

Job 22

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: 28 February 2021

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] Well now every religion of course has a different view of suffering but only Christianity, only the God of the Bible enters into our suffering and suffers with us and for us and today we come to Job 22 which is ably read by Caitlin. This is a kind of a sermon by Eliphaz, one of the three so-called comforters of Job and it's great preaching but a terrible sermon. I've preached a lot of those myself. It's a three-point speech, moving, convincing illustrations and application. It's just completely irrelevant. It's completely mistaken and all it does is it deepens Job's misery and like his two other friends, Eliphaz is talking to a man who is he's almost at the point of death. He's terminally ill. He's lost everything. He's in physical, emotional and spiritual agony and to preaching in this moving and mistaken way is just cruel and what makes it even crueler is that some of the things that Job's friends say are true and right. You know if everything they said was mistaken you could write it off but so much of what they say is excellent and true as we'll see as we get to chapter 22. So how do we read this? And I think what's a great help to us here is that the book of Job is like the Sydney Harbour Bridge which we used to call the Coat Hanger in Sydney. It's a great span of steel across the harbour of Sydney and it rests on pylons at either side. 58,000 tonnes of steel are held in place by these pylons at either end of the bridge otherwise it'll all come crashing down and Job is like the bridge. What holds this big middle part in place is what happens at the beginning and at the end of the book. Remember last week at the beginning in chapters 1 to 2 we're allowed into heaven and we hear what is happening from God's point of view and then in the last six chapters, five chapters, God himself speaks and we hear again what God's point of view is and in the very last chapter in 42 in verse 7 the Lord says to Eliphaz the Temanite, the same guy that's speaking in chapter 22, my anger burns against you and against your two friends. You have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has. So although from time to time Job sins, he goes too far in demanding an answer from God, on the whole he speaks rightly about God whereas the three comforters do not.

They see Job's suffering and his tragedy from a purely human point of view and they have an airtight explanation. They have a system to explain it which has some truth in it but it's misapplied to Job.

You can see where we're going with this and the reason the story gets going in heaven is because in the heavenly council God himself draws attention to Job, to his blameless life and his godliness and Satan chapter 1 verse 9 mocks God and mocks Job with this cosmic slander.

He says to God, Job is a phony and you are a phony. The only reason Job's got any time for you whatsoever is you made his life so easy and all the blessings that you've poured on him are nothing but bribery. Job is a phony. He's not serving you for your sake but for his own sake and you are a phony because you're not blessing Job for his sake but for your own sake because you're not worth worshipping or loving in yourself and I'll prove it to you. I'll just take, let's just take away his blessings and he'll curse you to your face and God allows it and this is what is behind Job's suffering because in some strange way God has attached his reputation to his people. There's always a cosmic backdrop to the suffering of all believers. The whole universe looks on to see whether we will continue to love God for who he is, whether he really is worth loving, whether we treat him as worthy or only for what we get out of him which is why enduring faithfully and wisely during suffering is so important for all of us and from the start of the book to the end of the book Job never finds out why he is suffering. God never tells him even at the end nor do the friends and I think that's very helpful for us because we can never say why one person contracts cancer or another person doesn't or one person gets a brain tumour or one person is involved in a car accident or has mental health issues.

This is why this book of Job is so precious to us and why the cross of Christ is so precious to us as well. Now the fact that Job's friends don't know why God is allowing Job to suffer does not stop them from pretending that they know exactly what is going on and when faced with the sufferings of others we pathologically try to explain it. Usually we put blame somewhere. Often we put blame on the sufferer themselves and we do that because we're desperately afraid it's going to happen to us.

[5 : 57] So here are Job's three friends and what we're going to do is we're going to do a quick helicopter travel through chapters 4 to 21 and then we'll settle down on chapter 22 briefly.

You remember in chapter 2 we were introduced to these three guys who've come to show sympathy and comfort for Job and his suffering. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. They're so shocked, they're so shocked by the physical change in this guy that they sit silent for a week.

And then what happens is from chapter 4 to chapter 26 each one takes a turn at speaking to Job and every time they speak Job himself replies. So we go one, two, three, Job has three replies and that cycle happens three times and chapter 22 is the beginning of the third cycle of speeches.

Now what's the most important thing to know about these three friends is this, that they have a framework, they have a grid about life. It's a black and white view of suffering and God and it's of no comfort to Job, it's of no comfort to us today because we know their assumptions are wrong. And this is the framework, it goes like this, you do good, you get good from God. You do bad, you get bad from God. Two straight lines, do good, get good from God, do bad, get bad from God. And they read these lines forwards and backwards. So if you're getting good from God, if your life is full of blessing and health and wealth and happiness, it's because you're doing good. If you're suffering loss and your health is gone, it's because you've sinned, done wrong and you need to repent. So back in chapter 4 verse 7 in the first speech of Eliphaz, Eliphaz says nobody is innocent, nobody, no innocent person has ever perished, nobody who is upright has been cut off by God in the way that you are Job. It is only with iniquity that you suffer because we all reap what we sow. Verse 17 he says, can a mortal man be right before

