

Why?

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like for a little while this evening to look at this passage in Job, Job chapter 6 on page 513. Well I'm not really going to look at the passage in any great detail, I'm going to dip into the book of Job at various points and try and get a very brief overview of what is happening. It's an absolutely fantastic book, it is a tremendous book, it's a book about one man who suffers more than any of us here will have suffered in our lives and are likely to suffer in our lives. He's lost everything, he's lost his health, he's lost his family, he's lost his career, he's lost his wealth, he's lost everything and it's really a book that looks at this man's wrestling with, it's an age-old question isn't it, suffering and there's not going to be any new answers this evening to that but I hope we can look at what the Bible has to say here for us this evening just for a few moments, not so much to find any answers about suffering but to just look for a moment at how God deals with it and how God deals with Job because it's a template, it's not make-believe, it's not a story, it is real and it's a real character, it's a real person, it's real suffering and there's real tears and there's real loss but God deals with this individual in a remarkable way that gives us a template into the character and the nature of God and into a little bit of how we might understand ourselves and maybe even more importantly how we deal ourselves with people who are suffering and how we respond to them because that's a huge part of this book, a huge part of this book is taken up with the response of the people who come to speak to Job and what God thinks of them and maybe as you read it what you think of them and see whether what you think of them parallels with what God thinks and then see how God deals with them, it's such huge book of the Bible, it's such a hugely significant and important issue because it's the question that everybody asks and it's the question that is on the lips of all who suffer, why does a good God allow suffering and it is always the question isn't it and we can have many different answers to that but we're reminded that this wells up within humanity and it wells up within us because it seems paradoxical and it seems wrong and we cry out with a sense in our own sinfulness of the injustice of what's going on and this book gives a remarkable answer to these things. Every Christian should know and love and read this book often and should spend time in it, it's a book you can read and should probably read in a winner, it's not a great book to dissect and tiny little sections which is me giving my own apologies for not doing that this evening but if it was to take one verse which would focus our thoughts it would maybe be from verse 14 and might not be the one you would expect, a despairing man should have the devotion of his friends even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty and there's a context that that is written into, it's written into the context of Job, it's actually right in the middle of Job being comforted, being spoken to by his friends who come to him, Eli Fess and Bildad and Zophar and they come to him and they spend seven days weeping with him in silence for all his loss, for his deep and grievous loss.

We've touched that this week but it can't get near to the suffering of or loss that Job had experienced in his life so these guys come and they sit in silence with him for seven days, it's the best seven days of their lives in terms of what they offer to him because then they begin to answer the reasons for Job's suffering and what I like just to say by way of application in a sense because we don't have time to look at all of the different answers that they give to Job as by way of comfort to him to explain why God has allowed this to happen to him, the danger for us of canned answers to people who suffer. I think that's one of the great lessons of this book of Job is that God is saying don't give people canned answers in their suffering, don't give them theological insight, don't give them words from Scripture that mean nothing to them in their suffering and in their loss, a despairing man should have the devotion of his friends is what Job is crying out for here even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. So much of Job is taken up with the responses of the friends of Job. God fearing men, holy men, men who love the Lord and they give textbook answers to Job and his suffering and his pain. You might read any one of them and say I'm meant to that. That's exactly right. Absolutely, Eliphaz, you've hit the nail in the head. You know exactly what he's going through and that's a great answer you give.

I would challenge any of us not to look at some of the answers that they give and said these. That's the kind of answers I would give. That's the kind of things I would say.

God responds very differently to them and to their answers which we'll see in a moment and there's kind of, I guess there's three kind of answers they give. Eliphaz in Job chapter 4 is the mystic. He's the mystic that comes to Job and tells him that he's had a message from the Lord for him. He says, you know I've got a word that was secretly brought to me. My ears caught a whisper of it amid disquieting dreams in the night when deep sleep falls in men. Fear and trembling sees me. A spirit glided past my face and the hair of my head stood and ended its stop but it couldn't tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes and I heard a hushed voice. Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his maker? So we have here Eliphaz's mystical experience and his mystical answer that the spirit of God whispers in his ear as he's passing. That no one can challenge and no one can find fault with. That really it's the great answer he's been given. Job no one is righteous. You're suffering because no one is righteous.

