

Pain-full worship

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Date: 05 November 2023

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[0 : 00] With Job chapter 1 open in front of us, do you not think verses 20 and 21 are pretty jaw-dropping?

! In just a single day, Job's animals and his servants are taken, stolen, burnt up and killed. All his wealth and possessions, his livelihood, everything he owns just wiped out in a single day. A final messenger arrives with news, your ten children, all of them, have been crushed, they are dead and gone.

So all Job had and the kids he loved just ripped from him in a single day of extreme and appalling tragedy.

And at this Job did what? At this Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head and then he fell to the ground in worship.

[1 : 05] 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.

Could you be like that? Should you be like that? Would you be like that? In your pain and in your grief, would you worship the Lord who not only gives but takes away?

Would you worship him? Or would you turn and curse into his face? You monster. I hate you. Job chapter one.

Welcome to the Old Testament Book of Job. Some of us here at St John's, I don't know all of us perfectly, but some of us here at St John's have in the past faced very, very deep and intense suffering in our lives.

And still today, the wounds hurt us. Some of us at some point in the future may endure almost unimaginable tragedy and pain.

[2 : 16] And there'll be some of us right now today, this Sunday morning, who are hurting so very badly. It might be that other people here at St John's don't know the suffering you're going through.

Maybe they don't. Maybe they do. Maybe you do, though. And if you're honest, sometimes it feels almost impossible to keep believing in a God of love when he seems to be neglecting you, punishing you, not caring for you.

Why does God allow us to suffer as we do? Why does he do nothing to make things better sometimes? What kind of a God runs a world like this?

And these are not interesting questions to sit around and discuss gently. They're real. They're vital. And these are desperate questions, actually, for believers and non-believers. And I want to just say up front that this is what Job is about.

This ancient bit of the Bible, which we're going to grapple with together over this coming six Sundays, is staggeringly honest and brutally raw.

[3 : 26] It will be as we read it. The book of Job in the Bible, if you've never read it, it rips the lid off nice, safe Christian talk. And it plunges us into what we really think behind closed doors and sometimes might say in our tears.

You will not get a single sentence answer to the question of suffering through Job. Let me say that. It's worth saying that. Job is 42 chapters long and poetic and disturbing and deep.

There is no single sentence answer to suffering. But God in his kindness has given us this book to help us. He's given us Job to help us as we wrestle with belief in him.

And he's given this book, it seems to me, to make us wiser as we suffer ourselves and as we seek to help people who suffer around us.

God has given us this book so that knowing him more deeply, you and I might be moved. And you and I might be moved to worship him humbly, even in the midst of the pain that we suffer.

[4 : 41] It's a really brief introduction. I want us to dive in together. There is an outline of the stuff that we're saying just on the back of the sheet that you've got on the chair in front of you. Chapters one and two of Job are so, so important and foundational.

Let's work through them together in the time we have left. First, straight away, in verses one to five, do you see this? We meet the blameless believer. Let me read from the beginning.

Verse one. In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. We don't know where Uz is. We don't know when this is, although it's likely pretty ancient days.

But a human being there was called Job. And this is what you need to know about him. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil.

If you met him, you would say Job is an awesome believer. He is everything we should be and everything we want to be in our better moments. He's blameless and upright. He's not without sin.

[5 : 43] Doesn't mean that. But he's genuine and sincere and godly. He feared God, bowing before his creator in wonder and love and awe.

And when he sinned, he shunned evil. He repented. What would we say about Job if we met him today? He's a disciple. He's a true believer. He's walking in the light. He is a friend of God.

And so it's not surprising that this blameless believer is blessed by God. Look, verse 2. He had seven sons and three daughters. That's wonderful. Ten children. 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. And I think as you read of the things that he has, you're meant to say to yourself, that's right, that's good, that's normal, that's fair.

Because God is fair and good and just. And in his world, it's right that you reap what you sow.

Those who love God and are godly should be great.

[6 : 50] Those who are holy should be happy. God favours his friends. He blesses believers. And Job is God's friend. He really is.

And he's a man so spiritually sensitive as well. Because, verse 4. His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays and they'd invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

And when a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be 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, which would be terrible.

