

A call to make wise decisions

Job 31:1-40

Friends if you have recently found yourself in a job interview,
then you'll have a fresh appreciation of what it means
to articulate your achievements.

The first step is to get your CV together,
making sure you list the positive things that an employer might want to hear.
Then you prepare for the interview,
making sure you have the words to convince others of your worth.

These are the things we need to do
if we want to get on the front foot and sell ourselves a little bit

But it can be an awkward process for many people, can't it?
We hate *boasters* and *tall poppies* and we don't want to sound like one,
And so we find ourselves trying to achieve this delicate balance
between not sounding arrogant and also making sure we stay in contention!

But this is what searching for a job is like, isn't it?
It's a process where, at some level,
we outline our experience and achievements.

Now, in the chapter that we've just had read out to us,
the OT character of Job is doing a similar thing.
In this chapter he's rattling off a list of his successes,
not in the sense of his work achievements
but in the sense of his *moral* achievements.

And the reason for this *ethical resume*, as it were,
is because he's defending his moral character.
Job has been accused by his friends of harboring some *secret sins*,
And that it's these secret sins that is the reason for Job's suffering.
But all throughout the book Job has insisted
that nothing could be further from the truth.

And in this, Job's final speech,
he rounds off his own defense with a very impressive resume
of how God's righteousness has been at work in his life.

Basically the evidence consists in Job making a string of wise choices,
Throughout his life Job has made wise choices *about sex*,
he's made wise choices *about the use of power*,
And he's made wise choices *about money*

And this trail of good decisions amounts to evidence that he *is in fact* a man of faith,
that he *is* a man who is walking in reverence and trust before God,
and not in deep and shameful hypocrisy - which is what his friends suggest.

Now, I appreciate that any talk of moral achievements is fraught with danger,
because who among us has a clean record? No-one!
And some of us might be painfully aware of how very poor our own resume is.
But stick with us because we do finish on a note of grace
for those of us who are all too mindful of our own failures in life.

Yet it remains true that God calls us to holy living.
Job knew this and he managed to respond to this call with some success.
Can we write as good a resume as Job,
or are there things we need to seek God's forgiveness over?
That's the question I'd like us to ask as we think about Job 31.

Let's have a look at the first of our three areas.
What kind of decisions has Job made *with regard to sex*?
It seems to me that he's made two decisions here:
a decision not to *look*, and a decision not to *lurk*

Ch 31.1 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a virgin.
According to the Bible,
God-honoring sexuality starts well before you reach the bedroom.
Some people might live with the philosophy "You can look but don't touch!"
But the Bible paints a more holistic picture of our sexuality;
what happens in you mind is just as important
as what happens in other parts of your body.
What does Jesus say in Matthew 5:28?
I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

What exactly is the problem with a lustful look?
I suggest there are a couple of things we ought to consider.
First of all it's no way to love your neighbor.

We men have no idea what it's like
to be a woman who is regularly subjected to second glances
and sometimes leery stares
from people who are much bigger and stronger than ourselves.

My eyes were opened to what this must be like
when I was waiting for a bus one evening during rush hour.
The bus was a long time in coming,
and so I was watching the traffic as it slowly crawled past the bus stop.
I noticed one car full of young men

who were peering out the window at us, laughing and joking to one another.
Then another car came with two older men who did the same thing,
pointing at the bus stop and making comments to one another,
then a man on his own, just staring at the bus stop.
I thought to myself, "What on earth are they all looking at?"
And then I realized that waiting with me at the bus stop was a young woman,
perhaps in her early twenties,
becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the attention she was receiving.

Gentlemen, you are in no way serving our sisters by your lustful looks and glances.
Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are paying them a compliment;
all you are doing is making them feel unsafe.

And looking at lustfully at a computer screen is not any better.
It's not loving towards the people on the screen
who are often taken advantage of in the production of pornography,
Nor is it loving towards the people in your household.

And pornography has another danger in that it trains you to sin on a larger scale.
This is the other issue with looking; not only is it unloving
but it also compromises your ability to resist further temptations;
indulge yourself with some unhelpful looking
and the physical sins will soon follow.

Perhaps the best piece of youth ministry I received as a teenager
was the off-the-cuff remark from our Moore College student minister at the
time who said that "*if you start looking at porn you'll ruin your sex life as an
adult*". And secular studies have shown that he is right.
Porn teaches us to have unrealistic expectations of real-life sex.
And so sex with the one person is soon not enough,
or the type of sex that our spouse is comfortable with is not enough
and so we go looking elsewhere
or we force something upon our spouses that they haven't asked for.

The Bible seems to understand the eyes as a gateway,
what you spend time looking at will have further ramifications,
so we must be guarding this gateway carefully.

And not only should we be guarding our eyes,
we must also be guarding our physical location.
Job uses a great image in v9; He speaks about not lurking at his neighbour's door.
It's a picture of someone hanging around a place where they shouldn't be.
Hanging around, hoping to just bump into that handsome neighbor
Lurking near the far office hoping to cross-paths with the attractive colleague.

Which locations might lead you into temptation?

