

Be Despairing

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn back this morning to Job chapter 3 and we're going to spend some time looking at this passage this morning.

I think we'll all be agreed if you were asked to write this chapter that you write it as a tough one, it would come in that category of tough chapters.

Whichever way we look at this chapter, it's a tough one to read and it's a tough one to take in many ways. And you might read it and say, well, I don't see much of the gospel in this chapter.

There's not much joy, there's not much encouragement there for us. And to be honest, I'm not sure if that's what I want to hear on a Sunday morning. I come for encouragement and uplift.

And it's just a hassle to read a chapter like this because it seems so bleak and it seems so depressive. I could do without it. Life is difficult enough, depressing and despairing enough without coming to church and getting a ladle full of it from the sermon and the preaching.

[1 : 06] But I hope you'll find that that isn't the case. It's in God's word. And it's in God's word for a reason. It's significant and important for us to deal with these issues.

And these are very real issues. And so what God's word always does and what I hope that our Christian community is able to be is realistic, whatever else it is.

It is realistic, spiritual, Holy Spirit led, gifted with God's grace, but also realistic. And it may be that there's somebody here today who is in despair and who is depressed and who finds it difficult coming to church every week with smiles and with joyful praise and with adoration and who needs to know and be assured that God is in their suffering and is in what they are going through.

Job remember had lost everything. He'd lost everything. He'd lost the companionship of his wife. He'd lost his family and his wider family, he'd lost his ability to work.

He'd lost his livelihood. He'd lost his reputation. Everything was gone. And last week we saw, we've seen the curtain being drawn back and the spiritual dimension of what was going on between God and Satan.

[2 : 31] But last week we saw that his instinctive response, his first reply was worship, was a recognition that it is God who is sovereign and that God is to be worshiped.

But here we come with a little bit more time and a little bit more reflection to the next stage of what he was going through because there was an instinctive worship, but now there's time and we've seen what he's going through.

We've seen the initial reaction he has, but now we hear from Job himself. We hear from him in himself. We get a window, we've had a window into heaven and earth, we've had a window into the spiritual realm.

Now we have a window into Job's soul. That's what we have here. We have him pouring out what he is feeling like. It's his feelings. It is sensed emotion and it's a voice without hope that we have here in chapter 3 of Job.

It's really bleak. There's no other way of describing this chapter. It's a hugely bleak chapter. It's searingly honest.

[3 : 44] And I wonder sometimes, can you, can you or and can my theology cope with a chapter like this? Would we rather just close the book on it and not deal with it whatsoever because we don't understand where it fits into the understanding about Jesus who says, come, I am come to give you life and life to the fool.

And well, it doesn't seem like it here. And the calls for joy and praise in our lives doesn't seem to fit in with the theology of our lives and this chapter which we have.

Do I need to hear these things? Well, I believe we do in many ways and many significant ways that I hope that we will see for a few moments. But as we look at this chapter, we see Job and we see

Job suffering hugely in three different ways or three different aspects of his life. We see our three different aspects that are unfolded to us here. Really there is deep mental anguish that he's going through of the deepest intensity and sadness and grief. And wouldn't we be there? Had we lost, you imagine today, fathers or mothers or children having lost everything around us, absolute deep mental anguish.

[5 : 05] The first 10 verses he's really saying, I'm not going to go into great detail on each verse there, it seems unfair to do that for Job's sake.

But we take an overall look at the chapter and we see the first 10 verses he's basically saying, I wish I'd never been born. Someone is in a deep depression in their lives when they come to that place.

Let the day perish on which I was born. And interestingly, there's a lot of talk in these early verses or chapters of Job about cursing, isn't there?

There's a saying, he says, curse God and die because that's what Job will do when you take everything from him. Job's wife says, you still hold on to your integrity, curse God and die. And here Job talks about cursing, but he's talking about cursing, not God, cursing the day he was born. That he wishes he hasn't been born. You'll see again in these first 10 verses, references again and again to darkness.

