

When God's People Suffer: Living in a Suffering World

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[0 : 00] 109 of the church bible and we're going to read all of chapter 1 so someone's going to read verses 1 to 12 and then 13 to 22.

Job chapter 1 or yeah chapter 1 sorry in verse 1. In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters and he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the east.

His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes and he would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course Job would send and have them purified.

Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them thinking perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. This was Job's regular custom. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with them.

[1 : 14] The Lord said to Satan, Where have you come from? Satan answered the Lord, From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it. Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job?

There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. Does Job fear God for nothing? Satan replied.

Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hands and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face.

The Lord said to Satan, Very well then. Everything he has is in your hands. But on the man himself do not lay a finger. Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabians attacked and carried them off.

[2 : 28] They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you.

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you.

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house.

It collapsed on them, and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.

Then he fell to the ground in worship and said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.

[3 : 35] In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Well, we are going to be looking at this book over the next number of weeks, and time to time I will recommend some books that relate to this theme.

I have got three this morning, some that I have read that you may find helpful. This one is just a very simple little book. It's called *Suffering and Evil*, aimed at kind of teenage years. But if you've got a simple mind like me, then that's the book for you. It's a very simple read. This one on a similar vein is, *If I were God, I would end all the pain*, written by a man whose father died in an airplane crash, and he works through that whole issue of suffering and the big question, why? Okay, this one is a little bit more, I think, better. It's a longer read, a little bit more pastoral. *Suffering Well, the Predictable Surprise of Christian Suffering*. And it really says, look, it's not if we suffer, but when we suffer, because we're all going to face it at some stage or another, asking all those questions and how to deal with it as Christian people. [4 : 58] So those are three books that I recommend, and there'll be others along the way that I'll be pointing out too. So you can look at them afterwards if you wish. Well, let's get to the book of the Bible, the book that we can trust, God's Word.

Let's pray. Father, we recognise that all of us will face some form of suffering, and perhaps we are already in it or have gone through it.

And we come with all kinds of questions and struggles, and we want to come with you openly and honestly, asking that you would speak into our lives, that you would help us to understand your ways better, but ultimately that you would give us a heart that submits to you and trusts you.

Even when the darkness closes in, we would still be able to say, blessed be the name of the Lord. Please help us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. A loving family, with all their plans and dreams ahead of them, are greeted with the unwelcome news that the husband has a tumour.

[6 : 36] With great strength and determination and faith in God, they fight through all the operations, all the treatment and the pain. Just after the birth of their second child, which he's become too weak to hold, he leaves this world as death takes over.

Why? A young man has become a Christian. He turns from his selfish life to submit to God. He was told that the cost of becoming a Christian, that friends might turn their back on you, and people might even criticise you.

But he never thought his wife would leave him, taking with her their only child. Why? A family who obeyed God's call to go and serve the people in North Asia.

At great sacrifice, they leave their family and friends, bringing with them the good news of the gospel. The conditions they are at are poor and basic, but filled with a love for God, they go on serving their neighbours around them.

Tragically, their little son dies in an awful accident, burned from an open cooking fire. Why? A pastor and his wife rush to the hospital, ready for the birth of their fourth child.

[8 : 01] The delivery goes well, but as the early days pass, it becomes apparent that their daughter is not going to survive for very long. Amazingly, she does survive, but requires 24-7 care.

Now more than 20 years later, she still can't walk or talk or go to the loo by herself. Why? Now I'm sure you all have your own stories of people who suffer, but each one of these are people that I know.

And their suffering is not just an intellectual problem with the head, it's experienced, and they live with the pain and the heartache every single day.

And of course, it's natural for us that when we are facing suffering, that we ask the question, why? Why me? Why this? Why now?

And it's a question that we all want answers to, but there are no easy answers. When we ask the question, why? God in his wisdom has given us a book called *Job*, which is 42 chapters long.

[9 : 14] In other words, it's telling us that there is no quick fix. There are no pat answers. You can't just do it in one easy session. As one writer has put it, these are not armchair questions.

These are wheelchair questions. So as we read through *Job*, we are invited to watch and listen and to learn from one man's experience of suffering.

It's a real and an honest account of personal pain, heartache, and tragedy. It's a journey of one man as he gets angry, confronting God and questioning God and shaking his fist at God to cope with suffering, to deal with suffering, to understand suffering.

We need to take time to immerse ourselves in this story. In some way, this story must become our story. We've got to let it touch our hearts and to impact our minds.

We are to feel his pain. We're to ask his questions and we are to submit to his God. So as we go over these studies over the next few weeks, there's got to be some clear signposts that we have in

place.