[7 : 36] This is just judgment. There's not much sympathy there and no one can challenge what he's saying because well the spirit's given it to him directly. The spirit's spoken to him in whispers in the night when everyone else is sleeping. He's spiritually alert. He's awake and he's ready to hear what God will say and he brings this amazingly spiritual and godly message to Job in his absolute despair which says that no one exempt from suffering. No one is righteous.

There's little sympathy and there's little closeness to Job and his need. And then Bildad comes onto the scene in chapter 8 and he's kind of, he's much more stoic.

He's kind of more presbyterian and Scottish in the way that he responds. You know does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him he gave them over to the penalty of their sin but if you look to God and plead with the Almighty.

And so on ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned for you were only born for you were only born yesterday and know nothing. And so he comes with this request or demand in unsympathetic tones too to just learn from what happens, learn from the past, learn from others who have suffered and be stoic, accept it so the immutable will of God. Just be strong, don't question him. You're only born yesterday Job. Why are you questioning God?

Why are you blaming God? Why are you abandoning the fear of God, the Almighty at this time? Just accept these things. And then further on Zophar in chapter 11 and we're only really glimpsing it at some of these things. Job, Zophar in chapter 11. Can you fathom the mysteries of God?

[9 : 41] Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens. What can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave. What can you know their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea? The classic answer. God's ways, Job are not our ways. Accept that.

Accept that you'll never know that. Accept that there is mystery in this but accept that God knows because he is right and that is what's significant. And all of them bring these measured theological, correct, precise pieces of advice to Job and Job is gutted by it. Job is gutted by their correctness and he says a despairing man should have the devotion of his friends even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. Job needed their friendship. Job needed their love at this point.

Job needed to know that they were alongside him, that they weren't casting judgment over him, that they weren't looking down on him. The seven days of silence were good days for these men before Job and he speaks brilliantly in description of the message.

My brothers, they're as undependable as intermittent streams, streams that overflow when the flooding ice melts and comes down but cease to flow in the dry season. They're all over me when things are going well. You know they're like just that flooded, they're all, they're great and they're tremendous and they're friendly and everything's good but in the dry season they've got nothing for me. They've got no help, they've got no strength, they've got no advice, no comfort, nothing that is helpful to me, undependable as intermittent streams. That's how he feels. This is God giving us the mind of Job here as to how he responds to the advice of those who seek to be Christian or biblical or godly in the advice they give to those who suffer. Hugely significant for us because each of us will spend time at graveside of friends. Each of us will go when the phone rings to visit a friend or a neighbour or a loved one who is in Christ who has lost someone close.

And it's important that we listen to what God is saying to us at times like these. Can I just ask you to flick forward to Job chapter 42 just right at the end.

[12 : 34] The whole book is mainly taken up with these three comforters in what they say and jobs complaints and then God's answer. Towards the end of the book we have God's answer but in chapter 42 in verse 7. After the Lord had said these things to Job he said to Eli Fass the team and I was probably the leader as aware of the three. I am angry with you. I'm angry with you and you're two friends because you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant job has.

Not spoken right. Now we can look at these sections and think you've spoken exactly right of God and God says no you haven't spoken right of me and you've spoken wrong in the way that you've spoken to Job and there's a great lesson for us in that. There's a great lesson in the way that we share truth about God to those who are suffering. There's a great lesson that we're not self-righteous, that we're not holier than thou and that we are not God ourselves. That somehow we think because God has revealed some things that we know it all and that we forget that there's mystery and we forget that we are not God and we simply don't always have the answers. God exposes them.

We might look at Job and look at his friends and theologically and temperamentally we lean towards his friends. We think his friends are more orthodox and they're more correct in what they say and we're more sympathetic with them. God says I'm angry with them.

They haven't said what is right. They need forgiveness. There's pride and there's coldness and there's lack of compassion. Do you know what they are? They're Job's comforters. That's what they are.

Cold comfort, cold, godless, graceless, anger-inducing, unsympathetic towards the need of their fellow believer.

