

When God's People Suffer: Faith in Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] Church book, it's page 523. And Johnny's going to be looking at Job's response to his three friends, his three friends who had gave misunderstood views of suffering, as we were looking at last week.

We'll read the entire chapter. So if we're ready, we'll start in verse 1. Then Job replied,

If you say, How will we hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him? You should fear the sword yourselves, for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment.

Thanks. Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 1 6] And as we look at this section, you're going to need to be dressed in full combat gear. Because as we look at these chapters, we are entering into a battle.

And as we enter into the battle, we need God's help. So let's pray together. Our Father God, we thank you that you are always understanding.

You are always aware of what is going on in our lives. Whatever our struggle, whatever our suffering, whether it's private or whether it's public, you are a God who speaks into the midst of it.

And we recognize too that sometimes that struggle is a battle. And we wonder how we will ever get through. And so we pray and we ask that your word would speak comfort and speak hope and show us the way forward as we live in this world with all its struggles and with all its heartaches.

We pray for your help in this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, every time we suffer, we do enter into a battle.

[5 : 5 3] A battle where we fight and we wrestle with God up close and personal. It's a hand-to-hand combat. We shake our fists at God and we complain, How can you, a loving God, allow this disability to happen to my child?

We try to force a submission through our questions. Why do you, a powerful God, not stop the suffering that my wife has to live with every single day?

We throw in our punches in frustration. How can I trust a God who includes earthquakes, disease and suffering in his plan for people?

The battle is fierce. It's bloody and it's brutal. But it's only in the heat of the battle that our faith becomes active.

A faith that enables us to deal and to cope with suffering. And that's what we discover as we look at Job. When Job suffered, he wrestled with his God.

[7 : 1 3] From chapters 4 to 27, he enters into this battle with frustration, but he emerges with faith. A faith where he shouts at God, but he's still at peace with God.

A faith that begins to question God, but he's still trusting in God. A faith that complains to God, but he finds comfort in his God.

You see, true faith lives with this tension that God is all-powerful and he's all-loving, but yet he allows suffering and he permits suffering.

And we stand in the middle, wrestling with these truths. And we stand in the middle, entering into this battle with the fact that God is all-loving, all-powerful, but permits suffering and allows suffering.

But it's only in the heat of the battle that we discover that the power of God becomes more reassuring and the love of God becomes more immense.

[8 : 25] If we're to know that, we've got to enter into the battle. And that's what we're going to do this morning.

We're going to walk with Job as he wrestles with his suffering. Keep your Bibles open then because we're going to be reading through different sections.

There are three main accusations, three main punches or blows, if you like, that he fires out at God. The first is this, that his pain has no meaning.

Look at Job's pain starting at chapter 6, verse 1 or verse 2. Chapter 6, verse 2. If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales, it would surely outweigh the sand of the seas.

Chapter 7, verse 2. Like a slave longing for the evening shadows or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility and nights of misery have been assigned to me.

[9 : 40] When I lie down, I think, how long before I get up? The night drags on and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs.

My skin is broken and festering. Verse 11. Therefore, I will not keep silent. I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit.

I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Verse 16. I despise my life. I would not live forever.

Let me alone. My days have no meaning. You see, to Job, his pain and his suffering is meaningless. He's crying out to God with the question, what's the point of all this suffering?

What's it going to do to me? And what's it going to do for anybody else? Chapter 10, verse 1. I loathe my very life.

[10 : 46] Therefore, I will give free reign to my complaint. I will speak out to God in the bitterness of my soul. Well, what is his complaint? Well, look at verse 8.

He says, Verse 12.

You gave me life and you showed me kindness. And in your providence, you watched over my spirit. But then all these bad things have happened. I've lost all my wealth.

I've lost my health. And I've lost all my family. Verse 18. Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me.

To Job, his life is meaningless. It's pointless. There seems to be no purpose to all of this suffering. Now, I wonder how often do we shout this complaint and question at God?

[12 : 06] Because if you've never shouted at God in this way, maybe you should learn to do so. Whether you experience it yourself or you see it from far off.

Because it's only in the heat of the battle where we come complaining and questioning with God that our faith actually becomes active.

The second fight that Job has with God is this, that the wicked prosper. Job's angry at God that innocent people like himself suffer while all the wicked people who carry on and do what they want don't.

Look at chapter 21. Verse 7. Chapter 21, verse 7.

Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes, their homes are safe and free from fear.