[10:39] They don't answer all of our questions. In fact, at the end of this study, there are going to be more questions. But what they do is they begin to point us in the right direction.

They help us to start the journey as we live life in a suffering world. So signpost number one is this, innocent suffering.

Job is innocent, but yet he suffers. You know the stories that I told at the beginning have all one thing in common. Those involved are all innocent people.

I don't mean they're perfect because none of them will tell you that they're perfect. But what I mean is they are hard-working, loving and caring people who seek to do what is right and good.

You see, some suffering that happens as a result of our foolish actions. We can understand that. So somebody might drink too much, they get in their car, they end up having a crash and they have brain damage.

[11:49] And as tragic and as awful as that is, we can understand that there's a logic to it. But when people suffer for no apparent reason, then that's really hard.

When good, honest and caring people get sick and they struggle with terrible pain and then they die. When people who love justice and seek peace get mugged and stabbed.

When hard-working, generous people lose their savings and job, we find it very difficult to understand. But that's the story of Job. Job is introduced to us, look at verse 3 of chapter 1, the end of verse 3, as the greatest man among all the people of the East.

He is obviously a man of great influence and power. He has considerable wealth. Look at verse 2. He had seven sons and three daughters and he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 oxen and he had a large number of servants.

He's in millionaire status. But he doesn't allow his wealth to rule or ruin his life.

[13:07] Look at verse 1. We're told there in the middle that this man was blameless and upright. He feared God and he shunned evil. Or as God says in verse 8, there is no one on earth like him.

Job is a man of integrity and honesty. He seeks what is good. He loves God, not just in words, but in his actions. And he hates evil.

But not only that, he's not only concerned for his own spiritual life, he's concerned for his whole family. Look at verse 4. His sons used to take turns holding feasts or parties in their homes and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

And when a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them thinking, perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts.

You see, Job is the kind of neighbour you would want, the kind of friend that you'd love to have, the husband or the father that you would dream of, the employer you'd love to be working for.

[14:19] You can't fault him. He's innocent. But then all of a sudden and without warning, he is destroyed by personal suffering.

In the first scene, look at verse 15. He loses his donkeys and servants to some act of war, not unlike what's going on in Syria. Then in verse 16, through some natural disaster, most likely it's lightning, but we're told that fire wipes out his sheep and more servants.

And then in verse 17, there's more violence as all his camels are stolen and his remaining servants are brutally butchered. And if that were not enough, in verse 18, all of his children and their families and all the grandchildren are killed in what seems like a tornado or a hurricane, a natural disaster similar to what had struck at Japan a year ago.

And then in the second scene, in chapter 2, verse 7, it gets even more personal.

We're told there that Job is afflicted with painful sores from the tip of his toes to the top of his head, excruciating pain all day and all night.

[15:41] In a matter of days, his life is ruined, broken, and destroyed. An innocent man experiencing unimaginable suffering.

And as we said, suffering that happens as a result of our foolish actions, we can understand, we can kind of get our heads around it, but innocent people who suffer, well, that's too hard to bear.

And it's that kind of suffering that begins to ask the question, why? Why did God allow this to happen? Why did God not intervene?

Such suffering threatens to destroy our faith, our hope, and our meaning and purpose, and to get our heads around the world that we live in.

Another man who knew great suffering was a man called Elie Wiesel. As a teenager, he was shoved with his family, a Jewish family, into a cattle hold onto a train and taken to Auschwitz. [16:59] On the first night of being in that concentration camp, he witnessed his mother and his little sister being forced into a giant furnace. and as he reflects, this is what he writes.

He reflects on that night. Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp that turned my life into one long night, seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke, never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.

Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments that murdered that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes. Never shall I forget these things, even were I condemned to live as long as God himself.

[18:20] Never. Do you hear what he said? Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith.

Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God. You see, innocent suffering when it comes threatens to destroy our faith, our hope, our meaning, our purpose.

What is this world that we're living in? And if we are to leave it there at this point, it would leave us without faith, without hope, without meaning, like Elie Wiesel.

But God has so much more to say. Our second signpost is this. Satanic influence.

Satan is real, but not in control. When suffering happens, people tend to blame Satan. In other words, everything bad that happens in this world is the work and the influence of Satan.

[19:30] But everything good that happens is the result of God's goodness and his love. But that's not how it's presented in Job. Unknown to Job, and let's remember this, unknown to Job, but known to us, the reader, God and Satan are in conversation behind the scenes.

Look at verse 6, chapter 1. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came with them. The Lord said to Satan, where have you come from?

