

Job: Suffering in View of the Cross
Agony
Job 3

In his book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller points out that almost all cultures in all times of history have found meaning and purpose in suffering. In describing the way many in the naturalistic Western world look at suffering, though, Keller says, “In the secular view, this material world is all there is. And so the meaning of life is to have freedom to choose the life that makes you most happy. However, in that view of things, suffering can have no meaningful part. It is a complete interruption of your life story – it cannot be a meaningful part of the story.” Close quote.

Suffering is a complete interruption of life and our pursuit of happiness. That is why we pay others to either eliminate, or to at least, mitigate our suffering – doctors, psychiatrists, insurance agents, lawyers. Believers have a better perspective than most, but the world’s expectation of success and comfort and freedom from suffering has found its way into the church in one form or another of the prosperity gospel. If you have troubles that don’t go away, it may not be that you are guilty of some horrific sin, but you obviously don’t believe God for what he has already done. From a biblical perspective, that is nonsense.

Keller’s book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, is one of three books that I am reading through this study of Job, and, which, I would recommend, but I need to warn you that it is a bit deep on the philosophical end early on.

Tullian Tchividjian’s book, *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free*, is a bit more accessible and is based around a study of Job. This book is fantastic! If you follow Tchividjian on Twitter you read a good bit about grace and gospel. Those same wonderful truths are proclaimed in the book.

Also, well worth reading, is Michael Horton’s offering, *A Place for Weakness: Preparing Yourself for Suffering*. Horton is my current favorite theologian and the provoker of some of the thoughts today about antiphonal response, to which David has already alerted you.

Job was in a mess. He was not privileged to live through the suffering, to which God had called him, in view of the cross, and his suffering was intense. Think of all that Job lost:

- 1) Wealth and security – in the context of our culture, not a big deal until you lose it
- 2) The means to regain wealth and security (animals, children, servants)
- 3) Dignity – surely some had been jealous, but now they were suspicious of what he had done (John 9 – “Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents?”); that continues today
- 4) Peace of mind, even at night – 7:13-15
- 5) CHILDREN! For whose safety he consistently prayed; furthermore, it was a natural disaster causing one to think perhaps that it was God’s judgment; lightning killed the sheep and a strong wind blew the house down that killed the children
- 6) Health – loathsome sores; what did he do to deserve this?

- 7) Companionship of his wife – never mentioned again
- 8) Most of all, a sense of relationship with God;

Can you think of anyone in Scripture, besides Jesus, who suffered more than Job? Why? Even God said to Satan, “There is no like Job on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” Why would God make use of Satan to accomplish his purposes by allowing such suffering? Christopher Ash, who has written a wonderful commentary on Job that some of our Home Group leaders are using, has this to say about Job:

“The more I have bashed my head against the text of Job year after year, the more deeply convinced I have become that the book ultimately makes no sense without the obedience of Jesus Christ, his obedience to death on a cross. Job is not everyman; he is not even every believer. There is something desperately extreme about Job. He foreshadows one man whose greatness exceeded even Job’s, whose sufferings took him deeper than Job, and whose perfect obedience to his Father was only anticipated in faint outline by Job.” Close quote.

Job’s suffering was, indeed, extreme. Last week we encountered disaster after disaster with Job. This morning, we will sense his agony, when, after seven days, sitting with torn clothes and ashes on his head, Job opens his mouth to give voice to the painful emotions that have welled up inside of him as he sat in silence. Although there are expressions of agony throughout Job, our reading today will be the third chapter of Job to get a sense of his torment. Perhaps you have felt similar.

As is our custom, I will ask you to please stand for the reading of Scripture. I will be reading from the ESV.

1 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ² And Job said:

³ “Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said,
‘A man is conceived.’

⁴ Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.

⁵ Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.

⁶ That night—let thick darkness seize it!
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.

⁷ Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry enter it.

⁸ Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.

⁹ Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none,

nor see the eyelids of the morning,
¹⁰ because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
 nor hide trouble from my eyes.
¹¹ "Why did I not die at birth,
 come out from the womb and expire?
¹² Why did the knees receive me?
 Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?
¹³ For then I would have lain down and been quiet;
 I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,
¹⁴ with kings and counselors of the earth
 who rebuilt ruins for themselves,
¹⁵ or with princes who had gold,
 who filled their houses with silver.
¹⁶ Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child,
 as infants who never see the light?
¹⁷ There the wicked cease from troubling,
 and there the weary are at rest.
¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease together;
 they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
¹⁹ The small and the great are there,
 and the slave is free from his master.
²⁰ "Why is light given to him who is in misery,
 and life to the bitter in soul,
²¹ who long for death, but it comes not,
 and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
²² who rejoice exceedingly
 and are glad when they find the grave?
²³ Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
 whom God has hedged in?
²⁴ For my sighing comes instead of my bread,
 and my groanings are poured out like water.
²⁵ For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
 and what I dread befalls me.
²⁶ I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
 I have no rest, but trouble comes."

