

Terrifying Reality

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're coming to the third of these introductory sermons on Job.

It's kind of hard the longer you go on the less you know and you know we come to Friday evening and I'm saying okay I've got my sermon done for Job for Sunday and I come to read it again in church on Sunday morning and I think I don't know anything here.

These are challenging and deep truths that we have here but let us look at the passage and see what God reveals to us from his word.

I think one of the important things as we will go through Job and it's a really important thing for our lives. You know sometimes you might think Job is rather disconnected and what I really hope we don't find is that you become oppressed by coming to church on Sunday morning looking through Job because it's not jolly stuff.

You know it's not bright and breezy but I'm hoping that it's not also desperately dull or mournful at all times because what it's doing is really giving us a handle for living and a handle for life and the important truths about God and I'm hoping that we'll be raised up by it also because of where it points us to throughout the book and because it's practical and because we live in a society we have a generation and we ourselves are people who are easily prone to the blame game aren't we?

[1 : 30] We find it easy to blame other people for all our mistakes and blame is such an important part of living and it's a great big industry. It's a huge industry. Bear watch what I'm saying with all the lawyers and the congregation but it is a huge industry and there's a great amount of blame that is attached to other people both corporately and nationally.

We've seen that over these last few weeks. Who would want to be a VW director at this time? Because there's great blame being attached to them for what they've done and that happens at corporate levels, it happens at political level but it also happens at personal level as well doesn't it?

It's always somebody else's fault and that's been what it's been like from the very beginning. It wasn't me, it was Eve, it was the one you gave me. Blaming her and blaming God.

It's Eve and you. And that's always been the way with us and God within that is always an easy target for us because he doesn't usually speak back at least not directly in the way we're used to.

So blame to God is an easy target. Even for atheists who say they don't believe in God, he seems to be a convenient one to blame for all the ills in the world that we face.

[2 : 42] And there are trolls clogging up cyberspace with blame and speaking and blaming and pointing the finger at everyone including God. And that is too easy for us isn't it in life?

It's easy to go through our lives blaming others. And we'll maybe look at that a little bit later on also. But when we come face to face with, as believers, as Christians, when we've been touched by the grace and the goodness of God, when we know Him to be loving and moral and just, yet, in that when we're faced as believers with the brutality of evil, the brokenness of society, the hurt in relationships and the miserable way that we sometimes live our own lives and what is in our own hearts, then we have tension, don't we?

The good, loving, glorious, redeeming God and the evil that we sense and we feel. It's a great evil, it's a great problem for the Christian. I'm not saying it's any less problem for the atheists or the unbeliever.

But what I'm saying for all of us, there's no easy answers. Again what I will stress again and again going through the book of Job is that we move away from easy answers and these sermons are absolutely not intended to be a simple ABC to all the problems of suffering and illness and pain that people go through in their lives.

There are no easy answers. We will wrestle and we will wrestle as long as we live but we come to the God who reveals, okay? So we have that help.

[4 : 28] We will wrestle but God reveals. He reveals what we'll need to know. It's not all that we need to know. We'll be left with many questions. Even Jesus Christ on the cross was left with questions. We will be left with questions but through that as believers we will be asked to trust, okay?

Through the darkness and through the difficulties you'll be asked to trust when we don't have all the answers. So what we have here is several things in this passage. It's a great deal in this passage and I'm going to have to skim through it and I apologize for that.

But we do have evil exposed in this chapter in a very clear way. We've seen that before. There's not many passages or not many parts of the Bible that speak so clearly and there's not many parts of the Bible that do speak about Satan and the devil in these terms.

But the Bible makes clear both here and elsewhere that the evil comes from, evil originates at a secondary level from a personal being.

It's not just a concept, it's not just something that floats about in the ether. There is personal, spiritual, created being who was created good.

[5 : 40] But we must say with the capacity for rebellion and who chose that? Who chose rebellion and chose to resist God and to rebel against God because he wanted to be God and he wanted all that God had.

And as he did so, evil is unfolded in his character and in his very being, Satan, the evil one. And his character is unfolded, at least part of his character is unfolded here or the character of him and his demons and of sin and evil is that he is primarily, whatever else we will say, he is a bitter enemy of God.

