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Job's concluding oaths. Our great salvation that the prophets of old sought to understand and the angels look into.

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Transcript

Job chapter 31. I have made a covenant with my eyes. How then could I gaze at a virgin? What would be my portion from God above, and my heritage from the Almighty on high? Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does not he see my ways, and number all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened to deceit, let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity.

If my step has turned aside from the way, and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out. If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door, then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her. For that would be a heinous crime, that would be an iniquity to be punished by

the judges, for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase.

If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what then shall I do when God rises up, when he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him, and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it, for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow. If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or the needy without covering, if his body has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, because I saw my help in the gate, then let my shoulder-blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket, for I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty. If I have made gold my trust, or called fine gold my confidence, if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant, or because my hand had found much, if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendour, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.

If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me, or exalted when evil overtook him, I have not let my mouth sin by asking for his life with a curse. If the men of my tent have not said, Who is there that has not been filled with his meat? The sojourner has not lodged in the street, I have opened my doors to the traveller. If I have concealed my transgressions as others do, by hiding my iniquity in my heart, because I stood in great fear of the multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors, O that I had one to hear me! Here is my signature, let the Almighty answer me! O that I had the indictment written by my adversary! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder, I would bind it on me as a crown, I would give him an account of all my steps, like a prince I would approach him.

If my land has cried out against me, and its furrows have wept together, if I have eaten its yield without payment, and made its owners breed their last, let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley. The words of Job are ended. Job chapter 31 concludes Job's speeches in this book.

This is the last chapter of Job's lengthy concluding speech, in which he sums up his case and once again asserts his innocence. This is Job's second oath, after that of chapter 27 verses 1-6. And Job again took up his discourse and said, As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit.

Far be it from me to say that you are right. Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go.

My heart does not reproach me for any of my days. The oath of this chapter comes after Job's recollection of his former estate in chapter 29, against which the misery of his current condition was seen in chapter 30. The chapter has an implicit courtroom setting.

Job has suffered tremendous misfortunes, which seem to single him out as a guilty man judged by God. Again Job, once a ruler and leader of his people, now appears to be divinely condemned, leaving him stripped of authority and standing in his society. Job has been calling for a divine hearing of his case, looking for vindication which will absolve him of the guilt that now wrongly seems to cling to him.

This chapter is a formal declaration, a self-malediction or self-imprecation, cursing himself if he is not telling the truth about his innocence in the matters of which he has been accused. This is more than just a denial of guilt. It is a formal proclamation, calling for God to act if he is guilty in any of these matters.

We should recall the way that Eliphaz the Temanite had made serious yet false allegations concerning Job in chapter 22, verses 5-9. Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities, for you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing, and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry.

The man with power possessed the land, and the favoured man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. Gerald Janssen mentions Robert Gordas' observation that there are fourteen sins that Job claims to be innocent of.

The two times seven list might be an indication of comprehensiveness. He also notes that, as the Hebrew verb for swearing or taking an oath is related to the number seven, there might be a significance in the number here. Against this point we should probably note that there isn't agreement in the numbering of the sins.

Once again, as in the vision of Job as the righteous leader in chapter 29, there is a clear accent upon justice as a social matter in Job's list. This is what righteousness looks like, not just a personal righteousness, but public responsibility and duty. Job throughout is calling for God to bring judgement upon him if he is guilty of any of the sins that he lists.

As he is currently suffering at God's hands, he is effectively declaring that his suffering has been justly inflicted upon him if he is guilty in any of the matters he mentions. Once again, many scholars and translations, dissatisfied with the ordering of this chapter, have reordered elements of it. However, as is generally the case elsewhere in Job, the justification for such ordering is relatively weak textually.

The chapter begins with the sin of lust. Job not only declares that he hasn't looked upon a virgin to lust after her, but that he had positively made a covenant with his eyes not to do so. We might here think of Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, verses 27-29.

