

Worthy of Worship

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[0 : 00] And I've been very much looking forward to coming into the book of Job. We've just finished the book of Ecclesiastes, which is piercingly honest about life.

And now we go into this book of Job, which is searchingly honest about suffering. And you'll find it helpful to have chapters 1 to 3 open in front of you.

And as you do that, I just want to point out that Job is not about suffering in general. It's not a philosophical or academic treatise on suffering.

It's about the suffering of one man who is a godly believer, upright and blameless, who experiences devastating suffering.

In fact, one book written on Job is called How God Treats His Friends. And this is partly why it's such a big book. It's 42 chapters and we had three chapters read today.

[1 : 01] Chapters 1 to 2, the first two chapters and then the last three chapters are like a narrative of what happens. From chapters 3 to 37, they're full of pain and questions.

Where is God? Why am I alive? And it's written to be read aloud. It's the most beautiful poetry. And I think it's a mark of God's kindness and love for us that he includes such a big book in the Bible, which is all about this issue of suffering.

It's so important for us because our culture doesn't do well with suffering. And there are all sorts of versions of Christianity that offer superficial and shallow answers to the issue of suffering.

You know, there's one version that says God doesn't really want you to suffer. If you follow our rules, you won't suffer. Which means that if you are suffering, it's your fault. Well, there's another version that says we can tell you why you're suffering.

We have the secret and then you can fix it. And I think one of the most important things about this book is that from beginning to end, Job never finds out why he is suffering, which exactly matches our circumstances and our experience today.

[2 : 23] And the long little chapters inside the book, Job's friends come to him and they have a kind of sound of music theology. You must have done something bad to be suffering like this.

But Job has not done anything bad to deserve his suffering, which I think is why the questions in this book are so honest and why we need all 42 chapters.

Because you can't put down what the Bible says on suffering into a tweet or a text and just download it onto your phone. It takes time. It takes space.

It takes truthfulness. It takes trust. It takes trust. And in the end, of course, God himself comes into the world in the person of Jesus Christ as the man of sorrows, the suffering servant, who doesn't give us all the answers, but instead he gives us himself.

We'll come to that later. So the first three chapters I've divided into two points. The first two chapters I've called on earth as it is in heaven.

[3 : 27] And these first two chapters contain five scenes. Scenes one, three, and five take place on earth. And scenes two and four take place in heaven.

So we go earth, heaven, earth, heaven, earth. And the reason for that is because what happens in heaven affects what happens on earth.

And what happens on earth affects what happens in heaven, particularly when it comes to suffering. Let's have a look at this quickly together.

The first scene, the first five verses are on earth and we're introduced to Job's very happy life. The book begins, there was a man, a real person living a real life in a real place that we don't really know where it is.

And we don't know where it is because it's a universal human story which happened to a real individual. And he's living the dream. He's wealthy, he's healthy, he's got a very happy family and

he's godly.

[4 : 27] He's got a huge house. Actually, it's a compound with 10 other houses around it, with farms. He's successful. Verse three, he's got a fabulous reputation. Seven beautiful sons, seven beautiful daughters.

And the kids actually like getting together at each other's places for birthday parties. And Job takes his spiritual leadership of this family very seriously, that after each birthday party, he gathers the kids and offers a sacrifice to God, just in case one of the kids might have accidentally cursed God in their hearts.

But the most important thing said about Job in these first verses is in the end of verse one, where he's described as a man who's blameless and upright, who feared the Lord and turned away from evil.

And this description of Job is repeated a couple of times, four or five times in the first two chapters. It's not just the writer's opinion. This is what God thinks of Job.

It's not that he's sinless or that he's perfect morally, but that his outside matches his inside. He lives out the life of faith in relationships and receiving the forgiveness of God.

[5 : 42] He treats other people uprightly. He has integrity. He's humble before God. He fears the Lord. He daily repents of his sin in thought, word and deed. He's a wise believer.

He's not backsliding. There's no secret sin. He's living the life before God. And that means that any suffering that comes his way is not a punishment. It's not a lack of faith that causes it.

And the reason this is so important to us today is that real believers who lead godly lives can go through deep despair and depression and desperation.

