than in the previous two sermons. After pointing out that within the larger context of the Bible Job is a type of Christ, he moves to pastoral application, where we today live after the fulfillment of Job's story in Jesus. He notes that the cross of Christ is a victory that changes things. Citing Revelation 12, Ash says:

Satan is no longer present in the council of God, as he was in Job 1, 2, to accuse believers before God. He has been thrown down to earth. ... But when he accuses us, God is not listening. The devil no longer has that access. The issue of our justification has been decisively settled at the cross. This is the gospel truth of the cross: there is no longer any condemnation (Romans 8:1), and our consciences have been cleansed by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14).⁵⁵

Like Ash, when I revisited the prologue of Job to preach it two years after the former sermon, I also came to see that the reason God can answer Jesus' prayer, restore failing people to himself, dismiss Satan's accusations, and all without tarnishing his honour and reputation, is this (and from here I will essentially paraphrase and draw from the second sermon⁵⁶): Job

⁵³ Ash, *Job*, 37-38.

⁵⁴ Ash, *Job*, 54.

⁵⁵ Ash, *Job*, 56.

⁵⁶ I prepared and preached this sermon during a time in my life when I spent one day a week behind the wheel of a car, often listening to sermons. I put on record here my own thankfulness and indebtedness in particular to Iain

was always just an example of faithful living. An example that points us to the ultimate example of faithful living in the life of Jesus Christ. But the good news is that Jesus, better than Job, not only showed us how to live faithfully loving God more than anything else, he exercised that faith for us in our place. Jesus came to *live* the perfect life. Not just to show us how it should be done, but to make the perfect offering of obedience for us in our place. Even for faithful Job, I realised, because even our best works do not make God owe us something (Isa 64:6).

Jesus stayed strong as he faced the severe temptations in the wilderness. Temptations to provide for himself, temptations of fame and recognition. Satan's temptations of easy blessing without the God of the blessing. Each time Jesus replied with complete trust. Jesus stayed strong in the face of desertion and betrayal and abandonment. When even his closest disciples and friends fled, Jesus cried out in faith, "Father ... not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). And Jesus still stayed strong even to the point where the Father himself turned away the face of his blessing and left Jesus all alone in the darkness. Family gone. No fortune to speak of. Stripped even of his clothes. Mocked and shamed and humiliated. His health and life draining away. Taking upon himself more suffering than God will ever allot to us, so as to bear all the suffering that our sins truly deserved on the cross. Surely the greatest test of faith that this world has ever seen. And in the depth of the darkness of God's anger at sin, as his life came under the sentence of death for sin, he cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). His faith never failed. He always clung tightly. He always loved God first before anything else.

And he did so that we whose faith is so often up and down might still be welcomed into God's presence as his dearly loved sons and daughters, clothed in the perfect obedience of Jesus, with Satan's accusation nailed to the cross. The blameless, suffering trust of Job could only silence Satan's accusation of himself; but the greater Job, Jesus—his sinless, suffering trust silences the accuser's accusation against *all* of Christ's people.

And until the day when Christ returns, we remain God's works-in-progress. Step by step God is answering Jesus' prayer. Our sin having been paid for, God is now slowly shaping us into the image of his Son. So that time and time again we learn the lesson that he is a good God, worthy of honour and glory, far above anything else we could set our hearts on. Slowly prising our fingers away from our idols so that we trust him and him alone. And the good news is that God's work in the lives of his people at the end of the day does not even depend on whether we happen to be strong or weak in faith. The good news is it is not ultimately up to us. Because even the faith that we have is his gracious and precious gift to us. It is not like Jesus

Duguid and Tim Keller, who in different ways through their sermons have helped me gain a clearer insight into the preacher's ultimate task. Although I have been unable to re-listen to the audio, the following paragraphs will have gained insight from them and echo something of what they have taught me. Although influenced by them, I still have much to learn—I make no claim to be an Iain Duguid or a Tim Keller!

paid it all except the bit about having faith in the middle of the storm. No, Jesus paid it *all*. God is not anxiously wringing his hands and hoping against hope that our faith is going to be strong enough to weather the storm when it comes and smashes us. No, God holds onto us firmly, with the grip of his grace, and he will not let us go.⁵⁷ Jesus has lived and died and has risen again for us, and he has given us his very own Spirit. There is the proof.

And Jesus has prayed for us, and God is at work answering Jesus' prayer. Because God really is worthy of honour and glory without anything else. To make us know this truth is his precious gift in this world that rejects him. When out of grateful thanks, we respond by putting God first in our life, we point people to Jesus like Job does. And Job summed it up well: the Lord can give and take away; may the name of the Lord be praised (Job 1:21). We go on learning this often painful lesson until the day God calls us home. And we gather around the Lamb, millions upon millions strong, all fully and finally convinced that God is magnificent and glorious and gracious and good, and we join in and sing with complete sincerity his eternal praise and wisdom and worth. God's exhibits of grace. Showcases that prove that, yes, his grace is sufficient to save.

So with that, based upon my change of thought as I came to the text the second time around and Christopher Ash's own published sermon, this is what I would consider a sermon needs to do something of in order to preach Christ.⁵⁸ What they really highlight is that what we really need time and time again is for *Jesus* to be preached. It is easy to not focus on him enough and to labour other points, even to miss him out altogether, even from the NT. We need to pray and ask God for grace to develop our Christ instinct,⁵⁹ so that having preached we can honestly say with the Apostle Paul that our aim has been to "know nothing ... except Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). We are compelled to preach this Christ from the prologue of Job, just as we are from all of Scripture, for the Bible is a book about him from beginning to end.

⁵⁷ We may compare this to the illustration Bunyan gives in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Interpreter shows Christian a hearth with a burning fire. Even though someone is continuously throwing water on the fire, it astonishingly grows larger and hotter. Interpreter explains that the one attempting to douse the fire is the Devil. (Similarly, in the Book of Job, Job will be given buckets of trouble, and the question is: will Job's fire be put out?) Christian is shown the miracle of grace, where behind the wall oil is being secretly piped into the fire by a man. Interpreter explains: "This is Christ who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart. No matter what the Devil tries to do, the gracious work that Christ is doing in the souls of His people only increases"; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which is to Come* (ed. C. J. Lovik; Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 52.

⁵⁸ These sermons in their own way made use of typology, redemptive-historical progression, biblical-theological themes, analogy, and so forth.

⁵⁹ Here I am picking up on Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: Developing a Christ-Centred Instinct* (London: Proclamation Trust, 2002). Ferguson argues that we need to cultivate within ourselves a passion for Jesus Christ, and that in preaching him from every text we aim do so naturally and realistically—we need to develop our "Christ instinct." For some particular examples covering different texts, see, e.g., Iain M. Duguid, *Hero of Heroes: Seeing Christ in the Beatitudes* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001); *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); *Daniel* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008); Mike McKinley, *Passion: How Christ's Final Day Changes Your Every Day* (Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2013). For an example of a preacher showing the workings as they are going along, see David Peterson, *Christ and His People in the Book of Isaiah* (Leicester: IVP, 2003).

May God help us to do so all the more, for his glory and our good!

About the author

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