

## **Job: Where is God my Maker, Who Gives Songs in the Night?**

For me, one of the most difficult parts of the ministry is to watch people suffer. That may be said for all of us, I imagine. As they share their raw feelings and deep emotions, and you look across into their weary, tear filled eyes, the Book of Job becomes alive. You cannot answer *why?* or *why not?*, you just look and stare and wonder. The urge of the three friends begins to crop easily into the heart – what about this, or that, or have you ever looked at your suffering from this angle? But every word falls far short. Tears are simply the only voice that is heard.

As one who has not suffered as Job but has the responsibility (and privilege?) to look in on those who are traveling through *incoherent suffering*, Job's words draw one in to find what the world longs for but only the believer has, and that simple yet profound word is *HOPE*; simple, yet deep, abiding hope. Imagine that, hope in hopelessness, light in darkness, joy in pain. The Book of Job is a book of hope.

The Book of Job is also an extremely difficult book to understand. Derek Thomas writes: *Having spent the last year and a half 'in Job', as they say, I have come to realize that the diversity of opinion amongst commentators on Job only serves to confirm that no uniform interpretation of Job exists.*<sup>1</sup> So as we travel through the Book of Job and enter into certain mysteries, we must learn quickly alongside Job and his three friends that God and His ways are not always easily understood, nor are they simply explained. As C.S. Lewis writes in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, *The lion is good, but he is not tame.*

### **Job 1.1-2.10: May the Name of the Lord Be Praised**

Job 1.1: *In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job.* G. Campbell Morgan states the value of the book of Job is *that it is the Book of Job. That is to say, it is the story of a man.*<sup>2</sup> This is both a comfort and encouragement as the book of Job is written about an ordinary person for ordinary people, carrying a timeless message that deals with a shared experience: suffering, pain, and the question *why?*

Job 1.1-5 sets the stage of the unfolding drama between God and Satan when Job is described as blameless and upright, not perfect and sinless. Blameless has the meaning of being beyond reproach, complete, an all around God-fearing man in the best sense of the word. Upright has the sense of “straight”, as we find in Titus 2.12: *[the grace of God] teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.* Job is also described as a God fearing man who shunned evil, and in verse 3, has been blessed greatly by God with material riches. Verses 4-5 reveal Job's family life and his role as high priest in his family. It is interesting to note the sin Job fears his children will commit through pleasure is the very sin Job himself is tempted with by suffering. We end by reading that this religious function was not a mere passing fancy for Job, but concern for godliness in his family was a regular custom.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Thomas, *The Storm Breaks*, (Great Britain: Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 12. With such a comment, one looks forward to discussion period following snack!

<sup>2</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Answers of Jesus to Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973 – reprint), 8.

With the stage set, we relocate into the heavenly realms as Satan meets up with God, bragging about his destructive work on the earth. In order to help us understand the preceding events, a comment from Packer is helpful as he describes the “evilness” of Satan:

*The mentality of Satan is a mystery whose depths we can never plumb; not just because Satan is an angel, while we are men, but also because Satan is purely evil, and we cannot conceive what pure evil is like ... Scripture clearly means us to believe in Satan, and a host of satanic [beings], who are of quite unimaginable badness – more cruel, more malicious, more proud, more scornful, more perverted, more destructive, more disgusting, more filthy, more despicable, than anything our minds can conceive.*<sup>3</sup>

This adequately describes Satan’s actions. God introduces Job to Satan, someone Satan has obviously wanted to get his hands on before but has not been allowed. Satan chides God by insinuating that the only reason Job worships God is because of what he gets from Him. God replies, in verse 12, *everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger*. And so unimaginable evil is poured out of the roaring lion as Job’s possessions and his children are devoured (1 Peter 5.8). A little while later, as Satan is permitted to touch the body of Job, but not take his life, Satan again mauls Job’s flesh in a vicious attack. His purpose is that Job might curse God and show all heaven (and earth) that God is not worthy of our worship.

If one has never read the book of Job, one may ask, why did Job have to suffer so much? Where was God? Do we live in a Deistic society? Was God sleeping? Is God limited in power and Satan happened to win this one battle? As we look into the heavenly courtroom, and have the privilege to view Job’s suffering from a much wider perspective than our natural earth-bound view, we understand God’s role more clearly. There is precise permission from God’s sovereign hand for suffering. Satan roamed and yet when it came to Job, he could not touch him (1.10). This brings certain comfort to all believers as we only suffer with the permission of God, not through the mere roaming of Satan. What if Satan did not have to seek permission? What if he could roam and do as he pleased? What if God was not in control? Imagine the evil, the pain, the suffering that would take place! One author summarizes the presence of evil as *a licensed visitor to our dwelling heart. And it is often difficult to recognize behind the gloomy shape a controlling hand, a solicitous and loving eye.*<sup>4</sup> (1 John 5.18)