He has this grotesque, resentful submission to God's presence. He comes into God's presence a second time in this chapter having come the first time and presents himself before the Lord.

I may well be reading and Isojeetting into this passage here but there seems to be a certain degree of coming unwillingly to present himself before God but whatever, if that's right or wrong that he is a bitter enemy of God, he hates God.

He hates God's goodness and power and glory and majesty and perfection and he abhors humanity made in God's image. Abhors humanity made in God's image and his task is to inflict evil wherever he can and divide God from his people and destroy God's creation at every corner and every juncture.

[7 : 16] He is indiscriminate, he is reckless, he is dark, he is destructive and the obliteration of God and God's goodness and God's influence is his dying role.

He is living as the rebellious one in the shadow of the promise that was given in the protein Gellageum at the very beginning that the seed of the woman would crush his head and he knows that and in his death throws even at this point he is merciless, he is an evil genius, bitter enemy of God and we see that unfolded in the venom that is poured out on Job when he is permitted to do so with all the mystery of that by God as we've seen before.

It's the cruelest brutality when he has the opportunity. He is determined to unleash on Job hell.

He's determined to unmask Job's faith as being false. You know we've seen that before in our earlier studies that this is very much a test of God's redeemed humanity and as he was with Adam and Eve he's saying to God, he said you're wasting your time with humanity.

I've seen them fall and stumble before and they will again and so he pours out his venom on the character of Job. This prototype or this character who represents this representative character of people of faith.

[9 : 06] God he's saying you are sovereign over a failed project. Abandon this people because I'll show them to be a people who will not remain loyal and faithful to you when the gifts that you give them are taken.

We see Job has enjoyed great wealth and relationships and happiness and power and influence and now Satan takes it all from him.

Every single good reason for being alive is taken from Job. Everything for being alive, his health, his wealth, his prosperity, his position, his family, his love, even the support of his wife.

Everything is taken from him and Satan knows this is what will bring to a nihilistic rejection of God and suicide. There will be nothing left.

He'll just absolutely give up on everything because that is what Satan intends in this situation.

[10 : 21] We can recognise and see the curtain being drawn back and a message and a truth being revealed for ourselves because we know the goal of the evil one in our lives.

It may be for us, and I don't think anyone goes through this to the extent to which Job is. It may be because we know from other places in the Bible that he comes as an angel of light and may be distracting us with the same kind of gifts that Job had, gifts of life, gifts of happiness, gifts of family, gifts of ambition, gifts of position in life.

He may distract us with all these things, with even a half truths of religion or he may come with a blunt weapon as he did here of loss and of pain and of rejection and of poverty and of isolation because what he wants you to do is to curse God and die.

That's what he wants. That's what he wants every believer to do. That's what he wants every unbeliever to do, to be distracted, to resist God, to curse God, to abandon God, to not believe in God, to say God's an ogre, God's an angry beast, God's capricious, God's wrong, to curse God and die, to be separated from Him and separated from all that He is in all of his life.

But we have Scripture to reveal to us, to open up to us the bigger picture that Job couldn't see, that we are given, the curtain is drawn back so that we can see this spiritual battle and this malevolent spiritual opposition to us and to our existence.

[12 : 10] And do I pray, think hard before you engage in the blame game. It's sometimes easy for us to cast our hand aside and say, this is all rubbish, this is God's fault, what is God doing or what are other people doing?

Life's rubbish and it's all because of what they're doing. Maybe sometimes just stand back and look at this spiritual picture that's given to us and ask different questions before we engage in the blame game.

So we have this scenario here and I simply haven't time to have gone into it in any more detail. I'm going to go through the responses that are also here because they're very significant and very important for us and helpful to us, I hope, to understand ourselves and God and faith and evil.

We have three responses recorded here in these two chapters. They're all very different but they're all significant and important because they reflect on life and they reflect on faith.

We have Job's wife who responds in this passage, don't we? She says that he should curse God and die in the second of the two.

[13 : 27] Then his wife said, do you still hold faster integrity? This is the second of the temptations that came out of the test that he received.

Curse God and die. That is Job's wife's response. Can you see that's absolutely natural. I'm not going to judge Job's wife here.

I'm not going to say, oh, wasn't she? I wasn't going to say blind. Imagine not being able to say, I'm not going to do that. The Bible doesn't do that. Job says to her that she's speaking as if she's one of the foolish women, whoever they might have been.

