

Job 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2019

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 0 0] and from Job chapter 3 verses 1 through 26 which can be found on page 460 of the white Bibles next to you. Again the scripture is Job 3 verses 1 through 26 on page 460 of the white Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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 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. Behold let that night be barren. Let no joyful cry enter it. Let those curse it who curse the day who are 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? For then I would have lain down and been quiet. I would have slept. Then I would have been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves. Or princes who had gold who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not a hidden stillborn child as infants who never see the light? There are the wicked seats 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. Why the 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 hidden treasures who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave. Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden from God has helped in whom God has helped in. For my sighting 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 am not at ease nor am I quiet. I have no rest but trouble comes. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

It's worthwhile pausing to pray before we enter into this text. Father we come to your word and expectation desiring to hear from the living God. We come upon a text that instills at least in me a sense of trembling that what is before us is words that shouldn't be uttered.

And so we come to you and we ask for your help. That you would shed light on your word. Give hope to your people. Bring joy to the downcast. We ask these things for Jesus sake. Amen.

Well we start the new year and we begin in the book of Job. It's a literary masterpiece. And it reflects on one of the most perplexing and significant human experiences.

Suffering. Suffering. There are haunting places in the world. Innumerable places that if rocks, trees, or soil could speak, they would testify to horror and atrocities that have taken place. I stood at such a place.

[4 : 5 1] It's unforgettable. It's been nearly 15 years. There I was on a cold winter day with a light layer of snow in western Poland in the city of Asfacim where Auschwitz is situated.

Though it's impossible to know for sure more than one million executions took place at Auschwitz. And in front of me stood what they called the killing wall. A thick cement wall where individuals were placed to face a firing squad. And I stood in front of that wall and I looked down at my feet and I asked If the soil could speak, what would it say?

It was surely a test to evil and suffering beyond comprehension. And just a few weeks ago, there I was at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Israel, where I learned that the lives of 1.5 million children were taken.

Evil and suffering magnified. What is a man to do? I had thought that the museum wouldn't have an effect on me having been at Auschwitz.

And there I was entering in a children's memorial, unsure of what to say, what to think. And I walked into this dark room and I just wept.

[6 : 33] I was unsettled. I was indignant. I was undone. How does one continue following a God under whose watch these things unfold?

This morning we come to such an individual. The example I used was historical, arguably distant, in that I did not experience it personally.

It was indirect. But this morning we come to an individual who suffers directly, intensely. Job is not reflecting on something that happened to someone else, or a situation that happened in some other place.

He is bursting forth something that has transpired in his own life. We chose not to read chapters 1 and 2.

And arguably because the passage is familiar, but I want to read the end of chapter 2, because it will help us get into chapter 3, where we will spend our time this morning.

[7 : 48] Chapter 2, verse 11. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Nahamite.

They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him.

Verse 13. Verse 13. Verse 13. 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 great.

It is a heavy word this morning. It is arguably one of the bleakest chapters in our Bibles. It is the account that the psalmist describes in Psalm 88, where he says, darkness is my only companion. And this morning we come to a text that gives us the genuine experience of a follower of God, who bears his soul, that has been crushed by darkness and despair, where death is attractive and life is bemoaned.

[9 : 24] Three things. I always say three things, I guess. That I believe are there. And you'll see as if you follow along. Three things.

It begins with this. When a cursed day. When birth is a curse. Verses 3 through 10.

Job had sat in silence for seven days and seven nights. Surrounded by three friends who were grieving with him. And he breaks the silence in verse 3.

What does one say in light of such evil and suffering? Will Job actually succumb to what Satan intends?

Which is found in chapter 1 verse 11. Just curse God and die. Curse God to his face in 1.11. Will Job heed the recommendation of his wife?

[10 : 31] In chapter 2 verse 9. Just curse God and be done with it. And die. He has lost, according to chapters 1 and 2, all his material possessions.

He has lost, according to chapters 1 and 2, all his progeny. All his children. He has lost, according to chapters 1 and 2, his very health.

Now the question remains. Will he lose his faith? There is a great tension in this text up to this point. Job is unaware of the cosmic exchange that has happened between God and Satan.

And he opens his mouth in verse 3. And instead of cursing God, he curses the day of his birth. And what he is saying here in these verses is, contrary to it being a day that is celebrated, curse it.