Here is found both encouragement and hope for those suffering. Although it seems as if everything is out of control, that evil and Satan and sin have won, and there is no future hope, praise God this is simply not the case. God alone is sovereign and uses our suffering for many purposes, not excluding the opportunity to bring honour and praise to His name. There is hope because knowing God saves us from the world’s despair in suffering, for they face their trials without purpose, ascribing it to bad luck and something that must be faced with stoicism and uncertainty. Job helps us understand that there is purpose through faith in God’s sovereign goodness, even when goodness has disappeared from our visible sight. Our lives are not in the hands of luck, or Satan; rather a king who is our merciful Father. By faith, we know that our soul is safe, whatever the disease of body or the suffering of the mind. We learn God permits adversity according

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from Derek Thomas’s commentary, p. 28. An excerpt from Packer’s book, *God’s Words*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> *Job*, The Pulpit Commentary, p. 23.

to necessity; suffering will be no greater than is necessary to accomplish His purpose, and while God lavishes us with blessings, he is selective in affliction.

Job's affliction is staggering. Will Job curse God? We read in 1.20, his first response was to tear his clothes and shave his head. *Then he fell to the ground in worship.* He says *I came into the world with nothing and I will depart with nothing; the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* Job acknowledged that God was sovereign over all and all that he owned was not his but belonged rightfully to God.

## **Lessons**

### **1. The relevance of Job is found in the universality of suffering.**

John Piper writes:

*Virtually everyone in this room will experience bitter calamity sooner or later. And you can mark it down ahead of time: it will almost certainly seem absurd and meaningless and underserved when it comes. ... It will seem very absurd and you will cry out "Why?" a hundred times before the cloud passes over. Most of our grief and pain down not come as clear punishment for sins. Most of it comes out of nowhere and baffles our sense of justice. That's why the book of Job is so relevant. Job's suffering seems to come out of nowhere and have no connection to his character. His story is recorded for us so that we will have some help in living through those calamities – and not just keeping a stiff upper lip but bowing reverently and trustingly before the sovereign goodness of God.*<sup>5</sup>

### **2. It is a comfort for believers that they may worship God in dust and ashes.**

It is striking Job's place of mourning is in the presence of God. In a day and age when worship is defined as *praise and worship*, it is a comfort that God can also be worshiped in the depths of suffering. As Calvin writes: *But when we see that [Job] was not disappointed in his hope, and inasmuch as he was humbled before God he found grace, seeing such an ending, we have to conclude that there is nothing better than to subject ourselves to God, and to suffer peaceably all that He sends us until by His pure goodness He delivers us.*<sup>6</sup> Job's suffering was done in God's presence, which is the best place to be found when suffering.

### **3. Job and his three friends never argue as to who allowed him to suffer.**

Job, or for that matter, his three friends never once blame Satan or bad luck. Job responded to his wife when she urged him to curse God and die: *Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?* God sent the affliction. John Reisinger writes: *All [Job] knows is that God has sent every one of the afflictions and God must have had a good reason for doing so even if Job could not fathom the reason. This, my friend, is the essence of Biblical faith in a sovereign and gracious God.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper, Job 1.1-2.10, taken from web sight, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons from Job*. Introduction by Harold Dekker. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> John G. Reisinger, *The Sovereignty of God in Providence* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, Inc., 1989), p.28.

#### **4. Spiritual battles wage in the spiritual realm.**

Derek Thomas quotes from Abraham Kuyper who asserts that in every aspect of suffering, there is a bigger battle taking place. *If once the curtain were pulled back and the spiritual world behind it came to view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle ever fought on earth would seem by comparison a mere game. Not here, but up there – that is where the real conflict is waged.*<sup>8</sup> Thomas goes on to say that we must avoid two errors, making too much of Satan's activities in our lives or too little. We must not over estimate the power of Satan, not do we want to under estimate the power of his devouring roar, as we read in 1 Peter 5.8.

#### **5. Job must be preached in our pulpits in order to teach people how to worship God in their suffering.**

Again, John Piper writes: *One of my duties as your pastor is to preach and pray in such a way that you are prepared in mind and heart not to curse God in the day of your calamity. But even more – that instead of cursing you might worship God and bless him as your free and sovereign Father no matter how intense the grief or deep the pain he brings into your life.*<sup>9</sup>

#### **Job 2.11-31.40: I Know my Redeemer Lives.**

I once read a story of a pastor who was called to be with a family that just learned their son committed suicide. During his three and a half hour stay with them as they waited for the coroner and other events, conversation added up to maybe fifteen minutes. He writes that he had never been more uncomfortable and when he left he wished that he could have done more for the family. A year went by and he met up with one of their relatives who relayed to this pastor: *I don't know what you did, but they sure are grateful to you.* He writes in response: *All I had done was commit myself to being with them. ... Those family members needed someone who would simply be with them and hurt with them.*<sup>10</sup>

Job's three friends sat silent alongside of Job for seven days and no one said a word. D.A. Carson writes: *they [did] the wisest thing they could have done, certainly much wiser than all the speeches they will shortly deliver: for seven days and seven nights, they kept silence, awed by the depths of Job's misery.*<sup>11</sup>

Job speaks out of the silence, cursing the day of his birth and asking sharp, pointed questions: Why didn't you let me die at birth? (3.11), why didn't you dry up my mother's breasts so that I would starve? (3.12), why do you keep wretched people like me alive? (3.20-22). Job discloses his suffering to his friends and tells them he is tired of living and sees no point in his suffering. Frankly he has had enough and wants to die, not by his own hands (suicide) but by the hand of God.

