

Be Frustrated and Hopeful

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[0 : 00] So we're going to look at Job chapter 19. I'm sorry if you are visiting with us today and you're being plunged into a book that is difficult and you're coming kind of in the middle of towards actually the end, more towards the end of the series but we hope that each of these sermons are also stand alone and that God will speak to you as we pray and hope that he will speak to all of us through it. And I wonder, what I ask, I want to ask you at the beginning, whether you've considered something very significant.

I wonder if you've considered the allurements of being bland. You know just being bland as a person. I think the New Testament sometimes calls it being lukewarm as a Christian more than as a person. You know when you think of your life living for living sake, you know you just get up, you do what you have to do, you watch a bit of telly, you go home, you watch a bit more telly and then you eat and then you go to bed and then you get up and you study and you do the same kind of thing and you work and you go to bed and it's kind of living for living sake. Blandness. Now you may argue with me at all kinds of levels about whether that is unfair or not for you or for me but I wonder if one of the measures of that will be for you if you find the study of Job hugely intense and a bit uncomfortable that you know you'd rather come to church and just be given some nice gentle truths and that I would kind of smooth and pat you on the back and that we would all say lovely things about Jesus and go out of the building skipping. Maybe that's what we would, that's sometimes what we prefer. That's why we come maybe to church to, we find the whole idea of the intensity and the suffering and the sheer pressure of Job looking at this book.

You say, oh not again, not Job again, it's so intense. I know verse chapter 19 that we're looking at verse 27 kind of sums up in many ways where Job says, my heart faints within me. There's that sense in which it's just everything so intense for him, that his heart just faints within it and it's troubled by all the suffering and we don't want to face up to suffering. We don't want to think about suffering, we don't want to experience suffering especially and so even all the talk of it, Derek you're only bringing suffering on to us all by all this talk of suffering and it can be very intense. It sometimes reminds me of a wonderful song by Tom Jones, well not by Tom Jones, he sings it in a great Gospel album he's got. It's actually a song by Susan Werner, a Gospel singer and it's called Did Trouble Me and it's this whole idea that God sometimes troubles us and very much in the theme of our own study. You know when I close my eyes so that I would not see my Lord did trouble me. When I let things stand that should not be my Lord did trouble me. When I slept too long and I slept too deep, put a worrisome vision into my sleep. When I held myself away in a part and the tears of my brother didn't move my heart. Did trouble me with a word and a sign with a ringing of a bell in the back of my mind. Did trouble me. That's sense of what sometimes God's word does that for us. But do you know why He does that? Because He wants a heartbeat. God wants a spiritual heartbeat from us. Sometimes this kind of intensity is like in the electric shock treatment which is brutal but He wants a spirit, an electric shock treatment because He wants a spiritual heartbeat from us. I often think good illustration of that is Theodon from the King of Rohan from Lord of the Rings.

You know when he's kind of in that anesthetized, paralysed kind of condition where he's been bewitched by Wormtongue and by Saruman and he can't really live and he's just hardly alive until that whole spell is broken by truth and when he begins to come alive again.

[4 : 39] That's I do believe what the word of God does for us and it is sometimes intense and it is troubling but it's to bring us to our senses so that we're not content with the piece of the graveyard but with the piece of the Lord Jesus Christ which is sometimes a weight on our shoulders but it's a lightweight and it's a weight that He enables us to carry.

So don't be concerned about the intensity. It's a good thing. We'll go on to Ephesians in the new year. That's nicer but Job is good and the reason behind the focus is often in God's word to trouble us so that we respond and become alive spiritually. He doesn't want us to be lukewarm and bland in our Christian living. So we come to Job here in chapter 19. Dear Job, he's become a dear friend to us over these last few weeks. We know him well now and we love him and we love the whole book and all that it means to us. Job's big dialogue has been with his friends and asking them why, why, why is all this happening?

The kind of questions we all ask, the everyday ordinary questions about why, the questions we've maybe asked this week, why, why are these things happening? That's what Job has been doing. He's been plunged into deep depression. He's known intense suffering, suffering beyond anything we have known and in all he's had the accusations and the opposition from his friends who have told them that he's a hypocrite and he must be a liar because he has some unconfessed sin that is leaving him under God's judgment and he in turn has been accusing God of injustice and of silence and of not caring about him in his life. This is a brilliant chapter. I think you can summarise really all of Job's arguments from this chapter.