[14 : 53] It's a great lesson to us that in any circumstance in life, though we claim the name of Christ and though we claim the knowledge of God through the work of the Spirit in our hearts, though we've taken from darkness to light, we are not God. It's often not about our philosophical understanding or our theological knowledge and debt or the words that we can say, but in our day to day living it's about loyalty and about devotion and about sympathy and understanding and humility and help and comfort and having broad shoulders for others to cry on, even in their despair and when they have forsaken the fear of the Almighty. There is this great need for us to show a great level of compassion. You know the longer that I go in the ministry and there's men here who have been in the ministry a lot longer than I have, but I guess I always felt that there was a need to have words. There was a need, you know, in a time of deep sorrow, that the minister would have words for people or that at funerals you would always have a word or a message or something important to say and that's a great and a heavy burden in the face of tragedy because sometimes there are simply no words. There is weeping and there is sorrow and there is crying and there is indistinct groaning which God interprets, but sometimes there are no words.

But what's God's answer and that's very significant. What's God's answer? Not what would we do, but what's God's answer to job? It's absolutely unique and it's beautiful and it's absolutely not what we would expect. He reveals Himself to job in this great book and He reminds us of who He is. It's not definite. Why? Job asks, why? Why has this happened? Why have I lost everything?

Why have I suffered? Why am I ill? Why have I faced the loved ones that I have been taken from me? Why? Why? That's a great question everyone wants to know, isn't it? You want the answer tonight.

You expect in the last part of the sermon here to give you the answer that comes from God in this passage. Well what does God do? Well He begins by asking job questions. That's what He does.

God asks job questions. That's how He begins to deal them. God does that. Chapters 38 to 41. If you have time this evening before you go to bed, read them. They're the most magnificent, in many ways, some of the most magnificent words in the whole Bible. You must have read them. If you haven't read them, please take time to read them this evening. He speaks to job and asks some questions. Who is this that darkens my counsel? Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who shut up the sea behind doors? Have you ever given orders to the morning? Have you journeyed to the springs? Have you entered the storehouses of snow? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain? Can you raise your voice to the clouds? Who endowed the heart with wisdom? He goes through all these questions, 64 questions. He asks job these great questions about himself, about God. And he's slowly unpacking to job the fact that job wasn't there.

[19 : 09] And that there are thousand things that job doesn't know and doesn't understand and doesn't even ask questions about, but accepts. Accepts about creation, accepts about God's glory, accepts about everything that happened before he was born. But he's trusted. He's trusted God in the past.

He's trusted that God has done these things. He's trusted in the nature and the character of God. And it's God beginning to gently remind job that it is more relational than propositional.

However significant and important propositional truth is in our lives and hearts. It's in the context of relationship with God. And he's gently saying you've trusted me in the past.

You've trusted me in all these great big issues. And I am God. And he's saying job I hear you. You know the response, the questions are responses aren't they? And he's saying to job I hear you.

You're not speaking into a vacuum. You're not just crying out and nobody's there. God condescends to answer job in his great suffering and saying, look, I hear you. This is not a mindless, moralless universe. I'm the log of her. I am the source. I am the beginning. I am the God.

[20 : 46] And he's asking job to accept in many ways the reality of mystery and his own limitations and his own inability to know and understand. He's saying job even at this time you are not the center of this universe and it does not revolve around you. We are subordinate to a great God whose purposes are often mysterious, higher and greater than we can ever understand.

So he asked these questions, but he also and there's much that must remain unsaid even in this revelation or untold maybe about the interaction between job and God. But there's there's a clear personal revelation to job of the nature and the character of God which not much is said of, but he responds to job's cries. He doesn't leave him on his own.

He doesn't leave him without hope. Whatever's unsaid, whatever we don't know, God brings comfort and assurance to job because job could see God. Job could see him. You said, listen now and I will speak, I will question you and you shall answer me. Job says, my ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. And there's this great sense in which the greater dealing of job with God is or with God with job is that he sees his need of God, which deflects from his need for answers to a specific situation. He sees God as his only hope, to whom he can repent in dust and ashes as his saviour and can receive forgiveness and grace and hope. I know this is Old Testament. I know there's shadow here. I know we don't know exactly how job, what job understood by the salvation of God in his life, but he recognized his need of God and of a redeemer. His wonderful words from Job 19, 25. I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth and after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh

I will see God. I myself will see him. What a statement of faith. He recognized God in all he's going through as his saviour, his judge, his Lord and the cleanser of his sins. And he had met with this great God. It's a great God who took his burdens, who changed his perspective, who met with him. And that was better than the answers he was looking for. He met with God and he sees God as his saviour, but also sees God as his provider. It's the one who would go on to provide for him, to return in more, in double time as it were, what he'd had previously, but also to anoint him with a significant, almost Christ-like intercessory role himself for his friends.