This chapter is important in setting the stage for the speeches that follow for at least two primary reasons. First, Job reveals the depth of his pain and suffering. Up to this point, Job has not spoken about his suffering and when he speaks his words drip pain

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> John Piper's sermon.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from a book, *After a Suicide: What is the best way to serve those left behind.* Randy Christian

<sup>11</sup> D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 156.

and sorrow. Job's counsellors will enter in the next chapter and instead of compassion and care, they approach Job with little sympathy and gentleness. The contrast cannot go unnoticed: Job should have received thoughtful words, filled with empathy and kindness.

The second principle is we must prepare ourselves for Job's complete and utter honesty before God. How would we respond if we were sitting opposite Job and he was pouring out his heart to us as he did in chapter 3? Would not the temptation be to fill Job with good theology? Job makes proper, well-mannered evangelical Christians uncomfortable because he has no time to be "political" with God. Take one example: Job challenges God directly when he says, *If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?* (7.20). What would your response be as you sit across from your friend who spoke these words, his dirty skin hanging from his naked body?

Out of the three friends, Eliphaz is the kindest, although his speeches will become more judgemental and harsh. Job 4.7-9 summarizes the main theology that runs through the speeches of the three friends: *Consider now: Who being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish. This follows his remarks in verses 5-6 where he rebukes Job for being impatient: But now trouble comes to you and you are discouraged?.* Eliphaz will say later in Job 5.8 that Job has not really sought God the way he should, which is by not despising the discipline of the Almighty (5.17). If Job does this, he will be restored (5.19-26), hearing Eliphaz conclude with utmost certainty: *We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself.*

I am sure we have all been at the end of a well-planned and penetrating rebuke, but consider the accusations heaped on Job! Eliphaz is essentially saying: *Job, no one is perfect and you must expect suffering so be a good man and bear with it patiently. Seek to make things right with God and all will be made right.* The insinuation of course is that there was something in Job's life that caused this to happen. And just in case Job has any doubts to the validity of Eliphaz's words, he hears how Eliphaz received these words from a direct revelation through a vision (4.12-21). How can Job argue?

Job answers in frustration and disappointment. He begins by asking God to strike him dead once again and then he speaks directly to Eliphaz saying that he is no help at all (6.11-30). After he is done with Eliphaz, he speaks again to God, asking Him to just leave him alone (7.16). Why should God pay any attention to Job, after all man is but *a cloud that vanishes and is gone* (7.9) Thomas summarizes the rest of Job's speech:

*... Job is angry that man has become the object of his scrutiny and, yes, it has now to be said, cruelty, even sadism. Job seems to be aware of an evil eye upon him and he cries out to God to leave him alone (7.14-16). His words become wild. In effect, he says, "If I have sinned, what harm have I done? You are too big to be hurt by a puny little thing like me; and in any case since I am a burden to you and to myself, why not be done with me?"<sup>12</sup>*

This sets Bildad in motion. He has heard Job's rebuke to Eliphaz as he clearly explains how he has not denied the faith nor sinned against God. Bildad deals much less gently with Job than the first speaker as he accuses Job **and** his children of sin, which brings on God's punishment. Bildad confidently speaks: *Does God pervert justice?*

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas, p. 88.

*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 will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.* If Eliphaz's defence was direct revelation, Bildad's justification is history: people who sin perish, those who transgress are punished. Again, Bildad, always the encourager, ends as did Eliphaz with promises of restoration, if only Job will listen: *Surely God will not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy. Your enemies will be clothed in shame, and the tents of the wicked will be no more.* (8.20-22)

Imagine for a moment, your son or daughter, let alone ten of them, perish in a house fire and your pastor comes to your house and says: *this would never have happened if your teenage son did not have some sin in his life. Or, your son died because of some sin in your life.* This is real life as Job hears words that are really heartless and cruel. Job listens and feels the sting as he responds in an attitude of despair in chapter 9-10. Job 9.2 finds Job agreeing with Bildad that God cannot be unjust. But despair enters in as Job also says God cannot be approached (9.3-13) because of his majesty and power. Therefore, Job is trapped in his innocence because on one hand he is accused of sin and on the other hand he cannot approach God to make his defence. If Job could, he would say to God: *Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me* (10.2). Here are a series of questions I want answered by you God: does it please you to oppress me?, do you have eyes of flesh?, will you turn me to dust again?. There are no answers, just silence. And in the silence, Job asks, *What is the point? I am tired with pain, God does not care, my days will soon be over. I loathe my very life, so please God take it from me* (10.20-22). Job despairs because he feels he will not get his day in court.

