

Deep dark despair

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[0 : 00] Right up front as we begin, here I think is the message of Job chapter 3. The message of Job chapter 3. A real believer may go through deep, dark despair.

! A real believer actually may go through such deep, dark despair that they barely sound like a believer at all.

Last Sunday we began this book with chapters 1 and 2 and we met Job. Three things about him. Job was first a real believer.

He was blameless and upright, he feared God and he shunned evil. Job is a disciple walking in the light, a friend of God. A man of whom God said he is my servant Job, there is no one on earth like him. An awesome standout believer who second, suffered awfully. Four, as we read last Sunday, all Job possessed and the children he loved were ripped from him in a day of extreme and appalling tragedy.

A real believer who suffered awfully and yet, third, continued to praise his God. In chapter 1, verse 21, Job 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.

[1 : 33] Were you to read the beginning of Job very quickly and casually, you could end up with a very, very shallow view of life as a believer. I don't know if you know this, I'm sure you do. There is a version of Christianity that seems to be always happy and clappy.

Whatever you're going through in life, look, Job suffered and he believed and he triumphed and nothing stopped him singing. In God's presence our problems disappear. You believe that, don't you? You trust God.

So join with us and let's sing another chorus like Job did. Maybe you've experienced that to some degree. A Christianity or the way Christians talk that makes light of suffering.

Your suffering. A Christianity that feels emotionally superficial. And that just doesn't seem very real. Well, if you know anything of that, I get it from one angle, we should say what a relief to come to Job chapter three.

What a relief. We said last week, this book is staggeringly honest and brutally raw. It rips the lid off nice, safe Christian talk and plunges into what we can really feel behind closed doors and sometimes say in our tears.

[2 : 59] As we go down into chapter three, I just want to know this up front. Know that Job is speaking as a real believer. It's really important, this.

In chapter one, he is God's servant. Right at the end of the book, in chapter 42, verse seven on the screen here, God says to Eliphaz, one of Job's three friends, I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has.

So all the way through this book, Job is and remains God's servant. A real believer who speaks the truth about God.

He is a man with whom God is not angry. And so what Job feels here in this chapter and what he says, it is allowed.

As in, a believer is allowed to feel like this and speak like this. Because a real believer may go through such deep, dark despair that they barely sound like a believer at all.

[4 : 13] And yet they still are. And let's walk through it together, just draw some implications for our own lives as we go in at the end. First, at the end of chapter two, see this real believer terribly alone.

Follow it through with me. By the end of two, verse 10, Job is sat among the ashes, his possessions gone, his children dead, his sores festering, scraping himself with a piece of pottery.

And now come his friends. Look, when Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuie and Zophar the Namathite, heard about all the troubles they had come upon, that had come upon him.

They set up from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathise with him and comfort him. That's good. That's what loyal friends do.

They don't run away or stay away when you're suffering. They come to be with you and to speak kindly to you. And yet, verse 12, when they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognise him.

[5 : 16] They began to weep aloud and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Wonder whether you've ever had an experience like this. Put yourself in the place of the friends.

You go to see a friend or a parent in hospital or at home and as you approach, you hardly recognise them. They've lost their hair through chemotherapy, maybe.

They're so pale, thin, broken. Their suffering has changed them and made them strange to you.

And you thought you'd come close and say it's really nice to see you. But instead of it, it's like there's a chasm between you and this person whom you once knew. The friends, seeing Job amongst the ashes as they see him from far off, they weep loudly.

They tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads and then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how great his suffering was.

[6 : 24] As far as I understand, tearing robes, dust on their head, a seven day silence is what people did in the presence of death. Job's friends have nothing to say to him.

Their friend is as good as dead. And so they just sit there. Maybe talking about him, but not a word to him. Imagine how that must have been for Job.

Would anyone please just speak to me? Acknowledge me. And when we suffer, we can find ourselves terribly isolated and alone.

That is what suffering does. You're stuck in bed at home or you're forced to isolate in your room because you have COVID and you hear the noise and the chatter downstairs.

You're cut off. You're in a hospital bed and the nighttime silence is horrible. Maybe you have people around you.

[7 : 27] But only you know what it's like to be the parent of this child whom you've lost. You're on your own. Or your suffering is so intense that friends draw back in horror and people say nothing.

It's almost as though you're already dead and gone. I ask. I ask. I know that some of us have. Have you ever known the devastating loneliness of suffering?