It might be a workplace, it might be a workgroup, depending who's there.
Maybe it's the isolated computer or TV screen.

What are the situations that leave you vulnerable?

I heard another preacher speak about
how we ought to be mindful of when we are hungry, and when we are tired.
Locations can be a stumbling block, as can certain situations.

And so Job makes a decision;

a wise decision to take *proactive steps* to protect his sexual purity.
No looking, no lurking, and so in the end, there's no loss of integrity.

And that's only one area of life!

What else does Job have on his resume here?
Well, he's also made good choices about *his use of power*.
Power can be a great blessing when it is used for good,
but a terrible curse when it's abused.

How responsible has Job been with his power? He says that he's used it pretty well.

Verse 13 If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they
had a grievance against me, ¹⁴what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer
when called to account?

We see here that for all his righteousness, Job isn't perfect.

Righteousness is not the same as being perfect
He admits that some people have had grievances with him
The key is in how he responds:
Will he correct any oversight on his behalf?
will he make sure his workers get their fair share of what is owed?

This is a problem that we are still facing in today's society.

I've noticed in recent months a number of news articles
about companies that have been caught underpaying their employees.
One high profile case involved the restaurants owned by George Calombaris,
one of the Masterchef judges. \$2.6 million dollars in unpaid wages!
To his credit, George has admitted the mistake and is rectifying the situation.

It's one area where the media and the Bible are on the same page.

There may be huge differences when it comes to how we think about sex,
But there is some common ground when it comes to industrial relations
Like the media, God is appalled by bosses who rip-off their staff.

You may or may not be a boss (or have been a boss)

but think about the people you have authority over.
Think about the people you pay to do a job,
be it a tradesperson or someone in the service industry.

Are you happy to pay them a proper wage for a job well done?
 Think about the people whom you think are below your own station in life.
 How do you treat them? How do you respond to their grievances?
 Do you just blow them off?
 Do you tell yourself *"I'll just run with things the way I want to!"*

Job gives us a good reason not be so dismissive of those who are underneath us.

Verse 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them?
 Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

Even though we have different responsibilities,
 on one level we are all still the same.
 That one person is a leader and another is a follower
 doesn't mean there's any difference in the respect that is due to each
because God created both of them.

In fact, you could say that those on the bottom are worthy of more respect,
 that's if we believe in the model that Jesus set before us,
 a model of servant leadership.

So here's a wise decision that's built on our understanding of God and Christ:
See those whom you are leading as equals in the eyes of God.
 God wants you to respect his handiwork,
 particularly the dignity that all humans have.

This leads to our third and final decision from Job,
 He's made wise decisions regarding the use of his *money and resources*.

In verse 16 we read that Job knows it would be a sin to deny the desires of the poor
 V17 It would be a sin for Job to have kept his bread for himself,
 not sharing it with the fatherless.
 That's a great image, isn't it? keeping your bread to yourself.

If you've ever observed young children in childcare or in a playgroup
 you'll know they sit on the floor greedily gathering toys to themselves.
 We adults can do that too, just that our toys and desirables are much bigger.
 But the Bible's expectation is that we become *sharers* of what we have,
 not simply greedy hoarders of what we have.

In the NT, Paul refers to greed as a form of idol worship;
 Greed is when we trust in money instead of God.
 And Job says much the same thing v 24-28
 If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' ²⁵if I have rejoiced
 over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, ²⁶if I have regarded the sun in its
 radiance or the moon moving in splendor, ²⁷so that my heart was secretly enticed and my
 hand offered them a kiss of homage, ²⁸then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would
 have been unfaithful to God on high.

Job likens the love of money as akin to the worship of the sun or moon,
 And such worship is a sin to be judged, Job says.
 But, if we know that it is God who has us and is with us,
 then we can open up that closed fist,
 safe in the knowledge that things aren't going to fall apart if we start sharing.

Have a think about what it is that you are gathering to yourself.
 What percentage of your budget is earmarked for others?
 Have a think about what you've got piling up in your house...
 I've just removed 100 books from my theological library
 so that Penny and Ben can give them to needy students in Namibia.
 Are you stockpiling clothes?
 Could you make a few more donations into our clothing bin?
 That would be an action that Job himself would approve of,
 Because, according to vs 19-20, it would be a sin for him to see someone
 perishing for a lack of clothing,
 or for Job to not warm them with the fleece from his sheep.

But job decided that he wouldn't remain unmoved by peoples need,
 that he would be willing to share from what he'd been granted,
 and it's a decision that we should consider as well.

Feeling overwhelmed?
 That's the danger of reading other people's resumes;
 you become aware of all your shortcomings.

So I want to finish with a word of grace:

1 Corinthians 6.9-11

Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you **were**. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Failure in these areas can be forgiven and will be forgiven.
 Bad choices need not stain our record forever;
 God's wants to forgive us.

But we should also recognise that the same power who washes us clean,
 —the power of the Holy Spirit—
 His is also a power that can help us make ground in these areas.
 So may the Spirit of God help us to not only develop the patient faith of Job,
 But also his active obedient righteousness.
 Amen.