When our children were young, we used to teach them to play verbal tennis with those who initiated conversation with them. "When someone ask you a question, do not simply answer them and let the conversation die. Say something in return. "How are you?" "I am fine." Say, "I am fine – how has your day been?" I have been on both ends of awkward silence, and I am certain that you have as well. Let me ask you something. When you are cross ways with your spouse or your roommate or your good friend or your children, would you rather there be sharp words or silence? Even if you think you would prefer silence, you wouldn't want as much of it as you think you would, especially if distractions such as TV, music, books, and shopping were removed.

We were made to communicate. Antiphonal response has been God's design since the dawn of creation. "Let there be light, and there was light." Let the earth sprout . . . and the Lord brought forth vegetation." At weddings, ministers ask, "Do you?" and man and woman say, "I do." At football stadiums you hear, "Tar – Heels, Wolf – Pack." If noise bothers you, silence can be much, much worse. It may feel peaceful for a time, but it gets old. This is especially true when you are suffering.

Suffering weeds out distractions and all your attention becomes focused on heaven. When the heavens are silent, we assume something is wrong. In fact, we assume the worst. It is bad enough to be in deep struggle, but for God to remain silent is almost more than we can bear. That is where Job sat. No communication with God – or, rather, from God. Right up to the time that he suffered, Job had followed the formula of "Obey God and he will bless you," and all had worked out for him, but, something had gone badly wrong. Job expressed his frustration with God's silence in 7:19-21:

19 How long will you not look away from me,
nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit?
20 If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?
Why have you made me your mark?
Why have I become a burden to you?
21 Why do you not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?
For now I shall lie in the earth;
you will seek me, but I shall not be."

Since Job lived with a law mentality – do the right things and God will be pleased with you – and, since Job couldn't imagine what he had done wrong, he was more than perplexed. Some of you are incredibly health conscious – and have struggled with cancer or other debilitating diseases. Some of you did everything right in your marriage to the best of your ability – and your spouse walked away. Some of you were the model employees at your places of business – and you were let go. Some of you made integrity your highest priority – and you were accused. And the heavens remain silent.

I think Christopher Ash is on to something when he says that Job's suffering prefigures the suffering of Christ. There are major differences, of course, which will be pointed out along the way, but there are some striking similarities, as well. Think of the parallels. Job was blameless, Jesus was sinless – something Job did not claim, as we will see. Job pleaded for an explanation for his suffering, Jesus prayed that his suffering might be avoided. In both cases, the heavens were silent.

If, on the cross, Jesus suffered the equivalent of an eternity in hell for me, then what must his agony in the garden have been as he faced the prospect of bearing my sin, of being separated from God? Job keenly sensed separation from God, but he was wrong. Just because God was silent did not mean that he was not fully focused on Job. With Jesus, God would both pour out

his wrath on Jesus and turn away from him in judgment. Jesus knew all of this in the garden as he felt such agony that he sweated drops of blood. Was this when Jesus learned obedience? Hebrews 5:7-8: 7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

There is deep theology here, and I going to guess that you suspected that to be the case. Jesus didn't need to "learn" obedience like we do, but, rather, to *fulfill* obedience, which is what is meant here. Job was of Adam and could not possibly respond to suffering in a fully appropriate way. Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15 tells us, was the Last Adam and it was crucial, for us, that he get right what Adam messed up. Believers are often eternally grateful for the cross but fail to appreciate the importance of Jesus living a sinless life. That is what made him an eligible sacrifice for my sin, for your sin.

Job, living with a law mentality, wanted to justify himself. Jesus said, in essence, "Even though I tremble at the thought of this great suffering, you do what is right." In other words, Jesus justified his Father. The benefit, for those who believe, is that God, in turn, justifies them, or declares Jesus' perfect obedience to count as their righteousness. Amazing! And, when believers suffer, they do so in view of the cross and experience communion with Christ that is not possible apart from pain. Once again, Christopher Ash:

"If Job is a prophet, then at the heart of his life was "the Spirit of Christ" indicating within him something about the "sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:11). Sometimes for the prophets this meant living out in anticipation something of the sufferings of Christ, as it did for Hosea when he was called to marry the immoral woman Gomer. For Job, perhaps supremely among the prophets, the call of God on his life was to anticipate the perfect obedience of Christ." Close quote.

Anticipate the perfect obedience of Christ in suffering, yes but Job did not fully model obedience. Jesus is the only person to ever live who was perfectly obedient, and he did so at a high cost. Because of Jesus' agony, not only do we have the hope of heaven, but we have joy in this life, assured that God is working his perfect plan to make us into his beautiful treasure. In home groups this week, you will examine 1 Peter 1:3-12. As we move toward the Lord's Table, let's pause long enough to drink in the promises of God for those who suffer:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.