We can walk closely with the Lord and yet enter great darkness of body and soul. Faithful believer can lose everything, including their health, and yet still live before God faithfully, wisely, and blamelessly.

Christianity is not cheap grace. It's not a transactional relationship between us and God, where I do certain things for God and he makes me happy and healthy.

[6 : 56] There will come times of grief. There will come times of suffering. It must not take us by surprise. That's the first scene. Scene 2, verses 6 to 12 take us up to heaven.

And here it's a picture of a council of heaven with God, with the spiritual beings who serve him. It's beyond our understanding. And sneaking around on the edge is Satan, the enemy, the adversary, the accuser, both of God and his people.

And God identifies him with a question in verse 7. He says, where have you been? And Satan doesn't really answer him. And so God then says in verse 8, have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. God loves Job.

He sees his integrity in godly life. It's important to God the way Job lives, just as it's important to him the way we live now. God is affected in heaven by how we trust him on earth.

[8 : 02] And what's really interesting is that God sets the ball rolling on Job here by drawing attention to him. It's God who draws Satan's attention to Job and his godliness.

And what's Satan's response to Job's godly life? He sneers with suspicion and cynicism and then he commits blasphemy. Look at verse 9 in chapter 1.

Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?

You've blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face.

Now that question in verse 9 that Satan poses, does God fear? Sorry, does Job fear God or love you God for no reason?

[9 : 03] In some ways that is the question of the book. You hear what Satan is saying. The only reason Job has anything to do with you God is because you've made his life comfortable, cushy and convenient.

You've cottonwooled him with success, with family and with wealth. His money and his ease are the reason he goes to church. He's a pragmatist and so are you.

And behind this is the cosmic blasphemy. It's a filthy lie. Did you hear it? God, Satan insinuates, you are not worthy of loving for your own sake.

The only reason people worship you or fear you is because you give them their goodies. You are unworthy of their faith. You are insecure and you are corrupt by trying to buy their love. No one trusts you. No one loves you for yourself. You have to bribe them with gifts and I'll prove it to you. Take away his goodies, his assets and he'll drop you like a hot cake and curse you to your face.

[10 : 15] And astonishingly, God allows Satan to do it. God is still sovereign over Satan in his holiness. He does not cause evil.

He must give permission before Satan can even lift a finger. And so God allows Satan to take Job's assets in verse 12 but not to touch his body. Just for a moment, think about this cosmic blasphemy of Satan.

It's exactly the same tune he was singing in the Garden of Eden. You remember when he spoke to Adam and Eve? God doesn't want your best. He's only stopping you from doing what you want because you can't trust him.

You can't love him. You've got to be suspicious of his motivations. He's keeping you as slaves. You should throw out that stupid, simple faith and come to your own wisdom and understanding.

And then you'll see that he's not worth loving for his own sake. And I think this is the closest we get in all the book of Job to explaining Job's suffering. Satan's accusation is that Job fears God for no reason.

[11 : 23] And in some ways, it is the only question of real eternal importance in the universe for us. Is God worthy of love and faith and worship and trust and adoration or not?

Because somehow the God of the Bible attaches his reputation and his glory to us, to how we live and how we believe and how we love him.

And the whole universe looks on to see if we love God for who he is, whether those of us who know him treat him as worthy or just treat him for how much we can get out of him.

In the book of Ephesians in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes, chapter 3, verse 10. He says, Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

It is the wisdom of God to reveal his glory to the spiritual powers through the church. That's why endurance is so pivotal in the life of faith.

[12 : 40] Every letter in the New Testament makes this point. Jesus makes this point in each of the gospels. That God proves his worth to the universe as believers endure suffering faithfully.

That when we live and believe as though God's glory is more important than our lives and our comfort and our assets and our health, God reveals he is worth loving.

A couple of years ago, I was visited by a young woman from another country who asked me, what were the exciting things I was seeing in my church? I think she was hoping for some grand stories of new converts.

And it's true, heaven rejoices every time someone turns to the Lord. And I had conducted a number of funerals in the previous weeks of godly believers who testified to Christ through their suffering and died well.

And I said to her, It rejoices the heart of God to see people loving him for his own sake, even though they go through the deep water of suffering.