He recasts the meaning of a birthday in light of the suffering and evil that have fallen upon him. Let it be blotted out. Let that day perish.

[11 : 44] Let it be shrouded in darkness. Let it be overlooked. Let it be ignored by God himself. Let it be joyless.

In verses 6 and 7. Take the rejoicing from it. Stop the joy from entering it. Stop any light or gladness from filling it.

For you and I, there are certain days on the calendar that cannot be overlooked. It is our birthday. It is the day of your birth.

Birthdays are celebrated. There are parties. There are gatherings. There are gifts. There are days that are never to be spent alone.

Why? Because they are days to be remembered and commemorated. Because the gift of life is a good gift from God. Regardless of the rituals that surround that day, the day itself is sacred.

[12 : 45] It celebrates life. It's memorialized in the day of every individual. It is unlikely that you will forget the day of your birth. It is that day of your birth.

It is that day of your birth. It's a boy. It's a girl. It's that day when Facebook announces, so-and-so, such-and-such, was born on this day, weighing this much, mom, child, are well.

Instead, according to verse 3, Job says, Let it perish. Let no announcement be sounded that a man or a boy is conceived.

This is not a day to be commemorated. It is a day to be cursed. You see the imagery. Job summons all the celebration that is to surround such a day and curses it and calls them to be silenced.

Instead of the light a newborn brings a family, let darkness shroud it. And the imagery is there, the darkness imagery. You see it, the ESV translates it multiple times.

[13 : 58] It's reinforced by such words like blackness and night. And together they all give us the thrust of Job's desire. I wish that day never happened.

Because if that day happened, I would not exist. And if I did not exist, I could have been spared from the suffering and the evil I undergo.

His pain and his suffering are so great. You see, what Job is doing is he's actually asking God to uncreate.

You remember Genesis, the opening chapters, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. When the earth had no form, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters and the first instruction, the first command to start God's order, God's good creation that would lead to humanity. He said, let there be light. And Job says, God, reverse that day.

[15 : 12] Let there be darkness. Bring forth darkness. I regret that day.

Well, his birth is a curse. And it's followed secondly by his outpouring that his death is desired.

Death is desirable. Verses 11 through 19. Job has not only cursed his birthday, now he turns into his entrance into the world.

He laments his first moments of life. Instead of growing into adulthood and experiencing the fullness of life, he laments it.

It would have been better, God, if I had a different biography, if I had died at birth. The great tragedy that you and I often lament is the expiration of life at a premature date.

[16 : 31] Tombstones attest to this. If you ever wander graveyards and you'll see tombstones not only marked off with names, but they'll be marked off with dates.

And if you're great at math, or even not great at math, you could pull out your phone and do calculations. And you begin to total and say, wow, that person was 103.

What a life. But on occasion, you'll come to a tombstone where the birth date and the date of death are identical.

We lament that. shortened lives are an injustice. There's something wrong with that. That's not right.

And yet here, Job is saying, I desired that. What is tragedy to you, his suffering is so heavy, what is tragic to you and I would be relief to him.

[17 : 38] He desires the tombstone where both the birth date and the death date are identical. A day where he not only received life, but life expired on him.

Instead of the long life, which we desire, Job laments the fact that he did not have a brief life. His lament is an outflow of a heart expressing a desirable death.

He's uttering words forbidden to us today. I should have died at birth. Why didn't I expire as I passed through the birth canal?

Verse 10. Why did I receive breast milk as an infant, a live infant? Then verse 12. I wish I was a stillborn.

In verse 16. See, for Job, death was attractive. His perception was death would have granted him everything he desired according to 25 and 26.

[18 : 52] I want to lie down quietly according to chapter 3, verse 13. I want to go to sleep.

Verse 13. I would have been at rest. Verse 13 and 17. I would have been at ease. Verse 18. I would have been freed.

Verse 19. If I had died, I would have been spared from all this evil and all this suffering.

And you begin to feel it, don't you? When your birthday is a curse and when death is desirable, as you sit in these words, you sense the despair.

If I could only have deliverance, if I could only have a little relief, if there were just a glimmer of hope that there are brighter days ahead, But there are none.

[20 : 01] There are none. Job's struggle. I would have been at ease. I would have been at ease. See, Job's struggle is not a primitive struggle. Isn't it our struggle as well?

Because for the Christian, the question you must answer and wrestle over with, against all other, I would say, all other religious systems or world religions or even the irreligious, what you and I have to wrestle over and confront is the God that we believe is sovereign and good.