It is now Zophar's turn to enter the skirmish with Job. He says basically what the other two have said, except in an even harsher tone. Zophar rebukes Job for claiming to be innocent, saying that Job is so full of sin *God has even forgotten some of your sin* (11.4-6). The accusation being that Job is being punished for a tiny portion of his sin, so full of wrongdoing is he before God. The solution is to simply put away his sin (11.14-15): *if you put away the sin that is in your hand and not allow evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear.* If Job does this, then everything will be better (11.16-20).

Job's responds with sarcasm: *Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!* (12.2). He says it is simply not true that the wicked are judged immediately; in fact even the birds and the animals know this (12.4-9). Job then speaks of the wisdom and power of God (12.13-25) but maintains that he wants his day in court (13.1-22). In verse 15, there is finally a sliver of hope in Job's voice as he wrestles with God: *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.* Calvin comments on this passage:

*Job indicates that although he is overthrown and as it were enraged in his passions, that he has not lost all hope; it is not that he pretends to plead against God, or perhaps alienate himself from Him, or that he wishes to vex Him by having no more to do with Him. Why not? He protests that he hopes, whatever may come of it. "Although He may kill me," he says, "and confound me, yet will I not cease to trust in Him; nevertheless I will argue my ways before His face.*

*Behold, I must mix this vehemence which you see and which I perceive, I must mix it with the hope which I have in God.” And here we have a beautiful and excellent mirror of God’s working. For he lets the faithful fall, in order that their faith may be so much better tried.*<sup>13</sup>

Job’s three friends could not shake Job’s confidence in God, despite their false accusations, harsh condemnations, and subtle promises. His hope is still found in God, although God appears to Job as distant and silent.

The cycle of speeches continue: Eliphaz – Job; Bildad – Job; Zophar – Job; Eliphaz – Job; Bildad – Job. Zophar does not speak a third time. Piper explains:

*But all of these are so preposterous (that is, the trumped up charges made by Eliphaz in his last discourse – 22.5ff) that when Bildad makes his last speech in chapter 25 he can only manage six little verses about the general sinfulness of man. And when its finally Zophar’s turn to round out the third cycle, he has nothing to say at all. And the symmetry of the book is broken because the theology of Job’s friends cannot sustain itself to the end. The simple principle of justice has not been able to stand. Job is a good man. Yet he suffers far worse than many wicked people.*<sup>14</sup>

We must stop for a moment at probably one of the most well known passages in the book of Job, chapter 19.25-27. The context of Job 19 is rejection – Job is rejected by his friends (2-5), his God (6-12) and society (13-19). In verses 21-22 it is interesting that he cries out for mercy from his friends, which we know he does not receive. When we come to verses 23-27, he knows with utmost certainty that he will find mercy with God, through his advocate: *Job knows that His Redeemer lives!* This is an amazing statement, not only because of his faith in his Redeemer that lives, but because so many of Job’s speeches have grappled with God’s goodness and have found little of it. And now, Job stands before his friends and relays that he is confident that God will deliver him because of his living Redeemer; he will therefore see God and find mercy. Thomas notices:

*Through the tragedies of life, there is an over-arching providence, a benevolent hand at work that sweeps all of human history to a climax: the mystery of the new heavens and the new earth. In that process great upheavals take place, but every single one of God’s children will be brought safely to him to live with him forever.*<sup>15</sup>

Why? Because my Redeemer lives! Job found his living and sustaining hope in Jesus Christ. We also are brought to the cross on humbled knees and see our deliverance is alone in Christ Jesus, through whom we receive the undeserved blessings and sovereign grace.

## **Lessons**

### **1. Within certain boundaries, God allows open and honest suffering.**

God does not blame us if in our suffering we frankly vent out despair and confess our loss of hope and our sense of futility. However, there are limitations, such as Job’s wife’s counsel: *Curse God and die!* But within certain boundaries, *God allows us to be*

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas, p. 127. Quote from John Calvin’s sermon.

<sup>14</sup> Piper, sermon Job 2.11-31.40.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, p. 167.

*frank about our grief, candid about our despair, honest with our questions, rather than to suppress them and wear a public front of puffy piety.*<sup>16</sup> Job knew God was present, and loving and just and that is why he had such a hard time understanding God's injustice to his circumstances. Job struggles as a believer.

