

The Compass

Week 35

OT Readings: Job 23:1 – Ecclesiastes 3:22

NT Readings: 2 Cor. 1:12 – 6:13

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Job 28 is an important “pivot” in the book by introducing the question, “Where can wisdom be found?” The answer will come when God gives the final word in chapters 38-42.¹
- Elihu’s speeches (32-37) prepare the reader for God’s speaking in 38-41. Job 42 is Job’s confession followed by an epilogue in which God restores Job’s fortunes.
- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 presents the theme of the whole, “everything is meaningless,” likely meaning transitory or temporary.² What follows in the book is a repetition of this theme approached from different angles. See “How To Read Ecclesiastes.”³

New Testament

- While 2 Corinthians feels a bit random in the reading, there are some discernible themes and structure. Much of what Paul is saying is related to his own ministry (as opposed to some other itinerate preachers), his complex relationship with the Corinthians and the ever present reality of God’s work thru Christ (now by the Spirit) in the world as well as in his own life.
- See “How To Read 2 Corinthians” and Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, 333-339.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

2 Cor. 5:14-15. Christian history is filled with stories of incredible sacrifice and often suffering in the cause of Jesus. Several years ago I read a book with several short biographical sketches of 19th century missionaries to Africa.⁴ East Africa in the 19th century was called the “white man’s graveyard” because of the causality rate of those who went. Many died in the first year of service; many lost spouses and buried children, one after another. Yet they refused to give up. Like them, Paul’s life story reads as a litany of difficulty and adversity (2 Cor. 11:23-29). What kept them fully engaged and persevering when there was every apparent reason to quit? Love. We might read the Greek of 2 Cor. 5:14 this way, “For Christ’s love continually holds me in its grip.” Paul knows this love is true because of the cross (5:15) and he is continually held by its power. For this reason, says Paul, I fully give my life to Him, without qualification or reservation. It is more than simply the immensity of God’s love shown in the cross, though that is far more than we deserve! It is the *ever present* love, provided by the Spirit, which makes His love real to us *continually*. (Rom. 5:5, Eph. 3:14-21) It is the desire and heart of God to love us and make sure we know it and to make sure we know it *continually*. The whole of our life is simply but a response to this continual love. Is this your experience with Him? Did you know that He loves you continually and seeks for you to live in the “grip” of it?

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

2 Cor. 5:14-20. Christ’s love (5:14) is so powerful that it breaks down our pride and self-sufficiency and brings us to surrender ourselves fully to Him as an act of love in return (5:15); it leads us to see the world with new eyes (5:16), introduces us into new life (5:17) and summons us to re-present Him to a lost and broken world (5:18-20). Such is its power; no wonder it is what the kingdom of God is all about.

The perspective of the writer of Ecclesiastes awaited the full revelation of God’s love that could lead us fully into the “newness of life.” Paul’s life and his letters are the evidence that this new life, this new age of God’s historical purpose, seen in the cross and made real by the Spirit is in fact now *present*.

That the old is gone and the new come is no nice platitude, it is to be an experienced reality for those who belong to Jesus. God’s love and the Spirit’s power are with us to empower us to walk fully into the freedom, wholeness and liberty as God’s people. How?

The answer to how must begin with our confidence in God's character and our response daily, hourly, continually to His Spirit and to His truth found in the Bible. While we look for formulas, the Spirit constantly brings us back to God. Do you trust Him? Are you obeying Him in all things? Are you seeking Him and His truth in the Word? If so, then this promised new life will not simply be yours; it will *find you*, grip you, change you and fill you with its joy!

Difficult Question of the Week

Q. "What should be our take away from the book of Job?"⁵

Job raises the question we all ask, "How are we to understand evil in a world that God created for good and that He is still Lord over?" Job helps in several ways:

- The book's prologue sets the scene for a cosmic conflict in which God's purposes of the ages is challenged by the "adversary" (Satan). This adversary raises the "question of the ages," "Does anyone (specifically Job) love you for Who you really are or only for what they get from you?"⁶ The challenge could not go unanswered and God chooses Job, who loves God wholeheartedly, to champion God's cause. All of this unknown to the participants. We, too, live in a war zone, the cosmic conflict continues and the question of the ages remains for us to answer in our own hearts.
- The perspective of Job's friends and finally even Job himself are all shown to be faulty. Though they speak out of their own experience of reality, they lack the full perspective needed to make sense out of Job's tragedy. Job perseveres despite his faulty picture of reality and of God.⁷
- God's answer to Job (chapters 38-41) may seem fully satisfying to answer our need to understand our own suffering. Yet, it is the only answer that could be given and one that causes Job to repent (42:6); in the end it is the answer that helps us to keep trusting God. The answer is this: reality is vastly more complex than we could ever imagine and there are forces at work which we cannot see or fully understand. For Job who could not even grasp the immensity and complexity of the creation, how could he understand the complexities of the conflict of which he was part but could not see?
- The bottom line is this: we are at war and not with God! Evil in the world and cosmos is not from God, nor is he responsible for it. God's character is true and He can be trusted.⁸

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¹ I am following Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, 121-129.

² The Hebrew *hebel* ("meaningless" in NLT) can be translated in different ways. Literally it is "wisp of air, vapor." It is used in Ecclesiastes as a metaphor for human existence, but what is the author's intent? Fee and Stuart feel that the best understanding is the "passing/transitory or unsubstantial nature of things," thus fitting a primary theme from their point of view: life doesn't necessarily follow neat or tidy formulas or categories, thus how should we understand its purpose and how should we respond? (Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, 154-160)

³ Of all of the OT books, this one requires a consideration of its background and purpose. These are the words of a "Teacher," "a son of David, king in Jerusalem," one who has wrestled with the meaning in life. While it has been attributed to Solomon, his name is not attached and many scholars feel that a Solomon authorship is unlikely. It is important to read it as the words of this "Teacher" and not necessarily as God's point of view. While the conclusion of Ecclesiastes is not despair, it may shake our picture of life if we are committed to nice, orderly categories of reality. If it does, the Teacher will have accomplished his purpose.

⁴ J. T. Mueller, *Great Missionaries to Africa* (Zondervan, 2nd edition, 1941)

⁵ I am following Greg Boyd's perspective on Job as found in *Is God to Blame?* (IVP, 2003), 85-102. I highly recommend this book.

⁶ The significance of this question should not be missed. In effect, Satan calls into question the whole purpose of the creation of humanity – real, authentic love that is the basis for love relationship with God and others.

⁷ "Job passes his test not because his theology is correct but because he does not reject God *even when his theology tells him he should*. Despite his theological misconceptions and impious rantings, Job's heart remains honest with God." (Boyd, 94-95) This highlights the need for us to work hard at correcting our faulty pictures of God; God longs for us to know Him for Who He *really* is.

⁸ Boyd points us to the ultimate expression of God's heart and character – Jesus, God incarnate. Jesus kingdom warfare was warfare against evil and suffering. Surely God is not schizophrenic?