

God's Purpose in Job's Sufferings

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: 20 March 2024

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] 20. Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped. And he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. And I want to take this verse in the light of what goes before it in the chapter, but also try and relate it to the overall message and the overall theme of Job as you go through the book.

Job is one of those books we call the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament, along with Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. A group together as a group of what are called usually Wisdom Books, because their main theme is, in one way or another, to present us with wisdom as specified by God.

And in many ways Job fits into that so admirably, because the wisdom of God and the wisdom that Job himself at times revealed and spoke of, is held in direct contrast to what his friends had actually wrongly thought was wrong with him, which was approaching it from a different point of view, from wisdom that was mainly wisdom founded on man's own, on their own thinking, on their own conclusions.

Now, the difficult passages in the book of Job, particularly when you come to the remaining part of it, from chapter 3 onwards, there are a lot of speeches there from Job's friends and Job himself, and probably that's one of the reasons that the book is not that well used.

[1 : 43] It is difficult to read through it, it is difficult to assimilate all that's in it, and try and gain some understanding of why these comments are made, and why these chapters are as they are.

But essentially, Job is about the place of suffering in a believer's life. I'm not giving any credence to the view that suffering has no part in a believer's life, that it doesn't belong in a believer's life.

The Bible is full of evidence that God blesses suffering, that God uses suffering. Instead of asking God just to simply take away our suffering, we should pray, and are praying, I'm sure, that God will help us, and others through the suffering that we need to endure, either small or great in amount, but that through it we will actually have a greater understanding of God, a greater understanding of his program, of our sanctification and cleansing, and all of the things associated with the way he deals with us, as we go through the various issues of life.

And as the purpose of suffering in a believer's life is brought out throughout the book of Job, it's particularly the case that it's God's part in that that's specially emphasized, or specially central to the whole theme.

What place does God have? What is God's part in the sufferings of a believing life? Is God detached from that? Is it simply a bare permission, as the sovereign God, to allow such things?

[3 :18] Well, Job will say there is that, but the book also tells us that there's actually an appointment of suffering on the part of God and his wisdom and sovereignty, so that you have to go beyond what you might call a bare permission from God for suffering to have a place in the Christian's life.

It's rather that God has appointed that, as well as all other things, to fit together into what he has purposed in his wisdom, to be the package for your life and mine, and for the life of his people in every generation.

So, we'll look at three things, three headings tonight. First of all, suffering and purpose together, suffering and God's purpose especially, as we find it here in these verses and in the book of Job as a whole.

Secondly, we'll look at the place that Satan has as the prosecutor of God's people, the prosecutor of accusations against them, and how that features largely in these opening chapters one and two of the book of Job as well.

Thirdly, we can look at the sovereignty of God in granting access to Satan to actually come and have access to Job's life and experiences.

[4 :37] So, suffering and purpose. Now, you see in the first part of the chapters we read through it, verses one to four deliberately describe the kind of situation that Job had in the world. Satan himself made reference to that as God called him to actually give a report to him, as it were.

And here is, in the first four verses, an account of Job's riches, of Job's status in his own society. In fact, it goes so far as to say that God said that there is none like him, as the greatest of all the people of the East, in verse three.

And why is that there at the beginning of the book? Why is that important before the book goes on to describe the sufferings that he endured and how these were things which he wrestled with and sought an answer from God for?

Well, the reason is so that we cannot say that Job was suffering or that God placed suffering in his life because there was something drastically wrong with his life.

It wasn't that his relationship with God had begun to founder or fallen on times of backsliding, you might say, on Job's part. It wasn't to do with that at all.

[5 :53] Whatever we say was the reason and the purpose of God in the sufferings of Job, it wasn't because he needed chastisement. It wasn't because he needed something from God to bring him back into the way of obedience.

He was already in that. And, of course, there are times in the book when Job spoke rather rashly and he had to take some of these words back towards the end of the book as he confessed to God his own smallness and his littleness and his inability to actually think as God thought and understand all the ways of God.

But his suffering preceded the suffering actually precedes the words that he spoke in terms of his complaint about his sufferings.

In other words, the Lord's sufferings were placed in his life and it's from that point onwards that he came actually to make his complaints to God. So, it's not because he was in need of correction.