## **2. Job suffered because he was upright, not because of his sin.**

In a summary paper on *Job*, Zaspel tells us what both Job and his three friends missed:

*Now the great question which so puzzled Job and his friends was the common question "WHY?" For Job's friends, the answer to that question was found in Job's sinfulness. For Job, who knew he did not deserve such affliction, the answer might rather be found in God's injustice! But what neither side was able to consider was that they were both wrong! There was another reason entirely. Job was not suffering because he had sinned. He was suffering because he had **not** sinned! It was not to his unfaithfulness to God, but his faithfulness that had caused all this. It simply never occurred to Job that Satan had instigated this whole affair. He had challenged and made a bet. ... And now Job was suffering, not for his sin, but for God's honour and in order to shame Satan.*<sup>17</sup>

Zaspel goes on to write that it strikes him as very curious that so often it is not the worst Christians but the best ones who suffer the most. And not just little pains, but as D.A. Carson writes, *incoherent suffering*, that is, suffering which seems staggeringly irrational and unfair compared to the relative inoffensiveness of the person. And so often, like Job and his three friends, we have no theological category for it.

## **3. It is a comfort that God deals with Job as a Father, not as a Judge.**

John Reisinger writes that another comfort for believers is the Fatherhood of God: *Even though all sickness and affliction are under God's control and are part of his purposes, it is NOT true that they are all chastisement for sin. ... Sometimes God allows His people to suffer just to demonstrate the power of His grace. It is wrong for a Christian to ever feel that God is "getting even" and punishing him when affliction comes. God only punished sin in one of two places: He either punished it in Christ and the penal debt is totally paid, or else He punishes it in the sinner in hell. Even when affliction comes into our life a chastisement, it is never penal (that is, from God as judge), but the chastisement is always remedial (that is, from a loving heavenly Father). Our Father teaches us through affliction, but never punishes us.*<sup>18</sup>

## **4. Compassion must be present in our theology.**

People can be harsh and pastors are not exempt. Passing on good theology to the suffering does not mean that we have carried out our pastoral role. Job's three friends often spoke good theology, telling Job of the transcendence of God, His justice and righteousness and the sinfulness humans. But correct theology is not enough; it must be

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Fred Zaspel, *Lessons for Those who Suffer from the Book of Job*, 1996

<sup>18</sup> John Reisinger, p. 22.

properly applied with a pastor's heart, filled with compassion for God's sheep. We may thank God that as Jesus walked this earth, he shed tears for the lost and hurting.

### **Job 32-37: I Am Like Bottled Up Wine**

Just as the first five verses introduce Job as a righteous and blameless man, so the first five verses in chapter 32 describe Elihu as angry (32.2, 3,5). He is angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God and he is angry with the three friends because they found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him (32.3, 12). It is interesting to note that now the three friends are referred to as *the three men* in 32.5.

Elihu begins in chapter 32.6-22 with an extensive defence for speaking to his seniors and one quickly learns that Elihu is wordy to the extreme as it takes him twenty-four verses to warn the others that he is going to speak. Waiting patiently through all the speeches, he is about to explode: *For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst* (32.18-19). One message that bursts out of Elihu in chapter 32 is a distancing from Job's three friends and their case: *and I will not answer [Job] with your arguments* (32.13-14).

Now Elihu turns to Job and rebukes him for charging God with injustice. Can it be God speaks in more ways than Job has acknowledged (33.8-32)? Elihu asks Job: *Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words?* (33.13) when *God does speak – now one way, now another – though man may not perceive it* (33.14). Job simply cannot maintain that God has invented all sorts of sins against him. God's ways are incomprehensible! Elihu asks Job why he complains to God when he does not receive a full explanation: does not God use all sorts of ways to speak to people, including pain? Carson comments on Elihu's argument: *This is an advance on the argument between Job and his friends. Here is a chastening use of suffering that may be independent of some particular sin. Its purpose is preventative; it can stop a person from slithering down the slope to destruction.*<sup>19</sup> In other words, suffering is not always a direct result of sin; suffering can be remedial (33.19-28). The comfort for Job in Elihu's first speech is that finally someone is not accusing him of sin that lead to suffering.

If Elihu was bottled up wine in his first speech, in his second, third, and fourth he is a gourmet chef that allows others to taste his good words (34.3). As Carson remarks, *perhaps one of the reasons why Elihu does not get a very sympathetic reading in some circles is that he is patently an arrogant and pretentious young man.*<sup>20</sup>

Interpretations vary widely for the remainder of Elihu's speeches. Thomas in his commentary writes: *We have to reach the conclusion that Elihu, at the end of the day, sides entirely with Job's companions: he defends God's justice and condemns Job as a sinner.*<sup>21</sup> D.A. Carson does not go that far:

*If Elihu is at times dangerously close to siding with the three miserable comforters, it is here. Certainly he has not empathetically entered into Job's suffering, or tried to fathom the anguish that leads Job to defend his integrity in such extravagant terms. But Elihu is right to defend the justice of God, and he has advanced the discussion by suggesting that Job's greatest sin may not be something he said or did **before** the suffering started, but the rebellion he is*

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<sup>19</sup> Carson, p. 169.

