

Series: Job
Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 17th July, 2011

Scripture: Job 2&3

INTRODUCTION (151)

Read [Job 2:11-18](#)

Okay, if you missed the first sermon in Job let me catch you up. We are only two chapters in, but a lot happened in those two chapters. Job is a great man, a rich man, a family man, well respected and godly. Calamity befalls him: he loses all his worldly wealth, and then also his ten children. A second round of calamity is more personal – his body is covered in oozing pussy sores and he finds himself on the hospital bed of the city dump; his only comfort is scraping his sores with broken pottery.

This book is great because it forces us to ask some really hard questions about really hard things in our lives... and that is good! The book of Job is one of the most conspicuous in the Bible. It deals directly with a questions that plagues many people in this life – if not directly, then indirectly. His own man 'Job' has become synonymous with suffering and loss. The question is simple: what are we to make of the suffering that we face in this life? And how is God involved in my suffering? What are you facing at the moment? How will/are you getting through? Is there hope? What is your hope? Is it sufficient?

In chapter 1 and 2 we saw that God was in control – God knows it, Satan knows it and Job knows it. He is in control of good and evil, yet he is never to blame for evil, nor does he take any pleasure in evil.

Today we are going to look at the responses to and the reasons for suffering

JOB'S SYMPATHISERS

The end of chapter 2 in meant to reinforce the reality of Job's suffering for us. His friends hardly recognise him – his body is so distorted and deformed by these 'evil boils'. His friends say nothing for seven days (which is the set time for Jewish mourning). They have the ministry of presence – they are just there.

HERE IS THE POINT: (1) Don't avoid people who are going through difficult times. In fact these guys have a chat and say – our friend needs us, let's go! They drop everything and go – the ministry of presence. (2) You don't have to say anything – as if you need to make everything better. That's just megalomaniacal.

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If you know someone who is terminally ill (for example) then not going because you don't know what to say is not excuse: Job's three friends were doing a brilliant job until they opened their mouths. *We've all been there – you're sitting with someone who is going through really rough time. You think, 'this silence is killing me so you whip out a comfort line like, 'everything's going to be alright'. And as you say it you realise how ridiculous it is!*

The two most obvious ways in which people respond to hardship is (1) depression, and (2) venting to God.

RESPONSE: DEPRESSION – WAS JOB SINNING?

Read [Job 3:1-10](#)

We normally celebrate our birthdays – throw a party, maybe receive a couple of gifts! But all Job wants is to eradicate from history the day he was born. He wishes that he were uncreated, that the work that God did in giving him life was reversed. He hits the same issue from 13 different angles. He finds 13 ways to say I wish I was never born – that's pretty creative! Job wants his parents to have no joy in his birth, for God to not care, for darkness to swallow the day, and to have a 364 day year. Why? Verse 10 tells us that if he had not been born then he would not have been subject to this calamity in his life.

Question: is this a sin? He is depressed (not a clinical diagnosis); he had hit rock bottom. And maybe you can relate to this – that you wish you were dead, because then you would have some relief from the reality of what your facing in life. Your hardship may not be as severe as Jobs – but perhaps you've put your hands in your head in utter despair and said, 'no more!' Your family, work, personal life, financial – how are you suffering at the moment?

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Is it a sin to be depressed, to reach rock bottom, to wish you were dead? No, as long as that is not where you stay, as long as it is not all that you wish. As long as it is a passing longing and not a worldview! To adopt it as a worldview is to deny God's gift of life, and therefore God himself – that is a sin. But if, because of the effects of sin, you are burdened and distressed and unbalanced, BUT you don't blame or correct God then that is not sin.

RESPONSE: PRAYER – CAN WE VENT TO GOD?

Read [Job 3:11-26](#)

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The next question is: should we vent to God? Chapter 3 is not so spoken so much to his friends, but it is a prayer to God. In this chapter we see that Job's actions are more mixed than in chapters 1 and 2. He has started to process what has happened. It is one thing to receive the news and throw yourself on God, but now he is busy living with the reality of his life as it now is. Not more sacrifices for the children, no reports about his sheep and camels and oxen and donkeys. It is another thing to not see your children then next day, and the next day, and the next day, and never!

His faith in God is being tested. And you can feel in the passage the turmoil within the man, the violence of his feelings, the battle he is having – it's raw and real! But you notice that Job does not (yet) cross over into blaming God.

Here is the tension – can I be honest with God about how I am feeling? Our prayers to God should be honest because there is nothing that we can hide from God anyway. God is all-power and all-knowing – so there is no point in pretending. But that does not mean that we should allow our feelings to run away into blaming God or correcting God, or demanding answers. IOW: just because you're honestly blaming God doesn't make it okay.

We should confess our honest desire to blame God, the temptation that we have to demand answers from him. It's the difference between praying: 'this is unfair God', and 'Lord I am tempted to blame you for this evil, but I know you are good and will uphold me – help me in my unbelief'

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Mark Dever: 'we pray as we want to be even as we confess what we are'. So our prayers should be honest, but also humble; real, but confessing our weaknesses. Tell God your struggles but don't conclude he is wrong!

REASON: IS THIS PUNISHMENT?

Job has been asking 'Why?' (2:11, 20, 23) and his friends are happy to try and give an answer. I want to look at the main reason they give: basically they say "you've sinned and upset God in some way and so he dropped a bomb on you." They say, "There is no way that God would allow all this if you didn't mess up really badly in some way".

Eliphaz

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Job 4:7-9 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? 8 As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. 9 At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.

Job 5:6 For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.

Bildad

Job 8:20 "Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers.

Zophar

Job 11:13-16 "Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, 14 if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, 15 then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. 16 You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by.

THEY ARE RIGHT...

Here's the thing: there is truth in what they are saying. God does discipline us sometimes with the consequences of our sin. David has an affair with Bathsheba and has her husband killed – but the child from the affair dies, and there is more turmoil in the family! Gehazi was struck with leprosy when he lies to Elisha about taking money from Namaan. The book of Hebrews tells us that endure hardship as discipline. I.E. If you steal you go to court, if you get drunk and have an accident people get hurt, greediness lead to an implosion, laziness leads to poverty, if you play golf when you should be at church you get sunburnt!

...AND THEY ARE WRONG

But this is what is NOT true: God wants you to be healthy and wealthy and if you are not there must be some sin in your life, or you don't have enough faith. *Our TVs screens and the internet are littered with rubbish preaching that say exactly that.* Job's friends had one sting on their violin and that sawed it relentlessly¹!

At the end of Job God is angry with the three counsellors for their rubbish advice to Job. So if you're wondering, "is this calamity because of my sin?" then inspect your own heart, ask God to reveal to you any sin that needs to be dealt with. Job freely admits that he is not sinless but he cannot admit to doing something so wrong and so evil that it merits this kind of judgement.

¹ Joel James, How to handle calamity

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OTHER REASON

But a catastrophe in health, finances, or family does not necessarily mean that God is disciplining you for some sin. Jeremiah, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and Jesus himself all suffered not because of sin God was trying to discipline out of them. Stephen's death propels the gospel out to the whole world; Paul's sufferings are a testimony to the truth of the Gospel; Jesus' suffering and death bring the greatest good of all time to humanity; do you think Job would have believed you if you told him that his sufferings would be a guide and a solace for many not just for decades or centuries, but for 5,000 years! More than that – we learn obedience and trust in God through trials. We will see this in Job's life. But Hebrews tells us that Jesus learnt obedience from what he suffered. And in the end we know that all suffering is a result, in some way, of living in a world that is infiltrated and corrupted by sin – that is why we get sick and die in the end.