But we're not told anything else. We make no judgment on her and I certainly don't do that. Some are quick to condemn or some are quick to say that that was the end for him with her.

We're not told that. We don't know how she responded later on and I will not judge her. Job does challenge the folly of what she says for them both.

[14 : 31] He says, look, shall we not receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? He involves himself in the answer saying this is not. This might be the easy answer.

The blame game might be the one that is easy, but it's not going to help us. But listen, she is in the deepest grief. She has lost everything.

Do we forget that? We look at the cold light of Scripture because it's just a summary of what's going on. We don't think of what she's put yourself in her situation. She's lost absolutely everything in her life, everything.

Heart and soul, body and mind, everything is lost to her and she gives up and blames God because that's easier.

That's easier for her in that moment. We're going to judge her for that, but it's not the right response ultimately for her or for Job or for us.

[15 : 34] There is an assumption from her that she knows and has all the picture, that she knows what's going on and so can make that judgment. And it's perfectly understandable that she responds in this way.

It's the default position of our hearts. The default position of our sinful hearts is to blame God. We've seen that from the very beginning that that was the default position of Adam and Eve, that they blamed each other and blamed God for what was happening in their lives.

But what I'm saying is that can sometimes just be too easy to blame God in that way. You know sometimes, well, it's a long, long time, maybe 30 years, is it?

No, 26, 27 years since I was doing any exams and I vowed when I left the future of church college, I would never sit another exam and I'd get to that and I hope I will never.

Because I'd sit hundreds, hundreds. But you know sometimes in the young people here, there are students and academics who will know that here, sometimes you get an exam question and you've got an immediate easy answer but you think that's too easy because it's wrong.

[16 : 44] I often answered like that. Oh yeah, that's easy. But it was wrong because usually the very easy answer in most cases if it's a serious exam, isn't the very easy one unless you're a real brain box, in which case it probably is and the illustration for you will fall through.

But for the rest of us ordinary mortals, then it's quite often the case that the easiest answer is not the right answer because they're wanting to test your knowledge. And often for us, blaming God is the easy answer but it is ultimately no answer for us at all.

It doesn't provide hope. It doesn't address these things. And it leaves us with the crisis and the problem undoubted with and with no where to turn.

Blame, curse God and die may be an easy answer for us in life. And as Christians when we struggle, when we're going through difficulty, the temptation will always be to curse God and die, to turn our backs on Him.

It might not be so dramatic as that but that will be the effect of it. It will be that we will turn our backs on the living God. So Job's wife is one response, then Job's response is incredible in these passages.

[17 : 57] Twice he responds. From the first tests in verse 21 of the chapter, naked I came from my mother's room and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord in all of this.

He did not sin or charge God with wrong. And then chapter 2 and verse 10, you speak as well. Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil and all this Job did not sit with his lips?

Can I say there's something here really important for every Christian, for everyone who puts their trust in God. This is the response of instinctive faith. Okay? That is an instinctive response we have from Job.

I think that's a huge lesson for us with regard to the faith that is God's gift to us when we face blackness and loss and grief and separation and hell as it were in our experience.

There will be for us, with our God's children, an instinctive response of faith. Blessed be the name of the Lord. His response was worship.

[19 : 00] It's instinctive. I'm saying that because it's important. This is his instinctive response. I'm not being simplistic. I'm not saying that people who are believers and go through difficulties don't have no feelings and have no troubles and difficulties.

But what I'm saying is the instinctive response is worship because we're in shock. And we're in shock, we do what's instinctive.

And Job did what was instinctive here. You know, you've seen that in the grieving process with so many people. They're in shock. They respond a certain way. And then in later days comes questions and anger and grief and frustration and doubts.

And that's very much the model and the picture that we have here. Later on in the book we have all kinds of things going on. There's a great backlash to come from Job in his question and his wrestling and in his debates with his friends and what he argues towards God.

But his instinctive response is worship. There will be doubt and there will be confusion and fear and darkness, but instinctively he worships.

[20 : 17] Why is that important? Why does that matter? Why? I can't see anyone here today. I shouldn't complain about the sun shining on me. When the building's being renewed, we're going to move the pulpit back a bit so I can see everyone.

