

OT Survey Class 6

Poetry

As we've been studying the Old Testament in our survey class we've looked at the Torah and seen the promises of God, his laws and the ongoing relationship between God and the Israelites. Today we are going to focus on what is known as the Books of Poetry. I've been excited about this class since Tom Roy started researching for it in the fall. He would talk to me about what he was learning and my heart would leap with excitement.

Anyone know how much of the Old Testament is poetry? 1/3. The importance of our understanding it is self-explanatory. Imagine if your spouse or best friend missed 1/3 of everything you told them. So why put 1/3 of the Old Testament in poetic language? Why not just say what you want to say?

For one, poetry is concise. Psalm 23 in the original language opens with just 4 words that we translate The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want- Think how much is in there.

More than that though I believe Tremper Longman III put it best: "It's all there because of its unique power to reach deep into our souls and move us in a way that largely bypasses the rational and speaks directly to our hearts."

No wonder these books tackle the biggest questions of life—How do we deal with suffering? How do we communicate with God? What is God like? What does he think of me? How should I live? Is there a purpose to this life? How do I have a marriage relationship? Poetry doesn't just relate a concept to our mind, but to evoke in the reader an accurate reproduction of experience—mind, emotion, and heart. It produces an image for the reader, but more than that it allows the reader to feel exactly what the poet felt through that image.

It is interesting to note that in Hebrew culture, the use of words to produce images was used commonly to help them understand ideas. In fact, it helps us understand everything Jesus did and the stories he told because they were designed to paint a picture: walking on water, feeding the 5000, and so on So does this apply to us today? Think of images in history like JFK being shot or 9-11, most of us will always remember the image of the twin towers burning. We also remember what we felt on that day. Well these books burn spiritual images in our hearts and minds.

Let's look at an example of this imagery in Psalms. Anyone know what Psalm part of the opening song comes from? Psalm 18. Let's look at v4-5 of Psalm 18. David has just been saved by God from Saul when he sings this. He could have just said, I was about to die when you saved me, but his words allow us to feel his desperation. The snares of death are personified and confront David. He is being wrapped in the cords of death or the grave and they are pulling on him. So when we sing I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised so shall I be saved by my enemies think of your most desperate time that God stepped in because that is what inspired David.

The other thing you see here is the key component of Hebrew poetry parallelism. Parallelism refers "to the

practice of balancing one thought or phrase by a corresponding thought or phrase containing approximately the same number of words, or at least a correspondence in ideas.” By repeating words, or ideas the poet furthers their ideas by making comparisons that allows us to know exactly what they mean.

Poetry is found throughout the Old Testament, but today we will focus on the five main books generally considered the Books of Poetry—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes are sometimes grouped as wisdom literature).

The Book of Job

What is the big lesson from Job? Is it about Satan, God, or our sin? While these are there it answers the question of why do we suffer and how should we deal with it. Also it helps us see how we should help others who are suffering. The challenge with suffering is when it is me it is real pain and heartache but how do I communicate that to you. When it you, I or we can feel uncomfortable with the person suffering. Our call is to be long-suffering with another human in pain. While some have fallen from God in their Job years/trials, Job is an example of wrestling with suffering and staying faithful.

The bible holds Job up with other spiritual heroes like Noah and Daniel in Ezekial 14:14. In James 5 :11 Job’s perseverance is an example to us and a reminder that God is compassionate and merciful even when we don’t see it.

Job was a righteous man who acted as the priest of the family 1:5. Am I taking this role with my family and praying for them and guiding them? Are you?

Next we realize that both God and Satan see our lives and character. Job 1:9-11. We also learn that Satan has limits and will always be below God. Job 1:12. Satan is our enemy, but we are our real enemy when lose sight that God is always in control.

Job was tested in life beyond anything he’d ever known. He loses possessions, family, ultimately his health. When we go through trying times, we really feel it. Whether grieving for the loss of a loved one, our own health problems and pains, we can struggle for a time. As a spiritual friend we need to have the quality of a long suffering friend, patient, and compassionate, to see our friend returned to spiritual strength. Three of Job’s friends further help to discourage Job by blaming his suffering on sin.

