

Series: Job  
Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2011

Scripture: Job 4-37

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## INTRODUCTION (332)

People love puzzles: whether it is a traditional type of jigsaw puzzle, a Rubik's cube, a logic puzzle, Sudoku, or a crossword puzzle. People enjoy puzzles so much that there are puzzles with 1000's of pieces (up to 24,000 pieces). You get jigsaw puzzles where all the puzzle pieces are exactly the same colour, or where they are all the same shape, or where the puzzle pieces are cut according to the contour line of the picture, borderless puzzles, or (the nastiest) where there are extra puzzle pieces.

I was never much into picture type puzzles, but I liked the logic puzzles. I remember going to our Infanta and sitting for ages, then needing a break and coming back for a second try until it was solve. And that's the point people love solving the puzzle – they get to conquer it, they achieve dominance, they owned that puzzle, at they now have the power/control over the puzzle.

The puzzle of human suffering is a problem. And it is not like other puzzles – if you spend enough time, or if you're clever enough, or if you work hard enough you'll solve it, conquer it, dominate it, or own it! Why? Because we're trying to bring together two things that seem to us to be irreconcilable – love of God and the power of God.

Well, I want us to look at three traps that this puzzle presents to us and one release. We're in the book of Job, this is the third in a series of four sermons. This week is a look at why Job stumbled.

## THE UNBIBLICAL ADVICE TRAP

Quick recap...

From chapter 4 to 37 there is a series of three rounds of Job's friends speaking. First Eliphaz speaks, then Job responds, then Bildad speaks and job responds, the Zophar speaks and Job responds. This conversation revolves three times (except the last time where Elihu speaks instead of Zophar).

Basically the four counsellors share their advice – at first in a gentle, loving and gracious way. But the more they see that Job is not getting what they are saying, the more blunt and direct they become.

Eliphaz

Job 5:17-18 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. 18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

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But Job defends himself – he knows that he is not perfect, but he has certainly not done something so evil that merits this kind of rebuke. Job says:

Job 7:20 If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?

And

Job 16:16-17 My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes; 17 yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure.

But this just upsets Bildad:

Job 8:2-6 "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. 3 Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? 4 When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. 5 But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, 6 if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.

Good, biblical counsel is invaluable when you are suffering. But one of the biggest problems is well-intentioned but unbiblical advice. If we were not privy to chapters 1&2 just consider how easy it would be to stand in the shoes of his four counsellors.

If these things had happened today what kind of advice would Job have received?

- Greediness, treating staff badly, business with non-Christians
- Job's counsellors is alive and well in the 'Word of Faith movement' – I was watch some revolting preaching on TV before the service. The preacher says you need to confess what you are – you are a Son of God, created for glory, not created for sickness, not created for poverty, not created for suffering.

Unbiblical counsellors portray God is incompetent, powerless, a scatty brained, delinquent deity who doesn't quite know which end is up. We need to see things as God sees them.

You need to say, like Job,

Job 21:34 "So how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!"

### THE GNAWING OF TIME TRAP

The problem was that Job did take some of this counsel on board. It appears from 7:3 that Job had been labouring for months in grief for over his children and suffering in the pain of his skin disease.

Job had started off really well. He was sheltering in his faith in God. But the longer he was enduring, the harder he was finding it – minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, week

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after week and month after month. And the worst part was that he did not know when it was going to end!

The really difficult thing about most trials is that we don't know when they are going to end. *Lit is like when you go on holiday for a long trip in the car and the kids are just asking all the time, 'are we there yet'; or when I first rode up Oukaapse Weg from the Sun Valley side I did not know where the top was – every turn there was another hill or another bend. I eventually stopped on the side of the road for a rest. When I got back on my bike I rode over the next hillock and I was at the top. I had given up 50m from the top!*

And the same is true of trials: you don't know when you're going to get better, or when your friend with cancer will pass away, or when you will get a job, or when...

The danger of time is its ability to do 'unseen' damage that weakens faith. *It's like borer beetles in Durban. The area in which we stayed in Durban was in the 'borer belt'. Little beetles would fly in through open windows, land, drop their wings and bore into any wood they could find. It was a particular problem in roofs and floors. On weekend we were about to go away on a Alpha weekend camp when we saw one of our light fittings had water streaming out of it. So I went into the roof to find that the beam on which the geyser was resting was collapsing and the geyser was about to topple over sideways. The only thing holding it was the copper pipe in the bottom!*

Time gradually ate away at Job's his faith. Has that happened to you?

## THE UNJUSTIFIED EXPECTATION TRAP

The third trap into which Job fell was the expectation that God owed him a better life than this because of who he was.

He was successful:

Job 29:6 my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil.

To the extent that he intimidated younger men and commanded the respect of older men:

Job 29:8 the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet; He spoke eloquently and people spoke well of him:

Job 29:11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, He was magnanimous and generous and compassionate:

Job 29:12 I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him.

He was so wise that people came to ask his advice:

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Job 29:21 "Men listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel. And because of all this he had built up a series of expectations. He believed that God owed him certain things: a long life, a peaceful death, glory in the eyes of men, strong and vigorous all his days. And now that this is not the reality in his life he gets upset with God.

What am I saying? That good living, respect, and compassionate giving has no value to God? No, not at all! Does God command righteous living? Yes. Does God promise endless good if you are a devoted mother, or a patient husband, or a faithful tax payer, or a devoted bible reader? No!

Job is going to bring praise and glory to God through his suffering. God has reasons that you just don't understand. This about parenting: you do this for your children because they are not mature enough to understand. Some kids get upset with their parents because they have to 'suffer' – but when they look back it was for their own good. *My parents forbade me to go and play the arcade machine games at the corner cafe on Belvedere Road. I remember being incensed! But they knew there were some unsavoury characters that hung around there.*

## THE FAITH RELEASE

The three traps of (1) unbiblical advice, (2) time and (3) expectations need to be combated with the shield of faith. Job had it firmly in his hands in chapters 1 and 2:

Job 1:21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Job 2:10 He replied, "... Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

The only way to handle calamity is to see the world through the eyes of faith. The problem with understanding calamity is that we perceive things with ourselves at the centre – and not with God at the centre. God is great and glorious. God is good. God is all-powerful. God is in control. These things are challenged when we face calamity. And they all take faith.

But you ask, 'How? How do I have faith?' The answer is not: "I believe, I believe, I believe..." The answer IS that faith has an object; faith all about the thing in which you have faith, the thing in which you believe. *Even buying a car is a faith decision: you choose to buy this car rather than that one because of what you know about it.* The same is true of God – the better you know him the better you will believe, the better you will handle calamity. Faith is about knowing God. You know God through the Bible.

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And so when you're facing the problem: I still don't have a job, I am still sick, I still have wayward children, I still...money, future You don't believe what your natural inclination is, you believe in the God who is there.

Ultimately it is about Christ Romans 8:31ff. If God has given us an objective demonstration of his power to save, love for us and his provision how much more will he not also give us everything else we need in this life!