It's almost a pivotal chapter. It covers so much of what is the reasoning and the argumentation of Job and we can only look at it very briefly but it does seem to be characterised by questions and confusion. That's what Job is experiencing here, questions and confusion, paradoxes that he's going through. What his faith believes, what he believes God should be and what God's people should be and what he's experiencing and how he's experiencing God's people to be different and God to be different from what he believes should be the case and so there's a confusion there and there's difficulty and questions for him. So in the first place he questions his life. In many ways he does question his life. Not so much here although the summary of it is here in verse 23 where in a sense he talks about vindication. He says, oh that my words were written, oh that they were inscribed in a book, oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock for ages. He's saying I feel that

I ought to be vindicated. There should be a legal testimony to what I am saying because I believe I'm right and so he's pleading vindication here for his innocence against what his friends have been saying because he believes himself to be a man of faith, a man above reproach, a man who is blameless. Now just by the way isn't it interesting that his words are written?

[8 : 35] He is vindicated. We do have his words, isn't that great? That wasn't an empty prayer. Job's words are written, engraved. We have them. He is vindicated. Praise God. And we've seen, you know, it talks a lot about blamelessness in this book that Job's blameless and we're worried about that because we know no one's blameless and no one's perfect. That's not what he's speaking about and just to remind us again of that he's talking about being above reproach. Same kind of standard that is required of leaders in the New Testament.

That whole idea of being above reproach, not being hypocritical, not being faithless, not hiding secret sin and he's always maintained he's never done that. He's never hidden. He has been as far as he can know absolutely right before God. He has confessed his sin.

He has lived outwardly the right way. If you have time today read chapter 31 of Job. It's an amazing chapter where he's vindicating his own life and he's saying, look, this is the kind of life I've led and it's an amazing life, you know. He's a really rich man and yet it's a beautiful chapter where he says, look, I've kept the standard of God's law that's required of me in faith and what I haven't. I've prayed but you know, I've never let, I've never hated my enemies. He says, I've never closed the front door of my house.

I've been hospitable to strangers and visitors. I've always helped the poor. There's never been people around me who's been left hungry. I've never idolized my money or my wealth or my position. It really is a fabulous chapter where you say, this guy was really, he was an upright man and he knew he was upright and he knew that this was the life he lived and he was a man of faith. So why, he says, am I suffering like this? Why am I suffering?

He's confused by the fact that he is sought to follow God and yet he's suffering and under God's judgment as he thinks, which he's not and he's questioning that because he's someone in questioning his life and his faith who is, he can't understand the paradox between being a person of faith and experiencing hell. And I'm not being a casual when I say that, but there's many word pictures here that do point towards this horrible, hellish experience that he goes through. He can't understand it. He thinks he's under God's judgment and what he does in this chapter is he

describes it in relational terms, hell in relational terms. That's the best and most powerful and most awful way to describe hell. In relational terms, you see it from verse 13 to 20. His life is hellish because everything that he's had is gone. His brothers are far from him. His relatives have failed him. His close friends have forgotten him. It does make you think of other prophetic passages that speak of

[11:47] Jesus on the cross. I call my servant, but he doesn't. His servants don't even answer him. He has to plead with him for mercy. His breath stinks to his wife and to his children.

His intimate friends, they turn against him. His bones are sticking to his flesh. He's got nothing, all the relationships, all the bonds, all the friendships that he had have gone. It's hellish. It's a relational hell. That is a great description of the reality of being separated in relationship. Of course, the ultimate one he feels separated from is God. He feels separated from God. Man of faith. Why? It's the paradox that he's questioning.

Why am I like that? Man of faith experiencing hell. But then he then, of course, he questions and we've seen this quite a lot. He questions his friends. He can't understand them as friends and people of faith and the accusations against him. It's paradoxical. He says in verse 1, I'm tormented by your words. You break me in pieces. Even if I, you're not ashamed to wrong me. They're attacking him. They're humiliating him. In verse 21, he says, you don't have any mercy on me, my friends. You have no pity for me. He longs for that. He's crying out in depression and brokenness and emptiness and loneliness. And his three friends have come alongside him before by this point. And he's looking for their love and their support and their friendship and their mercy. But they're called and judgmental. And in chapter 16, he says, you're miserable friends. Miserable comforters, are you all? Great friends that we take from Job. And that's a paradox. It's a paradox for him that they are people of faith. He had never abandoned his friends or his servants or the poor or anyone. And they are here. They are men of faith. They're abandoning him. It's a paradox to him. But so also is God. He can't understand. He's in deep spiritual confusion. It's great. The title of that album that I was speaking about, Tom Jones, won't get it. You haven't got it, get it. It's great. It's called Praise and Blame. Wonderful, wonderful title for a gospel album. And that's the, there's a paradox in that. And it's the same kind of paradox that