It's not because he was in need of returning to the way of obedience. It's something else. We'll try and explore that. And the suffering of Job was not designed by God to prove Job himself in terms of what he was as a believer.

[7 :14] It wasn't to prove either the strength of his faith or his own commitment to God. We read here in these last verses of chapter 1 that in all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

But the whole purpose of the book of Job, while it might account for, that might be part of it, it's not primarily to bring out for us the quality of Job's faith. It's actually, in the book, it's that God proves himself to be the one who is wise and the governor of lives, his people's lives, including their suffering.

And that while we may not have access to all the reasons and the purpose for God's placement of suffering in our lives, the book of Job tells us that God himself knows.

And that God himself knows full well. And therefore is able to use that suffering as we depend upon him to improve our relationship with himself, to actually enable us to understand more of his ways.

And when you go through the book of Job, the questions that arise in your mind as you read through it are questions not so much as why was there suffering in the book of Job.

[8 : 33] It's more questions to do with God himself primarily. Is God just? Is God a just God? When you read of the life of Job and God's relationship with his sufferings.

Or you might say, is the world, the creation, well managed? Is the reason that there are certain things in the creation that are obviously not right, obviously not working in sync, if you might say, is that because God isn't managing it very well?

And near the end of the book, the final chapters of it, God actually takes Job, or what you might say is a tour of the creation, mentioning some of the various parts of the creation, like planets and stars and so on, and places before Job the question, can you do any better?

Can you govern it the way I govern it? Have you a right to complain how I arrange things? When you see yourself in the light of my greatness.

So all of these things are things which come across in the relationship of suffering and purpose, especially God's purpose in the book of Job. So let's turn to, secondly, to the place of Satan, Satan the prosecutor.

[9 : 58] Now the word Satan, you probably know this already, the word Satan is a Hebrew word, and the word Satan really means adversary, or to oppose in the verbal form of it.

It almost means to stand against someone, to oppose someone, to be an adversary of someone. And all the way through these chapters, in the early parts of these two chapters especially, Satan comes across to us as the chief prosecutor, if you like, of God's people such as Job, who wants to actually have leave of God to access their lives, to attack them, to deal with them in such a way as he hopes will bring their trust in God crashing down.

Because, you see, Satan's purpose really is, in terms of his own aims and purposes in Job's case, is that he wants to actually prove that Job is a fraud.

That the only reason Job serves God faithfully is just so that he will get something personal out of it himself. And that's why Satan said to God, does Job serve God for nothing?

You have put a wall around him. He's protected by you. It's easy for him just now. But you take all that away, and he will curse you to your face. In other words, Satan wanted to prove that Job really was something of a fraud, that the only reason he trusted in God, or confessed to be a believer in God, was so that he could fill his life with the good things he already had, and multiply and increase them, and enjoy a good life.

[11 : 37] Take all that away, Satan said. And he'll curse you to your face. He will prove himself to be someone who's just in a selfish sense. Now, we can't get behind everything that's mentioned in the chapter.

There was a day when the sons of God, verse 6, came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. We understand that the sons of God, they're a reference to the angels, messengers of God, and that Satan came amongst them.

And one of the things that comes across from that is that in these opening scenes, all beings that are created by God, including angels, are answerable to him.

Whether they are the good angels, or the bad angels that accompany Satan and his designs, they are all ultimately answerable to God. And they all have to give, as it were, their report to God, which really, in a sense, the way they're coming to present themselves before the Lord.

You might take that in a literal sense, although there are difficulties along with that, but it certainly means that God requires of them an account of their doings, just as he does of you and me.

[12:50] And Satan is no exception. He is called to account by God to give an account of his doings. That's not because God didn't know that he asked Satan, where have you come from?

The Lord knew very well. But he wanted to hear from Satan's own mouth, and indeed for the benefit of Job, ultimately as well, what Satan was up to, what his aspirations were, what his purposes were.

And that's really taking us behind the scenes into the issues of eternity, the things which are, if you like, behind the curtain that separates us from eternity.