[13 : 19] The rod of God is not upon them. Their bulls never fail to breed, their cows calve and do not miscarry. They send forth their children as a flock, their little ones dance about.
They sing to the music of tambourine and harp. They make merry to the sound of the flute. They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace.

Yet they say to God, leave us alone, God. We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?

You see, this is what makes Job so angry and so annoyed. This is why Job wants to fight with God. Because it seems like God does nothing about it.

Look at verse 17. Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? The reality is, the wicked seem to carry on and do whatever they like and nothing ever happens to them.

[14 : 19] And it all seems so unfair. And that's why Job wants to pick a fight with God. He recognises that God is in control of his life.

He's in control of the world in which he lives. But it seems that God does nothing about it. And this isn't just the experience of Job.

We see it today all the time. Those who have acted corruptly get rewarded with big fat pensions. While the hard working get their pensions cut.

And all of this leads Job and us to one conclusion. His third battle with God. That God is just not concerned for his life.

In his suffering, Job continues his cry to God. This meaningless pain that he's living with. Watching while the wicked prosper.

[15 : 21] And yet Job in the middle of it all seems to get no answer. Look at chapter 23, verse 2. Even today my complaint is bitter.

His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. If only I knew where to find God. If only I could go to his dwelling.

I would state my case before him. And fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me. And consider what he would say.

Verse 8. But if I go to the east. God's not there. If I go to the west. I can't find him.

When he is at work in the north. I don't see him. And when he turns to the south. I catch no glimpse of him. And for Job this seems to be the heart of the battle.

[16 : 28] This is where it's raging. This is where the blows are being delivered. God knows all that's happening. God claims to be all loving and all powerful.

But yet God seems to be so unmoved and unconcerned. And so distant and far away that he can't get close to him. And Job is not going to let this go.

And so he continues to fight with God. Chapter 27, verse 2. As surely as God lives.

Who has denied me justice. The almighty who has made me taste bitterness of soul. As long as I have life within me. The breath of God in my nostrils.

My lips will not speak wickedness. And my tongue will utter no deceit. I will never admit God. That you are in the right till I die.

[17 : 30] I will not deny my integrity. So here is a real and living faith. Of a believer.

Who is wrestling deeply with his suffering. We might be uncomfortable with some of his questions. And some of his complaints. And the way he talks with God.

But you know what? It's not wrong to shout at God. And it's not wrong to question God. In fact at the very end of the book in chapter 42. God makes it very clear.

That he never ever charges Job with any wrong doing. In everything that Job said. God said. Job spoke. What was right.

It's not wrong. To fight with God. When we suffer. This is the kind of battle.

[18 : 30] That we enter into. And you think of your own personal struggles. And your own suffering. Or the things that you've had to endure. Or the questions that you have.

If you look out into a broken world. Where so much goes wrong. And God says. I'm all powerful. And I'm all loving. And we're asking. Why? Why? Why?

Why? Why? Our pain seems meaningless. The wicked just seem to prosper. And God seems unconcerned.

But it's only in the middle of this fight. In the frustration of it all. That our faith begins to emerge. And that's what we see with Job.

not only is there an accusing faith but there is this pursuing faith even though job has many questions and complaints he doesn't give up on longing for his god two things here we see that he longs for a faith in a powerful sovereign god you see as job contemplates all this suffering and all the struggle that he goes through he knows that god stands behind it all go back to chapter 12 verse 7 chapter 12 and verse 7 as he looks out on his own experience of suffering and all that goes on in the world we read this chapter 12 verse 7 but ask the animals and they will teach you or the birds of the air and they will tell you or speak to the earth and it will teach you or let the fish of the sea inform you which of all these does not know that the hand of the lord has done this verse 13 to god belong wisdom and power counsel and understanding are his what he tears down cannot be rebuilt the man he imprisons cannot be released if he holds back the waters there is drought if he lets them loose they devastate the land god remains in absolute control look at verse 16 to him belong strength and victory god alone acts with supreme authority he's reminding himself that there is nothing that happens in this world and there is nothing that happens in our lives without his knowledge and without his permission and that's why job is longing to meet with god chapter 13 verse 3 but i desire to speak to the almighty and to argue my case with god verse 15 though he slay me yet will i hope in him i long for him i desire him in fact job knows that trusting in this powerful sovereign god is the safest and the most secure place to be chapter 14 verse 14 chapter 14 and verse 14 if a man dies will he live again all the days of my hard service i will wait for my renewal or my restoration to come you will call and here here's the here's the words of faith you will call and i will answer you you will long for the creature your hands have made surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin my offenses will be sealed up in a bag you will cover over my sin you see in the heat of this battle job fights for answers from god

