

The Lonely Lament of a Suffering Servant

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[0 : 00] We are going to read again this evening and Phil Copeland began looking at the book of Job with us last Sunday. We're going to read on now in Job chapter 2 verse 11 and through to the end of chapter 3.

So if you'd like to take your Bible and follow along with me. We're picking up the story after the sudden calamity that befell this godly man Job. Wiping out his possessions, wiping out his family, leaving him himself suffering desperately in physical pain and discomfort and in absolute desolation.

But as we saw last time, despite all of these things, Job, the end of verse 10, did not sin with his lips. He humbled himself before the Lord and received at his hand harm as well as health, evil as well as good.

What an extraordinary thing. Let's read on verse 11. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place.

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Namathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and to comfort him.

[1 : 19] When they saw him from a distance, they didn't recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept. They tore their robe. They sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven.

And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. And no one spoke a word to him. For they saw that his suffering was very great.

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job said, Let the day perish on which I was born.

And the night that said, A man is conceived. Let that day be darkness. May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.

Let clouds dwell upon it. Let the blackness of the day terrify it. That night, that thick darkness seize it. Let it not rejoice among the days of the year.

[2 : 22] Let it not come into the number of the months. Behold, let that night be barren. Let no joyful cry enter it. Let those who curse it, curse the day.

Who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. Let the stars of its dawn be dark. Let it hope for light, but have none. Nor see the eyelids of the morning.

Because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb. Nor hide trouble from my eyes. Why did I not die at birth? Come out from the womb and expire.

Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts that I should nurse? But then I would have lain down and been quiet. I would have slept.

And then I would have been at rest. With kings and counselors of the earth. Who rebuilt ruins for themselves. Or with princes who had gold and filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden as a stillborn child?

[3 : 25] As infants who never see the light. There the wicked cease from troubling. There the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together. They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.

The small and the great are there. And the slave is free from his master. Why is light given to him who is in misery? And life to the bitter in soul.

Who long for death but it comes not. And dig for it more than for hidden treasures. Who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave. Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden?

Whom God has hedged in. For my sighing comes instead of my bread. And my groanings are poured out like water.

For the thing that I fear comes upon me. And what I dread befalls me. I'm not at ease. Nor am I quiet.

[4 : 29] I have no rest. But trouble comes. Amen. May God bless to us.

His word. Well please do have your Bibles open to the passage you read in Job.

When we Christians find ourselves going through a time of darkness and despair. How are we to respond? Well we know, don't we? That we are called to endure and to remain faithful to Jesus. No matter what happens. But what will that look like and sound like practically in our lives? Does it mean we simply try and pull ourselves together? And plow on acting as though we are unfazed by it all?

Should we feel guilty for any feelings of agony that might pierce through our hearts? Should we feel guilty for ever asking why is the Lord doing this to me?

[5 : 35] And if we have such agonized questions bubbling away in our hearts, can we share them out loud? Can we share them with others? Or should we remain tight-lipped and have them buried in our hearts?

Well this section of the book of Job will help us greatly. Last Sunday we left poor Job sitting in ashes all alone. Having faced appalling suffering and loss.

He was once the greatest man of the East. Healthy, wealthy, prosperous. He had seven wonderful children. But it was all taken away from him. And it's shocking for us to read of this.

Because as you'll remember, Job, we're told three times in chapters 1-2, was a blameless and upright man. A man who feared God and turned away from evil. In other words, he was a real believer.

A servant and friend of the Lord God. He wasn't sinless. But he was steadfast in his trust to his God. And yet he's blasted by suffering.

[6 : 40] And as Job sits there on the rubbish dump, the ash heap, he has no idea as to why any of this has happened to him. But of course we the readers know.

Because we've heard the conversations that took place in the heavenly realms between the Lord and his submissive opponent called the Satan. And to sum it up quickly, the Lord, we're told, as you remember if you were tuning in last week, Job sovereignly gave the Satan permission to sift Job like wheat.

In order to prove that Job was a true believer. One who loves God simply because he is God. And not because God gives him blessings and prosperity. And so Satan came and attacked Job twice with terrible suffering.

On the first occasion, we see that the Satan sees to it that Job's property is stolen and destroyed through what we might think of as acts of terrorism. And all of his servants are destroyed too.

And the Satan also sees to it that Job's precious children are destroyed. And what we might call a sort of natural disaster. And then on a second occasion, the Satan destroys Job's health.