And it's giving us a little glimpse into that world, that mysterious world over which God presides as he presides over everything else. And he's opening that curtain up just a little chink, if you like, so that we'll see that even there it is God who is totally in charge, and God is the master of all the beings that he has created, including those that fell, such as Satan himself.

Now here's a point that's really, I think, crucial for us to understand as you try and apply all these points and these related points to your own life as a Christian, and to apply them to your times of temptation, when you know that you're being tempted to be disobedient to God, and being tempted to just turn aside or take a little holiday from reading your Bible or prayer or things like that.

[14:21] The purpose of Satan is obviously that you would do that. But here's the comforting thing. The purpose of Satan actually fits into the overall purpose of God.

The purpose of Satan fits into the overall purpose of God. Here is Satan's purpose brought before us in the book of Job. He wants to get to Job. He wants to actually attack Job.

He wants to prove Job a fraud. He wants to actually get to him to such an extent that through his sufferings, he will turn against God and be done with God. But that all fits into God's overarching purpose, where he's going to prove to Satan that it's not for nothing that Job trusts in God, but because Job knows that God is worthy of it.

However much or little he will get out of it practically or financially or materially, God is saying to us through the book of Job, faith in God is not ultimately about how much we can gather of a material or financial or other blessings.

Faith is about putting God first, putting God first, come what may, challenging though that is. And so, you see, the aim of Satan in seeking to prove that Job was a fraud was pretty much, you could say, well, if he can prove Job was a fraud, if he can prove this man with all that he has, this man with his godliness, this man who is described as blameless and upright, who feared God and turned away from evil, if he can prove that he is a fraud, then it stands to reason or it follows that the credibility of every other believer really is at issue.

[16:19] If he can get to Job and turn his life upside down to deny God and to turn against him, well, where does that leave the rest of them? Where does that leave other believers?

others. And if he fails with Job, having been granted access by God to Job's life, to the extent, as the book shows, that he did to cause severe damage to his family, to himself, to his possessions, and to his own health, if he actually fails to turn Job against God, having had such an access, he's done for.

He's a defeated enemy. He has no chance against others. God will show that Job's godliness is actually for God's own sake.

So we mentioned previously some questions that arise as you go through the book of Job. We mentioned that one. Is God just? Is the world well managed?

But other questions that arise are not so much why is there suffering in the life of believers? Why does God actually appoint such things?

[17:41] Why does God not just allow but give such a place to suffering at times in the lives of his people? It's not too much that. The question really, I think, at the bottom of it all is why serve God at all?

Why serve God at all if there's suffering along with doing that? Is it worth your while serving God? Would it not be just as well to turn away from that and just put up with whatever suffering is in the world and live a good life in a worldly sense?

These are all questions that this book as a book of wisdom really comes out with, although maybe not specifying these questions exactly as I've mentioned them, but they come to your mind as you read through it and they come to your mind in such a way that says, well, let me ask myself the question, why do I serve God?

Why am I committed to following Christ? Why am I actually so concerned to keep on following and to pursuing with a believing life when I know that that is a life that attracts so much suffering from the world, from the devil, and maybe from within my own heart?

And that's a message for every suffering believer and I'm sure every believer suffers in different ways to certain degrees from time to time.

[19:10] You know yourself tonight that there's an element of suffering in your life, sometimes more than other times, but have you asked the question, why is it there? And even more so, have you asked the question, knowing that that's there, is it worthwhile serving God?

How do I answer that if the question comes to me from someone who knows my life to be one that has such suffering in it and knows that I'm a Christian? How do I answer them?

How do I actually say, well, this is why I serve God? And that's why Job's conviction here in verse 21 is so important.

He said, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Now he's saying that against the background of the losses that are described in the middle part of the chapter.

And against these losses you might expect, well, I didn't expect this to be such a tough shift following the Lord, believing the Lord. Now all that this has happened and the Lord is obviously presiding over it.

[20:20] I've lost so much. Where do I stand? What am I going to make of God through all this? Well, he says, I had nothing coming into the world when I came from my mother's womb.

And when I leave this world, everything that I have I'll have to leave behind. Naked I came from the mother's womb. Naked shall I return.