[23 : 19] he doesn't get any but he learns to trust that god will remember him he will restore him he will renew him he is going to call to him and job will answer and that god verse 15 is longing for the person that he has made with all his questions job knows that god's power is more reassuring than all of his suffering so not only does he have faith in a powerful and sovereign god he has faith in a loving redeeming god go to chapter 19 without any let up job continues in his accusations and his questions he's still in that fight he's still arguing with god verse 7 of chapter 19 though i cry i've been wronged i get no response though i call for help there is no justice his anger burns against me sorry verse 11 his anger burns against me he counts me among his enemies his troops advance in force they build a siege ramp against me they encamp around my tent he's shouting at god these things he's not content with the way things are but it's here again in the midst of the battle that his face begins to to come through verse 23 oh that my words were recorded that they were written on a scroll that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead or engraved in rock forever it's like job is anticipating his death and in preparation he wants his entire life recorded and well little no did little did job know that his life would be recorded that's what we have right here he wants everybody to know the truth of his innocent suffering life but how in the midst of all of that suffering he had faith in a loving redeeming redeeming god verse 25 i know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth it's the image there of god standing over him and looking upon his life and redeeming him verse 26 and after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh i will see he god you see while job fights for answers he doesn't get any but job trusts that god is going to redeem him that god is going to raise him from the grave that god has not forgotten him that one day with all of his questions job knows that god's love is going to surround him it does surround him and he will see his god verse 27 i myself will see him with my own eyes i and not another how my heart yearns within me you see the battle with suffering is intense in fact it's so tough we're probably reading through this and looking at this and we're wondering how would i ever survive my own suffering

and should i ever enter into suffering how am i ever going to get through this battle well job had immense faith but we have an advantage over job which guarantees our survival whatever you are going through whatever you are in we have an advantage over job that guarantees our survival you see job was looking forward to something god would do he didn't know what god was going to do but he knew he would do something but he he just looked forward in faith we on the other hand are looking back in faith to something god has done with absolute certainty you see our powerful sovereign god and our loving redeeming god came into the battlefield of this world in the person of jesus christ god would come down god would come down and suffer with us he would fight the battle for us so our faith today is not in some kind of in our faith it's not a faith in our ability to have faith our faith is in a warrior our faith is in a fighter who has entered the intensity of the battle for us and we look at christ as he entered the heat of the fight on the cross we look at christ who struggled and he fought in the darkness of the grave he went into battle he fought suffering i'm going to quote from joanie she's a lady for 40 years who suffered immensely and in these latter years of her life she lives with excruciating pain every single day and this is what she says when your heart is being wrung out like a sponge when you feel like salt is being poured into your wounded soul you don't want a thin pale emotional jesus who relates only to lambs and birds and babies you want a warrior jesus you want a battlefield jesus at different times in my life i've enjoyed the old pictures of jesus cradling cute lambs or walking around with blow-dried hair clad in white robe looking like it just arrived from the dry cleaner but these days these warfare days those old images just don't cut it for me i need a battlefield jesus at my side down here in the dangerous often messy trenches of daily life i need jesus the rescuer ready to wade through pain through death and hell to find me to grasp my hand in love and power to bring me safely through you see jesus wrestled with the powers of death and hell and he overcame his death proves to you that he loves you his resurrection proves to you that he has power to hold you in his hand and rescue you for eternal life our faith is in a victorious warrior

who walks with us in the suffering as we fight with our questions as we shout our complaints we have a battle-worn warrior who will walk with you every step of the way and who will guarantee your absolute survival and bring you home let's pray together read from first peter just listen to these words in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of jesus christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade which is kept in heaven for you listen to this who through faith are shielded by god's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time in this we greatly rejoice though now for a little while we have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials in all kinds of battles and all kinds of struggles but these have come so that your faith your faith in christ of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine and will result in praise and glory glory and honor though we cannot see him we love him we love him and even though we do not see him now we believe in him and we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for we are receiving the goal of our faithphicamentente the salvation of our lives.

Father, for every single person here who is in the heat of the battle today, shield them with your power.

Surround them and protect them with your love. Fill them with an inexpressible and glorious joy. That you are walking with them and that they will survive and you will bring them home.

[34 : 43] For those who have not yet experienced that battle, for the day that we do, may our faith rest in Christ, our warrior, our fighter.

The one who battled hell and death for us so that we don't have to. We trust in you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.