But why is it really important here? Why is the instinctive worship? How can he do that? Because he knows God.

That's why. Okay, we don't know what's going on. He doesn't know what's going on. He's in shock with everything that's going on. His trust has been stripped back absolutely to the naked bare line, but he has a past relationship with the living God.

Yes, I know it's in Old Testament shadows, but he is intimate, insight and knowledge of the living God and our relationship of grace and love with him.

He can dismiss what he knows about God's sovereignty and about God's love. And it's inexplicable worship against all the odds.

[21 : 23] You see, what we're being told here is that we trust in God. We have faith in God simply because of who God is, not what he gives us or not primarily what he gives us.

He is worthy of our worship and we can worship him even as in job situations everything is taken. Now that is not to minimize to one, I owe to what job is going through, but what we have here is this deep fundamental knowledge of God that allowed him to instinctively worship because God was trustworthy in his experience.

And even though he didn't know what was going on, he loved God. He knew God and that is hugely important for us because it's very different for us.

I don't know how unique job is in terms of world history and God's dealing with humanity. I think he is completely unique and is given for our instruction a special way. For us the curtains drawn back, we could see all this.

We could see all the stuff that the job couldn't see. But also we have the cross. We have the cross and we can see, hear the character of faith and suffering and in loss and we should, with what we know of Jesus Christ and of what he has gone through on our behalf, we should know instinctive worship in times of darkness because we have to say where else can we go?

[22 : 57] We can't go anywhere else. We might not understand. We might not like. We might struggle. We might doubt. We might wrestle. We might weep. But we can't go anywhere else.

And we know because we know Jesus Christ because the cross has changed everything for us. We know a suffering saviour and that is hugely significant who is a saviour who takes my sin and my guilt and whose death on the cross instinctively involves praising him because my praise is sealed and my worship is sealed in his blood.

We might not have any words but we know that to be the case and that is a great help for people I hope and I pray in my experience and in yours in our darkest hours.

What will I do in my darkest hour? I'll tell you what I'll do, what I hope I'll do, that I will visualise the Father that I visualise and that is the prodigal Father who runs towards me with his arms open.

That's what I cling on to when I don't know and when I don't understand and I have no no darkness of any significance but that's what I cling on to.

[24 : 19] A son who gave himself and a father whose arms are wide open, not impassive, not inhuman, not blind, not in hopeless despair but one that allows us to worship in the dark and I commend that Saviour to you if you're not a Christian because there is no other and I ask you not to blame easily this God and to take your blame and channel it through the prism of the cross first to see answers for you in your need and in your loss and in your sin and in your death which you face without Jesus Christ because it is that personal and it's that real and if you stand against Him in unbelief you are blaming Him, blaming the one who loves you so much that God sent his son.

Those who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. So you have job, it's wife and they are understandable natural response, you have jobs instinctive worship which is simply a gift from God because it's not what we would do but it's because we have come to know Him and He came to know Him and lastly and very briefly we have the friends in 11 to 13 Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

Now can I say a couple of weeks ago for Joseph of Vistia, a couple of weeks ago I asked the congregation to read through the book of Job twice and it's very important to read right to the end and it helps understanding the early parts as well.

It's not like a novel where you're just reading chapter and chapter and you get to an amazing end it's helpful to read the whole book and to look at it as a whole in that response but can I say in relation to that these three verses they're the best times.

It's their best moments okay it goes downhill from here for these three friends. This is their best moment in the book, brothers who come together, there's maybe a sense which it was cultural to do that of course but nonetheless they come together and they come to grieve with Him and mourn with Him and they are so shocked by Him.

[26 : 38] This is an important man, this is a prince in his land and he's sitting outside the city rejected, ostracised just in an utter mess they can't recognise him physically and they mourn with him and sit with him for seven days and seven nights no one spoke a word for they saw his suffering was great, a week's silence.

They're thinking God is really judging this guy, he must have been a nightmare but they don't say anything yet.

But I think there's a very important and a huge lesson here in terms of our community and in terms of your relationship and my relationship within Christian community how we respond not to our own suffering but the suffering of others.

Huge lesson for us, the importance of silent presence in the suffering of others. We come into people's company, we know them, we love them, they have been hit by some great tragedy and great difficulty in their lives.