[7 : 56] Painful sores break out all over his body. And yet after all of that, did Job curse God? No. Instead, Job shows stunning faith.

He humbly submits to the Lord's painful and perplexing providence. He does not charge God with doing anything wrong. Nor does he sin against God with his lips. Instead, he shows that he is a real believer who loves God because he is God.

And you know, we would love for the book to end in chapter 2, verse 10 with Job's trials over. But it doesn't. Satanic oppression is going to carry on coming Job's way through the words of his three friends.

We meet them again in verse 11. They come and we're told they're going to comfort Job and sympathize with him. But actually, in the end, they torment him by speaking all sorts of false things about Job and also false things about the Lord.

Do tune in next Sunday evening when, God willing, we shall look at what they say. But in our passage tonight, we see that they actually start to torment Job before they've even said a word to him.

[9 : 15] And here's our first point this evening. The first thing we're going to look at is this, the loneliness of God's suffering servant. The loneliness of God's suffering servant from verse 11 to 13.

Job is so alone. And sadly, his friends make him feel all the more alone. In verse 11, it's implied that a fair bit of time has passed since Job has sat himself down on the ash heap.

Remember, it would have taken a decent amount of time for the news about Job to have traveled to his three friends because back in those days, there was no WhatsApp groups, there was no instant messaging or emails. And we're told that the three friends come from three different countries. And so it would have taken a fair bit of time for them to hear the news. And it would also have taken a bit of time for them to correspond to arrange the date that they would all come and arrive together to see Job.

And so Job could have been sitting on that rubbish heap alone for weeks, maybe even months. In fact, in chapter 7, verse 3, Job speaks of having been allotted months of emptiness.

[10:24] Months of isolation. Months of deep loneliness. His only companion, it seems, was a shard of broken pottery that he used to scratch his sores and bring himself a bit of relief.

And so in verse 11, as we read of these men coming, at first it seems a relief to us as the reader because we think, oh great, he's going to get some sympathy, some company. But in fact, in verse 12 to 13, these friends will do things that at first might seem sympathetic but are actually deeply unhelpful.

Let's read verse 12 and 13. Now the tearing of robes, the sprinkling dust on the head, the sitting for seven days and seven nights were all rituals that you carried out when someone had died.

Now just think about the impact this must have had upon Job. He's in deep darkness and distress, suffering all alone. And now his friends are treating him as though he's already dead.

A man with no hope. Christopher Ashe says this of these verses. It is as if they call for the hearse and sit by Job with the coffin open, ready for him.

[11:59] There is no point talking to a corpse. One just weeps by it. To them, Job is no longer a living person. I just noticed the chilling detail in verse 13.

For seven days and seven nights, no one spoke a word to him. Now friends, there is a good type of silence that should take place when you're visiting and comforting a suffering believer.

What the great Bob File. Those of you who know me know I like to do a Bob File impression. I'm not going to do the voice tonight. You can hear Bob in a couple of weeks' time, God willing, because he's going to come and preach to us, which would be great. But anyway, Bob calls the good type of silence a sympathetic silence where we sit with a person who's in pain, maybe hold their hand if appropriate, weep with them, let them know how much we feel for them and love them.

But that is not what we find in verse 13. Bob calls this silence of his friends a bankrupt silence. They have nothing to say to Job because they think he's beyond help.

They don't comfort Job because it seems to them too late for that. And notice actually what verse 13 says. Do you notice it says, no one said a word to him, to Job.

[13:16] So that doesn't rule out the possibility that during those seven days and seven nights, these friends could have spoken to each other whilst at the same time completely ignoring their suffering friend. But we can't be sure about that.

But what is clear is that their presence and bankrupt silence has only served to heighten Job's loneliness. And that is what we will hear in chapter three.

But before we come to look at that, let me just say a few things by way of implications. Friends, if we are ever in the situation where a close friend of ours in the church goes through a time of darkness, then let's remember some key things from this scene.

Firstly, let's remember that people who suffer do so alone. For suffering always brings deep loneliness into the heart of the sufferer.

Again, listen to Christopher Ashe on this. He says, even a non-serious illness cuts us off from others. We have to miss out on a family outing, a party or a gathering. And if even a trivial suffering begins to isolate the sufferer, heavy suffering isolates acutely.

[14:29] Even a shared loss is experienced uniquely by each bereft person. When a child dies, the father alone knows what it is to be the father of this dead child.