But what do we make of the world's disarray? What do we make of the evil that we see?

How do we make sense of the suffering we undergo? It's not a primitive struggle. It's our struggle. And the relevance of the Bible continues even today.

Its truthfulness records this, that even the righteous suffer. That those under the rule and reign of God experience what is, should be unspoken.

[21 : 21] We cannot be a people. This cannot be a pulpit where only victories are touted and triumphs are told. For that is not the reality of this world.

The reality of the Christian life is it's filled with tragedy, suffering, and mystery. Our life is not one where suffering is eluded.

We likewise fall victims to evil, injustice, and inexplicable pain. If God did not spare his son, in his infinite knowledge, he has chosen not to spare his saints.

We are not inoculated to suffering. We don't have some immunity card. We are not inoculated from suffering.

We as a congregation can attest to this. That suffering hits us in the same way it hits the rest of the seven billion people in this world. It hurts the same.

[22 : 22] That we have held stillborn infants. That we have lost investment and savings. We have been crippled with infirmities that are only remedied, not even remedied, that are helped by maybe medication and modern science.

We attest to this. So how do we make sense of this? When the doors of heaven seem barred shut, what are we to do? Well, I want to offer a few things.

First, Job legitimizes for us a language of protest and lament. He legitimizes for us a language of protest and lament.

The Christian is not one who gags our desperate questions. We don't simply accept that it's a mystery and simply keep quiet. We grieve.

We mourn. We weep. We lament. We protest. We likewise scream in pain and in anger. We, like Job, bemoan the life that has been given.

[23 : 33] It may be surprising to you, but in all that Job is doing, the narrator is very careful to say he did not renounce his faith, his righteousness, or integrity.

we're able to do it. We're able to protest and scream. The Bible in some way, the God of the Bible is not one whose ears close to the cries of suffering.

Rather, the God of the Bible summons us to cry out, to call out, to protest, and to plead. You see, lament is the voice of pain.

Whether for oneself, for one's people, or simply for the mountain of suffering humanity undergoes, lament is the voice of faith, struggling to find, struggling to live with unanswered questions and unexplained suffering.

well, verses 20 to 26, Job turns from his consideration of the past, his date of birth, he's already cursed, his entry into life, he's already expressed his desire to die.

[24 : 55] And in the final stretch, 20 to 26, he begins questioning the value of his very life in light of his suffering. what are we to do, thirdly, when life is unbearable?

He continues his sequence of questions. You see this. Why? In verse 11. Why? In verse 12. Why? In verse 16.

And in verse 20, he continues, Why? Why is light given to him who is in misery, namely himself, and life to the bitter soul who long for death, but it comes not.

What is the value of life for those who are suffering? Life is aimless, isn't it? It's futile, without purpose.

The image is so vivid. Job has described it in verse 23. You want to know what it's like? He's saying. Hedge me in.

[25 : 59] I've been hedged in. I've been put in a jail cell of sorts. I cannot escape. I cannot get out. I cannot flee.

This cell is confined to suffering. He has no access to help and no deliverance of any sort. I'm trapped.

And God has locked me in to this turmoil. You see, the heaviness of the text is increasing. Why? Why, God? Why does such harsh suffering happen? He longs for, verse 25, for the thing that I fear comes upon me.

What I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet. I have no rest, but trouble comes. He's experiencing a restless despair.

[27 : 04] It's relentless, unforgiving, and unbearable. As far as we know, Job doesn't know the back story. He doesn't know the story and the story of chapters 1 and 2.

According to chapter 7, it's been months now. This isn't just a two, three day thing. It's been months and I'm going to, I believe it's probably going to be close to years.

What do we say about this? What are a few pastoral observations I can make for a man who suffered very little, admittedly?

Three things from the text. It's noteworthy that for Job, God remains in the equation. His beloved wife in chapter 2 verse 9 has already told Job she has shared in the suffering in some degree. She has lost her children as well. She has lost all their resources and money as well. She's not suffering physically.

[28 : 19] But she tells Job do this according to chapter 2 verse 9. His wife said to him, do you still hold fast to your integrity, Job? Curse God and die.

In other words, abandon your faith, Job, and take your life. His wife's words are the words of our world.

You're a Christian and God did that to you? You're a Christian and you're a good God allowed that to happen to you?