[13 : 45] That's the really exciting thing I've seen. And I think she was most disappointed, but I know God wasn't. So scene three, we now come back to earth and Satan wastes no time at all.

Verses 13 to 22 of chapter one. He loves destroying things. And in one day, with four blows of the axe, violent, sudden, devastating, traumatic, two of them by natural disaster, two of them by criminal, even terror acts, Satan plunges Job into poverty and grief.

It's beautifully told. At the beginning, we're taken to the party where the kids are enjoying food and fellowship together. And the livestock is stolen.

The servants are slaughtered, except one who escapes to tell the story. And then the sheep are burnt up with lightning and the servants are killed. And there's one who comes to tell the story. And then the rest of the livestock, thirdly, are destroyed, except one servant who gets away to tell the story.

And we think, oh, thank goodness the kids are okay. And then verses 18 to 19, we don't even want to read them. While his dear sons and daughters are celebrating one of their birthdays, the east wind blows the house down and there is not one single survivor.

[15:01] And in one day, Job's life goes from comfort and wealth and joy to ruin. He's stripped bare.

He's alone on the stage. Does Job serve God for no reason or only for what he will get out of it? Verse 20 to 22.

He doesn't rage. He doesn't scream. He stands up. He rises up. The pain in his heart is so great he can't sit.

He tears his robe as a sign of inconsolable grief. He shaves his head as an outward sign of loss. And he falls on the ground and he worships.

Naked, he says, I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gave. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

[16:01] And in all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Almost as though he's been reading Ecclesiastes, isn't it? He looks at life as though it's a gift from God which God can give and God can take away.

And far from cursing God, he blesses God. He prays that everyone who's going to hear his story will also bless God as well. And it doesn't remove his pain. It doesn't palliate his pain.

But it's still real. And it proves Satan is a liar. And then quickly we go up to heaven again. Scene 4, chapter 2, verses 1 to 6. And scene 4 is almost a repeat of scene 2 in heaven.

Again, God initiates the conversation. Again, God says that Job is blameless. Again, Satan blasphemes. He says to God, you're not worth loving for your own sake.

You did not let me go far enough. He's still got his health. Let me take that away and you'll see what an unworthy God you are as he curses you to your face.

[17:02] And again, God allows it. Which means that God's reputation and his glory really are more important than my health or my wealth. And then the final scene, scene 5 in chapters 1 to 2 is 2, 7 to 10.

On earth again. And things go fast now. It speeds up. Satan himself directly and personally administers this suffering and he attacks Job's body.

It's total. It's intimate. He covers Job with excruciating, separating, loathsome sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet.

And the extent of his pain and his suffering come out in the conversations in the next 37 chapters. And Job goes outside the city to the city dumpster and he sits in ashes and he takes a piece, a shard of pottery and he scrapes himself.

In chapter 2 verse 9, we don't know whether Job's wife is trying to help or not. She says to him, you think you're blameless. Why don't you just curse God and die?

[18:07] And it might be that she just can't stand watching him suffer in this way and so she offers him the false compassion of assisted suicide as a way out.

Where it might be she's just acting as the mouthpiece for Satan. Either way, what she says is foolish. And Job says in verse 10, And although he doesn't sin, he now feels very much on the receiving end.

But he still trusts and fears the Lord. And from this time forward until chapter 38, heaven is silent. There is a huge amount of talking, mostly from the three friends who come and sit with Job at the end of chapter 2.

They come from a long way away and they come to offer him sympathy and comfort. And Job is so ravaged by disease, he's hardly recognisable. And they weep and they put on their funeral clothes and they sit with him in the ashes and they say nothing at all for seven days.

And most commentators on Job say this is the best thing they could have done. And they ruin it when they open their mouths. Whether that's true or not, I think we are meant to see the sheer loneliness of suffering.

[19:25] That even with friends sitting and weeping with you, when you are suffering, it doesn't remove the torment. And I think the deeper the suffering, the deeper the isolation.

And there's no one magic silver bullet that fits all that you can give to each other. There's only one person who can enter into your suffering with you. He is the one who suffered for us, even Jesus himself, which I'll come to in just a moment.

So that's the first point on earth as it is in heaven. And more quickly, I want to cover chapter three. And I've called chapter three.