Only the mother enters the unique depths of loss as the mother of this son or daughter has died. However much they share, at the deepest level, they suffer alone.

So friends, let's remember that sobering lesson. Whenever we are trying to comfort those in pain, they will most definitely be suffering in a way that is unique to them.

So be sensitive to that. Be sensitive to that. The second key thing to remember from this scene is that when we comfort people, let's be sure to give them sympathetic silence, not bankrupt silence.

Let's not make them feel even more alone by following the example of Job's friends. Good comforters will silently weep with those who weep. And they will know and exercise wisdom in when is the right time to speak and open up and when is the right time to stay tight-lipped.

[15:46] And one final thing about Job's awesome loneliness. And again, I'm deeply indebted to Christopher Ashe on this, but Job's loneliness clearly foreshadows another believer, an even greater man, who centuries later endured an even deeper suffering.

This believer too was with his dearest friends. And he told them to sit and wait while he prayed. He took with him his three closest friends and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

And he said to them, my soul is sorrowful even to the point of death. Remain here and watch. He went on a little further, fell on the ground and prayed with loud cries and tears.

But when he came back, he found his friends sleeping. Could you not watch one hour? He asked sadly. And the next day, of course, he suffered.

Stripped of his robes, robbed of his friends. Even his mother had to keep her distance from the cross. And in the deepest intensity of his sufferings, he cried out in anguish, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[16:56] It is as the old hymn puts it. He bore the burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone. And so friends, in Job, we see here foreshadowing the Lord Jesus.

And friends, for us today, if we should ever find ourselves in darkness and despair and loneliness, we must remember that we have a great high priest who loves us and who knows exactly what it is to suffer alone as a believer.

In fact, however deep into darkness and despair you may feel that you have sunk, you must remember that you have a high priest who's been deeper into darkness and despair.

And so he can sympathize with us in our tears. And he has promised to always be with us. And he constantly prays for us even when we don't feel like that is the case.

Even when we don't feel like that is true. Well, after seven days and seven nights of no one talking to Job, the loneliness and the pain in his heart finally bursts out into this powerful and actually deeply shocking lament of chapter 3.

[18:10] Well, having seen the loneliness of God's suffering servant, we now hear the lament of God's suffering servant. In chapter 3.

Friends, when a real believer suffers, they will humbly submit to the Lord's providence even though it may be perplexing and painful. The real believer will stay faithful to the Lord through it all.

But that does not mean that a real believer won't feel absolutely miserable and full of despair. And a real believer will not be afraid to express the pain and the anguish that they feel so deeply in their hearts.

In Psalm 39, King David says these words, I was mute and silent. I held my peace to no avail and my distress grew worse.

My heart became hot within me as I mused the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue. And in a similar way, Job's inner anguish has been boiling up within him, probably provoked by his friends.

[19:22] And in the end, he cannot hold it in any longer. And he pours out probably what is the darkest speech in the whole of the book. And before we look at the text, let me just say two things.

Firstly, in this lament, we're going to see that Job is going to use some very extreme poetic imagery. Very extreme. In fact, Job is going to say things that may shock us and actually cause us to doubt whether or not he really is a believer.

after all. The second thing just on that note is this. When we listen to Job say these shocking things, we must remember what the Lord says about Job at both the beginning of the book and at the end of the book.

Now forgive me for jumping on to the end, but it is important. Because in both the beginning and the end of the book, the Lord says Job is a real believer. And in chapter 42, which we hope we'll come to one day in the future, the Lord says that Job has spoken rightly of him.

Job isn't charged with saying anything wrong about the Lord. And so friends, that must control how we read the shocking things that Job says in this dark lament.

[20:35] This is the voice of a real believer. Well with that in mind, let's briefly run through what Job says and then we will think about the implications for us today.

The lament splits into really three sections. Firstly, in verses 1 to 10, Job curses his existence. He curses his existence.

Now we don't have time to run through all of the detail, but essentially what Job cries out in desperation is this. He says, let the day when I was born be cursed. Let it be engulfed by thick and terrifying supernatural darkness.

And the day I was conceived, let that also be hidden by darkness. I want that to happen now so that I will be utterly blotted out from the records of history.

I wish more than anything to be uncreated. That seems to be what Job is really crying out for. Every time he says he wants darkness to come over him and come over his origins, he's really saying that he wants to be like the uncreated, sorry, the created order was like when it's mentioned in Genesis 1 verse 2.