Job is feeling here. There's, well, come on to it, but there's, there's praise and there's blame. But he's blaming God. Now, this is very interesting. This is also crucial to our understanding of the whole of the book and what God is teaching us. See verse 21. Follow it with me. Have mercy on me. Have mercy on me. Oh, you, my friends, speaks to his friends. For the hand of God has touched me. See, he can't understand that all the suffering is from the hand of God that he thought was his friend. And we've seen how he's accused God in his, his accusations.

He said, God is silent. God is unjust. I'm God's enemy and it's overwhelming to him. The whole of his life has been based on being a covenant believer and believing in a covenant God. But nine times in the short passage from, from verses seven to 12, he, he's saying he or his about God. You know, he talks about that. He has stripped me. He breaks me down.

[15:15] He pulls me up. He has kindled his wrath. His troops come together. He has put my brothers from, he's accusing God. He's pointing the finger and it's getting sharp and every time that this is God who is blaming God for what he has experienced is blaming God. And that's very crucial to our understanding of the book because I'm going to stop you there. I'm going to stop there and challenge that. I'm going to challenge that statement that this is God's hand that's upon him because we have a fuller picture. We've got a bigger picture and a more complete picture than Job had himself. And that's very vital, very important. Turn with me. I want you to turn with me to work the book for a minute, work the pages, okay, or your screen if you're trendy and modern. Okay. Chapter one of Job very important versus 11 and 12. Okay. We did this right at the beginning of the series. I'm just recalling what we've done before. This is the curtains drawn back and Satan and the devil, sorry, the devil and God are in dialogue and God says in verse 11, but stretch out your hand, sorry Satan says, but stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face. Now listen, and the Lord said to Satan, behold all that he has is in your hand only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went from the presence of the Lord. So in blaming God, Job is wrong because it's not the hand of God that is against him. It is the hand of Satan. That is a very significant and important distinction that's crucial to our understanding of the book. You see, evil and horror and destruction come from the hand of Satan come from the hand of the evil one and its aim is to destroy us and to make us as believers particularly. And so listen up, listen up here as

believers that the aim of it is to make you curse God and die is to destroy your faith. That's what you want from all of humanity that humanity will curse God and die and all the evil that he pours out has that intent. But the mystery and the place where faith must come in for us is that God permits this with strict constraint. We don't understand the timing, we don't understand the amount but he permits it with strict constraint because under God he is redeeming through it and ultimately that is Satan's nightmare. God is using that temporary ability of Satan to inflict evil, temporary and defeated ability for his God's own purposes and good and redemption.

It's crucial to understand that the evil is satanic. When people say that God is the author of evil that we say, no that is not the case, that is an important distinction.

We need to remember as we study Job, as Job goes through this in chapter 19, it's not the end of Job's story that the evil he faced even that he went through was constrained, was kept, he was under the authority of God. It was allowed because at this point God had a higher purpose and it's often for us a mystery. Why is it God? Tube's all coming off from his body. That's a mystery. Why when there's been 12, 14, 15 babies born this year perfectly well that Isaac is born and they take Ally and Vicki through to say we've lost him. Come and look at him one last time. Why we don't know. We don't know these things but we ask God for a miracle and we believe that God knows and we believe that God has a purpose and that that is where we do not curse God and die but we seek the hand of

God and trust in him. The point sometimes it's the electric shock isn't it? It's so that we move from that position of not caring about anything apart from just getting through another day and seeing that God wants us to live. It's the paradox of blaming God that Job is going through and then because that isn't even the end of the story in this chapter praising God, blessing God, boasting in God in one of the most remarkable words in the whole Bible from verse 25, for I know that my Redeemer lives. Can you imagine these verses?