Had Job acted in such a manner, he leaves his heroes in no doubt that judgement would have been deserving, and disaster might even have been appointed to him. Verses 5-8 move to falsehood, deceit and dishonesty. Job insists that he is a man of truth and requests that God weigh him in a just balance so that the matter of his integrity would be left in no doubt.

Adultery in verses 9-12 is the next sin. Had Job been guilty of this, he says that he himself should be cuckolded as a just judgement. He euphemistically speaks of men bowing down over his wife, like a prostitute.

Several commentators also see a euphemistic reference to sexual intercourse in the grinding mentioned in the first half of verse 10. The male upper millstone grinds upon the lower female millstone as an image of sexual relations. Clines argues against this.

He claims that it is more likely that it refers to the wife being reduced to a slave and the most menial of tasks, although this might well have implied or connoted that she would have been sexually abused. Injustice and oppression are the subject of verses 13-15. God is the patron of the weak and the oppressed, and those who abuse them are subject to God's curse and judgement.

Deuteronomy 27.19 Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, and all the people shall say, Amen. The righteous man is supposed to be characterised by generosity, charity and magnanimity. In verses 16-23 Job exculpates himself of miserliness and indifference towards the poor, from the sins, not of commission so much as in verses 13-15, but sins of omission.

The righteous man needs to act when he sees that justice is not being performed. Greed, avarice, arrogance and the pride of life are the subject of verses 24-26. Job enjoyed immense wealth, but his confidence was not in his wealth.

He looked to the Lord for his security. Idolatry is next in verse 26 and following. Job has not worshipped the heavenly bodies or other idols.

He has been faithful to God throughout. He has not rejoiced in other people's ruin or downfall. He is not afflicted by schadenfreude.

He does not rejoice in the destruction of others, but wishes people to be built up. The ancient Near Eastern man was expected to be a good host, characterised by liberality and hospitality, and Job again has been faithful in this matter. No one can justly accuse him of not having performed his duties in this respect.

Hypocrisy is the subject of verses 33-34. Job's righteousness has always been the real thing. It's not just a facade he puts on for social face.

David Klines argues that verses 35-37 are out of order and should be placed at the end of the chapter. Janssen, as we shall see, argues against this transposition. To render all of this even more formal, Job proclaims his desire for a witness, likely at this point God Himself, and places, as it were, his signature or sign beneath his verbal statement.

He fervently wishes that he had the indictment of God, the judgment and sentence against Him that account for all of the disaster that has befallen him. So confident is he that no such document exists, that he declares that if he were given it, far from hiding it away, he would wear it openly and proudly. In chapter 19 verse 9 he had declared, He has stripped from me my glory, and taken the crown from my head.

Now in a surprising return of that image, he wants to wear the Lord's indictment against him around his head as a new crown. He has lost his honour, but he would wear the document of indictment as a badge of honour. He would give a thorough accounting of all of his deeds, and approach God with confidence, like a prince.

In the concluding verses of Job's speech, Jansen hears an allusion to the story of Eden in Genesis chapter 2 to 3, to Adam's relationship to the land, presenting the intriguing possibility that Job is gathering together all of his former self-imprecations and denials and exculpations in terms of the paradigmatic curse of Genesis chapter 3 verses 17 to 19. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

This, Jansen suggests, would help to explain why the chapter fittingly ends with these words, rather than with verses 35-37, as Gordis, Clines and others suggest that it should. Furthermore, in the statement that ends the chapter, that the words of Job are ended or completed, Jansen also notes a possible allusion back to the description of Job's character as that of a complete or blameless man, as he was first introduced to us in chapter 1 verse 1, the words are related. A question to consider, on a number of occasions in the Psalms and here in the book of Job, individuals appeal to the Lord, insisting upon their righteousness and claiming that they are not guilty of sin.

How are such declarations possible for fallen human beings to make? Can we make such declarations? 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 1-21 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with his blood, may grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him, though you do not now see him, you believe in him, and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating, when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. First Peter is the first letter of the leading apostle in the New Testament. Some have doubted that such a letter could have been written by a man of Peter's education and background on account of such things as its strong Greek style.

