

**Job 3:20-23**  
**Who Instead of Why**

*Why is light given to him who is in misery,  
and life to the bitter in soul,  
21 who long for death, but it comes not,  
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,  
22 who rejoice exceedingly  
and are glad when they find the grave?  
23 Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,  
whom God has hedged in?*

Reading the book of Job has raised a lot of questions in our congregation. He was a moral man, but did he sin in his accusations against God? Can I be a righteous person and still have questions?

Reading Job is traumatic. He is suffering. He does not know why. He does not know how it will end. It seems everyone close to him offers him counsel contrary to his thinking. He is all alone.

**First: A Look at Job's Response. 3:1-26**

On a single day, his children died, his material goods perished and within a short period of time he is physically touched by boils – “loathsome sores” - that cover his entire body.

His suffering was sudden and severe, this godly man was demolished in every way.

Job's response is holy ground –

Job 1:21 - 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.”*

Who could be more tested? We face minor inconveniences when compared to Job's suffering.

When compared to Job's heartache, we are humbled by our complaints. He certainly did better than we do when we are stuck in or cut off in traffic, late for a meeting, stand in line too long, don't get our way, etc.

The narrator says – 1:22 – *“In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”*

Job's initial response is remarkable.

But the story is not as simple as *“he trusted God and so should you.”*

Starting in Job 3, the text moves from narrative to poetry and this is important. Why? Because the author isn't just telling a story. That move takes us from what we see to what Job is

experiencing. The author is opening up Job's life to provide us with a wealth of wisdom about enduring suffering.

The majority of the book is Job's laments and his conversation with his friends.

It's a journey of slow pain...a long delay before God responds. As you've read it this week, you have no doubt, wished it would end.

In the process, you've gained an understanding of Job's wife saying, "*Curse God and die.*" (Job 2:9).

We all hate to suffer. Even more, we hate to watch loved ones suffer.

ILL – Sometimes God allows a loved one's suffering to endure so that it gives our hearts time to change our minds. In the beginning, we pray, "*Don't take them...*" But death is natural, to a fallen world and Jesus has turned our greatest enemy into a friend. We sorrow for ourselves, not for our loved ones. But in time, our hearts change, and we begin to say, "*Lord, let them go in peace.*"

The book of Job is 42 chapters long for a reason. Suffering is real. Suffering is painful. Much of our lives are spent insulating ourselves from sorrow.

But there is no instant relief to pain. There is no immediate salve that conquers every sorrow. Much sorrow lingers and even after the emotional or physical pain has ceased, we still remember it. It remains. And there is no escape from some of it until we die. Some sorrow will require a divine hand on our cheek wiping away tears. Until then, we only wish it would die.

One of Job's greatest gifts is that he teaches us how to lament. We all want undivided joy and there are times to rejoice but we also need to know how to lament; how to sorrow, how to possess joy in suffering.

When Job's sorrow breaks his emotional dam, he curses the day he was born (3:1-13 & 16-26). If this kind of suffering is going to happen to people who are born, why is anyone born?

More deeply and behind the 'why' question is the bewilderment of "*Is God for me or against me?*"

- God has birthed me
- God has attacked me
- God has gone silent on me

*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience,  
but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*  
C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* (1940)

- God is indifferent to me

*Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are 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. 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 a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?*

C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed* (1961)

Job has lost a lot but losing God's presence is his greatest heartache.

It's one thing to endure this heartache on your own. But how do you respond when your husband, your wife, children, your friend, asks you "Why?"

We want to and need to be careful in our responses to suffering. Job's friends were not.

#### **Second: A Friend's Counsel 4:1-6**

Job's friends – Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar - who initially mourn with him, eventually then turn on him in their explanations of his sorrow. We learn from them what not to say to suffering people

Basically, they have a cause and effect paradigm. "You sinned. You suffer."

But we, and Job, know that is not true.

Eliphaz is the first to speak –

8 – *As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.*

Simply put: "Bad things don't happen to good people."

For Job's three friends, only sinful people suffer.

They are orthodox: God does punish sin. Yes...but, they are right but are not correct.

The narrator: 1:1b - *that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*

And God agrees –

42:7 - After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

We must be careful. Where did they err?