[21 : 48] Before the Lord God created light and life, we're told in Genesis 1 verse 2 there was just darkness and chaos and emptiness Job longs to be in a Genesis 1 verse 2 state of non-existence.

In verse 6 he says, rip out my birthday from the calendar. Blot me out, please, remove any record of me. For Job, life has become so painful that he wishes the roots of his existence are ripped out and taken captive by death.

He wishes God would rewind the tape of creation and undo the part that leads to his existence. And verse 8 is absolutely terrifying.

What Job wishes is for someone to rouse up Leviathan against him. Back then, Leviathan was seen as a sort of storybook sea monster of chaos. The great enemy of the creator whose mission it was to undo order and beauty that God had made.

And in verse 8, Job pictures Leviathan is having a kind of team of handlers like zookeepers, a professional team of curse bringers who can whistle Leviathan awake to come and destroy part of the created order.

[23 : 07] And in verse 8, Job says, I want Leviathan's keepers to wake him up and to set him loose upon the day when I came into existence. Let Leviathan swallow up my origins.

My friends, of course, all that Job is saying here is fanciful. He knows he cannot effectively curse the past.

But just remember what I said earlier. He's speaking here in poetic hyperbole. He's pouring out the deep pain in his heart and the anguish that he feels. He curses his own existence.

And in the next section of the lament, in verse 11 to 19, Job longs for rest. He wants there so much rest and peace.

And out of the whole chapter, I must say, I think that this is Job at his absolute darkness. And what I want to do is just read these verses to you again and just hear his pain and think of the shocking things he says.

[24 : 08] Let me read verse 11 to 19. Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire, why did the knees receive me?

Why did the breasts that I should, that I should, or why the breasts that I should nurse? For then, I would have lain down and been quiet. I would have slept.

Then I would have been at rest with kings and counsellors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves or with princes who had gold who filled their houses with silver. or why was I not as a hidden stillborn, as infants who never see the light?

There, the wicked cease from troubling and there, the weary are at rest. There, the prisoners are at ease together. They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.

The small and the great are there and the slave is free from his master. Now what Job is really saying here is that he would be so much better if he was in the place beyond the grave, if he was dead, rather than in the land of the living.

[25 : 22] And the Hebrew word for the place beyond the grave is Sheol. And Job is absolutely desperate to go there. Why? What is it about Sheol?

Well, Job claims that in Sheol the dead have rest. The dead are no longer in a place where they can face the sort of horrible anguish that he is currently in.

Just look again at verse 17. He says there, that is, in Sheol the wicked cease from troubling others. In Sheol there won't be any Chaldeans or Sabeans sweeping out of nowhere to rob you of your cattle and to destroy your servants.

In Sheol you won't get any messages that your children have all died. In Sheol all people, kings, politicians, prisoners, the great and the small of society, they cease to face the harsh reality of life in this present world.

They have all laid down and are at peace and they have the rest that I so desperately want says Job. He's desperate. He is absolutely desperate.

[26 : 28] Now again, remember Job is speaking in hyperbole here. Later on in chapter 17 it is clear that Job does not actually believe that Sheol is the place where people find rest.

In chapter 17 he says that Sheol is the place of the pit and the worm. It is a God forsaken place where people are imprisoned and held captive. So again, Job doesn't actually believe what he says here, but again he's using the shocking imagery because this is what's in his heart.

This is the pain that he feels. This is the depths of despair that he's reached. He longs for rest so much so that he thinks that going to Sheol would be a better option than staying alive.

And in the final section of the lament from verse 20 onwards, Job asks an agonizing question.

Please look at verse 20. Why is light given to him who is in misery and life to the bitter in soul who long for death but it comes not and dig for it more than for hidden treasures who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave?

Job's agonized question seems to be why is it that life keeps on being given to people like me who are so desperate and want to die?

[27 : 53] Now the Lord isn't mentioned explicitly here by name but the verb used there in verse 20, given, that implies that this is whom Job is really addressing or at least starting to address with his words.

He is protesting, asking why is the Lord keeping me alive when he can see that I'm in such torment and pain? Why does the Lord do this for people like me who are so keen to find death that they would search for it as a miner searches out for precious gems down a mine shaft?

And he repeats his question in verse 23, why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has noticed hedged in?

You remember, I'm sure, back in chapter one, when the Satan was bringing his accusations against Job, he said that the only reason Job loved the Lord was because the Lord had hedged him in with comfort and prosperity.

