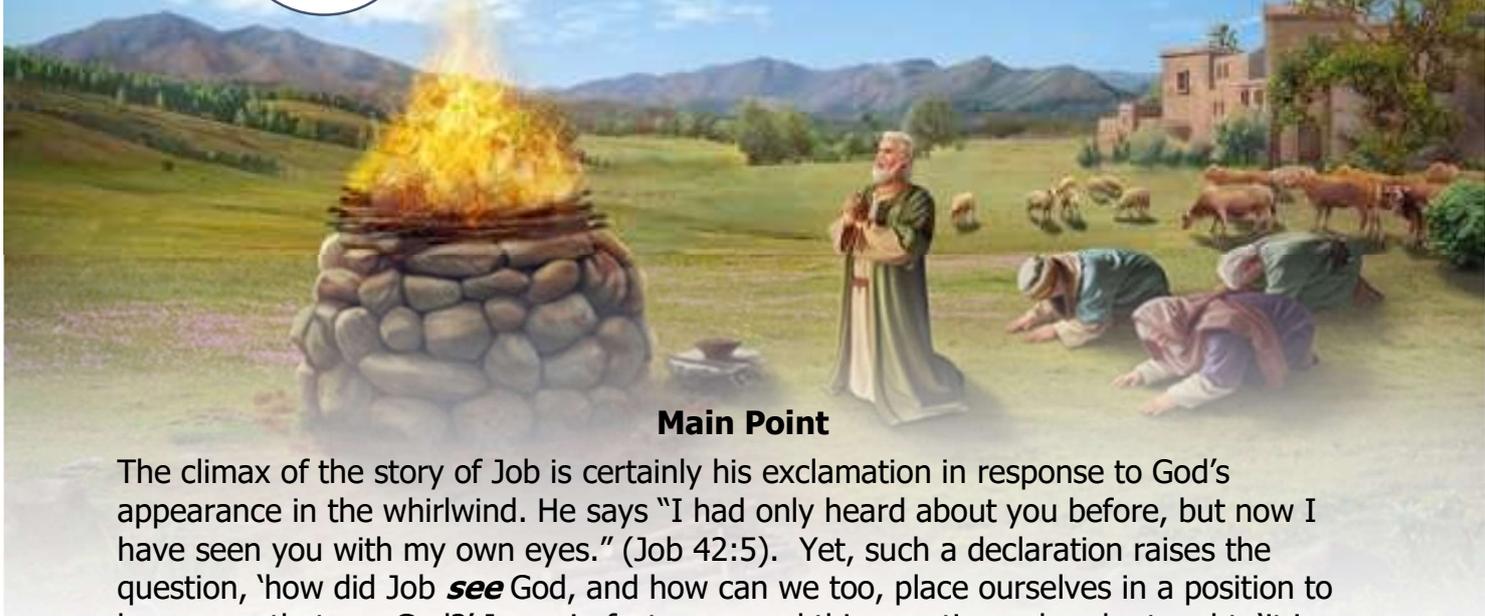




24th October 2021 | 22nd Sunday in

Developing a pure heart that sees God



Main Point

The climax of the story of Job is certainly his exclamation in response to God's appearance in the whirlwind. He says "I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes." (Job 42:5). Yet, such a declaration raises the question, 'how did Job **see** God, and how can we too, place ourselves in a position to have eyes that see God?' Jesus in fact answered this question, when he taught, 'it is the pure in heart that see God' (Matthew 5:8). Today, we'll learn that a pure heart is gained by the person who has a genuine relationship with God.

Intro |

About thirty years ago I worked as a graphic designer for the Government Advertising Agency. In those days the government's advertising agency was separate from the government's printing agency. Obviously, the two organisations worked closely together. As I was responsible for the publishing of the weekly Public Service Notices, I spoke almost every day with the head printer at the printing agency. His name was Tony. Because I had never met Tony in person, I created a mental image of what I thought he looked like, based entirely on the sound of his voice. My picture was of a tall, dark, handsome man in his thirties.

Well, after three years of talking to Tony almost every day, one day I received a surprise visit. Tony had decided to drop into my office to meet me in person – and boy was I in for a shock. He was short, grey and had thick glasses - nothing like the mental image I had created.

Well, the experience of having a carefully crafted mental image of someone totally obliterated, is a bit like what Job experienced when – after months of crying bitterly to God, God finally presented himself.

And this is how Job responded,

"I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.

³ You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?'

It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me.

⁴ You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.'

⁵ I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.

⁶ I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."

The verse that I would like to focus on today, is verse 5:

"I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes."

I don't think there is anyone among us who would not want to have the same experience as Job – that is, want to encounter God to such a degree that they say, "I have seen God".

Job's words, immediately reminded me of the words of Jesus said,

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

So that means, just logically speaking, that throughout Job's lengthy season of suffering, he must have maintained a pure heart.

I suppose that's why the Apostle James called Job, "a man of great endurance" (James 5:11).

But, as we identified two weeks ago, Job really did ride a rollercoaster of emotions during his months of pain. As we read through his long speeches, we have to admit that he wasn't always the model of patience that we may expect.