Life is not always fair or it may seem that way. There is pain, accidents, hurts from our sin and we may be victims of others’ sin. Since the dawn of time men have questioned how a good God could make a world like this. Job deals with this with powerful and brilliant discussion. In Job 38-41 we are given a picture of God’s sovereignty that is clear. You can spend months thinking about these ideas. Just as an example look at Job 38:8-11. When you walk along the beach do you ever ponder why the waves stop where they do? God decided that. If you are a scientist and think about the moon and gravitational pull you should be more amazed that God set that up.

The central theme is not about suffering, but what Job learns through his suffering, the sovereignty of God over all creation. Job 42:1-6. He may never understand everything, but through suffering Job sees God and when he sees God he no longer asks why but trusts in the Lord. In the end, we may never understand what we go through, but we have the same decision to make, surrender to a Holy God in humility or live without hope for anything more than what we see or feel.

We also have something Job didn't. In Hebrews 4:14-16 we are told we have Jesus who understands everything we go through. Jesus suffered on the cross and withstood Satan's temptations. Our hope rests in his resurrection. Like Job we need to draw near to God.

On Job's wife, (curse God and Die) that statement should be looked at as an indication of the intensity of the situation. Let's put our family in their place and ask ourselves not if but when was it that a day turned stressful for our family or a family member caused you to be annoyed with them and we just couldn't handle the situation with poise. I believe Job lost his family and could handle it spiritually where most if not all of us would not be able to handle all he did. Let's also be sober to the fact that some families have experienced horrible crimes like recently murder/suicides, rape, or in other war torn countries horrible events and we may convert some of them and they need a lot of grace and patience

From Job's friends we learn a couple of things. Job's three friends gave essentially the same answer: All suffering is due to sin. Elihu, however, declared that suffering is often the means of purifying the righteous. God's purpose, therefore, was to strip away all of Job's self-righteousness and to bring him to the place of complete trust in Him. We do not always suffer because of our own sin.

1. They were loyal and sincere spending days with Job. Are we that loyal
2. They ran out of compassion, we need to be long-suffering with one-another, Col 1:11, Eph 4:1-2, ps 119:165, James 1:4, 2 Peter 3:9, sometimes we need patience which uses God's timing to get us through a rough spot and Advice per se, may not be useful.
3. We should not look down on them, who of us would sit for a week with a brother in the church, but must learn from their mistakes.

Thinking how Job's friends should have been even more patient, Patience: Long-suffering is also be referred to as patience. Patience is being mild, gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The real test of patience is not in waiting, but in how one acts while he or she is waiting. A person who has developed patience will be able to put up with things without losing his or her temper. Scripture tells us in

James 1:4

"But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting (lacking) nothing."

Job showed us why we suffer and how to handle it and help others. Psalms helps us to grow closer to God and understand him better. Ephesians 5:19-20 tells us to speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We need to meditate on them to be able to do this. In Psalms you will find answers to questions like Who am I? Why am I here? (Psalm 8) Is my life valuable (Psalm 139) Why do good things happen to bad people? (Psalm 73) How can I be happy (Psalm 1). They show us how to worship God, magnify the Master, to present

your plans and feelings to God and how to journal our journey. We can connect to the psalmists in all of our emotions.

Psalms is the largest book of the bible and Psalm 119 alone is 176 verses and larger than books like Obadiah, Haggai, Jude, 2 & 3 John. Psalms along with Proverbs is one of the most read books by non-Christians from the bible.

We see men like David, an incredible spiritual man you will learn even more about in next week's class deal with pain and struggles. Look in Psalm 13:1-2. David fought Goliath the 9' giant yet you see his agony and pain. Five questions show his pain and struggles with enemies. Have you ever had an enemy, someone who frustrates you maybe drives you mad, like a tough boss, or co-worker? Or like David, whose son even tried to kill him, do you have pain because of a family member? David can relate and he was transparent with God in his pain, sin, joys and love for God.

