

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Job 42:1-6,10-17

NRSV

Early in the book, Job was deprived of all his worldly possessions, his children, and his health – as tests to determine whether he really is a person of great integrity and fidelity to God. He has wondered why misfortune has happened to him: surely punishment is for the ungodly, not for him. Three friends have come to comfort him; they have argued that he must have lived contrary to God's ways to suffer the way he has. God has met him and has asked: *who are you to doubt my plans and my works?* Job has come to realize that neither he nor his friends understand the world, so he has no grounds for complaint against God. God has even invited Job to replace him as divine king and manager of the world, but it is a safe offer, because Job cannot and will not accept it.

Now Job answers: he acknowledges God's "purpose" (v. 2). God has taught him a lesson. Job acknowledges God's sovereignty. In vv. 3a & 4, he quotes God's words spoken earlier. He admits his ignorance (v. 3b). He has long had faith in God; this has now been replaced by *seeing* (and experiencing) God. (V. 6 is incomplete in the Hebrew. Because v. 7 implies that Job is godly, "repent" here is not repentance of sins, it may mean *approach you in awe*.) It is sufficient that God has come to him; he seeks no explanation of his suffering. In a turnabout, God is angry with Eliphaz and the other friends for their ungodliness (v. 7); he orders them to ask Job to intercede on their behalf (v. 8); God accepts Job's prayer for them (v. 9). The ancient story begun in 1:1-2:13 now continues. All Job has lost is restored to him, some in double measure. He is no longer shunned by his relatives (v. 11). Whether his health is restored is not mentioned. To ancient people, possessions and progeny indicated God's favour: God loves him even more dearly. Gifts are God's to give. Their absence or withdrawal is hard for a virtuous person to accept.

Psalm 34:1-8,(19-22)

NRSV

The psalmist blesses God continually for what he has done for him: God heard him, and restored him to a peaceful life (vv. 4, 6). May he be an example for the "humble" (v. 2, the dedicated, committed believers in God, who hence have a claim on God's help). God protects ("the angel of the LORD ...", v. 7) those who hold him in proper respect ("fear") and saves them. Come to understand ("taste and see", v. 8) that God is ultimate goodness! (v. 8) The godly are his "holy ones" (v. 9), those set apart for him; they lack nothing (v. 10). Doing good, abstaining from evil deeds, seeking and working for peace is God's way (v. 14). It leads to a rich, long life. God always hears the pleas of the godly when they are in need physically and spiritually (vv. 17-18); when they suffer, he "rescues them" (v. 19). Though they will suffer, they will be restored to health (v. 20). But he is "against

evildoers" (v. 16), causing them to be forgotten when they die. At the Last Day, the ungodly (who hate the godly) will be damned but God will liberate those who trust in him.

Hebrews 7:23-28

NRSV

The author has written: "we have a great high priest" (4:14). He asks: "If perfection [the completion of God's plan of salvation] had been attainable through the ... [Temple] priesthood" (v. 11) why would there be need to speak of another priest? The levitical priests were under Mosaic law, but "there is ... the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God" (v. 19). Jesus, the high priest, unlike others, "became a priest with an [divine] oath" (v. 21). Psalm 110:4, the author asserts, is about Christ: "The Lord has sworn ... 'You are a priest for ever'", so "Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better [new] covenant." (v. 22).

Platonism distinguished between (1) a single, eternal ideal of earthly things and (2) multiple transitory copies of the ideal on earth. In vv. 23-24, the author sees "former [Temple] priests" as transitory (because individual high priests died) and Jesus as the eternal ideal ("he continues forever", v. 24). So "for all time" (v. 25) Jesus is the way to God and to salvation for those who are godly because he (as priest) lives to plead with God on their behalf ("intercession"). Under Mosaic law, priests subject to "weakness" (v. 28, sin) were appointed without divine oath, but "a Son" has been appointed, by God's "oath", superceding the Law, a "perfect" (ideal) priest forever. Vv. 26-27 list Christ's qualities. He has no need to sacrifice continually for his own sins and those of others (as, the author asserts, earthly high priests did) for he is "separated from sinners, and exalted" (v. 26), i.e. with the Father; in dying, he offered sacrifice "once for all" (v. 27) for our sins.

Mark 10:46-52

NRSV

Jesus and his disciples are now nearing the end of their journey from Caesarea Philippi (in the north) to Jerusalem: "Jericho" is some 25 km (15 miles) from Jerusalem. We have seen the disciples' misunderstanding and blindness to Jesus' message. Mark has told us of the healing of an unnamed blind man (8:22-26), one who is healed gradually.

Here Mark gives tells us the name of this "blind beggar". Bartimaeus makes a politically charged statement: Jesus is "Son of David" (v. 47), King of the Jews, and Messiah. Elsewhere, Jesus orders silence on the matter, but not here: his time is approaching. For the first time, a sane person immediately proclaims Jesus' true identity. The "cloak" (v. 50, garment) Bartimaeus throws off is probably the cloth he uses to receive handouts; in Mark, *garments* often indicate the *old order*, so Bartimaeus has accepted the new. Jesus' question in v. 51 is the one he asked James and John when they sought status in the kingdom (10:36), but Bartimaeus' approach is different: he comes in humility ("My teacher", v. 51). Jesus simply tells him that his "faith", (v. 52, his receptivity of God's healing word), "has made you well" (also meaning *has saved you from impending destruction*). Bartimaeus is cured immediately and becomes a follower of Jesus ("the way").