God? Can a man be pure before his maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust and his angels he charges with error. But we know that God does see Job as blameless and pure. Sure, not without sin, but living in fellowship with him. In chapter 5 verse 6 Eliphaz goes on, affliction does not come out of the dust nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Again, we're back to Julie Andrews and that movie Sound of Music, you know, nothing comes from nothing. Somewhere in my youth and childhood I must have done something good to deserve this good thing. Eliphaz is saying to Job, it's not for nothing this is happening. You need to seek God, brother, and this will all disappear. But Job keeps arguing, no, a lot of those who do wrong live happy lives and die happily in their beds. And those who do right and live good lives they suffer terribly. I'm not guilty of any gross sin. Of course I'm sinful. I regularly sacrifice to God and know his forgiveness. But guys, this has come out of nowhere. God seems to be using me as a target practice and you guys are not helping me. And with each answer, the comforters get more and more cruel. So Bildad in chapter 8 says, you remember your 10 children who were killed? Chapter 8 verse 3, does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children had sinned against him, he would have delivered them from the hand of their transgression. In other words, your kids deserved it.

[10 : 00] Zophar makes things worse in chapter 11 verse 6. Because of your stubbornness and not agreeing with us, you are suffering. You're suffering less than you deserve to suffer. I don't want that sort of comfort.

But Job continues to hold on to his integrity. Chapter 19 verse 21, he says to them, have mercy on me. Have mercy on me, my friends. For the hand of God has touched me.

Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why not satisfied with my flesh? Very interesting. Things get very heated. They call each other all sorts of names.

Stupid cow, windbags. They're constantly telling each other to shut up. Even when the things they say are true and right, these friends are pretty heartless with Job.

And in 16.1, Job says, you are miserable comforters, windy fools. Just try sitting in my place for a couple of minutes. This is one of the main reasons why the book of Job is given to us.

[11 : 05] It's to break us out of that neat and tidy box where you do good, you get good, you do bad, you get bad from God. Now there are all sorts of different versions of the Christian faith out there, which really are different versions of that box, that framework. And the main test is whether the gospel only works when things are going good. I mean, the most obvious version is the prosperity gospel where God owes us health and wealth and happiness. But there are much more close-in versions of Christianity that equally misrepresent God. And they usually come with the most positive possible packaging. They speak about all the good things that God will do and they play down any problem of sin or evil or suffering or taking up your cross daily. And in the end, it leaves a gospel that only works when things are good. And it makes children of us. It places all emphasis on life now, how we can have fullness of life now. And there's no mention of any difficulty playing down our war with sin and flesh and the devil, and that sometimes God withdraws his presence from us.

It minimizes the fact that Jesus calls on us to daily crucify ourselves and follow him. And the picture of the Christian life is very attractive, like a bed of roses.

And just follow Jesus and all your problems will melt away. And even though it's well motivated, it's cruel. It leads to arrested spiritual development.

It never prepares us to face opposition or the real temptation or to serve others. And it's impossible that God could send us into a season of darkness and withdraw his presence from us.

So that when we encounter real suffering, we feel somehow the faith is not working anymore. And that brings us to chapter 22, which exposes what's really happening here.

[13 : 09] This is a great picture of a gospel that only works when things are good. So this is the beginning of the third cycle of the speeches. And by now, all pretense of comfort given away to open condemnation.

Job still holds his conviction that what happening to him doesn't make sense. And Eliphaz and the other friends are desperately trying to get Job to repent because of their framework.

So it's a three-point speech. I'm just going to go through them very quickly. And each of the points begin with A. Accusation, argument, and appeal. First, the accusation, verses 1 to 11.

If you have Job 22, you can see in verses 1 to 11, Eliphaz goes straight for the jugular. Verse 5, the fact that you are suffering proves what a terribly vast and great sinner you are.

And in verses 6 to 9, Eliphaz bends the facts about Job's life to fit his theology. He accuses him of being a money-grubbing, entitled man who's abused his position of privilege and power by his lack of compassion to others.

[14 : 17] That's why you're experiencing these shakes and these terrors, he says. It's just not true. You read on to chapter 24 or chapter 27 or chapter 29.

Job explains he's delivered the poor who've cried for help. He's given help to the fatherless. He's been so generous that widows have sung about him. You see, there's a distinct lack of humility in Job's comforters.

And you know when you're acting on pride and insecurity when you have to change the facts to fit your framework. But worse than that, Eliphaz becomes a mouthpiece for Satan in his accusation.

Look carefully again at verses 2 and 3. Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable just to himself. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right?

Or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? Well, Eliphaz thinks the answer is no. But we know from chapters 1 and 2 that the answer is yes.

[15 : 30] Eliphaz is not talking about the God of the Bible. He's talking about a God who's just got justice but no love. A God who's not really personal, who's enslaved to this mechanical view of justice.

He reduces God to a transactional God, where his dealings with us and our dealings with him are just utilitarian. You see, he's speaking for Satan again.

But we know from the start of this book that it matters deeply to God how we suffer. It matters intimately. It matters intensely to God whether we continue to fear him and turn from evil, whether we love him and serve him for who he is.