And the Lord has given, the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. In other words, he's saying, whatever God has given me in the past and given me an abundance of material things that I enjoyed, whatever God takes away from me, it doesn't alter this great fact that the Lord's name remains blessed.

That the Lord remains one worthy of my worship, worthy of my service. That's why he speaks in chapter 2 there to his wife.

You see there he, after he lost his health as well, he was struck with loathsome souls. It's really difficult reading it. Verse 8 there in chapter 2, he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself from his sores while he sat in the ashes.

[21:40] And his wife said to him, Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. Be done with it. And he said, You speak as one of the foolish women speak.

Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? in all this God did not sin with his lips. So you see Satan, the prosecutor, for all his attempts thus far, at least as you read into it, read into the book, has met with failure.

Because Job's conviction is that God, come what may, is worthy of his trust. Worthy of being served. sometimes we're challenged in our own lives, aren't we?

Maybe it's just a challenge that arises in our own minds rather than from somebody else outside of ourselves. But a challenge nevertheless through various things that we experience in life that are hard and difficult and unexpected and would rather not have in our lives.

The challenge then is, am I going to keep on serving God? Is it worth going on with a Christian life? And Job is saying, absolutely it is.

[23:00] Because the name of the Lord remains blessed and whether we receive good or evil or difficulty from the hand of God, it should never actually lead us to think of sinning against him, denying him or not being true to his calling of us.

So suffering and purpose, Satan the prosecutor, we could amplify that some more but I want to move on thirdly to the sovereign way in which God brought the suffering into the life of Job.

Now it's very interesting in these chapters that the focus of the Lord is not upon Job. The focus of the Lord is on Satan.

The focus of the Lord is on him. It was just the Lord that having asked him where have you come from and Satan said I'm from going to and fro on the earth from walking up and down on it.

That's very similar to Peter's description isn't it? Of the devil as a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour, seeking to intimidate, seeking to actually swallow folks up and destroy their faith if he could.

[24:14] Well, here is Satan's answer from going to and fro on the earth and walking up and down on it and it's the Lord that said to Satan have you considered my servant Job?

He's calling Satan's attention deliberately to this particular man, to this particular individual and while you can't get behind all that's involved in that it does show you that the Lord's concentration there is on Satan and on the way that he's going to use Satan to show that faith in God while it may actually bring many benefits it's especially to do with bringing glory and praise to God himself.

Have you considered my servant Job? And it teaches us this as well that the way in which God overcomes evil in terms of the life of his people I'm thinking especially of the way that God overcomes evil is not by destroying evil altogether and Job God could have instantly said to Satan you can't get access to Job anymore that's it he could even have destroyed him he could destroy the devils he could destroy the source of evil just like that and say to us now I've done that there's no more evil for you to confront so you're free and you're free from such awful temptations and difficulties and sufferings in your life don't do that God's way in overcoming evil and sin and death through his people not that God cannot do it without it's what I mean is when there's evil and suffering and trial in the life of God's people he doesn't overcome it and he doesn't enable them to overcome it by just taking it away altogether the amazing thing is that

God through his people contends with evil contests evil battles with evil overcomes it by giving his people grace and strength to overcome it and what better way is there rather than just by some miraculous event though of course God could easily have done that in Job's case in your case in my case by some miraculous event that would show his mastery of evil and his support of you instead of actually producing that and being very spectacular in his demonstration of his mastery over evil what does he do?

He gives you grace he gives you grace to overcome it to stand up to it to wrestle with it God overcomes the evil and the the sin and the life of his people not by stamping it out but by using them as frail human beings in dependence on himself to show that he is the Lord and to show that the best thing we can do is to continue to depend upon him he uses our weakness I will remind you of what Paul says in his letter to the second letter of Corinthians you know the passage in chapter 12 where Paul describes his being lifted up to the third heaven and mystery though there is in that he was caught up to the third heaven and heard things that whether in the body or out of the body

[27 : 55] I don't know he heard things which cannot be told which man may not utter and then he goes on to speak about so to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations a thorn was given me in the flesh God applied we're not exactly sure what it was but it was certainly a physical matter which caused Paul a whole lot of pain for which he prayed three times that the Lord would take this away from him but you see I've described it a thorn was given me in the flesh a messenger of Satan to harass me and that does not mean that every element of suffering in your life is a messenger of Satan that doesn't mean that when you have severe suffering in the life of any Christian that the source of that is Satan and that the reason is there's something wrong in that person's life don't ever conclude that