And we'll know, with great irony in chapter 3, Job claims that the Lord has hedged him in with not prosperity and goodness and comfort, but with anguish and trouble and misery.

[29 : 07] And Job can't understand why the Lord has done this and why the Lord continues to do this. And friends, this question, why, the why question, is a question that we will hear Job wrestle with again and again and again throughout the rest of the book.

Yes, Job humbly submits to the Lord's painful providence. He doesn't curse God, he will speak rightly of God, but that does not mean that Job will not wrestle and wrestle and puzzle and puzzle over why the Lord is doing what he's doing.

Well, our time is gone this evening, but let me finish by drawing this to a conclusion with two things. Firstly, it's this. Job 3 teaches us a very, very important truth that we need to grasp.

And it is this, it is the truth that a real, genuine believer who has not fallen into sin may go through utter dereliction, blank despair, and utter desperation.

That can happen. And yet, at the end, be seen to be a real believer. It is so important to remember this, friends, because there's a type of Christianity out there in the world today that is shallow, trite, and superficial, again, let me quote to you the great Bob Fowle.

[30 : 38] Bob Fowle describes this type of Christianity as a kind of Christianity that would have had Jesus singing happy-clappy choruses at the grave of Lazarus. Someone else gives it a name, easy triumphalism.

It is the type of Christianity that sings songs which contain lyrics like, in God's presence, all our problems disappear. Or my love for the Lord keeps growing every day.

Well, neither was true for Job in chapter 3. And yet, he was a real believer, a blameless believer.

The real deal. Secondly, Job 3 also teaches us that real believers, when they are going through the mill, and when their hearts are full of despair, we don't need to be afraid of weeping and pouring out the pain and anguish of our hearts.

We can lament. I once sat down with a senior pastor of a church, and I was just asking him about his experiences of visiting people in his church who are suffering.

And he said that actually when he goes to visit suffering believers, they tend to follow actually the same pattern in these meetings. He said to me, when he goes in, it starts off with the suffering believer being pretty guarded, pretending to be okay.

[32 : 10] Actually, most people put on a brave face and maybe they're smiling, but it doesn't last long. Because gradually, as the chat continues, they will start to open up and share what is really going on in their hearts.

And they will say things like this. I just can't stop weeping. I've never been so alone. I can't understand why God would allow this to happen.

What's going on? And of course, while they say these things to the senior pastor, it is usually always accompanied with tears and raw emotion, maybe even anger.

But then the senior pastor says that having done that, having opened up, usually always, usually always, the poor suffering souls that he's gone to visit, they will usually always stop and immediately recoil as though they've done something wrong.

They'll recoil back into themselves and say something like, oh, do you know what, I'm really sorry for getting so emotional. I'm sorry about that. I shouldn't have done that. I know I shouldn't feel this way. I just need to pull myself together.

[33 : 16] I need to pull myself together. Friends, Job chapter three says something refreshingly different. Suffering Christians should not be afraid to weep and pour out their hearts.

And as we shall see as we get towards the end of the book, suffering Christians belong to a God who is big enough and gracious enough to take our honest cries of lament a God who is big enough and gracious enough to hear our protests and our words of pain.

Job's God is our God and I pray that knowing this will be a great help to you tonight if you are going through the mill and I pray that it will help you in the future if you do.

Well, that's Job three. come back next Sunday online as we think about what not to say to a suffering servant of the Lord, what not to say to a suffering servant of the Lord.

But now let's be quiet for a moment. We close our eyes, bow our heads and then I will lead us in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our gracious God and heavenly father, we praise you that Job is in our Bibles.

We pray as we prayed last week that once again you would help us to learn from Job as an example. Please give us the same faithfulness that he had so that we will patiently endure suffering and not turn away from you.

we praise you too father that Job chapter three assures us that you are a God who is big enough to take the honest outpourings and the protests of our hearts.

You're a God who is so gracious and kind to your suffering people. And heavenly father we pray that you would help us not to forget that we have a great high priest who is able to sympathize with us as we suffer and struggle on.

We praise you for the sweet name of Jesus who is our shield and our rock and that in him we stand safe and secure no matter how down or how miserable we feel.

[35 : 55] We thank you that he is our shield and our rock. So help us as a church family we pray. Help us to be better at comforting those who are in pain.

Help us to be a people who are ready to weep with those who weep. Father give us the wisdom that we need to know when to stay silent with someone who is grieving and when to speak words of comfort.

Help us we pray in Jesus precious name and for his sake. Amen.