

# Reverent wrestling with suffering

*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: 10 June 2012

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[ 0 : 0 0 ] One of my responsibilities as a parent is to raise my children into wise adults. And by that I don't mean experienced and educated adults.

I mean wise adults. We are told in Proverbs, the beginning of wisdom, the very first foundation of wisdom is in fact the fear of the Lord. And so wisdom is not a collection of knowledge and experience per se.

And it's not a collection of pithy sayings or abstract thoughts. It is in fact relational. It's about a relationship. To grow in wisdom is to grow in relationship with our Lord through all the ups and downs of our lives, in all the ups and downs of our daily experiences.

And so my responsibility is to teach my children a knowledge of God. Not that they might have a knowledge of the Bible, but in fact that they might have God.

They might know God and that they might fear Him so that they don't have to fear Him. A big part of that teaching is me being a wise parent day by day.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] That is that they see me fearing the Lord day by day. And one of my responsibilities as your pastor is to do the same thing. To preach and to pray and to live in such a way that you are prepared in mind and heart to grow in relational wisdom, especially in the day of calamity, the day of disaster.

The day that the biopsy test comes back positive. The day that the police knock at the door to break the news of a fatal accident. The day that you discover a terrible secret in a relationship.

These are the days that can be the start of unimaginable grieving and suffering. And so my job is to prepare my children and you for those days so that instead of cursing God, you would in fact bow humbly, worshipping Him and blessing Him as your sovereign and merciful Father.

And I don't mean, when I say that, a stiff, upper lip, cavalier attitude. Where you are resting on your own resources, I mean a reverent and trusting worship of God.

And so this book of Job, as we begin in this search of wisdom, takes us to the life of a man who loses everything. As we just heard just then, Job's possessions, his livelihood, his children and his health are ripped away from him in tragic circumstances.

[ 2 : 5 7 ] And even what he has left, his wife and his mates, turn out to be no help at all. Job enters into crippling, mind-numbing anguish.

And on one level, you could say that the book of Job is all about suffering. It does offer certain insights into why bad things happen. But I want to suggest to you that it is fundamentally so much more than about suffering.

Because although there are a few insights into the issue of suffering, the central idea of the book is not why suffering occurs. The reason I say that is because it's no mystery at all to the reader why suffering occurs.

We know the answer to that by the end of chapter 1. The real mystery and the tension of the book is not why suffering happens or why Job suffers, but how he will behave towards God in his suffering.

Will Job curse God as Satan predicts? Or will Job continue to trust God? And this is the tension that draws us on as we read through the book.

[ 4 : 12 ] Because it appears right at the very first couple of chapters that Job does well. And then you start reading chapter 3 onwards. And it appears that Job's not doing so well.

The central theme is the nature of wisdom and where it can be found. And the way it tackles that issue of the nature of wisdom is by creating a conflict between two different views of wisdom.

One is the rigid connection between actions and consequences. For instance, if you are lazy, you'll be poor. If you smoke, you'll get lung cancer.

And if you have a rigid connection between actions and consequences, then what happens is when you see the consequence, you start reading the consequences back into actions.

The person's got lung cancer. Must have been a smoker. That person's poor. Clearly they're lazy. That is, in this idea of wisdom, the world is ordered and wisdom is about knowing the order.

[ 5 : 28 ] Wisdom is about understanding the set rules and principles of order in the world. Or as the people on the video said, wisdom's about knowledge from experience.

That's what that sort of wisdom is. Knowledge from experience. I've experienced this in the world and that's what wisdom is understanding as you grow older, understanding what the order is.

Job's three friends are working with that kind of framework. Because all this bad stuff is happening to Job, it must be because he's done something really bad.

That is their experience. And that is only partly right. What Job helps us to see, another idea of wisdom on this side, is that life is rarely, if ever, that straightforward.

And that is the limitation over here of human wisdom. My experience. That's the limitation of human wisdom. And Job helps us to see that biblical wisdom is not so rigid.

[ 6 : 44 ] It helps us to see that the order of our universe is not always there for us to see. We can't always see the order of the universe.

And so therefore our experience is limited. And it helps us to see that there is a God who stands above the order and knows the order and is not restricted to the order.

And therefore biblical wisdom is being in relationship with that God. Which goes way beyond human wisdom. That's the clash as we go throughout this book.

It is fundamentally about knowing and trusting the God who knows and is sovereign and is good. And this need for relational wisdom is especially crucial when life is tough.

How do we grow in wisdom when the world isn't as we think it ought to be? And so in that respect the book of Job is kind of like a first aid manual.

[ 7 : 50 ] You see a first aid manual doesn't normally go into great detail about all the different ways that you can break an arm. It's more concerned about how do you fix the arm when it's broken.

So Job doesn't give us an exhaustive list of why suffering happens. He's more concerned to explain how to behave towards God when suffering happens.

And so let's have a look at it there. Get your sheets open up. Job 1 and 2. In verses 1 to 6 of chapter 1 we get a glimpse of what Job is like.