[6 : 10] I don't want to lie. The darkness, just let it just overwhelm me. It just covers me. That being the experience of someone in deep depression, it seems like darkness is there.

And isn't that so contrary to the day of someone's birth? A day of joy and a day of lightness and a day of brightness and a day of happiness.

And he said, no, let it be shrouded in darkness. It's a bad day. The day I was born was a terrible day. It's not a day for joy and celebration. And it was dreadful then here.

He's exposing this deep sense of self-worthlessness that he feels, that he's lost all self-worth and his life right from the very beginning. Rub it out from the calendar of time.

Just let it not be there. I don't remember the day I was born. It is sad and sorry and mournful and difficult to read and to think about and to consider this great sorrow in his life.

[7 : 12] He wishes he'd never been born. And he goes on in probably verses 11, in many ways, in verses 11 right through to 22. He talks similarly, but from another angle, saying, well, I wish, I wish for release in death.

You know, it's the same kind of thing, but from a different angle. I wish I'd never been born. But now that my life has been lived and I'm here, I just simply want to die.

You know, that's really what, you know, why didn't I die at birth? And then he goes on. Why didn't the knees receive me? And then he goes on to say, I would have slept and then I would have been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth.

There's suicidal thoughts that he has. He regrets that loving mother who fed him and the God to allow him to live and to get to the age where he was.

So for Job in this condition, he looks back and he wishes, well, if I'd never been born, I would never have any of this great sorrow and heaviness and grief. But even now I wish I could rest in death.

[8 : 18] For him, death is a release. Death is an answer. Death is freedom. And he's longing for the end of this great pain and this great physical torment of agony and the mental anguish that he's going through and all that he's lost.

So there's this deep mental wrestling that he's going through that's unfolded in this chapter. And I think along with that is there's a spiritual oppression that he goes through.

And probably verse 23 says, why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God is hedged in? And so for him, there's this spiritual element. He's a believer and any believer who is in despair or in depression will have a spiritual focus on that also.

There will be a God word element to it. It's not God. The reason behind it isn't spiritual, but there will be a spiritual outworking of it.

And here, this blameless and upright believer that is marked as such by God himself.

[9 : 24] That very blamelessness and that walk with God makes his despair and his depression worse. He has no sense of God whatsoever. No sense of God's presence.

And he feels crushed by God's presence and that God himself is hidden from him. And there is no communication that he longs for.

It's as if even at this point, the earlier wonderful instinctive confession that he makes, you know, shall we not receive good from a bad evil from the hand of God and good, is hollow to him. And he feels imprisoned and suffocated by his knowledge of God. There's a very interesting play on words here where we're told in verse 23 says, whom God has hedged in.

You remember that phrase before? In Job, God has hedged in. At the beginning of Job, when God presents Job as it were before Satan, Satan says, of course Job worships you and loves you because you've given him everything.

[10:29] You've hedged him in. You've protected him. You've kept him safe. You've allowed him to be blessed. He is rich and he is at a great family life and he is reputed.

Everything's going well because you've hedged him and of course he worships you because you've given him everything. But that's not how Job feels. Job feels that this presence of God is, it hedges him in like a jailer.

It imprisons him. It stifles him. He can't get away from this knowledge of God who seems to be oppressing him at this time. So there's that spiritual dimension to what he's going through that kind of unfolds throughout the book in many ways and ends up with the answer that we have towards the end of the book.

So there's the mental anguish. There's the physical, there's the spiritual oppression that's linked to that and also there's the physical turmoil. The last couple of verses he talks about, my sighing comes to me instead of my bread.

My groanings are poured out like water. The thing I fear comes upon. I am not at ease. I'm not at quiet. I have no rest but trouble comes. And there's this physical unrest and physical dimension to his despair.

[11:41] He lacks appetite. It seems to be that he lacks appetite. That his very mourning is taking away his appetite. There's nothing there for him. He knows heaviness.

