

In coming to chapter 23, we come to Job's response to Eliphaz, who if you recall, accused Job of great wickedness. Job's response is found in chapters 23-24, neither of which are a direct response to Eliphaz, but are what's called a soliloquy, which basically refers to speech comprised of a man's thoughts.

Thus, within chapters 23-24, Job isn't directly speaking to God or his friends, but largely to himself—he's thinking out loud. He's contemplating (or wrestling) with how God deals with the righteous (23) and wicked (24).

Chapter 23 is very interesting, because Job starts bitter and ends terrified, but in between these bookends, we find some of the most comforting and instructive words in the entire book. And we've seen this over and over again. At times he sounds off, and at other times he's spot on (all within the same chapter).

- I. Job's Complaint (vv1-7)
- II. Job's Commitment (vv8-12)
- III. Job's Confidence (vv13-17)

I. Job's Complaint (vv1-7)

1. Consider two things about Job's complaint: (1) it was bitter, v2—"Even today my complaint is bitter; my hand is listless because of my groaning."
2. This is important to keep in mind, because much of what Job says in vv3-7 can only be described as foolish.
3. Job's soul was overtaken with bitterness toward God—he felt a sense of resentment for the way God was treating him.
4. Now keep in mind—to be fair to Job—he's not actually telling God this, but this is what he was thinking (there is a real sense in which these two chapters are the words of a bitter man).
5. (2) It was against God (vv3-7)—though not expressly stated, we can guess the reason for his complaint.
6. He's likely complaining about the way he's been treated; by his three friends, but especially God Himself.
7. Remember, Job fully understood that God was sovereign over all things, and this includes good and bad.
8. V3—"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!"—he wanted to voice his complaint to God (before the Judge of the universe).
9. V4—"I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments"—that is, about the way he's been treated.
10. V5—"I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say to me."
11. In other words, Job claims to know exactly what to say—he believes he could effectively argue his case.
12. Job is actually using courtroom language and imagery—it's as if he was saying—he would serve as his own defense team.
13. V6—"Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take note of me"—He would have to listen.
14. V7—"There the upright could reason with Him, and I would be delivered forever from my Judge"—I would be able to convince Him of my innocence.
15. Now, keep in mind brethren, generally speaking, Job was innocent of what his friends accused him of.

16. Thus, the point of these first 7 verses is that, Job wished he could present his case before the judge of heaven.
17. Observation 1—We must be careful in our thoughts of God never to grow bitter or discontent with Him or His ways.
18. It's rather easy, especially in times of hardship or want, to grow bitter toward God and the way He's dealt with us.
19. Brethren, again as I've said on prior occasions—though Job isn't always a perfect example, he's an honest one.
20. Dear friends, it's very easy to grow bitter at a person, and it's even possible to grow bitter at God and His ways.
21. Observation 2—When we are misjudged by people, we should look to God as the just Judge of heaven.
22. While we should not imitate everything Job thought or said, we should imitate him in this—we need to take our case to God.
23. 1Pet.2:23—"when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."

II. Job's Commitment (vv8-12)

1. Having given vent to his complaint (vv1-7), Job affirms God's ways are mysterious, His testing beneficial, and His word necessary (wherein he restates his innocence).
2. (1) His ways are mysterious (vv8-9)—these verses basically mean—Job was unable to perceive how God works.
3. Regardless how or where he looked, he was not able to "perceive" or "behold" Him—God and His ways are beyond our grasp.
4. Several months ago, we learned that God was incomprehensible—He's beyond our grasp or comprehension.
5. Here we learn, that God is not only incomprehensible, but His ways (works) are also incomprehensible.
6. Man will never fully grasp God (He's beyond us), nor will man ever fully grasp His ways (they too are beyond us).
7. Isa.55:8-9—"For My thoughts are not your thoughts. Nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."
8. (2) His testing is beneficial, v10—"But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."
9. (a) But He knows the way that I take—this is contrast to vv8-9—while Job was unable to know God's ways, God knew His ways.
10. Job was far from understanding everything about God and His ways among men—he couldn't see them.
11. But God knew everything about Job and his ways—God knew everything that Job thought, said, and did.
12. (b) When He has tested me—the word rendered "tested" literally means "to try" "prove" or "examine."
13. It fundamentally means "to try, test, or examine something, in order to determine its quality or condition.
14. It here of course refers to Job himself—God was trying or testing Job to expose what was on the inside.