Others have observed many similarities to Paul. Perhaps it is written with the help of Silvanus, who was associated with Paul, he is mentioned in chapter 5 verse 12. The notions that we have of authorship may be rather narrower than those that should apply to a letter such as this.

While there is no compelling reason to doubt that it was sent by Peter, in his name and with his authority and in accordance with his teaching, this need not mean that he composed every single word himself. Nor needs such a position question that this book was inspired by the Spirit in its entirety. Some have suggested that the book is primarily a catechetical or liturgical document that has been formed into a letter, with a lot of fundamental teaching covering the basics for those who have just been baptised for instance.

While no conclusive case has been proved on this front, it is a tantalising possibility. One of the things that it does, for instance, is suggest that things such as household codes were standard elements of early Christian catechesis. Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He is once sent as an emissary of the Messiah, one who represents his master. It is sent to elect exiles of the dispersion. These people are objects of God's choice, they are elect, even though they may be in exile.

In a condition of exile it may seem that God has cut them off, but in fact they have been chosen by him and while scattered abroad in the world, are gathered to him by his Spirit. The language of the dispersion was often used by the Jews. Peter Davids has observed that two to four million Jews lived outside of Palestine and only about a million within it.

Much of the Jewish nation then was living in various parts of the Roman Empire. In this letter Peter does not seem to be writing wholly to Jews, or even primarily to Jews. There are a number of statements about their former lives that suggest that the recipients were Gentiles.

This of course is noteworthy because the Church is taking on aspects of Israel's identity. These Christians lived in a large area of Asia Minor, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. This region was highly Hellenised, it was cultured and wealthy in its cities, and was a context with various mystery cults and traditional Greek religion in addition to the imperial cult.

The early Christians, to whom Peter is writing, were living in that sort of world. They have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. This is God's eternal purpose, his choice and his providence.

The Church's existence, and its existence in its scattered form, is according to God's intent and providence. It's not an event, it is not something that we have stumbled into or grasped for ourselves. Behind all of this lies God's settled and effective purpose.

We are elect in the sanctification of the Spirit, in addition to the foreknowledge of God the Father. We have been set apart as holy, marked out by the Spirit of Christ. We are marked out for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

We are elect for the sake of obedience, chosen to be conformed to his image and to act faithfully in his name. We are elect in order that we might live a new form of life and live to God's glory. We are sprinkled with Christ's blood.

This is the blood of a new covenant, a blood that leads to cleansing and forgiveness of sins and access to God. If we had been paying attention we would have noticed that this is a Trinitarian opening, the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. As in the rest of the New Testament, there is an implicit Trinitarian structure to the Gospel.

Peter opens up with a blessing. It is a blessing addressed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is framed and known in the light of Jesus Christ.

If we want to get access to God it is through Christ. If we want to know who God is, we see who God is in the light of Christ. Through God's mercy we have been begotten again.

We have a radical new beginning, a new beginning that has occurred through the resurrection. This was the decisive event of new birth. Jesus became the first born of the dead and we enter into the new birth when we are united to Christ.

The new birth is not primarily a fact about individuals. It is a fact about a new humanity that is being formed in Christ. The new birth is an event that primarily happened to Christ and we are being joined into it.

And all of this has set us apart for a heavenly inheritance that has been preserved for us. It is protected from all sorts of corruption or destruction from any sort of defilement. And we are preserved for it.

God guards us through faith for the full measure of the salvation that he has in store for us. A salvation that will be revealed finally on the last day. And recognising the contours of the situation that Peter has described, we can rejoice, even in the midst of trials.

These trials are not without purpose. They are there to purify and strengthen our faith, preparing our faith like gold for Christ's glory. Our faith will be a cause of glory and praise to him.