When I see what happens next in the text. See this real believer, terribly alone, cursing his birthday. 3 verse 1. After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed. Not God. Job won't curse God to his face. But rather he cursed the day of his birth. In verses 3 to 10, put so darkly. This is what he's saying. I wish I'd never been born.

[8 : 49] Do you think you're allowed to say that as a believer? Do you think it would be okay if a Christian brother or sister said that to you? Listen to the poetry.

May the day of my birth perish and the night that said a boy is conceived. Calling down a curse on something, wishing something destroyed is so extreme.

I was born on the 24th of April 1975 in Lancashire. It was a Thursday. It was 10 to 4 in the afternoon. May that day be utterly destroyed and blotted out and non-existent.

Not just that, says Job. Rewind further. To the joyful night when mum and dad made love together and said, a boy is conceived. May that night too perish.

I wish I'd not been born. I wish I'd not even begun to exist as a fetus. Look, that day, my birthday, may it turn to darkness.

[9 : 50] May God above not care about it. May low light shine on it. May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more. May a cloud settle over it. May blackness overwhelm it.

In the Bible, light is life. And darkness is death. It's why Goths wear black. It's why deep depression feels like a darkness that won't lift.

It's why when you're suffering, you turn out the lights and shut the curtains and sit in the gloom. Job pours darkness on his birthday. No light but gloom, utter darkness, a cloud, blackness.

May death claim that day, he says. Verses six and seven. That night of my conception, that night.

May thick darkness seize it. May it not be included among the days of the year, nor be entered in

any of the months.

May that night be barren. May no shout of joy be heard in it. This is awful. Scrub the night of my conception from the calendar. The night of joy when seed and egg join in the darkness and new life blossoms.

[10:58] May it be a stony, barren, silent night. May those who curse days curse that day. Those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. Wake up, you evil sea monster, and swallow up life with death.

May that day's morning stars become dark. May it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn. Just unending night. Why?

For it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes. This is terrible. It's terrible. It's not Job saying, please take away my suffering.

He's saying, I wish I'd never been born. Curse that day with thick blackness. Every blessing I've enjoyed in my life. My family and friends and sunlight and laughter and feasting.

Not worth it. Given my sufferings now, I would rather have seen none of it. I wish myself back behind the doors of the womb in darkness, in non-existence.

[12:08] I wonder if there's ever been a moment when you have thought something like that. I wish I'd never been born. And yet today, of course, in the darkness of our lives, you can't turn the clock back.

You can't. And so in verses 11 to 19, Job's curse merges into desperate lament. Longing for the grave.

Why? Why? Look. Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb? Why were the knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?

So the journey of verses 11 to 12 is about life and love and nurture. Can you picture it? You come from the womb and you're placed on your mum's knees and she meets you and receives you.

And then she lifts you to her breast and you suck warm food into you as she holds you. That's a beautiful picture. You're alive. You're alive. Job says, why?

[13:08] Because all it did was launch him into this life of misery. Why didn't I just perish at birth? 4 verse 13. Now I'd be lying down in peace.

I'd be asleep and at rest with kings and rulers of the earth who built for themselves places now lying ruins. With princes who had gold who filled their houses with silver.

For you see, if life is trouble, how much better to be dead and resting. Now verse 13.

Lying down, peace, asleep, at rest. We know what that's about. When you've had a hard day at work or with the kids and there's stress and trouble and just at a very simple level, you long just to lie on the sofa in peace with your eyes shut at rest.

How about a forever rest? How about a forever rest in the grave? When you're hurting and you see no way out and there is nothing to look forward to.

[14:14] Let me say this very carefully. How understandable, don't you think? To start to long for the grave and wish death upon yourself.

Or why, verse 16, was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day? There the wicked cease from turmoil.

There the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease. They no longer hear the slave drivers shout. The small and the greater there and the slaves are freed from their owners.

Life is cruel and we're trapped here. Bring on the day when I am dead and free. You know, that is not the kind of talk you hear in church much.

But it is how some of us may feel some of the time. This unrest and trouble of which Job speaks, it's not just that he's hurting so badly.

[15:27] His possessions gone, his children dead, his body sore. Awful though that is. As we go on through this book of Job, what troubles him more and more is why he's suffering like this.

Because he's a believer. He's a friend of God. And he knows and worships the God who is surely sovereign and good and just. And so as he sits among the ashes, suffering yet alive, he is rocked and troubled to his core about God.