And this was Job's regular custom. So, have you met him? He's a blameless, forgiven, faithful friend of God and rightly blessed.

Why tell us this at the start? Why underline Job's blamelessness? Why did you see Job suffer terribly? Oh, it's because when you see Job suffer terribly, you might be tempted to think it's because he sinned.

[7 : 58] Because when you suffer terribly, you might be tempted to think that God is punishing you for being unfaithful to him. But that won't explain Job's suffering.

It might not explain yours either. Because Job is blameless and upright. He fears God and he shuns evil. First in the story, meet the blameless believer.

Okay, now second, verse 13 onwards, see his awful suffering. Oh no, no, hang on. Because before Job's story continues in verse 13, you need to come up to heaven.

See this? In verses 6 to 12, we leave Job on earth below. We're transported to God's heavenly throne room up above. To a meeting that takes place.

And a conversation that Job knows nothing about. A conversation in heaven that will shape Job's experience and shape this whole book.

[9 : 04] And may shake us very badly. Look closely in heaven. Verse 6. Verse 6. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with them.

Did you know, by the way, this is how our world is governed. There is one creator and ruler of the heavens and the earth, the Lord God. He has no rivals. He's supreme.

He is seated on his throne. We sing of that most Sundays. And yet this almighty God does not govern his world alone. Because he has angels.

He has creatures of his. Who carry out his will in the world on his behalf for him. And under his control. And in verse 6, the angels come and gather before God in his throne room to report to him.

Like a heavenly council meeting. And in among them comes Satan. And one of the stupidities of Halloween is dressing up in little devil costumes and thinking that Satan and supernatural evil is just make-believe.

[10:16] And good for giggles and being scary and getting sweets. No, no, Satan, the Satan, is the accuser. He's the enemy.

He is that ancient snake called the devil. And this isn't biblical make-believe. He is real and active in our world today. The Satan is made by God.

He's one of God's supernatural creatures. And yet Satan is against God. He's a liar. And a murderer. He loves to get his claws into people.

And turn them from God. And have them curse God and die. He's an evil supernatural being. The Satan. Did you know? Not make-believe this is true.

And the Satan also came into the heavenly throne room with the angels. Now the conversation. Verse 7. The Lord said to Satan, where have you come from?

[11:19] Satan answered the Lord from roaming through the earth going to and fro on it. And then the Lord said to Satan, the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job?

If you ever watched the Lord of the Rings films, there are moments when the evil eye of Sauron turns on Frodo Baggins. And here in verse 8, the Lord invites Satan to turn his eye on Job.

You think, Lord, what are you doing? What are you doing? See how God speaks of him. My servant Job. There is no one on earth like him.

He is blameless and upright. A man who fears God and shuns evil. I think in a sense the Lord is looking saying, I am proud of this man. Look at him. My blameless servant who fears me and worships me gladly.

Now here is a man you cannot accuse. I think imagine how wonderful it would be if God said that of us, pointed us out.

[12:27] Well then in verse 9 comes the terrible question from which everything will flow. Does Job fear God for nothing?

Satan replied. Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You've 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. We're going to have to come back to this again and again.

Does Job fear God for no reason? This servant whom you're so proud of God, does he simply worship you because you're worthy of worship because you're God?

No chance, says Satan. The reason Job worships you is because you bless him. You've stuck a hedge around him.

[13:26] You've given him good things. You've given him good health and a loving family and lots of stuff. That's why he sings to you in church on a Sunday. That's why he's a believer.

Because of what he gets. But take it all away and of course he will curse you. No one really honours you for you, God.

I wonder if you feel the teeth of Satan's accusation. Let me turn it to us. These believers at St John's Orchard Park on a Sunday morning, they aren't true worshippers of God.

They only fear God because he blesses them. They are grubby gold diggers. They use God for what they can get.

Make sure you keep giving us good things, God, and we'll keep following you. But that is not true worship. They are just using you, God. I tell you what, Lord, take away what they have.

[14:32] And then their grubby, grabbing hearts will be revealed. They will curse you and hate you, those Christians at St John's, like everyone else in the world around. Because no one really loves you for you, so called God.

We're spending a bit of time here. I think this accusation is pretty frightening, actually. I've been a Christian since I was 18.