Satan answered the Lord, from roaming through the earth and going to and throw in it. There's something evil and sinister there, isn't there? Satan wandering around the earth looking for ways to get at people.

Verse 8, then the Lord said to Satan, if you considered my servant Job, there is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.

Does Job fear God for nothing? Satan replied. Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and his herds are spread throughout the land.

[20:50] You see, anyone will love God, or the only reason that Job seeks good, the only reason that Job loves God, the only reason that Job hates evil is because he's wealthy and healthy.

Do something to him, verse 11, stretch out your hands and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face. You see, saying anybody will love God, any one of us will be a Christian, if everything in their life is a bed of roses.

But if you throw in a few thorns, then that will soon sort out who is a genuine believer. Go on, God, make something bad happen, make him suffer, and then you'll soon see that he is nothing more than a fake.

Without a doubt, Satan is real. His influence is real. And we should never minimize his desire and his effort to keep people from God and to turn people away from God.

He is God's enemy and he's our enemy. But we should never think that he has the power over God or that he has control over the world.

[22:08] The story of Job does not allow us to let Satan be the boss. Look at what happens in this conversation. It's all happening in the control room of power.

Look at verse 6 again. The angels were told and Satan come to present themselves before God. It's like they've been summoned to report their activities to the Almighty, to the one who's in control.

Even Satan knows who is in control. Look down at verse 11. He says, but stretch out your hand and strike everything he has.

Satan knows he can do nothing on his own. He hasn't got the power to do as he pleases. He has to ask God to stretch out his hand. Verse 12.

The Lord said to Satan, very well then, everything he has is in your hands. God, with absolute power and supreme authority, allows Satan to bring suffering into this man's life.
[23 : 25] But there is a boundary. Look at the rest of verse 12. But on this man himself, do not lay a finger. It's repeated again in chapter 2.

There's almost the identical same scene. They come before God, present themselves. Look at verse 6. Satan has come again asking for more suffering.

The Lord said to Satan, verse 6, very well then, he is in your hands, but you must spare his life. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

Satan is real, but he is under the control of God. It's like if we could imagine it like this, that Satan is on a leash, he's on a lead, he's tied.

Yes, he has influence, but he does not have free reign to do what he pleases when he pleases. The story of Job makes it crystal clear that this is God's world and he is the one who remains in charge.

[24 : 36] sin. So signpost one, there is such a thing as innocent suffering. Signpost two, there is satanic influence, but he does not have control.

And the third signpost is this, divine sovereignty or sovereign control. God is powerful, but lets people suffer.

You see, despite all the suffering, God holds sovereign control. Nowhere are we ever to think that this world is in freefall, that it's some kind of avalanche that nobody can stop, or that somehow Satan is this force that God is struggling to cope with, trying to come up with plan B and plan C. In fact, the opposite is true. Behind all the suffering that is going on stands God who remains firmly in charge of Job's life, of your life, of my life, over Satan and the world in which we live.

In fact, the big shock and the big struggle and the big difficulty for us is that God, who is all-loving and all-powerful, allows innocent people to suffer.

[26 : 07] Look at how this has worked out. God initiates Job's test. Look at verse 8 of chapter 1. Then the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job?

You see, it's not Satan who picks on Job. It is God who brings his faithful servant Job to Satan's attention. To God, Job is special.

He calls him a servant. It's a title. The same title that were given to great men of honour like Abraham and Moses. The same title that was given to Jesus Christ.

So there's no animosity between God and Job. God loves him. He treasures him. He cares for him. But yet God takes this initiative.

Have you considered my servant Job? Job? Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. Job. But then God also permits Job's suffering.

[27 : 19] Verse 12. The Lord said to Satan, Very well then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.

Satan knows who's in control. That's why he had to first ask God, for God to stretch out his hand. But in what is perhaps the most surprising and shocking response in the whole of the story of the Bible, God turns Satan's desire back to Satan and gives him permission to inflict suffering. It's not that God is standing idly by with his hands tied behind his back. No, he's involved, he gives permission for this awful suffering that follows.

And if that is not shocking enough, and it should outrage us, Satan comes a second time to God. Look at chapter 2, verse 3. The Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job?

There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil, and he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.

[29 : 02] Skin for skin, Satan replied. A man will give all he has for his own life, but stretch out your hands and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.

You see, at this point we would think God would say, no, that's it, stop, enough is enough. There's been enough suffering in this man's life, there's going to be no more.

But to our shocking surprise, God gives Satan permission again, verse 6. Then the Lord said to Satan, very well then, he is in your hands, but you must spare his life.