Much as the testing and the proving of Job's faith brought glory to God and matured Job as a son, so the trials that we experience are preparing us for Christ's glory and for fellowship with him. We already love and rejoice in Christ with great joy, even though we have neither seen him in the past nor presently see him. In all of this we are experiencing a foretaste of a gift of God without measure that we are awaiting in the future.

We are having a reality filled promise of what is yet to come. A down payment of what we expect in the future. This salvation brought by Christ was foretold beforehand.

The Old Testament speaks of it and anticipates Christ in many different ways, sometimes through direct prophecy, sometimes through typological prefiguration, sometimes through such things as the words of the Psalms and the two different levels of reference that they can have. All of these scriptures were revealed by the Spirit of God and Peter speaks about the Spirit of Christ speaking in, through and to the prophets and the way that the prophets were trying to discover what was being foretold, seeing shadows and silhouettes thrown back by a great light that awaited in the future, they were trying to understand what was going on, what this was all about. They maybe saw the initial fulfilments of the prophecies that they foretold but they could not see that greater fulfilment that was awaiting in the future.

What they predicted was not just the glory of Christ but also his sufferings, in places such as Isaiah 53 for instance or in Psalm 22. And in some way they realised that these prophecies were not ultimately for themselves, they were awaiting some later time when their true meaning would be disclosed. And Peter says that that time has come and that the early church is experiencing that.

In the message of the Gospel announced to them, these secrets that the prophets had been trying to figure out have now been disclosed. Indeed angels themselves try to figure out these things and understand what is going on. The prophets have tried to figure out these things in the past.

In the revelation of the Gospel the angels are trying to figure it out, its great mysteries. And then Peter challenges us to figure things out. We must prepare our minds for action.

He speaks of girding up loins or perhaps we might think of rolling up sleeves, preparing for action and being sober minded, developing a seriousness and determination in the way that we approach these things. The same energy that the prophets devoted to figuring out these things and the angels devote to these issues, we should devote. We should think through these things, try to understand them, try to figure out what it means for us.

And as a result to set our hope fully on the grace that we are awaiting at the future revelation of Jesus Christ, Charles Cranfield describes verses 14-23 as describing the warp and the woof of Christian life. The warp, the threads that run lengthwise and the woof, the threads that run across. The warp is the nature of the Christian life and the woof is its motives.

The warp is obedience to God, holiness, the fear of God and the love of the brethren. And the woof is God's holiness and our belonging to him and the fact that we relate to the judge of all as father. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and we have been begotten again by the word of God.

He begins by calling us to be obedient children. We are not to be conformed to the

passions of our former ignorance. Obedience involves struggling against our lusts and our passions, the things that once characterized our state.

A state that is itself described in terms of ignorance and lack of knowledge. The same ignorance that we should be fighting against as we gird up the loins of our mind and struggle to learn and understand more about God's truth. Peter takes up an expression that is almost a refrain in the book of Leviticus.

Be holy as I am holy. We are children of God and we must seek to conform ourselves to the character of our father. If we call upon God as father, he is the impartial judge of all and we must have an appropriate sense of fear in calling such a one our father.

We should not be presumptuous. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Peter wants us to have a sense of the weightiness of what it is to approach God and the grace, the sheer measure of the grace that we have received.

When we approach God we are approaching the impartial judge. We are approaching the one who is a consuming fire and we must have an appropriate sense of how we stand before such a God. We must also consider the cost of our redemption.

We were delivered at incalculable cost. Christ is our Passover lamb. He was the one who was sacrificed for us.

God did not redeem us at the cost of silver and gold, even vast quantities of silver and gold, but with the precious blood of his own son. No price could be greater than that. This advent and gift of Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world.

This was always God's purpose and intention and in his providence it came to pass. Our redemption finds its origin in God's purpose before the dawn of time and now in the last times he has made this manifest for our sake. It is out of this purpose that we are believers in God.

A question to consider. What could the Old Testament prophets have known about Christ ahead of time? What do you think they would have expected?