This is my second point. The birthday curse. Now, it's so important that we read chapter three with chapters one to two. Otherwise, I think we'd get the wrong idea.

It's possible to jump from Job one to two to the end chapters and only hear Job at his best and not really enter into his suffering. You know, you could say, oh, Job suffered.

[20 : 29] He didn't sin. It's all good. You should go and do the same. Not helpful. We need to enter into chapters three to 38 because here is Job at the bottom of the pit.

He is anxious. He's agitated to the point of being frantic. We hear him cry out in pain, wailing the hard questions.

And what is so brilliant about this book is that God is not afraid of the hard questions. But I think we have to acknowledge that the fact that God is all good and loving and full of compassion and mercy and sovereign and full of power makes holding our faith and enduring suffering complicated.

It would be easier in some ways for Job to give up his faith, to become an atheist or to start believing in karma or take up the offer of assisted suicide. But he does not. Three things from chapter three.

Curse and two questions. Firstly, the curse. Job curses the day of his birth. He doesn't curse God. But in verses three to 13, he prays the day of his birth would be covered with darkness and cease to exist.

[21 : 47] It's some of the strongest language in the book of Job. He's not asking that God would end his life, though he does long for death. Because then at least he thinks he might be at rest.

What he prays for is that he wishes he had never been born. That God would erase the day of his birth from the calendar and his conception.

That he would reverse his life. It is an expression of raw and deep distress. He curses the day of his birth. And then the first question he asks is the why question.

And I think he asks it seven times in this chapter. I think when we ask the why question, we usually say, why am I suffering?

Why is it me, Lord? Which implies I don't deserve to suffer or perhaps I can think of someone else who should suffer. Job's question is much deeper and more difficult.

[22 : 47] His question is, why do I exist? First, verse 13, why did I not die at birth? Or verse 20, why is light given to him who is in misery, who longs for death, but it doesn't come?

He's lost all joy in living. He just cannot understand why he continues to live without hope or purpose. The losses and the pain that he is suffering are not just physical.

They're not just a loss of assets, of family. They're deeply emotional and they're spiritual. He has not visited heaven. He has not heard what's at stake.

And you may feel that now, well, you may feel right now that the future is completely black for you. I mean, you may be someone who's finding it very hard to hold on and you may be suffering in ways that others would find unimaginable.

I want to encourage you to reach out. Call us at the office or email us and we'll be in touch. It's always better to have two people praying than just one. But the second question that's asked is even deeper.

[23 : 59] It's not the why question, it's the where question. Where is God? This question comes back again and again through the dialogue section where Job is talking with his friends.

Where can I find God? In verse 23 of chapter 3, he begins that direction. By describing himself as hedged in by God, you look at the context.

I can't see light. I can't see hope. I can't see joy. What he is doing is he is feeling the absence of the presence of God. Something that believers have done ever since the start.

C.S. Lewis married and his wife died and he wrote a little book called *A Grief Observed* about the death of his wife. It's another honest book. And he says this in the book.

When you are happy, you have no sense of needing him. In fact, you're tempted to feel his claims upon you as an interruption. If you remember yourself and turn to him with gratitude and praise, you will be, or so it feels, welcomed with open arms.

[25 : 08] But go to him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain. And what do you find? A door slammed in your face and the sound of bolting and double bolting from the inside.

Why is he so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in our time of trouble? And the next paragraph, Lewis goes on to say that he asked a friend about this.

And the friend reminded him that Jesus prayed on the cross, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? And I think Lewis's friend was being a very good friend. Because neither the book of Job nor human suffering make any real sense apart from the cross of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, who is not just blameless, he was sinless. And the Gospels go to great lengths to show us how utterly alone he was, abandoned by disciples and friends, ultimately forsaken by his father on the cross because he bore our sins.

[26 : 19] And his suffering, unlike Job's suffering, was for us and for our salvation, he went deeper into suffering and sorrow than any human could.

Which means he is the only one who can join us in the pit. Not just for sympathy, but to carry us and to care for us. And to bring us the assurance that we are most certainly not alone.

And his promise is to walk beside us in the valley of the shadow of death. And afterward to receive us to glory.

Which I think is very good news. Now Josh.