15. God obviously didn't need to learn this for Himself, but He was trying (testing) Job so that Job would know.
16. He brought these trials (hardships) upon Job to prove his character—to expose the condition of his heart.
17. Job is here confessing, while he may not understand all that God does, he ultimately knows the reason.
18. (c) I shall come forth as gold—that is, after God tested him, he would come forth as pure gold or metal.
19. Because most gold contains impurities, the gold would be melted in fire, so the dross would be exposed.
20. This was the way gold, or other precious metals, was purified—they were purified by or through fire.
21. Thus, when Job says he shall come forth as gold, he means, he shall come forth as pure God because of the testing.
22. (3) His word is necessary food (vv11-12)—here Job is basically restating his innocence to prior accusations.
23. Job describes God with human body parts—His steps (v11), His lips (v12), and His mouth (v12), all of which are figurative.
24. The first phrase "my foot has held fast to His steps" likely means, he held fast to God's character as made known in Scripture.
25. He followed the moral example of God as made known in His word—he refused to walk any other way.
26. Thus, Job asserts his commitment to persevere in the ways of God, regardless of his outward circumstances.
27. He conveys his resolve to follow God, obey God, and treasure His word, more than his necessary food.
28. Now again, if you remember last week I mentioned, Job had the word of God either through oral or written tradition, and/or through direct revelation (dreams and visions).
29. But either way—Job understood that God's word nourishes the soul just as physical food nourishes the body.
30. And so, in closing this section main heading, I want to point out three things about the testing of God.
31. (a) It's painful—this is obvious from Job's example—the means that God uses to test us is often painful.
32. Isa.48.10—"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."
33. While this statement originally referred to the nation of Israel (and her captivity), it perfectly describes Job.
34. He was being tested "in the furnace of affliction"—now, let me just say, every Christians is tested in the furnace of affliction.
35. Yes, it's true the degree and duration of that furnace varies (few if any are tested to the extent Job was).
36. But remember what I've said before—this is one of the main points of this book—Job's affliction was intentionally great.
37. That way, he serves as the perfect example for every person—no one can say, I'm suffering more than Job.
38. There are five main causes of his affliction—his children died, his possessions were lost, his wife was foolish, his friends were unhelpful, and God was distant.

39. Thus, from Job's example, think of the many causes of affliction—bereavement, the many difficulties that come from family life, financial issues, health issues, friends and extended family, and spiritual issues.
40. While Job had all of these in an intensified and exaggerated way, these are the some causes of our afflictions.
41. (b) It's beneficial—that is, testing is necessary for all Christians, because it results in us being purified.
42. Prov.17:3—"The refining pit is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts (refines or purifies hearts)."
43. All Christians are gold, but no Christian is pure gold—every Christian has a measure of remaining dross.
44. Again, this is illustrated in Job, who was described in the first chapter as blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.
45. Thus, if Job needed to be tested and purified, dear brethren, what does this say about us—we too need it.
46. (c) It's manageable—I wasn't sure how to work this point; what I mean is this—God provides the necessary grace to enable His people to endure this painful and yet necessary testing.
47. Look at Job—here's a man who's being testing in a way few Christians will ever—and yet, he holds fast to the word of God.
48. Brethren, this is the only thing that will get a poor tried and tested child of God through the fire and flame.

III. Job's Confidence (vv13-17)

1. Verses 13-17 form the conclusion to the previous verses and contain two parts—a blessed description (vv13-14) and a fearful response (vv15-17).
2. (1) A blessed description, v13—"But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires that He does."
3. Job says three related things about God: (a) He is unique—the Hebrew word rendered "unique" literally means "one."
4. Many translations have added the word "mind"—"but He is one mind"—but the phrase is literally "He is one."
5. (b) He does not change—it's very possible this phrase explains the former—because He is of one mind He never changes.
6. (c) He does as He wills—"and whatever His soul desires, that He does"—He does what He wants to.
7. V14—"For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him"—this is really a personal application of what he just says at the end of v13.
8. The word "appointed" refers to His eternal decree—before He created anything, He decreed what would happen.
9. Everything that comes to pass, was decreed from eternity—nothing happens randomly or by chance.
10. But notice, Job isn't content with a mere theological statement, but he applies this truth specifically to him.
11. V14—"For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him"—everything that happens to me was appointed for me.
12. Now, this is blessed truth—a truth that many Christians deny—a yet, it's a truth that Job clearly affirms.