Paul knows this is the case because God revealed it to him and what he's saying is a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from being too elated three times I pleaded with the Lord about this that it should leave me in other words Paul himself this apostle of God was saying three times he pleaded with the Lord please Lord take this away I want to serve you and serve you free from this hindrance this harassment please take this away and God said my grace is sufficient for you this was God's way of saying no in other words it's no but no but my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest on me for the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses insults hardships persecutions and calamities for when I am weak then I am strong when I know my own weakness when I confess that before God when I take

God's promise that his grace is sufficient for me that I can overcome this pain this difficulty this suffering this buffeting this messenger of Satan when I know that God's grace is sufficient for me to do that then I will glory in my infirmities that's very strong language instead of having it taken away as if that was going to be the best solution to the problem he's now saying I accept what God has said I accept that this is the best way that he will give me grace so that I will overcome by his grace the difficulties the trials in my way and you remember in Luke chapter 22 as well when the Lord revealed to Peter that Satan had desired to have them he mentions Satan has desired to have you but as you plural the whole disciples maybe even the whole church but certainly at the very least the band of disciples at that time along with Peter

Satan has desired to have you that he might scatter you like wheat that he might sift you like wheat see that's his purpose he wants to destroy he wants to cause havoc he wants to get in among the disciples and cause such havoc that they'll be scattered and the cause of God will be questioned and people will say well it's not worth serving that God but I have prayed for you he said and I have prayed for you prayed what that God would take away the suffering in his life no I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail yes God knew the Lord knew that Peter would deny him and he did so three times grievously against the Lord but when you are recovered when you are turned back when you are converted the old version has it it means when you have come back from your lapse when you have come back from that turn against me in your denial strengthen your brethren see that was

Satan's purpose to destroy but like I said at the beginning it's inside God's purpose to strengthen his church because Peter was going to prove to be one of the main means of strengthening the church in the New Testament as the gospel went out both to Gentiles as well as to Jews and see in the early chapters there of Acts you can see the leadership of Peter and how strong that leadership was how vital that leadership was and that's God demonstrating through Peter that overcoming evil and overcoming Satan and overcoming even the lapse on the sin in his own heart is a matter of Christ's prayer for him filling him with strength I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail and when you are recovered strengthen your brethren now tonight isn't that our prayer as well we have no right to say to God

[33 : 42] Lord please take away suffering from my life I would be a far better Christian without suffering in my life without having such difficulties and trials to contend with to battle against that's not our prayer Job teaches us our prayer is Lord turn at all times my sufferings to blessings turn my trials and my difficulties to blessings for myself and for others enable me through them not only to progress in my own life as a Christian but to be of benefit and help to others around me in your church that I might strengthen your cause that I might strengthen especially any others who are struggling with temptation and questions in their life about their relation to God God's purpose in Job's sufferings in all this would that it was true of me and of you

Job did not sin or charge God with any wrong let's pray Lord we thank you that there are such books in the scriptures as the book of Job we acknowledge that you are the author of scripture from beginning to end we acknowledge oh Lord that it is authoritative and accurate for us a word that is dependable we pray for the grace of your spirit Lord to add to our understanding daily of what your word teaches us we thank you especially tonight that as we know that there are powers looking down upon us more powerful than ourselves who have an evil intention against us we bless thee for the shelter of your wings we thank the Lord for the security of your intercession for your people and we give thanks for the assurance you give to your people that evil will not prevail that you will bring them at last as we've been singing earlier to love the Lord more fully and also as we learn from your word to be brought finally to that state and into that place of heaven where there is no temptation anymore bless us then and bless your word to us hear the prayers of your people both silent and spoken here tonight and in all other gatherings of your people

Lord be present to bless them we ask it all for Jesus sake Amen this comunisan and text as we understand we ask your tard ■■ that the Helen miracle who said to the lord or for Jesusát where she saw the other thousands of Jesus as we I told us of Jesus and