He called out to God, *"Why do you treat me like an enemy?"* (13:24)

And, *"He attacks me with a storm and repeatedly wounds me without cause"* (9:17) *"He set me up as his target, and his archers surround me"* (16:12).

He believed that God had rejected him (10:3), and that God was *"pouring out his anger upon him and bringing fresh armies against him"* (10:17b)

Job was a man in turmoil, not knowing what was going on, without any idea of why he was suffering – and over and over again Job poured out his complaints to God. If there is one thing we see, as we read Job's responses to his friends, he was brutally honest about his distress. Even to the point when he lost hope about the meaning and continuation of his life (10:21-22).

Job desperately wanted to present his case before God. He wanted God to put him on trial and judge him – that was how confident he was of his innocence (13:17-24).

And God faithfully answered Job's demand for an answer. He not only heard God in the whirlwind, he 'saw' God with his own eyes. That means, through all his complaining, he did not corrupt his heart.

That really challenges our ideas of what it means to have a pure heart, doesn't it?

I mean, if I was to ask you what the person with a pure heart would say about God, you wouldn't really expect me to suggest, 'Well, the pure in heart, say *'God treats me as his enemy'* and *'again and again God smashes against me, charging at me like a warrior'* (16:14).

Maybe we need to re-learn what it means to have a pure heart.

Point 1 | Purity of heart is a crucial issue for Jesus. Our heart represents the core of our being, our attitudes, our motivations, our desires. Jesus came into the world to purify, dirty hearts.

Your heart is who you are, in the secrecy of your thoughts and feelings; the real you that no one knows about, except God.

What happens in the invisible places of your heart matters as much to God, as what everyone can see in your outward behaviour and conduct.

That's why Jesus spoke of people committing adultery 'in their heart', (Matthew 5:27-28). He taught that it is not outward actions that defile us, rather defilement is due to the evil thoughts that linger in our heart (Matthew 15:18-19).

So, our heart is utterly crucial to Jesus. What we are in the deep, private recesses of our lives is what he cares about most. Jesus did not come into the world simply because we have some bad habits that need to be changed. He came into the world because we have such dirty hearts that need to be purified.

Point 2 | To 'see' God means to be admitted into His presence.

But, how do we 'see' an invisible God?

First, to see God means to be admitted to His presence.

The expression to 'see' God, doesn't mean that we 'see' God with our physical eyes.

Remember, when Moses appeared before Pharaoh in the Old Testament?

Moses so angered Pharaoh with his declaration of plagues, that he exploded,

“Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!”

Moses answered, *“As you say! I will not see your face again.”* (Exodus 10:28-29)

When a king says, “You will never see my face again,” he means, “I will never grant you admission again into my presence.”

In the same way, we call the doctor and say, “Can I see the doctor today?” We don’t mean, ‘can I see him from a distance?’ Or, ‘can I see a picture of him?’ We mean, can I be granted access into his surgery office?

So, the first thing seeing God means is being admitted to His presence.

Point 3 | To ‘see’ God means to be awestruck by his glory

Seeing God also means that we have an experience in which we are awestruck by His glory — there is a direct experience of His holiness.

This is of course, what happened to Job. When God confronted Job in the whirlwind, Job said, *“I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.”*

When we experience glimpses of God’s majesty and power, we say “I’ve seen God”.

When we experience glimpses of divine providence, when situations or events seem to divinely fall into place, we say “I’ve seen God in action”

When we experience glimpses of God transforming a person’s character, we say “I can see God is moving in their life”.

While now we only ‘see’ glimpses of God, one day we will see God fully – for He will dwell among us, and His glory will be the very light in which we move (Revelation 21:23).

So, seeing God means not only being admitted to His presence, but also being awestruck by a direct experience of His glory.

Application | To ‘see’ God means being comforted by His grace and mercy.

Finally, seeing God means being comforted by His grace.

Again and again the psalmists cry out to God urging Him not to hide His face from them. For example, in Psalm 27:7–9 David says,

*“Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!
Do not hide your face from me.”*

The expression “do not hide your face from me” is the same as saying “Be gracious to me!” So, seeing the face of God means knowing God’s grace as a sweet and comforting experience. If God shows His face, we are helped. If he turns His face away, we are dismayed.

The same picture is repeated whenever the blessing is spoken,

“May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, and give you his peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26)

So, when Jesus promises the reward of ‘seeing God’ there are at least these three things implied: we will be admitted to His presence, not just kept in the waiting room. We will be awestruck with a direct experience of His glory. And we will be helped and comforted by His grace.

So, finally, how did Job maintain his pure heart, through all his complaining?

The reason Job was able to preserve purity of heart, was because he came honestly and genuinely before God.

There is a right way to process pain, suffering and struggle – it is through a genuine prayer relationship with God – a prayer relationship that knows God’s presence, is awestruck by God’s glory, and is regularly comforted by God’s amazing gift of grace.

A Month of Daily Devotions on the book of Job

For those who would like further reflection on the story of Job, a month-long devotional has been developed. This devotional journeys with Job through his long and arduous time of testing.