And so in the last section, verse 20 onwards, hear this real believer groaning, why? Verse 20.

Why is light given to those in misery and life to the bitter of soul? To those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave.

Verse 20. Why is light given? It's actually stronger than that. A better translation probably. Why does he give light to those in misery?

[16:36] The Lord who gives and takes away. Why does he keep giving light and life to all those who are in misery? We are suffering.

We long to die. We'd be so glad to reach the grave. And yet he keeps our life support machines on. Why? Verse 23.

Why? It's a desperate groan, this. Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? Before he put a protective hedge around Job, around me, blessing me richly.

Now it's like he's hedged me in with razor wire, imprisoning me in a life of trouble. Why? For sighing has become my daily food.

My groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me. What I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness. I have no rest, but only turmoil.

[17:40] And we've made it through. We said at the beginning, I said at the beginning, I don't know what you make of Job 3.

I don't know what you make of Job 3.

We don't have sermons on this passage every week, thank goodness. Someone said to me they think that Job 3 is the most dark and hopeless chapter in the Bible.

I don't know what you think. See this man, Job, sat among the ashes, terribly alone, cursing his birth, longing for the grave, and groaning.

Why? Why? Does he sound like a believer? Barely, don't you think? And yet he is.

[18:49] He is a real believer, suffering awfully, speaking honestly. As we finish this morning, in the last few minutes, three implications of Job 3 for us.

One, you are allowed to feel like this. A Christianity which is always happy and light and bright, as though that is the only way you can be now you know God, it just isn't real.

It's not real. For sure, there is deep, everlasting joy in being a friend of God for all eternity. We will experience that and we will know that.

But there can be times, and this might be true for some of us now, there can be times when the sufferings you go through, physical or mental or relational, there can be times when the sufferings you go through are so troubling that hope and joy drain from you and you long for darkness to close in over you.

You are allowed to feel like this. There is space for you in God's family to feel like this.

[20:06] You can be God's servant, a believer, and it is not wrong for you to express your misery like this. It is okay to say, why did I not perish at birth?

One, you are allowed to feel like this. Two, allow each other to be and talk like this.

I long for this. I long for us not to be a let's pretend church, trying to push one another to grin and be positive all the time because we are Christians and God is working in us for our good, and so don't be glum, come on.

I don't think we are like that. But what I'm saying is, we must allow and give permission to one another to go through despair.

And we must allow one another to groan and say, why does God give light to those in misery? That would be a good church to be a part of, more and more, wouldn't it?

[21:14] One, you are allowed to feel like this. Two, allow each other to be and talk like this. Last thing to say to us.

I'll just drop this in at the end. As we go through this kind of deep, dark despair, we must realise and we must realise and we must know that all is not lost.

For even in the deepest darkness, there is light and there is hope. Third, ultimately, look to the cross. In your darkness, the Bible as a whole would say to us, look to the cross.

In our sufferings, know that there is one who came into the world for us and walked in the footsteps of Job for our salvation.

Jesus, the utterly blameless believer, who is greater than Job, gave up all he had and chose to suffer, alone and terribly.

[22:30] And as he hung in darkness on the cross, a deeper darkness than Job's, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All of history centres on this moment, the moment of such deep, dark despair that he endured.

And he went through this, our Lord Jesus, not only that he might walk with us through suffering, because we will never actually be utterly alone with him, but he went through this ultimately that he might rescue us through his suffering and deal with death and destroy Satan.

And he did that so that he might take you and me one day to a new creation, where the Bible says sorrow and sighing will flee away and there will be no more mourning or crying or pain for good. Job chapter 3. A blameless believer, terribly alone, cursing his birth, longing for the grave, groaning why. In the darkness, look to the Lord Jesus, who walked the path of Job and came for our comfort and our salvation.

[23 : 57] Let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Our Lord and our God, we read these words of Job some of us, some of us, some of the time, these words echo what we might feel and say.

thank you that these words are here for us in scripture thank you that it is okay to be like this and feel like this thank you that ultimately we are not terribly alone thank you that you are the God who in Christ has come to comfort us in the darkness help us please as a church to be real about our lives and what we go through may we be a blessing and an encouragement to one another as we mourn with those who mourn and grant us increasingly to see the light of your goodness in the midst of darkness we pray in Jesus name amen