We don't blame, we don't explain, we don't quote verses to them, please don't quote my friend all things work together for the good for those who love the Lord, not to someone who has lost everything.

[28 : 06] Leave that to God. Don't give them platitudes, don't send them Facebook posters that speak about giving little ditties about life and suffering and death.

You know what we should do? We should shut up. That would be a great thing to do and that's a great thing for a pastor to learn to shut up and I will shortly.

The ministry of silence because we're reflecting a common need, a common trust in God and an understanding of one another.

Can I say within that silent presence that will mean sometimes for us that God's silence will sometimes be pastoral for us. You know, we always, you know, when the Samus speaks about God's silence, why don't you speak the heavens, see my brass, God isn't responding.

Will there be a case from this to say also that sometimes in our lives God's silence not speaking to us is pastoral. He's dealing with us nonetheless.

[29 : 12] He is sending His Spirit who is pleading on our behalf with groans that are unutterable, reminding us that there's more than words and communication or that communication is more than words and knowledge, silent presence and the suffering presence.

They come and they associate with them, they suffer with them, they sit with them. That was a great thing they did. We give these, you know, jobs there, jobs, comforters.

Interimble, comforters are you all, he says later on. But let's give them some credit. They suffer with them and they sit with them here in his suffering where he is ostracised and rejected and even his wife is encouraged God and died.

We don't know where she's gone. A boat will hold somewhere to recover. But they were suffering presence. That is again, I think in our lives where we will most closely reflect Jesus Christ in our community with one another because Christ is a suffering presence with us.

He has empathy with us because he entered infinitely our suffering and pain on the cross and he wept with those who wept and he vicariously suffered in our place so that our suffering is ameliorated and is temporary and will one day end and we can live in glory with this victorious and risen Savior which is why the resurrection is so important and why the Lord's day is the day we worship him on because it's the resurrection morning.

[30 : 49] We don't make nearly enough the fact that we worship a living Savior, not one who remains crucified. He has been to hell and back. He knows what forsakenness of the Father is and he knows infinite suffering and therefore we recognise his suffering presence with us even when we don't understand that whatever is going on in our lives.

So in our lives we have this knowledge and vision of God that we know him and we know him as one who loves us, who has entered into our loss, who promises that it will end, who is revealing here that evil doesn't reign, it is under his governance, it's not purposeless with all the mystery that remains within that and it's important for us to face these facts in our lives and not be content with the blame game.

It is easy to blame others and to blame God. It usually means we become self-contained and self-righteous and everyone else is wrong, I'm right.

And yet it doesn't provide the hope and the forgiveness and the grace and the peace and the knowledge that there is something better and that even in the darkness we will come and hold the hand of the one who knows no darkness himself.

And we reflect on the love of Christ especially can I say in community today and that this speaks of the importance of, can we bang on here about the importance of community?

[32 : 38] Sometimes it's a pain in the neck isn't it? And sometimes you want just to run away. But it's spiritual and it's there to help and enable as we live with the characteristics of Christ and our need for Christ, forgiveness of Christ and the grace of Christ, it's a new community and it's the kingdom of heaven that we're seeking to reflect in suffering and in joy in good times and in bad times.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Before God we ask and pray that you would help us to understand what it means to know your word and to understand what you reveal.

We recognise we stand on the edge of knowledge, we stand on the edge of revelation and we are left with many questions and for those who are plunged this day into darkness and defeat and struggle it may all seem platitudinal.

We pray that it wouldn't as your spirit would take it and apply it to our hearts and that we would be very careful about how we speak and when we speak and that we would learn the great value in communication of when not to speak, when to weep with those who weep.

Not as a sign of weakness but a sign of meekness of controlled strength and may you help us to be vulnerable in order to be supported and strengthened and yet be strong within that as we make our strength Christ.

[34 : 06] Lord God help us we pray and be particularly near to those who suffer today, those of our community who are depressed, who are broken, who have lost loved ones, who are questioning huge life issues.

Remember our young people at the cusp of their lives, may they understand and grasp and soak in the important truths about the living God so that when the storms do come on the beach of life, when they are there may they be able to know that their spiritual home is founded on the rock that is Christ and not on the sinking sand.

Lord help us to be preparatory theologians preparing for what might or might not come but knowing the living God that is revealed to us.