PROPER JOB

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Job is not a theoretical exercise in theodicy. It is about real life. It does not give a simple answer, because there are no simple answers. However, it does point to the importance of a transformative encounter with Yahweh.
Category: Observations

When I was in my early teens, my mother tried to get me interested in reading the Bible by suggesting I read the book of Job; "it's a great story", she said. So, I did as I was told and started reading. For once my mam was right, Job was a great story - at least for the first couple of chapters. Somewhere around chapter 4 I gave in and went back to Lord of the Rings or some science fiction.

Earlier this week, I attended a day long study session on Job at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, led by my friend Tim Davy who has just completed his PhD on the book. I'm still not entirely convinced that Job is a "great story", but I do have a deeper respect for the book. Here are a few random thoughts culled from the study day.

Job is a Wonderful Book: Job is a deeply moving book which grapples with the hardest questions that human beings face. It doesn't shy away from human suffering and doesn't offer glib answers. It isn't an easy read, but it doesn't cover an easy subject. It is deeply relevant to all of humanity, because all of us will eventually have to face up with the issues that it raises.

Job is a Necessary Book: in Job 1:9, the accuser questionsÂ whether Job simply worships God for what he gets out of it. In other words, do human beings worship God because he is worth it, or do they worship him in order to get something? Do we have to be bribed before we will turn to God? This question cuts to the root of the whole story of the Bible. If human beings only honour God out of self-interest then the notion of God's unconditional love and grace is undermined. If the accuser is right, then the mission of God is all for nothing. The question that Job deals with is a make or break one in the Biblical narrative. It doesn't move the story on as such, but without it the story would be empty.

Job is a Hopeful Book: there are pages upon pages of tight argumentÂ about the nature and cause of suffering. No doubt the author had debated this issue long into the night with his friends and the book of Job represents a pinnacle of human reasoning with regard to this deep issue. However, all of the argument and discussion ultimately leads nowhere and Job is no better off when all his friends have had their say. The answer to Job's questions does not lie in reasoned argument or fine words, it lies in an encounter with the living God.