That has a physical dimension. We know that David suffered from that. Sam 32 speaks about it. My bones were heavy as in a summer drought.

There was this real heaviness about him. He can't sleep. He has no rest and he has no refreshment. That all adds up to a very bleak and despairing picture of a man at the end of his tether.

A man who mentally, spiritually and physically is utterly depressed and struggling. And he's fixed into this reality for him.

This is it. Uncontrollable depression. So that's a summary of the chapter. Bright and encouraging, eh? Are you glad you came this morning?

[12:46] Well, I hope so because we're not yet finished. And it's important that we're not finished yet. Very important from Scripture. Where do we go from here?

You know, there doesn't seem to be much grace. There doesn't seem to be very, there seems to be very little hope and almost no gospel whatsoever. What do we do with a chapter like this?

And there's one or two other chapters. Sam 88 would be another one that is almost unrelentingly bleak. What do we do with a chapter like that? Well in our interpretation of the Bible, it's very important that we deal with it.

And we must see this chapter in its rightful place in Scripture. First of all, we must see that it's there for the first place.

So that despair and depression are a legitimate focus and subject of God's word. And that is important. If you're despairing or if you're depressed, then it's important that it's not a stigmatized subject biblically.

[13:47] It's not something that Christians shouldn't experience or go through or deal with because the Bible is clear and open and relentlessly honest in dealing with these things.

It isn't a subject of the Bible. It doesn't avoid these subjects. Nor does it judge in the way that often we will do as Christians.

But we need to see this chapter three of Job. We need to see in its rightful place in the book of Job, which is why, and I've probably said this every week so far, you'll get tired of me saying it.

It's important to read the whole of the book of Job because this chapter fits into the whole of the book and we don't simply read it as a standalone chapter.

And we recognize it's not the end of Job's story, but it's also not the end of the biblical revelation that there's a lot more to be revealed in Scripture. Not only about despair and depression, but also

about hope and about a future and about a God who deals with these things in Christ and on the cross.

[14:53] The jobs despair you see here, this starts his reality. He can't see beyond the moment. This is his feeling. This is how he feels. And isn't that often how we live our Christian lives?

This is how I feel. Therefore, it must be. It must be absolutely right because I feel this way. And yet the Bible hears reminding us that his feelings were absolutely real to him and absolutely genuine and not judged.

Remember at the end of the book God says, this job of mine did not sin in what he said. Yet his reality was distorted and it was not until later that he could see things differently and not until later can we see things differently.

That this had purpose, that God was involved in this, that his life had value, that he was restored, that God was motivational in all of this and there was a reason behind it.

So we look at a chapter like this and you think, well the Bible asks us to accept depression and despair fatalistically. Well that's what happens. That's what we do, the Bible says it. But that is clearly not the case that we must see all of Scripture in its rightful place and know the whole of the story, for example, of Job and also know the whole of the canon of Scripture.

[16:17] And remind ourselves, even for ourselves as Christians, 1 Peter chapter 1 and 6 and 7, which says, in this you rejoice though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is involved and as his followers we are reminded that there will be battles and struggles and difficulties in suffering for us to undergo.

See its place in Scripture. That's very important that will give us hope and a future. But we also need to see it, I believe in ourselves.

Where we have here is a believer who has gone through the deepest darkness in his life and he has done so and it's not because he's a deliberate sin, it's not because of deliberate sin he's committed, that is absolutely clear from Scripture.

He's a sinner who's saved by grace and he's in a relationship with God, he keeps short accounts with God. But as the rest of the book goes on to try and accuse him of, it's just because he's got a deliberate hidden sin that God is punishing, that's not the case.

[17:30] Nor is it because he has a lack of faith. And these are both very important precursors of our understanding of depression as a Christian.

And it will be for one in four of us statistically a reality. It will happen for us, many of us, that we will be plunged into darkness and depression and despair.

And it's important therefore in the light of Scripture and the light of what Job does here, it's important to verbalise our feelings when we are going through times like that.