I've been a Christian for 30 years. Do I fear and worship God simply for his own sake, because he is God and worthy of worship?

Or do I follow him for what I get, because he makes life good for me? Were he to take away my stuff?

Were he to take away someone I love, or my health? Would actually an ugly heart be revealed? Would I turn from God and curse him?

[15:33] You know, if I, after 30 years, were shown up as a sham believer, in it for what I could get, it would be awful. If I'd lived my 30 years, blessing God, you're so wonderful, I follow you, something's taken away, and I say, get away from me.

It would be awful if I was revealed to be like that. And Satan would be very, very happy. And God would be terribly dishonored.

And yet, if Job or you or I were to suffer terrible loss, if we were to suffer terrible loss, And if you and I were to continue to worship God as God, with our faith in him proved genuine, Is it possible that that could be one of the most precious things in the universe?

If Satan's accusations are proved wrong, and through your life, great honor and glory would come to God, Would that not be precious beyond belief?

Well, I think that's why, come back to the text in verse 12, The Lord said to Satan now, very well then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.

[16 : 57] It's a terrible permission, a terrible granting to Satan to go and have Job suffer. But it is permission given.

Just notice here in the text, as someone has written, The devil cannot touch a hair upon the back of a single camel that belongs to Job, unless he has divine permission.

The Satan does what he is told, no more and no less, because the devil is on God's leash. But now, with God's permission, Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

They're heavy verses, verses 6 to 12. Follow the story now, verse 1 to 5, meet the blameless believer. We're back on earth now with Job.

Verses 6 to 12, up in heaven, of which Job knows nothing, Satan accuses and God permits. Now, back on earth below, see Job's awful suffering.

[18 : 01] And it is awful. One day, when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the eldest brother's house, such a happy celebration.

A messenger came to Job and said, the oxen were ploughing and the donkeys were grazing nearby and the Sabeans 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.

Just out of the blue, it seems. So it seems. A terrorist attack. Servants killed and cattle taken. Imagine the shock of that in your life.

And some of us may have, at some point, had our home burgled and ransacked and they took jewellery and possessions. How that rips at you. While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, the fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants.

And I am the only one who has escaped to tell you. We call these kind of events natural disasters, don't we? A lightning strike and floods and earthquakes that terrify and destroy. It's the fire of God, says the messenger.

[19 : 09] And more of what Job has goes up in smoke. While he was still speaking, verse 17, 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. The Satan had said to the Lord, have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?

And now in a single day, everything he has is gone, taken and burned up and killed, the outer hedge of protection and blessing.

What's next? His household. While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the eldest 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. And forgive me for saying this too quickly. How utterly devastating to lose children whom you love.

[20 : 23] Last December, you don't know him, I stood next to a guy as the ashes of his 16 year old son were buried.

It's unbearable. It's unexplainable. I don't know if anything in Job's experience here in Job 1 connects with you personally.

For sure, everything about Job is very, very extreme. He's extremely faithful, more faithful than you or me.

There's no one on earth like him. And at the same time, this day of suffering is extreme. All he has taken and all his children dead in one day.

It's so extreme and so intense, his suffering. But it will connect with us at some point, in some way, when something we value or someone we love is taken away.

[21 : 25] How might we respond? Here's the question in Job. Will Satan's accusation stick? Will Job turn and curse God to his face?

Would we? First, meet Job, the blameless believer. Second, see his awful suffering. Third, verse 20, hear his painful worship.

At this, Job got up and he tore his robe. I think that's expressing the pain tearing at his heart inside. And he shaved his head, expressing deep, deep grief and mourning. And then he fell to the ground in worship.

And he 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. What do you make of that?

[22 : 35] In his unimaginable pain and grief, Job knows that every blessing he had enjoyed was pure gift from God.

I arrived into the world naked and the Lord gave my wealth, my possessions, even my children, undeserved gift from him.

And the Lord has taken away. That is his right. For he is God. And I go naked to my death.

And so, may the name of the Lord be praised. Do you not find that, I don't know.

I think as well as perplexing to us, I think it is meant to be, I think it's meant to be painfully beautiful.

[23 : 38] To see a man who has everything taken from him. And yet continues to bow down in genuine and costly God honouring worship.