<sup>20</sup> Carson, p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, p. 267.

*displaying in the suffering. Even so, that does not explain the genesis of the suffering. It may, however, prepare Job to be a little more attentive to listen to God when God finally does speak.*<sup>22</sup>

I tend to follow Carson's evaluation of Elihu's impact for a number of reasons.<sup>23</sup> First, God does not condemn Elihu's speech as he does Job's three friends in chapter 42. It is hard to imagine God not condemning Elihu's speech if what Thomas says is true, that Elihu ended up agreeing with the three friends. Second, Elihu's speech grows more gracious, something that could not happen to Job's three friends because of their theology. We notice in chapters 35-37, for example, Elihu brings several themes together, concentrating on the firm pillar of God's justice. This is what Job directly challenged in his speeches (36.3). However, in saying this, Elihu also proposes that God is not malicious and therefore Job should not become bitter (36.13). Instead, Job must be patient through affliction: *But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction. He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food* (36.15-16).

At the end of the friends speeches, one pictures God as vindictive and harsh; after Elihu's gourmet meal, God is to be praised and feared. Job 36.22 begins a song of praise to God: *God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, 'You have done wrong?' How great is God – beyond all understanding! The number of his years is past finding out.* (36.22-23,26). Elihu points out to Job that he is simply wrong to claim he is innocent at the expense of God's grace: *The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress* (37.23) This hymn of praise begins to humble Job and sets the stage for the Lord to speak out of the storm.

### **Lesson:**

#### **1. God's sovereign grace extends into all areas of our life.**

It is a comfort that as God has saved us by his sovereign grace before the foundations of the world, so he is now sanctifying us freely by his grace through suffering according to his infinite wisdom. We are reminded of 1 Peter 1.6-7: *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of far greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

#### **Job 38-41: Brace Yourself Like a Man**

The moment Job begged for has arrived as the storm clouds gather and God begins to speak to him: *who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?* (38.2) God lets Job know immediately that his presence is an act of

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<sup>22</sup> Carson, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas has a quote in his footnotes concerning author's viewpoints on Elihu. He writes: *Certainly, commentators vary widely in their assessment of Elihu's contribution. Whilst older commentators are largely sympathetic to it (Calvin, for example, is almost totally uncritical of Elihu's contribution), most modern commentators are doubtful of Elihu's overall understanding of the situation. There are exceptions: Kline and Carson interpret Elihu favourably. Kline sees Elihu as the 'forerunner' to the Lord himself.* Taken from footnote 1, chapter 23, p. 342.

condescending grace. God is present in the storm, not because Job deserves an answer, but because God will graciously speak. For Job, it is time to listen to God as he presents question after question, each reminding Job of his weakness and utter powerlessness as he stands before God. It is interesting to notice that God does not directly answer Job's questions. This is important because *what if God took each of Job's questions and began to answer Job directly?* What would that say of God? And the answer would be that God would be answerable to man; God would somehow owe man an explanation for his decisions and conduct. But God will state the exact opposite to Job, saying that unless Job can give an answer, then God in His sovereignty is in no way obligated to answer Job. In fact, throughout God's speech, He does not even attempt an explanation of Job's suffering, nor does he try to justify himself. Instead, as Thomas writes: *God challenges Job to a dual: a battle of wisdom, for there has been too much talk, too many words of knowledge (32.8).*<sup>24</sup> God simply says: *I am*, and Job must be satisfied.

God's words also speak indirectly to Job's three friends. God never charges Job with sins that have brought the suffering, nor does he challenge Job's defence of his own integrity. This clears Job of the indictment from his three friends. Carson writes: *The reason he calls Job on the carpet is not because of Job's justification of himself, but because of Job's willingness to condemn God in order to justify himself. In other words, God does not here "answer" Job's questions about the problem of evil and suffering, but he makes it unambiguously clear what answers are not acceptable in God's universe.*<sup>25</sup>

In Job 38, God challenges Job to *brace himself like a man* for He will now question Job (38.2) as He focuses on the earth (4-7), the sea (8-11), the dawn (12-15), and the depth and breadth of the sea and the land. God asks, *Job, have you ever been to the bottom of the sea or around the world? And you challenge me of being unjust?* In the last half of chapter 38, God brings Job's thoughts to consider the heavens, the origin of light and dark (19-21), and the production of snow, hail, rain and frost (22-30). In verses 31-33 Job is asked if he rules over the constellations and if he is able to make it rain (34-38)? Piper writes about these verses:

*So whether we focus on the earth or the sea or the dawn or the snow or hail or constellations or rain, the upshot is that Job is ignorant and impotent. He doesn't know where they came from. He doesn't know how to make them work. He is utterly surrounded, above and below by mysteries. And so are we, because the scientific advancements of the last two hundred years are like sand pails of saltwater hauled from the ocean of God's wisdom and dumped in a hole on the beach while the tide is rising. God is not impressed.*<sup>26</sup>

Is it any wonder that after God speaks about the animal kingdom in 38.39-39.30 that Job responds with the following words: *I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more (40.4-5).* We are reminded of how Job has been humbled when in Job 31.37 he suggested he would approach God as a 'prince'; now, after Job has heard God speak, the first words that come from his mouth is a confession of his **unworthiness**. No longer the prince, Job is merely a beggar at the heavenly gates.