And I think there's an astonishing lesson here that God has given us a role in overturning the cosmic blasphemy of Satan in how we live both in prosperity and adversity.

You know, when Job was wealthy, he didn't allow wealth to go to his head. And now as Job suffers, he suffers with patience and endurance. It's very interesting to me that throughout the book, Job's friends never speak to God, but they only speak about God.

[16 : 41] But Job continues to speak to God in anger and distress. Because when we suffer with patience and endurance, it demonstrates in a way nothing else can, that our relation with God is not a contract of mutual manipulation, but that we love him for who he is and he us.

That's the accusation. Secondly, briefly, the argument, verses 12 to 20. Eliphaz is so sure of his framework, he rubs salt into Job's wounds.

In verse 15, he says, oh, you're just following the way that every other wicked person does. In verse 19, he says, those of us who are truly righteous and innocent are gleeful when the wicked suffer.

We're being restrained here, Job. And I think one of the purposes of Job is to teach us how to help one another in suffering by showing us what not to do with each other in suffering, how not to be with one another.

And the way not to be with each other in suffering is to misrepresent God. When I was at university, I had a friend of mine who was not at the university who was diagnosed with cancer.

[18 : 01] While he was dying, I asked the group on campus to pray for him. After the meeting, one of the guys of the group came up to me and said that the only reason my friend was dying of cancer was because there was some great unrepented sin in his life and that if he repented, God would bring him back to full health.

It was the first time in my life I'd ever heard someone say anything like that. And I just, it was so wrong and so unfair. I imagined this guy speaking to my friend.

I was so shocked I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. Some Christians think that God is locked into this cycle of impersonal justice. So if you are suffering, it's something you've done or it's something in your family or, you know, your grandfather was a mason or you've let God down on some big thing and so you're always condemned to living a second-rate life.

It's neat and simple and it's absolutely false to the God of the Bible. The trend today in Christian circles is that when we have friends suffering, we just say nothing.

We just be with them. We exercise the ministry of presence. And there is a time for that. I mean, Job's comforters started out that way. But the book of Job does not encourage us to be silent.

[19 : 21] It shows how it is and how important it is that we are with each other and what we say with each other during the ministry of comfort, how crucial it is to faithfully represent God to each other.

In fact, the great bulk of this book is about the fact that when one of us suffers, the way we comfort that person can either bring grief or glory.

Remember the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians? The apostle describes the near-death suffering that he had, the physical and emotional and spiritual toll. And he says this in the first chapter.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction.

Why? So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort that we ourselves have been comforted by God.

[20 : 24] So as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and your salvation.

And if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same suffering that we suffer. In other words, part of God's purpose in allowing us to suffer is to bring comfort to us so that we will take the comfort we've received from God and it might flow unto others.

There's nothing fake about this. In fact, this is one of the things that we learn from our video testimonies week by week by week. We experience God's grace so that we might share his grace with others.

I'm not talking about psychological technique and comfort, but the actual grace of God flowing through us to others, changing me, changing you. It's what the cross of Jesus looks like in our lives.

I was very interested that Wazoo used that phrase this morning, I've learned to rely on God more deeply. Relying on God is more important than our physical comfort.

[21 : 39] Faithfully representing God gives growth and comfort to others. And then thirdly, there's the appeal. Verses 21 to 30. Beautifully put, completely misses the mark.

Elphaz says, look, if you really truly repent and return to God, if you stop loving your gold and your money and you love God more, if you take our advice and make your slate clean, God will give it all back to you again and bless you again.

It's a terrible thing to so beautifully misrepresent God. It does not just add to Job's pain, but it means doing Satan's work for him. Because God cares about how we suffer, and God also cares about how we represent him to one another when others suffer.

That's very interesting. In the last chapter, again, chapter 42, I want to read to you verses 8 and 9. Now, therefore, God says, take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves.

This is the three friends. And my servant Job shall pray for you, and I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your foolishness.

[22 : 55] You've not spoken of me what is right, but my servant Job has. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Namathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

It matters in heaven whether we faithfully suffer, whether we endure in suffering, and it matters in heaven that we represent God to each other when others are suffering.

And as soon as that sacrifice had finished in chapter 42, the comforters could have said these four things to Job. One, we don't understand really why you're suffering, dear friend, but we're here with you.

Two, we do know that God does not treat us according to our sins. Your sacrifice and your prayer have shown that our relation to God is based on forgiveness of love and not this old principle of just merely justice.

Three, we've been talking about God so much, and now we're going to pray for you that you will continue to trust God even in the darkness. And four, God is your creator and redeemer.

[24 : 06] Even if you feel you're in the darkness, he hears you and you are his delight. And if they've been able to get into a time machine and travel to the time of Jesus and then come back to chapter 4, they could also say that in time, God himself will come among us as a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

As the sinless one, he'll come as the suffering servant. And his suffering will put an end to all suffering, proving ultimately that God never treats us according to our sins.

And he promises to be with us in the light and in the dark all the days until we meet him face to face. And after you've suffered a little while, Job, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.