Could it be beautiful? Satan had predicted that Job was a gold digger, a grubby gold digger. Satan had predicted Job would curse God to his face.

Ha! Satan, you are wrong. You are wonderfully wrong. For here is a man who truly fears God for nothing.

And in all of this, verse 22 over the page, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. It's beautiful to see.

And yet, Job 1 is not the end of the story. Because in chapter 2, look, over the page, another day comes round.

[24 : 41] That was just one day. And again, Satan comes before the Lord. God says, look, my servant still maintains his integrity. For you incited me against him to ruin him without cause.

In 2 verse 4, skin for skin, Satan replied, a man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones. And he will surely curse you to his face.

Having taken away all he has and his household, now take his health. Stretch out your hand and strike his body. The Lord said to Satan, very well then, he's 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 crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

Can you see him in your mind's eye, this believer? His possessions gone, his children dead, his sores festering, sat on a rubbish heap scraping himself.

[25 : 54] His wife said to him, his wife appears, are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die. Sometimes it's through our nearest and dearest that Satan will attack us.

Through a parent or a partner. He has ruined your health. Are you still going to be a believer? Curse God. Curse him. Your closest loved one says. Job replied, you are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?

And in all this Job did not sin in what he said. I started to ask at the beginning, if and when we suffer, could it be, should it be, would it be, that we would be like Job?

Ultimately, will we worship the Lord, who not only gives but takes away? Or would we turn and curse him to his face, you monster, I hate you?

[27 : 15] My guess is, I don't know whether you've read Job before, my guess is Job one and two might have shaken you a bit this morning, as it's shaken me over the past few weeks. It could be that what happens in these opening chapters troubles you.

The conversation in heaven. Satan's place in things. The Lord being supreme. And such horror on earth. And maybe you say, Job one and two, what's going on?

This is not helping me yet. Maybe even Job's worship troubles you, because you think maybe I should be like this. But how could I ever? How could I ever?

Just as I end, I want to say, this is the beginning. Hold on. Would you hold on with the book of Job, firstly?

Because we've only just started. And there is more to come. More to come from Job himself, as we will see. Chapter one, 20 and 21 are not the end of the things he says.

[28 : 21] There will be trouble and confusion. There will be wanting to die. There will be painfully raw words. There will be argument with God as Job pushes and pushes against his maker and all sorts.

There's more to come about God, too. Who he is, what he's like, what he's doing. So would you hold on to this book of Job as we think together about our own lives and suffering?

And God, I honestly, I deeply hope that over this next five or six weeks, we will really read and grapple with what is said here. Would you read Job slowly and carefully and prayerfully?

Would you ask God to work amongst us over these coming weeks? Hold on to Job. But secondly, finally, hold on to God today.

I said at the beginning, I don't know what you've gone through in the past. I might not know what you're going through right now. And no one might.

[29 : 33] But please hear this this morning. The Lord is supreme. And the Lord is good. And the Lord is for us right now and this week, whether we sense him or sense that or not.

And no, lastly, that in and through Jesus Christ, who was even greater than Job, and yet gave up all he had and went to suffer a God forsaken death on a cross, through and in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Father is able to grow in us, even us, the kind of beautiful God-honouring faith that can say, even through pain, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

May the name of the Lord be praised. And we're going to stop there.

Let's have a couple of moments just in quiet. And then I will lead us in a prayer. Let's have a couple of moments just in quiet.

Our gracious Lord and Father, You know us through and through. You see the bent of our hearts.

[31 : 33] You see the shape of our suffering. suffering. You hear our tears. You, almighty God, are sovereign and supreme and good.

We pray that through these words in Job these coming weeks, you would help us. Help us understand life in this world. Help us to understand our experiences. Help us to understand you. Our Lord, we've read here of a conversation in heaven between you and the Satan of which Job knew nothing. We see the experience of Job, so faithful to you, yet suffering so deeply, and his worship of you.

Please work in us by your spirit, we pray. Open our eyes to the truth of your word. And in your mercy and grace, please move us to be those who not only question you, challenge you, but those who sit humbly under you.

Might it be that for us in our lives, come what may, we may fall to our knees in worship and say that whether you give or you take away, may your name be praised.

[33 : 15] Hold on to us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.