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas, p. 287. Emphasis his.

<sup>25</sup> Carson, p. 172. Emphasis his.

<sup>26</sup> Piper, p.2. Sermon from Job38-42.6.

God is not done with Job: *Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendour, and clothe yourself in honour and majesty* (40.7-10). God now tells Job that he is in no position to pass judgement on God. Thomas writes: *If the world has treated him badly, it is for a reason that is beyond Job's ability to do anything about it. And in an amazing display of condescension, God offers to bow down in deference to Job's godlike powers if he can demonstrate his ability to do something about the wickedness of the world* (40.14).<sup>27</sup>

The "wager" is if Job can capture and subdue the *behemoth* and the *leviathan*, then Job can charge God with injustice because he would know more and be more powerful than God. The interpretations vary as to the identification of these two creatures, some saying *they probably represent primordial cosmic powers that sometimes break out against God*,<sup>28</sup> while others identify them as the hippopotamus and crocodile.<sup>29</sup> Whatever they are, the relevance seems to be to engage Job in battle with powerful creatures that he is able to neither approach nor tame. God on the other hand controls not only the Behemoth and Leviathan, but also tens of millions of other things in the universe, perfectly and in complete harmony. Job can't begin to know all that has to be taken into account in making decisions about how to run the world for the glory of God and the good of His people. It is simply an unequal contest and Job is made to see not only God's sovereign might but also God's ability to rule with justice, righteousness, and goodness.

Job responds in 42.2-6 humbled before God, seeking repentance for his attitude and thoughts towards Him while he suffered. Thomas writes: *On more than one occasion Job had set himself up as a rival god! This is something he now bitterly regrets. He repents of his arrogance in impugning God's justice*.<sup>30</sup>

## **Lessons**

### **1. Pride looms large in suffering.**

Pride can cause us to accuse God of being unfair or to demand of God answers that we believe he owes us. Job is humbled before God, learning his proud and presumptuous demands were sinful.

### **2. God protects us through His silence.**

In suffering, we think the more answers we have from God, the more content we will be. But as God shows Job, he simply cannot handle the answers God would give. Instead, God says to Job: *This will help you more in your suffering: trust that I am all-powerful **and** good, and you can rest in my sovereign will*. Calvin writes: *The faithful must content themselves with that which is revealed unto them: and it is far greater and better wisdom, than to be inquisitive of all things without exception ... it is not that [God] is [meagre] to show us his will any further, but because he knows what is convenient for*

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas, p. 301.

<sup>28</sup> Carson, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, p. 302.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, p. 308.

us.<sup>31</sup> We simply cannot understand the ways of God, whose thoughts are so much higher than ours. Even the simplest matters are thoroughly complex and incomprehensible to our finite minds.

### 3. God is sovereign.

Consider for a moment the profound impact on those who suffer to know and trust that God is sovereign and gracious. Calvin writes: *For the story here written, shows us how we be in God's hand, and that it lies in him to determine of our life, and to dispose of the same according to his good pleasure: and that it is our duty to submit ourselves to him in all humbleness and obedience....*<sup>32</sup> Piper adds: *When your calamity comes may the Lord give you the grace to affirm the sovereignty of God, let your tears flow freely, and let God himself be your treasure and joy.*<sup>33</sup>

### 4. What if Job had agreed with his three friends and just repented?

If Job had just repented to relieve himself of suffering, he would have given Satan the victory over God. Job's three friends were not just a sideline temptation in the book; rather Satan uses these three men, with good theology, to try to defeat God. If Job had agreed, then he would have shown he loved God, not because of who God was, but because He gives Job good health and prosperity. Job's friends at the end of their speeches are constantly telling how well life will be *if only* Job will repent. We learn an important lesson in both suffering and pastoral care. The purpose of theology, no matter how orthodox, is not primarily to "get people out of suffering". Rather, God reveals that theology is important in suffering **in that it sustains and cares for** a person who may be called to suffer intensely and for an extended period of time.