Because that's exactly what Job was doing. I feel God is nowhere. I feel that God is hedging me and that he is suffocating me. And it's important as believers we learn that the Bible is acknowledging and justifying that this is a good and right course of action is to verbalise before him and before others how we feel, not to suffer in silence, not to be alone, to release our feelings that we have before confidants, not before everybody in some kind of communal public splurge, but to know people and to have people that you can go to, that you can tell people that will listen.

Job had his three friends here, remember they were still listening at this point, they were doing well. And God was listening. God was silent, but God was listening.

[19:08] And Job was pouring out his feelings before them. We recoil a little bit sometimes, theologically and academically from feelings, you know, touchy feeling.

Let's get over it. Let's get over that stoic, stiff upper lip kind of stuff. And let's recognise that there will be in our lives time when we need to explode our deep seated despair and depression and verbalise our feelings, but not just that, we need through recognising scripture and our relationship with God, because remember, it is Job's relationship with God that was the key here, his loving relationship with God in the darkness, that also we are as believers particularly to trust God through the darkness and despair that we find.

Even this chapter here, Job is looking for answers, isn't he? He's crying out to the God who thinks isn't listening, or at least he states, is someone who is ways are hidden from God.

And yet he's looking, there's a spark there still, isn't there? He's in despair, but he doesn't choose to die. He's sad, but he doesn't go for suicide.

And that's important, because he does move on and he moves through what he's experiencing here. And for us, we need to learn from Job and from the word that it's not the end of the story, that in our despair what we feel is not necessarily based on all the facts, that we simply don't know.

[20 : 55] As Job didn't know, he didn't know the unseen war between God and Satan, he didn't know the end of the story, he didn't know what was going to happen, and often we don't. And he didn't know that God was silent here for a purpose.

It's often the case where you feel as a believer that the heavens are brass, you know? That God is silent and he's not responding. But it's not that he's not hearing, and it's not that he's not there, and it's not that he doesn't care.

But there is a purpose in what he is doing that we simply will often not know about, but we can say, even though we might not feel it, that it's a loving purpose because of the costly grace we have already experienced in Jesus Christ and on His salvation.

And that's where the gospel must come into looking at a chapter like this, that it always will point to the whole biblical revelation which speaks about Jesus Christ, who on our behalf to be our Savior Himself was plunged into infinitely deep felt despair and darkness on the cross.

Okay? A darkness that even the physical world would not look on. So the sun stopped shining for that three miraculous hours from 12 noon when it set its height to 3 p.m.

[22 : 18] The world was plunged into darkness because it's real but also symbolic of the great deep darkness that Jesus was experiencing, the forsakenness, the fury of hell, the sense of being hidden from God, exactly what Job is experiencing here, but infinitely more deeply on the cross.

The fury of hell unleashed on him and he does it for us who will put our faith and trust in him so that we can have hope and we can know strength and we can come through these times.

You know, if you've been depressed, clinically depressed, depressed in many different ways or in despair, in that condition, I imagine you would always say, I wouldn't want this, I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy.

And yet that is exactly what Christ takes voluntarily. He takes that suffering and that darkness and he overcomes all of that darkness, all of that forsakenness, all of that despair, all of that death, he overcomes it in our place.

So that even when we go through it, we never go through it alone, even though it doesn't feel like that, and we never go through it without hope because there will be a change for us.

[23 : 54] So in Jesus Christ, in despair and depression, there still is for us something to hold on to, something that we can say, I know I don't feel it just now but I believe it will change.

I believe the tears will one day stop and I believe that He loves me even though it doesn't seem like that. So see it in ourselves and be honest about that and recognise it.

And I finish with just talking briefly about seeing it in others. I also think that's very important as an outworking of this chapter.

I think the danger always isn't it that in the Christian community, we want everything and we long for everything to be all sugar and sweet and nice and clean and untroubled and without problems.

