

Job's Suffering and God's Glory

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[0 : 00] It says this, workers dropped a crate containing an estimated 75 million year old dinosaur skeleton outside the museum in The Hague, Netherlands, breaking it into 188 pieces.

A spokesman told the reporter, the two Canadian scientists who had spent two years gluing the skeleton together had tears in their eyes. Two years down the gurgler.

Have you ever had one of those days? Everything just goes wrong. Of course, our suffering can be much worse than seeing a skeleton shattered. When I was studying at Bible College, in just two years, I knew of fellow students who needed surgery.

Others were told they could not have children. Others buried parents. Others had miscarriages. One couple's child was born with Down syndrome. Another had twins who died two hours after being born.

And one student in my year, just a month before graduating college to become a minister, was told that he had throat cancer, which is pretty bad when you use your voice.

[1 : 03] When suffering comes, so does the questions, particularly the question why. Well, we're going to be looking at the book of Job over the next four weeks. And as we do, we'll see all sorts of answers to that question, why.

Today, we're going to look at just two or three, actually. And I do hope you find this series helpful because suffering is something we all have and will experience this side of heaven.

Certainly, Job did. But when we first meet Job, his life is actually quite good. So at point one, verse one, it says, Job, we're told, lived in a place called Uz, which is somewhere in the east of Israel. And first, we're told that he's a man of great godliness. He was blameless and upright, it says. A man who feared God and shunned evil. He really was a good man.

And his greatness in godliness seems to be matched only by his greatness in earthly blessings. So we continue to read in verses two to three that he had seven sons and three daughters. And he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen.

[2 : 24] So 1,000 oxen and 500 donkeys and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the peoples of the east. And in those days, when wealth was measured by livestock and servants rather than Ferraris and market shares, Job was filthy rich.

Loads of livestock, seven sons, which was also a sign of great blessing. In fact, in the Old Testament, seven sons seem to be considered as the ultimate blessing.

I've got one. That's enough. But we see this in the book of Ruth, for example. But Job had even more that. He had seven sons and three daughters.

He had it all, it seems. No wonder the narrator calls him in verse three, the greatest man of the east. Well, in verses four and five, the narrator returns to Job's godliness with an example of how he tried to please God.

And so we read in verse four, his sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified.

[3 : 31] Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking that perhaps my children have sinned and curse God in their hearts. This was Job's regular custom.

You see, Job did everything he could to try and please God. Here is a man of great blessing and of great godliness. And in case this guy seems too godly to be true, God affirms it in the next scene, which brings us to point two and Satan's accusation.

And here our gaze moves from earth to heaven. So verse six. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.

The Lord said to Satan, where have you come from? And then notice Satan doesn't really answer. Satan answered the Lord from roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth 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. Here God calls Job my servant, doesn't he?

[4 : 38] Which is a subtle way of saying that Job is a godly man. For God often called the great ones of the Old Testament my servant, like Abraham and Moses and David. And of course, the servant of the Lord in Isaiah, who turns out to be Jesus himself.

But then we read it, didn't we? That God explicitly says in verse eight that Job is blameless and upright. There's no one on earth like him. In fact, but sorry, then Satan challenges this and accuses Job of ungodly motives.

In fact, the name Satan means accuser or adversary. Accuser is probably better because that's what he does. He accuses people. And here he accuses both Job and God of being dodgy. So look what happens next in verse nine to 11. Satan says, 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 now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

[5 : 49] See what Satan is saying here? He's saying, Does Job really fear God for nothing? That is, does Job really worship God without getting something in return for it? Here Satan accuses Job of worshipping God in order to get and keep the good life he has.

In other words, Satan accuses Job of having a shallow faith, one that worships God in order to get earthly blessings, rather than one who worships God because God deserves to be worshipped. Of course, there are people who do worship God only in order to get things or something out of life. I mean, the classic example, like this is someone who's, you know, you see it in the movies, don't you?

They're on a plane, the plane's, the engine's burned out, the plane's about to go down, and they say, God, I'll go to church if you do something for me and get me out of this mess. People do act like that.

Of course, it's not a genuine faith in God, is it? It's a shallow faith at best, one that treats God like a business contract. As long as God provides goods and services for me, I'll pay him with worship.

[6 : 52] That's the kind of faith that Satan is accusing Job of having. But by doing so, Satan is also implying that God has bribed Job into worshipping him. Satan says to God in verse 9, Have you not put a hedge around him and everything he has?

That is, have you not protected him and blessed him so that he'll worship you? Have you not bought his faith by giving him a good life? In other words, Satan is accusing God of bribing Job in order to believe in him.

It's as though Satan is saying to God, You alone are not good enough to be worshipped. You have to sweeten the deal for people and buy their worship. And so Satan suggests that if God takes away Job's wealth, then Job will no longer have any reason to fear God.