He is unquestionably godly. Three times in chapters 1 and 2 we are told that Job was a blameless and an upright man.

The book begins with this declaration in verse 1. In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job and this man was blameless and upright.

[ 8 : 45 ] And then if you go down to verse 8 we are told what it means to be blameless and upright. A man who fears God and shuns evil. Which is the definition of wisdom.

According to Proverbs chapter 1. To be blameless and upright means to fear God and shun evil. We are supposed to see Job as the model of a righteous and a wise man.

Not that he was perfect or sinless. Not saying that for a moment. All the contributors in this book Job and his three mates particularly his four mates are convinced that all people are sinful.

And in fact Job's first act in the book is in fact to offer sacrifices for sin. So he's not sinless here.

We're not saying that at all. We're meant to see Job as an extremely well-to-do man. He is upright and he is blameless. He's the complete man. In fact it says there is no one like him among all the people of the east.

[ 9 : 48 ] He is a head and shoulders above everyone. Everything is as we would want it to be. A good man enjoying a good life.

Actions are consequences. We might even say that Job has worked hard on his godliness and he's therefore getting the rewards from God for that.

And so imagine the shock within the space of two days all your children are killed you lose your job your wife thinks you're mad all your employees are murdered your superannuation nest egg is stolen and just to top it all off you now have no roof over your head because it probably doesn't matter anyway you've been admitted to hospital because from the top of your head to the soles of your feet you are covered in gaping sores which are oozing pus.

Oh one more thing while you're there lying in hospital wondering about how you're going to pay the medical bills and the funeral for your kids your long time Christian mates come in and tell you that the events of the past two days are all your fault as you sit there with a piece of brick scraping your sores it's all your fault Job if it wasn't for you Job none of this would happen in the space of two days Job goes from prosperity to poverty from great comfort to crippling from pain from the greatest man in the east to sitting on a rubbish tip scraping his body with a broken piece of pottery and one of the worst things for Job is that why you see

Job doesn't have the full picture Job does not know what we know we get a glimpse into the meeting between Satan and God verses 6 to 12 describe the encounter in verse 7 Satan says that he spends his time going to and from the earth we know from 1 Peter that he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to destroy and then God puts on display to Satan a trophy that he delights in very much verse 8 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 doesn't seem like a clever thing to say does it it's like the owner of a jewellery store meeting a thief in his store late one night and saying to him what are you doing here and he says just wandering around your store and the owner says oh why are you here let me show you the most valuable diamond we have doesn't seem to make a lot of sense it might look as if God has made a mistake but God never says oh dear oops

[ 13 : 20 ] I didn't see that one coming so let's just leave aside that God's making a mistake here and leaves us with one possibility he is setting Job up for trouble he is proud of Job Job's fear of God has endeared God to Job in a very deep way but Satan quite naturally is not impressed in verse 9 he insinuates that Job is not such a great example of reverence of God he says that the only reason Job fears God is to get rich and so Satan says to God in verse 11 stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face now what God could have said at that moment is I don't need to prove anything to you or to anyone else I know the heart of my servant Job and that is enough for me he could have done that but he didn't in this case

God chooses to get an open victory over Satan for his own glory a test will show that in the heart of Job God is more highly esteemed than any possession or any family member so why is God doing this the answer is something of immense heavenly significance is happening here God is in the process of demonstrating to the heavenly realms and to us the readers of this encounter that he himself is supreme in the heart of Job God is not because of what he gets out of it as if God himself was of no value Job is based on the value of God for who God is and God is about to reveal that to the heavenly realms

God is the revelation of this truth is so important that God is willing to subject his great servant Job to grief and poverty and sickness in order to make it known to the heavenly realms and so verses 20 and 22 record the great victory over Satan Job got up tore his robe and shaved his head then he fell to the ground in worship and said naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I depart the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away may the name of the Lord be praised and in all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrong doing Satan has proven to be wrong Job did not curse God when he lost his wealth and his children he worshipped and he blessed

God and so the superior value of God becomes evident to all in the heavenly realms and to us the readers he treasured God he treasured God what a response well now God Job will be blessed by God for such a great response and he will go back and be healthy and wise and wealthy and everything else that's actions and consequences isn't it well no chapter 2 Satan comes back again to God and runs down Job's character he makes the accusation that if you take away his health he will curse God and so this time God allows Satan to touch his health but he's not allowed to take his life and according to chapter 7 verse 5 Job was covered with boil like sores that opened and were running with pus and then got clogged with dirt and they were infested with worms from the top of his head to the feet open gaping sores running with pus with maggots this was not a case of the flu and again the worth of God is challenged in that moment is it

God himself the Job's treasures or is it the earthly treasures of family and possessions and health the great tragedy is that when Job's health fails it proves too much for his wife she with Job have endured the loss of the possessions and their children but now with the life of her husband draining away leaving her utterly destitute her faith collapses in verse 9 are you still holding on to your integrity curse God and die and you can just imagine in that moment that a smile comes on the face of Satan it's not going to be a victory for God this time but then comes the shattering victory of Job's faith in verse 10 you are talking like a foolish woman shall we accept good from