Can you imagine this statement from Job at the end of what he's going through or in the middle of what he's going through? I know my Redeemer lives and that last he will stand upon the earth after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh I shall see God and whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold and not another my heart faints within me.

[20 : 59] These words must have been a dagger into the heart of stone of Satan. Absolute dagger.

Satan's intent was to bring Job to that place and he used Job's wife and he used Job's friends and he used Job's bank account and he used everything to say curse God and die and Job here says I know that my Redeemer lives. Now last week we were talking about nuggets, we were talking about digging, we were talking about finding things in Scripture. This is one of them. People have mined for centuries and have never found anything like this. My Redeemer lives. Glorious statement, almost unbelievable. In the darkness it says he says he's far more than he can know I believe at this point. Absolutely prophetic. The power and the glory of the gift of faith. Wise and intellectual commentators say it must be a later addition. It can possibly be him that has said this. It's out of sync with the rest of the book. I say with all reservation nonsense. This is God who perfectly in his timing, gives us the opposite of cursing God and dying. That somehow Job can understand that he is a helper, a rescuer. He will be resurrected. There's going to be a new creation, something better. Something much better than what he's experiencing. Now before we stopped and challenged when Job blamed God but now we're going to stop and praise. We need to stop and praise if there's a praise and blame here. We've looked at the blame and now we look briefly at the praise because he's boasting here in God. I do believe Job only glimpsed it. I believe we are much, much more privileged today. We can see much more clearly than Job could possibly have seen. We have the invisible spiritual dialogue between Satan and God.

We have the end of the story of Job before Job ever experienced it. And we have our Redeemer. I know that my Redeemer lives. We have seen him. That's why we worship on the resurrection morning, isn't it? Can we possibly be lukewarm? Can we possibly be bland in the light of this?

Can we go from here and stick our fingers up at God and say, I'm just going to live my own way because it doesn't really matter that much. When we have this great truth right before us where our hearts faint within us, where we wrestle with this truth that we have a Redeemer who is unbelievable and the Redeemer who on the cross experienced all the hell that is envisaged by Job here in this chapter, the utter abandonment, the complete loss of friendship, even his closest friend said, I don't know him. No, Jesus, no, never knew him, never spoke to him. One of his closest friends lifts his heel against him and betrays him to the authorities. The same but far deeper where

Job in his being above reproach points us forward to Jesus who is genuinely innocent, genuinely blameless, genuinely all man and all God and yet who on the cross, the only, only innocent sufferer ever experienced the power of hell far greater than Job, the sense of abandonment and the wrath of the Father judged by the judge, the judge judged by the judge, the Redeemer, redeeming his people, the great transaction to make what you do and what I do today absolutely significant. I was speaking at Queen Margaret's, see you on Thursday night about being living sacrifices. So we're not here for the hour to just profess, we are living sacrifices because of what Jesus has done and we praise him, we praise him. And if you are not a believer, I hope and pray that your heart is troubled, that you know the living God troubling you, that you know his word in your conscience in your heart because he wants to make you human and he wants to make you whole and he wants to make you his child and that's good. You know I'm not discouraged when people who are not Christians, they come to church and then they stop coming to church and they avoid seeing Christians because they trouble them. That's not a bad thing you know, obviously you wanted to move on from there but it's not a bad thing that you're coming to church if you're not a believer and it's troubling you and it's causing this great unrest in your heart because that's the Holy Spirit working. It's the electric shock treatment that he wants to bring you alive and sometimes we just bury our heads in and say, I can't, I can't face all that trouble but when we think like that, it's only when we think that somehow we can make it right with God and he says it's all there, [26 : 28] I'm your Redeemer, I've done it and I will be with you and you don't need to curse God and die. So very briefly as we close, we learn from job don't we? We learn so many things from job but there's one thing I want to take from today and I know it's only one thing and there's many, probably many, many more important things but one is don't judge without knowledge.