Instead, Job will curse God and his faith will be seen as shallow and fake. And in the process, God will be shown to be foolish for holding up Job as a man of great faith in the first place.

And God will also be shown to be guilty of bribing Job into believing. And so at stake is not only the sincerity of Job's faith, but also the righteousness of God's character.

[7 : 58] Now, somewhat surprisingly, God gives Satan permission in verse 12. And with that, our gaze moves from heaven back to earth to see Job's suffering and response.

Point three, verse 13. Verse 13. 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 ploughing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabines attacked and made off with them. 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 heavens and burnt up all the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. And while he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you.

And 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.

[9 : 07] It collapsed on them, and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. It would be almost comical if it wasn't so horrendous.

These verses bring new meaning to the expression, When it rains, it pours. I was talking with someone from our own church recently, who in one week had her car crashed into, fell and hurt her back severely, and then the next day, having to get out of bed, to top it all off, a bird pooped on her head.

It wasn't a good week. But Job's suffering happens in one day, doesn't it? News reports start coming in to Job, one after the other. In fact, even before one bad report finishes, another comes in. And like an avalanche of boulders pounding down upon the ground, these reports pound down upon Job. How will he respond? In fact, these reports happen in almost the reverse order to how they were introduced.

So on the next slide, in the early part of chapter one, we were introduced to Job's faith and godliness, then his sons and daughters, and then his sheep and camels, then his oxen and donkeys, and the servants that attended them all in the process.

[10 : 27] And when disaster hits, the order is somewhat reversed. He first loses the oxen and donkeys, then his sheep and camels, and then his sons and daughters, and the servants that go with them all.

And so the question is, will this reversal continue? Will he lose his faith and godliness that we were first introduced to? Will he turn his back on God and curse him as Satan predicted?

Will God turn out to be wrong about Job after all? Well, have a look at verse 20 to 22. At this, Job got up, tore his robe, shaved his head, then he fell down to the ground in worship and said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

And that's an extraordinary response, isn't it? It's especially extraordinary since Job acknowledges that he's suffering is God's doing. He says that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

[11 : 32] Job acknowledges that God is God, that he is sovereign or in control of all things, including his suffering. Yet he still says, Blessed be or praised be to the name of the Lord.

And so here we see two things. At first, Job's faith is proved genuine, isn't it? He trusts in God, even despite his great suffering. And second, God's character is vindicated.

God is shown to be right about Job all along. God did not bribe Job to worship him, because Job praises him even in his suffering. In other words, God's character is glorified through this.

But before we can pause for breath, round two hits, doesn't it? It's as though the boxing bell sounds again, and history repeats itself in chapter 2. Point four, have a look at verse 1 of chapter 2.

On another day, the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before the Lord, just like what happened before. And the Lord said to Satan, Where have you come from?

[12 : 34] Satan answered the Lord again, from roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it. Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on earth.

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 without any reason.

Skin for skin, Satan replied, a man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to his face.

Again, as I said, the angels present themselves before God, and again, Satan comes along with them, and God again holds up Job to Satan, doesn't he?

Chapter 1 is being repeated, only this time God himself claims he is responsible for Job's suffering in part. In verse 3, God says, You incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.

[13 : 33] God acknowledges that although Satan did all the bad stuff to Job, it's ultimately God who's in control of Job's suffering. In fact, both times, it's actually God who kind of starts the whole ball rolling.

God was the one who held up Job as a great man of faith in the first place, which kind of provoked Satan. If God had kept quiet about Job, then none of this would have happened. What's more, God even acknowledges in verse 3 that he has afflicted Job without any reason.

Do you see that? Now, at this point, we need to remember two things. First, there is a tension here that is true, even though we might not fully understand it. And this tension is that while God is in control of suffering, he is not to be blamed for suffering.

You see, Satan is the one who actually commits the crime here. God is always one step removed. He's always... Only good comes from God, though he's still in control of suffering.

Now, that's a complex idea, and I've just brushed over it very quickly. If you've got more questions, I'm sure we'll have a question sometime in the series. The second thing we need to remember is that when God says he has caused Job's suffering without any reason, it does not mean that God has no reason at all.

[14:47] It just means that Job has not given God a reason to cause his suffering himself. That is, Job hasn't done anything wrong to deserve this suffering. God still has other reasons, though, for causing this suffering.

And this is the problem with the atheist who says, how can a good God allow suffering in the world? And the answer is, because he has good reason. And some of those we'll see in tonight's talk and others in the following talks.

But for now, Satan does not concede that Job truly trusts God. He does not admit that God was right about Job. After all, God has still given Job his health.