### Job 42.7.17: God's Blessing Returns

There are two main events found in this concluding section of Job: the humbling of Job's three fiends and the blessings graciously granted to Job. God says to Eliphaz: *I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has* (42.7-8). We want to notice a number of important elements. First, God is angry with Job's three friends. God said that Job's three friends were theologically wrong, for he was displeased with what they spoke. This does not mean that Job spoke everything right; it does however show that when it comes to the basic dispute between Job and his three friends, he was in the right. Calvin will say this is the key to understanding the Book of Job: *... in the whole dispute Job maintains a good case, and his adversary maintains a poor one. Now there is more, that Job maintaining a good case pleads it poorly, and the others bringing a poor case plead it well.*<sup>34</sup> Job's good case is that he knows that God does not always afflict men according to the measure of their sins, rather God has his secret judgements. He pleaded

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas, p. 288. Quote from John Calvin.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, p. 331. Quote from Calvin.

<sup>33</sup> Piper, Sermon from Job 1.1-2.10.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, p. 5.

his case poorly by using himself: *Job here now throws himself off balance and uses excessive and exaggerated propositions, so that he shows that he is desperate in many respects.*<sup>35</sup>

Job's friends present a poor case as they show God to be someone who always punishes men according to the measure of their sin, while using beautiful and holy sentences. Calvin writes: *there is nothing in their propositions that we ought not to receive as if the Holy Spirit had pronounced it; for it is pure truth, these are the foundations of religion, they discuss the providence of God, they discuss His justice, they discuss the sins of men.*<sup>36</sup> Their case is poor, but they plead it well.

Piper also notes a reason why God was angry with Job's three friends and not Job: *... the three friends saw all justice working itself out in this life. But Job eventually broke through to the truth that much that is amiss in the world would be made right in the life after death (19.25-27). Job was right.*<sup>37</sup>

The second thing we notice is God not only humbled Job's three friends by condemning their words, He also humbled them by telling them they must go to the one they accused and ask him to act as their priest! This may also have been a trial for Job, as he needed to pray for mercy for those who had condemned him. Job seems to have no trouble praying for them simply because he had just been humbled by God himself. His own sins have bent him down to dust and ashes, how then is he not able to forgive those who have trespassed against him?

Thirdly, God calls Job *my servant*. God had won, Satan was humiliated! Satan's boast was shown for what it was, an evil, wicked lie that sought to extol Satan and disgrace God. But such is God that His glory will always remain and in fact, increase. How many people have not bowed their head after they have read the book of Job and simply uttered, *Thank you God for who you are to me. Thank you for your protecting, sovereign goodness. I humbly praise and worship you on bended knee.* Satan has been shamed throughout all of history because of the faithfulness of Job **and** the revelation of God's compassion and mercy (James 5.11).

Finally, we notice a typology of Jesus Christ in Job. Job is God's suffering servant, who offers prayers on behalf of his accusers. Job represented his three friends in a priestly fashion and in turn, they are reconciled to God. In the book of Isaiah, we read of a servant who suffered and interceded on behalf of those with whom God was angry. Through God's dealing with the three friends, we are given a glimpse of the Saviour to come.

The second half of chapter 42 tells us of Job's public vindication. The book ends, as it began with a blessed man who is enjoying material prosperity, his children and long life. However, things are also different. Job has been humbled by God and made more Christ-like. Above all, God has been magnified, on earth and in heaven, as Satan lost his wager and inadvertently glorified God through His servant Job.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, p. 5

<sup>37</sup> Piper, sermon on Job 42.7-17.

## Conclusion

We began by saying the Book of Job is about hope. I want to slightly correct what I wrote by adding to that: ***the Book of Job is about hope found in the majesty and sovereignty of God.*** If one reads through the entirety of Job, one simply, yet profoundly, stands amazed at God. When God is noticed, suffering, while not understood, is put in perspective. Who can sit in the ashes of suffering and tell God he has made a mistake? God is working in the life of the one who cries to him through incoherent suffering and tells Him simply, *I am God and I am in control of what is happening. Rest in my promises and me. I am God your Maker who gives you songs in the night.* This hope is what the world knows nothing of today; sadly, it is a lesson that many in the church need to learn as well, myself included.

*... what distance there is between God and us! Then let us learn, therefore, to conceive what the majesty of God is; and thereupon let us be no more so foolish as to wish to attempt anything either against His word or against His judgements. Let us bow our heads, and let God say what pleases Him, and when we have heard His word, let Him also do what He thinks good, and let us adore Him in all His works; especially when we enter into consideration of our feebleness and frailty ...*<sup>38</sup>

*All was soon to be darkness, dismay, and doubt in the mind of Job; but to him who sees the end from the beginning all was clear and full of meaning. The machinations of the devil will only serve to bring out the fidelity and patience of his chosen servant, who will live to see the “end of the Lord”, that he is very pitiful and of tender of mercy. Let us lift up our thoughts, in every season of personal or national depression, in every time of discouragement, when wickedness abounds, when the devils seem to be advancing his kingdom and the light of faith is waning, to that eternal unquenchable light of the wisdom that cannot err, the will that evil will never defeat.*<sup>39</sup>

***We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.*** 1 John 5.18

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<sup>38</sup> Calvin, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Author uncertain. Taken from *The Pulpit Commentary: Job*, p. 23.