Many of his Psalms that started out with pain ended like this in v 5-6. We see how David moves from doubt to trust by going to his creator. I know I want to learn more to live like this in my walk with God.

While Psalms tell us how to communicate and know God, Proverbs give us the wisdom on how to live life successfully. Proverbs tells us very clearly its purpose in Proverbs 1:2. Proverbs lays foundation of the Christian Godly life, As Derek Kidner puts it, Proverbs is Scripture's effort to put godliness in working clothes. It is really Christianity 101, as a matter of fact a non-believer can apply this wisdom to his life and succeed. Note also that many themes in business or self help books are based on proverbs and other biblical books. Most of it was written by Solomon who we know from 1 Kings 4:34 had wisdom sought after by people and kings from around the world. In 2 weeks, you will learn more about him.

You can hear the passion and see his heart to help his and I would say clearly all our teens, young adult children. Over and over lines like "Listen my son" "My son if you accept my words" over and over pleading, imparting wisdom with the heart to protect his children from a miserable life of sin and folly. The lessons for a Godly life are exactly the same today as 3,000 years ago. If a young adult/teen can start their life out in submission to Solomon's/God's wisdom, well can you think of anything better for their future?

Think of a list of topics covered, we all need to listen to the wisdom in proverbs. Wisdom, Folly, Adultery, broken spirit (depression), evil/hatred, nature of God, drinking, the tongue, poverty/wealth, industry/laziness, fantasies, a good name, generosity/greed, home life, friendships, woman's noble character and more.

Let's look at Wisdom from Ecclesiastes.

- 1:7 fear of the Lord, is the starting line. Fools despise wisdom and discipline
- 1:8 Listening to instructions from your parents are a foundation on the path to gaining wisdom. How many of us despise any family issues would have been saved from pain had we listened to our parents.
- 3:3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of

your heart.

- 3:5 Trust in the Lord
- 3:11 used in Hebrews 12, My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.
- 3:19 By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; if we can attain wisdom we can have access to a fundamental element of Godliness.

Let's look at how poetic language drives home the point in Proverbs. Before I start is there any man here who would let me light his lap on fire?

Look in Proverbs 6:26-29. Adultery takes everything from you. It is always found out. Adultery is one of the themes continually addressed in proverbs.

(We have close brothers who have left their wives and wives who have left their husbands, so let's not think this is outside the church)

The wisdom of proverbs is invaluable, yet Ecclesiastes sobers us to the limits of anything we pursue in this world. To fully understand the book it is important to grasp the meaning of the word meaningless. Meaningless (hebel) is more like a mist, Fleeting, temporary, useless. However one translates *hebel*, the word evokes a realistic view of life. Life is but a brief, fleeting moment; humans cannot fully grasp it.

Solomon, in v1:12 -2:12 in what could sound like bragging is really trying to paint a picture from his perspective as the most powerful and wisest man of his time in trying to understand life itself. He has given us so much in candor and humility when you consider he is really pleading with us to see the futility of the things of this world vs the preciousness of God and his wisdom for us.

This is a very rich and powerful book packed with wisdom. As a matter of fact it touches on some areas talked about in proverbs, reinforcing concepts of wisdom:

Ecclesiastes 7:12

Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this : that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

Amen to that.....

Also themes of immorality, folly, errors of a fool and more. It reminds us of the joy that comes from accepting our life and our work as a gift from God in Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, but in the end it points to the meaninglessness of all of life. These ideas are summed up in a wonderful poem on Aging and Death in Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8 that I recommend studying. The core idea of this book is found in its conclusion. Look at Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. Life comes down to God and judgment. Like Jesus, Solomon points us to God and our salvation as the only things that matter in this life. Take an inventory of your life. Does where you put your energy reflect what really matters about life? If you are not right with God or not being obedient to him do not delay because everything you are putting in front of him is meaningless. Solomon already figured it out for you.