We've mentioned this before but it's very much at the heart of what's in this paradox that job, this swinging from one thing to another in this chapter, this paradox of being faithful and being judged, being as Christian friends and the way they're treating them and God, blaming God and praising God. Don't judge without knowledge. We often live our lives too black and white. It's too easy for us, too simplistic. We make the judgment about people, we make the judgment about God and it allows us never to sit in His presence again or in the presence of others. Think before judging. Think before judging other people can I say very practically like Job's Comforters who judged Job and who will go on to see, judged him wrong. They didn't judge him right. Whatever the, whatever great God has with Job, it's not for them to point out and they judged him wrong. He wasn't suffering because he was being judged for some unconfessant. They were wrong in that and it led them to being miserable, miserable people and miserable Comforters. Now as Christians we can take that and apply that very strongly. Let's not be Christians who justify ourselves and expose everyone else's failures because we often are judging without knowledge. Let's not be miserable Christians and condescending Christians. There's nothing worse than Christians that always have the answer, is there? Because we don't always have the answer. And there's times when humbly we stand before God and I don't know, I hardly know my own heart, let alone yours. So let us be careful as we learn from Job, the whole concept of grace and respect and prayerfulness and humility. And that's a challenge as you go from here, every single day. It's a challenge in the Christian church. It's a challenge in the community of believers. It's a challenge that we need to overcome. Speaking to someone yesterday who was in the house for a number of hours who said that she would never, she never goes to church because she doesn't trust any Christians. Now we need to move beyond that. We need to move beyond finding the failure in everyone else and recognise that in our own lives God has placed us in community and that we are not to judge without knowledge. But also, probably much more significantly as a reflection of that, we are to not judge God without knowledge. We live in a society where it's very quick, where people are very quick, we're not Christians particularly to judge God, to blame Him and question Him. We must rise above that as Christians and we must show people a different understanding, far from it that we should be people who are know-alls who have all the answers. I don't mean that at all, but I mean that we live with the eye of faith and we're able to say to people, I can only understand this through the prism of the cross, through the Christ who already has suffered and who has promised that this mysterious and difficult temporary period is indeed that, but that the hope is for a future free from evil and suffering and judgment as long as we come to terms and put our faith and trust in the only Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We must not judge God quickly and cheaply and easily just because we've seen it on YouTube or it's on the God channel or whatever else it might be or not on the God channel maybe.

Satan unleashes evil, remember that, Satan. Whatever mystery there is in God's sovereign ordaining oversight, Satan unleashes because he wants to destroy, he wants to break, he wants you to curse God and die and he works, doesn't it? It works. But it's also in your suffering and your darkness and your depression, it's not the end of your story. Now that is, can be said very trite and very cheaply, but it can also be said very humbly and very gently. He loves you and it's not the end of your story and there is a different perspective and we do need,

I think, to recalibrate our perspective a little bit towards eternity. We kind of think this is all there is. We kind of think that this is the most important part of our lives and well, eternity is kind of just the pudding. It's just the sweet course at the end somehow.

But it's not like that. This is just a warm up. Eternity is the real thing because it's eternal and because that is the place of victory where God is and we've often lived our lives with the opposite perspective. My life now, my pleasure now, my happiness now, my worth and my importance, living a life of significance now, whereas eternity is where God has his eye and his focus and may we just be able to always live our lives through the lens of Calvary where we see the ultimate of defeat, of death and separation and curse. Not yet it's destruction, but it's clear and absolute defeat where God's justice is satisfied and God's love is able to be outworked for you and for me, for God so loved the world that gave us one and only Sunday, whoever blues and should not perish, but I've ever lasting life. May we sing about Jesus all the way to the grave and may we be able to sing songs in the night also. Amen. Let's pray.

[33 : 09] Father God, we love Jesus Christ and we ask for forgiveness for how little we love you and for how lukewarm our faith often is and how often we are bland and accuse you easily and quickly because it allows us to carry on without being troubled. Forgive us when we have stifled and drowned the voice of conscience from the Holy Spirit, when we have run a mile, when we have wasted our lives in riotous living. But Lord, like the prodigal, we all need probably daily to recognize that there is more than abundance in our Father's house and in his company and in his shadow. And may we find that, may we be prodigals who find that truth day in and day out. May it humble us, may it exalt us, may it enable us to sing with absolute joy and rejoicing and may we be Christians who are miracles, walking miracles who are hot rather than cold or lukewarm only because of what Jesus has done. And as we dig, may we find more and more treasures and not expect everything for us to be easy and on a plate. Lord, help us, we pray, and help us really sing in response to your word with power and with joy and with passion as you have ordained praise and you have given us voices with which to mourn, with which to praise, with which to express our faith. And we thank you for that. May it not be perfunctory praise for us, may we not just be going through the motions the end of a service, but may it be spirit filled, powerful, meaningful praise for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.