God says he's got an important role to play and despite his anger and his questions and his doubts and his fears and his forsakenness of God as he repents and as he sees God as God is, Job, God says to him that he wants him to offer prayers for his three friends.

[25 : 12] Isn't that beautiful? Would that be what we would do? Isn't God unique in the way he deals with individuals? So we have Job here being asked to pray for forgiveness for his three friends who have been like intermittent streams, dry, dead and dry and useless in their comfort. And he has this great role to play on their behalf and a great role which they themselves must have recognised was from God and was to bring them repentance too. Yeah, experiences God's assurance and God's grace and God's love and God's provision. So just as we close, we all go through greater or lesser degrees of suffering in our lives. Can I just ask you, not so much in your own suffering but in the suffering of others to learn from the story of Job, particularly from his friends. Learn the importance of compassion. Learn the importance of being there for people. Learn the importance of silence. Learn that we don't always need to give people a text.

We don't always need to have the answers for them. We don't need to be God. Learn to go the extra mile to spend time with them in silence, praying with them and for them and not correcting them in the midst of their blackness and grief. Many people will say things that God will deal with in their grief and in their sadness. We don't need to. It's not our place. Let's not be intermittent streams. And the only way we can not be intermittent streams is by ourselves going to the source of all water, of all life constantly being refreshed. As I talked about last night, guarding our own hearts. We're not going to be able to bring comfort and solace and tears to those who are in darkness and suffering if we ourselves have lost touch with the source of our spiritual life and the water of life ourselves. And also remember not just that compassion, but remember that our greatest need, whether it's in suffering or whether it's in joy, whether it's in guidance, whether it's in our lives generally, what is our greatest need? Our greatest need is a personal encounter with God.

That is our greatest need. That is what puts things into perspective. It's not simply propositional truth, but we know propositional truth is how God reveals himself and it's part of the answer. But it's that personal encounter through propositional truth, through the Holy Spirit, through spending time with him. That is our greatest need because that is our foundation.

So that when the storms come and when the winds blow, our foundation is built on that personal encounter with the living God, a life like jobs of repentance and faith.

Where we are sorry for the wrong things we're doing because they take us away from this great God. And where we are renewed and refreshed and revived and we don't live with a sense of fragility and a sense of dependence upon whatever might happen inwardly and outwardly. And please don't think that that in any way minimizes the suffering of others or our own suffering. But our only hope is to see God and to see the bigger picture and to be blessed by him even in the midst of darkness and to put your faith and trust in him. I just can't think of anything worse than people suffering in this life without Jesus. For some people it seems to be that that will make them move away from

[29 : 50] Jesus. But I can't think of anything worse than loss, devastating loss, loss of a son, loss of a daughter without knowing Christ. Amen. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father God we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us. We thank you for it. We thank you that is a remarkable and an unexpected word sometimes. Forgive us for the times when we might have cheaply offered solace without compassion, with orthodoxy but without grace, and with correctness about without love. And Lord enable us to be vulnerable enough to leave the mystery of suffering to God and be ordinary enough to be used to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn.

Lord help us to be those who come to you for repentance, faith, grace, insight, strength, and joy. Help us to find that that perspective of a personal encounter with you keeps us from self-righteousness or personal fragility and allows us the freedom of self-forgetfulness and enable us Lord God to rejoice in the joy and in the freedom of forgiveness and of another new continue to bless us. We pray bless our fellowship together, continue to be very close to those whose loss is great tonight and maybe we feel it more because we know them or some of us know them.

But Lord we live in a world where this kind of tragedy and this kind of loss is happening all the time and we barely take note. So Lord help us to be sensitive and gracious and remind us that we are often in a veil of tears here but that it is temporary and they have a wonderful glorious future with Christ where he will wipe away every tear absolutely once for all and we look forward to that day grant us the ability to grieve as those who have hope and not those who despair with a deep and dark and desperate despairing. So Lord hear us and bless us as we sing and we know we can sing often in sorrow but sing in joy, a wonderful expression of worship and praise and may we do so from our hearts as we close this formal part of our worship this evening.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.