You see, everything within us screams that this can't be true. I want to rip those verses out of the Bible.

I don't want to read them because I don't like them. I find it too hard to come to terms with because the God that I know is loving and compassionate and in my thinking he would never take initiative and he would never give permission for such terrible suffering to happen to innocent people.

[30 : 23] The man is blameless, people are blameless, he's done nothing wrong, how can we say that God is behind all of this? It raises lots of questions and there's no way that we're going to answer all of that.

That's why we're going to take our time over these coming weeks to work through it, to battle with it, to deal with it. But at this point let me say that as far as this story so far, the story of Job tells us that God stands behind all good and behind all evil.

But God is never ever charged with wrong doing. He's never charged with doing anything wrong. He's not vindictive. But he stands behind it as the one who's in control and as mysterious as it is for us to try and comprehend, we are left to conclude at this point in the story that God is in control. He's in control of the world. He's in control of your life. He's in control of my life. He's in control of everything.

everything. So how do we respond? Well, Job's response helps us. Look at verse 20 of chapter 1.

[32 : 08] Let's try and put ourselves in this man's shoes and all that he has lost and the suffering that has come his way, verse 20. How does he respond? At this, Job got up and he tore his robe and he shaved his head and then he fell to the ground in worship.

He doesn't understand his suffering. He has no answers. He has no reasons. He simply responds with worship.

He's not jumping up around the place, jumping up and down, singing happy songs. That's not what it means. He fell to the ground in worship. It means that he just fell down and submitted himself to God.

He bows down to one who does know and one who we can trust in every circumstance of life. And then he says, verse 21, the well-known words, naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. Do you notice that Job attributes all the good in his life and all the suffering in his life, not to Satan, but to God.

[33 : 42] we sang it earlier, these very words, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Verse 22, in all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Job longs for answers as we will see as we read through, and we desperately want answers. But before we can move on and start addressing some of those, we've got to stop.

We've got to stop and worship. To learn to trust God like Job and not curse God like his wife.

Look at chapter 2, verse 9. His wife said to him, are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die. He replied, you are talking like a foolish woman.

Shall we accept good from God and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. There's no quick fixes.

[34 : 54] There's no pat answers. And if we are to live in a suffering world, we must stop to worship.

to bow down with all of our questions that we have right now and submit to our God, who is loving and compassionate, who is powerful and sovereign, and kneel before him and say with all of our struggles that you are God and I am not.

Amen. I'd like us to turn to Psalm 13.

Rather than sing, I think it's hard to sing sometimes. It's not always appropriate to sing. but we're going to read a psalm that perhaps helps us to express some of the things that we've been looking at.

Psalm 13. I'm going to read verses 1 and 2 and then I'd like us all together to read verses 3 to 6.

Psalm 13.

[36 : 19] 13. The first part is just simply an expression of the questions of why. But then as we get into it then there's this trust in verse 5.

I will trust in your unfailing love. So let me read verses 1 to 2 then you respond by reading verses 3 to 6 out loud and then we'll just simply have a moment's quietness to reflect.

How long O Lord will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your faith from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

how long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer O Lord my God give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death my enemy will say I have overcome him and my foes will rejoice when I fall but I trust in your unfailing love my heart rejoices in your salvation I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me let's just take a moment's quietness to reflect Lord holy safe and have tears to the you .

pro Thank you.

[38 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Everything is possible. God at that moment could have come to Jesus and said, enough is enough. We won't go through this suffering.

Everything is possible. But then he says, yet not what I will, but what you will.

[40 : 46] The cross reminds us that God plans suffering for himself so that we might live.

And with absolute control, God in Christ suffered for you and for me. Jesus submitted himself to the Father and Jesus on the cross drinks the cup of suffering.

He takes the wrath of God on himself for my sin, for your sin. He takes the judgment of God. He experiences hell, the ultimate suffering, on himself so that we don't have to.

God planned suffering for himself so that we might escape the greatest suffering.

And that's what we celebrate here with the bread and the wine. The simple meal, Jesus took bread and broachers and gave it to his disciples.

[41 : 52] And he said, you have to do this in remembrance of me. God will not suffer anything from himself so that we might escape the most of you.

And the bread and the wine after I make is full of me. Just in his mind, reflect on what Christ has done to me and to me.

And then we will continue. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[43 : 56] Amen. And Christ was in the garden.

And he prayed. he cried out that if possible the suffering would pass but not my will but your will be done and in his submission he suffered on the cross for you and for me so that we might have life and the promise