And the devil through the world says, curse God. Walk away from the faith and just die.

Take your own life. Yet Job, for Job it's not an option. It's not an option because God always stays in the picture for him.

[29 : 40] he has found wrestling with himself the very reality that God is somehow superseding his sufferings. It is God who has hedged me in.

It is God who has given me this lot in life. It is God who has permitted this. And if it is God, chapter 13, though he slay me, yet I will hope in him.

suffering cannot be purposeless given our understanding of God. Secondly, Job, this is striking, Job has not been spared from suffering because he's blameless and upright, according to chapter 1, verse 1.

As a matter of fact, Job is suffering because he is blameless and upright. It dispels any secular notion of karma.

You get what you deserve. If you're good, then good things happen. If you're wicked, then wicked things happen. No, the human experience is not a scientific experiment.

[31 : 01] It is not a math equation. You do not simply go A plus B always equals C. That is not the human experience. It cannot be the human experience because we live in a world that is not only physical.

You see, it tosses aside any notion of good happens to you because you're good. Evil happens to you because you're evil.

We live under what Isaiah the prophet says, we live under a God who hides himself. A God who is mysterious. A God who transcends the laws of nature when he needs to.

A God who transcends the human philosophy of karma because he wants to. We live under a God who has revealed himself in natural law, who has given himself through revelation in the Bible, but who can't exercise in himself something that you and I, our finite minds, cannot grasp or comprehend.

There is an element of life that requires faith. There is. And thirdly, lastly, suffering and trials, the New Testament tells us, prove the genuine nature of faith.

[32 : 37] Why are you a Christian? Well, some would say, because God has prospered me in my business.

God has prospered my family in our relationships. God has preserved my health. God has given me eternal life. Well, these chapters remind us that there is more at stake than what appears on the surface of human experience.

What is at stake is the desirability of God. God will Joe love God for who he is instead of loving God for what he gives?

People have already jumped ship. His wife said, God took my property. God took my progeny. God took what he gave.

I don't want him. But for Joe, God took his health, his progeny, his prosperity.

[33 : 57] And Joe continued and said, I want God for who God is.

You see, up to this point, the devil's claim is, God, no one, no one wants you for you, God. Do you know why Job wants you, according to chapter 1?

He loves you because you built a fence around him. Of course he loves you. You've provided for him bountifully.

Take that away and he'll curse you to your face. Take his health away and he'll curse you to your face. And for Job, he will prove himself that he will love God not for his gifts.

He will love God not for the prosperity that he brings. He will love God not for the health he sustains. but he will answer the question can a man love God when all of life's experiences scream that God does not love you.

[35 : 15] He will answer the question will a woman, can a woman love God when her circumstances have no reasonable explanation and God's goodness is hidden.

Job will answer the question can a teenager love God when life the life he or she has is not the life he or she desires.

Can one love God when all of life's questions go unanswered? And the answer is yes. Though God slay me I will hope in him.

Possibly 3,000 years later another man comes on the scene. another man who was stricken hedged in by God rejected by men scorned by the ones he loved falsely accused verbally assaulted physically beaten and condemned to die and while that man suspended himself on the cross he did what Job did he protested my God my God why have you forsaken me and heaven did not answer in his lifetime and there he expired but he did the same thing Job did he entrusted himself into the hands of God that into your hands I commit my spirit

Jesus was stripped of his kingly crown he is humiliated by the ones he came to save he lost his heavenly estate he bows his head in death and he imitates Job in clinging to God's goodness when the answers aren't given and so we enter a new year what a way to enter a new year from my count we're anticipating eight new births in these first few months I'm participating in at least two weddings this summer in this congregation there are new job prospects new means of provision for you and your family yet be reminded we are not a people that love God because of those things we cannot be a people that love God because of those things we long to be a people who love God in spite of them in spite of our circumstances in spite of our suffering and this morning we have an opportunity to come to a table and I'll lay it out this way this table is spread it's set for the suffering and it's made possible only through suffering well shall we pray father what do we say oh father would you give us a resilient spirit that seizes you regardless of the life that we receive that we see in this passage that there's this heavenly dialogue that

[39 : 42] Satan will even use suffering to strip our faith away but father would you hold us fast will we be mindful of these things that we would not find it strange that we suffer we would maybe not yeah so strengthen us meet us minister to us help us for Jesus sake amen