So when difficulty and despair and depression come into our focus in the lives of others, sometimes we just don't want to deal with it. We don't want to spend the time and have to face up to it because it focuses all kinds of insecurities in our own lives, apart from anything else and fears that we might have and we simply don't, we can't be bothered with it in the lives of others and we can be insensitive.

[25 : 14] We can deflect the whole concept of it in many ways with a kind of unspiritual piety where it says, you know, I'm going to focus my attention and my efforts getting deep with God and having a deep relationship with Him and learning from His Word and growing and maturing but I haven't got time for others.

You know, others in their brokenness and their pain and their suffering, I'm just going to get deep with God myself. That my friends is misguided piety and it is not grace at work.

And we can also judge people in these situations as we will go on to see in the next few weeks with Job's Comforters, theological terrorists, that's what they were and they took what they believed to be true and they nailed Job with it and he didn't need that.

Poor Comforters you are indeed, he says, because they kept blaming him and kept saying that there was great fault in his life and that he had to get his life right before he would know God's blessing again.

It was a great place for them to be because it was judgmental and because it deflected any attention from themselves. How does the book end? The book ends with God focusing the attention on them.

[26 : 37] You said of me what was wrong and all of a sudden the light, bright light is shining on them and away from Job and there's huge implications for that in our communities, Christian communities and in the way we think about one another and deal with one another.

That we are to be people who understand grace. Can we do that? Understand grace, you know, the cost of our salvation on the divine being, Jesus Christ voluntarily, means there's a great cost to us loving others, you know.

Salvation is free, you know the next line don't you, but it ain't cheap. There's a great cost to giving and loving and serving others because that's the way of grace.

Imagine if Jesus had said that about us. I just want to get deep in fellowship with God the Father and God the Son. Forget all humanity, they're just going to let me down anyway. Imagine hellish existence would be ours forevermore and the reality is that grace for us is something that we need to understand and out work with others, not as islands, not as lone rangers but in relationship with others.

Recognising apart from anything else with this reality of depression, it may well be something that we will experience in our own lives and we will want to be treated. We will want others to treat us the way that we believe is right to treat, to be treated.

[28 : 18] And grace, understand depression, I think that's important, it's wider than this chapter but this chapter gives some great insights into mental, spiritual and physical out workings of depression.

You understand the different causes, different symptoms and characteristics. Depression doesn't always look like chapter three of Job, it isn't always a wailing and gnashing of teeth. People can dress smart, can look smart, can smile and be happy and still inside, be hugely discouraged and depressed.

It can be clinical, kind of physical, hormonal triggers, it can be circumstantial, it can be stress related, it can be relational, it can come through the loss of loved ones and yes, sometimes it can come through unresolved sin.

What we may be called rightly in its rightful place, spiritual depression, that might be caused because we are deliberately and clearly and defiantly choosing to live in such a way that is known to us to be disobedient and God may well, in order to draw us back to Himself, give us an experience of despair.

But that is often not the case and it's not about a lack of faith for healing if a Christian is depressed nor is it mostly anything to do with personal sin in our hearts.

[29 : 54] Understand depression and then kind of going back on what I've said here, notes aren't very clear, understand again the Christian community that we are together here, we're a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

And in saying that, I'm not trying to give the impression that we justify being sinners, that we stay kind of sinners, we are with a hospital for transformed sinners or sinners being transformed, we're looking always for the Holy Spirit to transform us, but we will be people who stumble and fall and who struggle and who have experiences that are bleak and dark that have nothing to do with our personal walk with God and we will need one another because that is what a community of grace is, a place where we can be real and honest and vulnerable, where that you will have in this growing congregation at least a few deep friends to whom you are committed, to who you will pray with, who they and you can be honest together where there's a veneer being stripped away, where there's accountability and transparency and help for one another in your darkness and in your despair.

And as we understand that, we will outwork our understanding of compassion. You read this chapter and you will begin to just begin to understand how terrible depression is, how awful it is to experience and we will be looking to respond with compassion, with patience, to respond beyond words with people, to recognize that it's not a quick and an easy fix in people's lives, that it might take time and it might take years in their experience of your patience, of your time, of your grace and of your prayers.