The last book we will look at today is also written by Solomon—

Song of Songs.

The Song of Solomon perhaps was written in a theatrical style. It is thought that it was originally composed to be performed before an audience. Since it is called a song, we could say perhaps it was an ancient musical.

Scholars have varying opinions regarding the work being an allegory of Christ's love for the church since 5:25-32 talks about marriage as compared to Christ and the Church and our desire to be united with God in heaven which marriage is and relationship are commonly used as a metaphor for throughout the Old Testament. Some have moved away from this and look at it as solely an allegory on marriage and the passions and purity of marriage. The reason some moved away from this is there are points in the song where Jesus would be shown the way by the church. I'm not going to decide this debate this morning, as there is much written about it for you to explore.

The Song of Songs holds a special place in the history of the church and synagogue. By A.D. 1200 over 100 commentaries had been written on the book. The Song has generated more exposition than any other biblical book, except for Genesis and Psalms.¹ Origen alone wrote ten volumes of commentaries on the Song.² Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) preached eighty-six sermons and only got to the beginning of chapter 3!

We do know that it is *poetry* intended to evoke a mood in which love is celebrated in the appropriate context. It is *poetry* that creates an atmosphere of mutual respect, intimacy, and exclusivity. From an intertextual reading one can conclude that loving God is inseparable from loving one's neighbor. The more one understands and lives out the covenant relationship of marriage, the better one understands the human and divine relationship. Today we will look at this book in the context of marriage.

The song starts out with "*Let him kiss me*", it gets to the point right away. It's about passion with a capital "P", and purity. This is a song of desire and dreams of intimacy but they remain pure until marriage. If there was ever any doubt about the role of Biblical woman in passion and choosing and desiring a man it is put to rest here as the woman was clearly excited about the man she desired.

But what if the wisest man of all penned the most sensual poem of all to help us in our marriages, or to desire one true soul mate in your life instead of having many relationships. The woman/bride was noble in character and a great example for us all, she is a hero. As a matter of fact Solomon never had a one true, love a soulmate to share his life with. As in *Ephesians 5:25-32* a powerful godly marriage is an example of Christ's love for the church.

As a matter of fact some non Christians look at marriages in churches and do not see anything better than the world. Some groups have the same exact divorce rate as society. We need to make sure this is a continual priority in our fellowship so our marriages are a light to the world.

Song of Songs 2:15 talks about the traps or foxes that destroy our marriages. When a fox gets loose in a vineyard it destroys everything. They sneak in quickly and unexpectedly. This image is a reminder that we all need to guard against these. We can apply this further to the church as well.

Song of Songs 3:5 gives a key piece of advice. There is wisdom combined with beautiful imagery of gazelles and does that give a picture of everything being right with the world in all innocence and purity. This is very much

the same heart Solomon had when giving instructions to his son on immorality and Ecclesiastes another book of wisdom is also repeating the theme. We need to take this serious if the wisest man in the world is repeating himself over and over.

When you start a relationship in the typical worldly way, you miss out on the natural courting and falling in love, dreaming about the other person. You miss planning your life from the beginning, house, kids etc. The world has filled us with no greater lie than that waiting is foolish. I beg of our young people and singles to avoid the pain of this mistake. The pleasure is meaningless and the gift on the other side is so worth it.

This book deals with the challenges of our shames, the beauty of oneness in our relationship, and the passion of intimacy. Song of Songs 7:11-13 shows this passion. The theme is clear we are to wait until marriage, but then it is time to fully enjoy the pleasures and intimacies God has set before us.

I hope what you have seen today is how our God chose to speak to us not just intellectually, but directly to our souls. He gives us the answers to life's biggest questions and in the end it all points directly to Him. Through Jesus we can have the relationship and salvation. So next week we will come back to the story of how God kept his promise to Abraham, Jacob and Judah through a king named David.