[ 19 : 03 ] God and not trouble in all this Job did not sin in what he said her response was foolish that is it was unwise here is a lesson in wisdom in the face of calamity comforts and calamities come from the hand of God is what Job says comforts and calamities come from the hand of God Job will not relinquish a rock solid confidence in the sovereignty of God and neither should we remember too that Job is not aware of this dialogue between God and Satan all Job knows is the suffering in fact as you read through Job Job's greatest suffering is silence from God that's what he cannot bear is silence from God and this is a reality for us as well decisions are made in heaven which affect us but which we like

Job know nothing about and one thing that is so blatantly obvious in these early chapters is the controlling hand of God did you notice that in the two heavenly scenes here God handed Job over to Satan's power not to say that that power is limitless Satan recognises here his own limitations he has to go and get permission from God before he is allowed to do anything and so in chapter 1 verse 12 God gives permission for Satan to take away everything from Job but he isn't allowed to touch Job's life you can't touch his body that is Satan couldn't even in that moment give Job a common cold unless God allowed it to happen it's because Satan is not equal to God he doesn't know what

God knows he doesn't have the power that God has he does not control life and death he's a created finite being and he needs permission but when Satan has done his work of taking Job's wealth and family Job says in chapter 1 verse 21 the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away blessed be the name of the Lord Job says that it's ultimately the work of the Lord himself who took away his family and his wealth and similarly in the second heavenly scene God says in chapter 2 verse 6 to Satan he is in your hands but again in chapter 2 verse 10 Job says shall we accept good from God and not trouble in other words Job again goes all the way up to the sovereignty of

God over Satan and says that his sickness is from God Satan may have been the immediate cause but ultimately it is from God and the inspired writer warns us not to criticise Job here in the very same verse he says in all this Job did not sin in what he said he did not accuse God by going all the way up to God and saying it came all from his hand Job rock of refuge and hope when everything else was crumbling was the absolute sovereignty of God I love one of Charles Spurgeon's quote who himself went through enormous physical and emotional suffering in his life he said that it was an unbearable thought for him that his suffering would come from anywhere else than his sovereign gracious father it was unbearable to him that there was any other source for his suffering than his sovereign gracious merciful father to be wise to live well in

God's world is to say with the psalmist in 115 3 our God is in the heavens and he does whatever he pleases it's to fear God and to shun evil and so let us make the absolute sovereignty of God the rock on which we build our lives and our church but let me say as well that this does not the sovereignty of God does not work itself out in a flippant insensitive superficial fatalistic response to suffering for Job or for us verse 20 of chapter 1 Job got up tore his robe and he shaved his head let your tears flow freely when your day of suffering comes the tears of grief and pain are not the signs of unbelief let me say that again the tears of grief and pain are not the signs of unbelief what made

[ 25 : 06 ] Job's worship magnificent for us to behold was that it was in grief not because it replaced grief it was in grief let your tears flow freely when your suffering comes and let us at least model the silent friends of Job at the end of chapter 2 not when they start speaking but the silent friends of Job as they gathered and sat with him to weep with those who weep friends suffering and hardship are a certainty both for you as an individual and even for us as a church let me tell you that change in any group of people brings hardship and loss it results in grief suffering and hardship is inevitable individually and corporately growth is optional so given the certainty of suffering and our limited understanding of suffering what Job teaches us is to trust in God that is in fact what it means to be wise to go all the way up to the God who knows even when our experience doesn't in Philippians 4

Paul speaks of a peace that transcends all understanding it says this rejoice in the Lord always I'll say it again rejoice let your gentleness be evident to all the Lord is near do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding the peace of God which transcends your experience and your knowledge will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus you see what Paul is talking about there in Philippians is a state of being reconciled with God through Jesus in such a way that we are more satisfied in him than in any understanding that we may have of our passing circumstances why would we treasure Jesus and rest in him and the peace that we have in him because he is near this God is near we see that

Job ultimately looked to a redeemer in chapter 19 he says this in chapter 19 I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth in Job chapter 19 he says I am here God is there and we need someone in between us we need someone in between us to help in the day of calamity and he says I know that my redeemer is alive and in the end this redeemer will stand upon the earth and how did Job's redeemer and our redeemer redeem by living more righteously than Job ever did and suffering more than Job ever could and by taking upon himself more suffering than he ever could Job's patient endurance in suffering is meant to point us to this redeemer this Jesus on the cross where he ultimately defeated this work of Satan where the victory over

Satan is finalized he is the one who can make us stand on the day of calamity and so to be wise to live well in God's world is to trust in the sovereign goodness of God and for this Jesus to be your peace and your treasure and your joy in the day of calamity so no matter what happens I have everything in Christ even if God had in fact let Satan take Job's life I know that Job would have said with the psalmist in 63 3 the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life so when your calamity comes may the Lord give you the grace to be wise and live well may he give you the grace to affirm the sovereignty of God may he give you the grace to let your tears flow freely and give you the grace to let

Jesus himself be your treasure and your joy Amen