There are no platitudes but also no fatalism. You're not there simply to be a sounding block as your relationship with someone is real and meaningful.

Pray for the wisdom to know when is the time to speak, when is the time to challenge and when is the time to reflect differently and give people a different perspective and remind them of that.

[32 : 35] That needs huge wisdom and grace from the Holy Spirit. Now can I just finish by asking you if you are a Christian? I've spoken today and the whole presumption has been that everyone here is Christians and I've dealt with it in the light of despair and depression in the life of a Christian and part of that great hope and that great gospel is that as Christians we know that this is not the ultimate reality and what we feel isn't necessarily what is absolutely the case.

Job here says that for him death would be great, it would be rest. Isn't that what lots of people think and that's where lots of people who are not Christians maybe sometimes think in this condition as well, that death is a rest and death is, you know, Job speaks about the slaves and the prisoners and the counsellors and the kings, princes who had gold, they all rest together in this lovely peaceful rest and the challenge is that for the unbeliever and for the believer that death is never the answer, Christ is always the answer because Christ has died and rose again in order to redeem us and to assure us that there will be a day when there will be no more tears.

Without Christ whatever else you have you have nothing and Christ offers himself to you and I on his behalf do so also that you would consider and be challenged by not religion and not by church going and anything else but by Christ himself and by his infinite, infinitely great love for you, grace and what he has already done which is the foundation and the very hallmark of what makes us Christians.

So maybe that we go from here with that reassurance as Christians also and I offer Christ and I pray that as a people we would offer Christ to others, you know, we're going into a time of prayer at the end of October special time of prayer.

One of the things we're praying every day is for our three best friends who are not Christians maybe our mums, maybe our dads, maybe our friends, neighbours, brothers, sisters, whoever is, we'll long for them to come to know Jesus because he transforms even our darkness and our despair.

[35 : 09] I mean let's pray. Father God we ask and pray that you would help us, help us to understand who you are, help us to be encouraged that the Bible isn't sugar and sweetness but is real and honest and has a flow and a direction that always in the Old Testament points forward to the cross and the new turns back to look at the cross and the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the hope of victory in him.

And may that be something that we cling on to knowing that we will suffer, knowing that we are part of a world in which there is suffering, knowing that we were the focus of spiritual opposition, knowing that our bodies are not yet perfected and that there is imbalances and impurities there that will reflect itself in mental and physical anguish.

We know that we will suffer, we will lose loved ones, we will be ill and we know that's not all the picture and we do rejoice that there are great and wonderful things but let us Lord God be open and honest with each other and with the word of God itself and we pray that you would bless us.

We do remember those who are depressed today in our fellowship and those that we know, help us especially when we just don't know what to say or we don't know how to deal with it.

Help us Lord to understand compassion and grace and gentleness and hope. Hope is never to be supercilious or proud or distanced or stoic.

[37 : 00] Remind us of the great cost of Jesus Christ and His salvation. Remember those today who grieve in our fellowship but also those who grieve wider afield.

We continue to remember the crisis, refugee crisis and all the brutality and brokenness and horror. Think of all those who have lost lives in the States and yet another mass killing.

Lord we are so distant from it and so far away in our lives are so good and yet we are asked to remember and to cry out to the living God for these things.

We remember those who need your help, congregationally here in different ways, those who are ill or housebound, those who are in hospital, we pray for Sue today and we ask that her operation would go well.

We remember Tom and Charlene away from us at this time shortly to be home. We thank you for the learning that he has done in New York and we pray that the church planting conference and the different aspects of that will be greatly helpful to him and to the work that they do in Midlothian.

[38 : 18] Lord God we do pray then that you would help us and guide us and keep us and protect us and teach us from your Holy Spirit so that we know who we are and whom we serve.
For Jesus' sake we ask these things. Amen.