In effect, these friends only added to Job's suffering.

*Men seek an explanation of suffering in cause and effect. They look backwards for a connection between prior sin and present suffering. The Bible looks forward in hope and seeks explanations, not so much in origins as in goals. The purpose of suffering is seen, not in its cause, but in its result. The man was born blind so that the works of God could be displayed in him. But sometimes good never seems to come out of evil. Men wait in vain. They find God's slowness irksome. They lose heart, and often lose faith. The Bible commends God's self-restraint. The outworkings of His justice through the long processes of history, which sometimes require spans of many centuries, are part of existence in time. It is easier to see the hand of God in spectacular and immediate acts, and the sinner who is not instantly corrected is likely to despise God's delay in executing justice as a sign that He is indifferent or even absent. We have to be patient as God Himself to see the end result, or to go on living in faith without seeing. In due season we shall reap, if we do not give up.*

**Francis Anderson**

There is mystery in suffering and Christians must be comfortable in the mystery of our suffering and in the mystery of God.

### **Third: God as God.**

Job 38-42 is God's longest discourse in the Bible. That is really important.

When we are suffering, we should listen in on that monologue.

In these chapters, God is looking at Job, but he is looking out for us.

Job was a blameless and upright person but that didn't mean that he didn't misread God during his suffering.

Job found fault with God – chapter 10 – "You've either made a mistake or you are mean."

God says, (38-40) - "Walk with me. There is more to me than you."

- Creation 38:1-38
- Zoo – 38:39-39:30

How is this relevant?

- God knows

- God cares

Job never understands the why but his ‘*why*’ question is answered in the ‘*who*’ question.

**Job 42:6 - ...now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.**

The book of Job doesn’t answer the question of suffering, because the book is not really about suffering but about God. It is about us bowing down before God and leaving our questions unanswered.

Do you have that grace? To bow down before God and him be sufficient?

### **Conclusion:**

#### 1 – The dark night of the soul

We most often use the term ‘the dark night of the soul’ to define the pain of a spiritual crisis caused by unanswered heartache and suffering. There is a sense in which that is right. But, ‘the dark night of the soul’ is really a poem about being united to God. It’s not a bad thing. It’s a good thing. And it is what Job chapters 3-37 are all about.

#### 2 – The prelude to the Gospel

Job suffered more than you and I have. But there is someone else who has suffered more than all of us.

Job’s 3 friends have no category for innocent suffering and none of them are innocent, not even Job, and yet there is one innocent who did suffer.

But God’s remedy – that the innocent might suffer – was unthinkable to Job’s friends.

Who might be innocent? Who might suffer for sin? Not Job, not Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar. There is only one name: Jesus.

The great mystery is not ‘why do we suffer?’ The great mystery is ‘Why would a sinless God suffer on our behalf of us, his sinful enemies?’

We have something to hold onto that Job nor his friends possessed: the cross –

Does God know? Yes.

Does God care? Yes.

Is God doing something about it? Yes.

How do I know? The cross.

He is reconciling all things to himself!

After all, what *more* is there than God?

**Community Groups:**

- 1 – What have you enjoyed most about reading Job?
- 2 – What have you endured most about reading Job?
- 3 – What has been most significant to you?
- 4 – What is your most important take-away?
- 5 – How has your mind changed about God?
- 6 – How has your mind changed about suffering?
- 7 - Read Job 1:21 – To whom does Job attribute his calamities?
- 8 – How does a view of God as sovereign bring comfort and encouragement to us?
- 9 – Read 1:22 – Why did Job not charge God with wrong?
- 10 – Read 2:9 – What is your understanding of Job’s wife’s comments?
- 11 – Why did Job not curse God?
- 12 – Read the first Lewis quote. How is pain God’s megaphone?
- 13 – Has God ever used pain to get your attention?
- 14 – Read the second Lewis quote. Have you ever experienced a shut door in prayer?
- 15 – What is the paradigm Job’s friends use to explain his suffering?
- 16 – Read 42:7 - How does Job’s life disprove that thinking?
- 17 – Why do people suffer; righteous or unrighteous people?
- 18 – What is the ultimate cure for suffering?