And so, Satan says in verse 5, God, take away his health, and then he'll curse you. So, in verse 6 we read, The Lord said to Satan, Very well then, he is in your hands, but you must spare his life. And so following, so Satan went out, he wastes no time, he went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

[15:59] His wife said to him, Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die. You see, here in the end, Job is left scraping his sores as he sits on a heap of ashes.

All he has left is his life, if you can call it that, and his wife, who's not all that helpful actually. I mean, people have said that Satan left her living for a good reason.

And her words echo Satan's in the Garden of Eden, much like Eve's did. But will Job do as his wife suggests? Will he curse God and die?

Well, verse 10, Job 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.

You see, Job doesn't give in to his wife's advice, does he? Instead, he continues to acknowledge that God is sovereign, that he is in control. Job says that God is God. And so he can give both good and bad if he so chooses.

[16:59] And by doing so, Job acknowledges that God alone is worthy of worship because of who he is. For Job is worshipping God with essentially nothing.

God doesn't need to bribe people. He alone is worthy of worship. And with that, Job's faith is again proved genuine. And God's character is again vindicated and glorified.

For God is shown to be right about Job all along. And he's shown to be worthy of worship alone without any bribery. And here we start to see some of God's reasons for why we might suffer in life. Which brings us to our final point, our suffering and God's glory. And so at this point, I want us to turn to our other reading in 1 Peter. So if you've got your Bibles there, just turn to 1 Peter, our first reading.

It's on page 1220, 1220. Let me just read it to you again.

[18:07] Verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in his great mercy 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.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you 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 all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

these have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

In verse 3, we're told that Jesus, through his death and resurrection for us, gives us a living or a certain hope that no matter how much we suffer now, it will one day end. But according to Peter, one reason why these sufferings come is to prove the genuineness of our faith. It says there in verse 7. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do as a minister was to conduct a funeral for a stillborn child.

[19 : 23] The parents are some friends of ours and it happened a week before Christmas, so not really great timing. Yet through their tears and grief, they continued to trust God.

Even though they didn't know why this had happened to them. And because they continued to trust God despite their great suffering, their faith in God was proved genuine, you see. Everyone watching them knew they were serious about their faith in Christ.

They had to be serious to keep believing after losing their child like that. You see, their suffering showed their faith to be genuine. Now, you might not think that this is a very good reason for suffering, but we need to remember how much our faith is worth.

See verse 7 again. How much is our faith worth according to verse 7? Well, it's of greater worth than gold, isn't it? Why? Well, because it's by faith we receive salvation.

That is, it's by believing in Jesus that we have a living hope. It's by believing in Jesus that we are saved from hell and granted entry into heaven. You see, faith in Jesus determines where we end up for eternity.

[20 : 36] Faith really does matter. And so the point I need to ask at this moment is, do you have faith in Jesus? Do you have a hope, living hope? The living hope of heaven?

Because if you don't believe, then you have no hope. And for those of us who do, then are we happy to face suffering in order to make sure our faith is genuine? I remember a speaker, his name was Don Carson, some of you may have heard of him before.

He actually prays that his children might face suffering. You pray, you know, it's not a usual prayer, your parents pray for their children. He prays that his children might face suffering, not too much that they'll fall away, but enough that their faith might be proved genuine.

You see, he prays this not because he does not love them, but because he does love them. And he wants their faith to be proved genuine so that he'll see them in heaven. Faith matters.

And suffering various trials helps prove our faith genuine. I wonder if that's a prayer that we'd be willing to pray for ourselves. Of course, suffering not only proves faith genuine, it also grows our faith.

[21 : 45] On the next slide, just a quick couple of verses from James chapter 1. James writes this, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James says that we're actually to rejoice when trials and suffering come, and not because they are good things, but because of what they produce.

For they produce perseverance, and in turn, Christian maturity. It's a bit like exercise. I've started riding my bike a bit, and when I first started riding, when I came to Melbourne, I tried to ride to Coorong, which is Blackburn.

I made it to the shop and then I had to ring up my wife to come and get me because I was out of it. But the more riding I've done, the stronger my legs have become and the more I'm able to go, the further I'm able to last.

You see, suffering is a bit like exercise. It forces us to exercise our faith, and the more we exercise our faith, the stronger it becomes.

[22 : 54] See, suffering not only proves our faith genuine, it forces us to exercise it, to grow it, to mature it. But the emphasis back in 1 Peter here is on the result of genuine faith.

And what is the result? Well, it's praise and glory. See verse 7 again? He says, These sufferings have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, which is of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

You see the logic? Our suffering proves our faith genuine, which in turn results in praise and glory. But the question is, whose praise and glory?

Ours or God's? Now, it could be both. And usually when you're faced with a decision like that, the Bible can handle both. For example, those of us who have genuine faith and persevere even