13. And yet, as we shall see in vv15ff, it failed to bring him any true comfort but actually increased his confusion.
14. Why? Because remember what Job was enduring—remember what happened to Job in the earlier chapters.
15. His children died, his possessions taken, his health lost, his wife blasphemed, and his friends are accusing him of hypocrisy.
16. You see—Job understood that these were things God appointed for him—he knew this was among the things that He willed to do.
17. V14—"And whatever His soul desires, that He does"—God's soul desired that these things happen—this was Job's problem.
18. (2) A fearful response, v15—"Therefore I am terrified at His presence; when I consider this, I am afraid of Him."
19. At first this response may seem out of order, but keep in mind what I've just said—Job is wrestling with God's sovereignty.
20. The knowledge that God is sovereign over all of his suffering, produced in Job an awe and terror of God.
21. Now, as you know there's a proper fear of God that's commanded—this is a healthy fear that should be fostered.
22. But there's another kind of fear that's to be rejected, and that the kind of fear that drives us from God.
23. Christians have been delivered from this kind of fear; they should never be afraid of God or terrified at Him.
24. And this is what happened to Job—his heart was made weak because he was unable to understand why God was doing this.
25. Verse 16-17—"For God made my heart weak, and the Almighty terrifies me; because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness, and He did not hide deep darkness from my face."
26. Thus, by "darkness" is meant the suffering and pain that Job felt, and the confusion that came as a result.
27. It was the "darkness" of calamity and the feeling of abandonment—both by our friends and by our God.
28. Albert Barnes—"This feeling is very common among those who are called to pass through trials. They do not understand why they were reserved to these sufferings, and why God did not take them away before the billows of calamity rolled over them."
29. Christian fear, that fear that Scripture commands and commends, has two basic parts—a knowledge of God in all of His transcendent glory as reconciled to us in and through Christ.
30. And thus, when a person only has this first part, a knowledge of God in all His transcendent glory, without the other, as reconciled to us in Christ, the type of fear that Job has is the result.
31. I said before there's two kinds of fear—the one we are delivered from and the other we are given in Christ.
32. There is a fear of God that's driven out by love, and then there's a fear of God that brings us to Him in awe.
33. But then there's a third kind of fear, and it's a mixture of these two—it has good and bad elements in it.
34. This is the kind of fear that Job here has—as we read through these verses his response is a good one; and yet, there are somethings that he says that's not good or healthy (as we are never to be afraid of God).
35. Joseph Caryl—"His was a mixed fear; it has something of slavery in it, and it has some touch of sonship in it; there was much of the spirit of bondage in it; and something of the Spirit of adoption in it."

36. V15—"Therefore I am terrified at His presence; when I consider this, I am afraid"—He was terrified of God because he saw up-close the sovereign power of God.
37. He saw that God does what He wants, and that it was God's will or desire for Job to endure the furnace.
38. Thus, it was God's sovereignty and holiness that caused Job to be terrified and afraid at His presence.
39. And brethren, to know God as sovereign and holy is a very good thing—it's something we need to cultivate.
40. But here's the problem—along with a sight of God's majesty, Job also had a deep sense of his own weakness and sinfulness (and this was the cause of his response).
41. (a) He had a deep sense of his own weakness, v16—"For God made my heart weak, and the Almighty terrifies me."
42. And of course, it's a good thing to know our weakness, but only in so far as we look to Christ for strength.
43. Yes, it's true, I can never endure this furnace—I am too weak and frail—but God has promised to be with me.
44. This can be illustrated in the book of Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace—if you remember the three young Hebrews were placed in there because they refused to worship the gold image.
45. Dan.3:24-25—"Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Look! He answered, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."
46. Here's the point—yes, we are weak and frail, and yes, we would be easily consumed by the fire of affliction.
47. But God has given us a fourth man to endure the fire with us—to be with us—and ensure we will not be hurt.
48. (b) He had a deep sense of his own sinfulness—this is always the consequence of seeing God's glory.
49. Within this chapter Job beheld the glory of God's sovereign power, knowledge, wisdom, and ways (purposes).
50. And whenever a man beholds the glory of God in this way—he will always sense his own sinfulness.
51. This of course can be illustrated in Isaiah 6, when the prophet was afforded a sight of the LORD sitting on His throne.
52. Isa.6:5—"So I said, Wie is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."
53. In Luke chapter 5, Peter beheld a glimpse of Christ's glory as He performed a single miracle (by causing all the fish to swim into the net).
54. Verse 8 was his response—"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"
55. You see, in all three cases, Job, Isaiah, and Peter, there was a deep sense of their own humanity and sinfulness.
56. And again, this is a good thing providing we also have a deep sense of our forgiveness and acceptance in Christ.
57. Isa.6:7—"And he (the seraphim) touched my mouth with it (a live coal from the altar), and said, Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."
58. Luke 5:10—"Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men"—that is, I have made you a follower of Mine—you are My disciple—I have cleansed you.