

# Where is God when it hurts?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, suffering is a reality in our world and we have all had to deal with suffering at some stage in our lives, whether that be our own painful suffering, and I know many of you have, or whether that be the suffering of those whom we love.

But when you suffer, what do you do when you feel you just can't take it anymore or you just can't go on any longer?

Well, that is exactly how Job felt as we read these desperate words of his in chapter 3. You'll notice straight away Job wished that he was dead.

And this really is Job's darkest hour. And what he does is he bears his soul, speaking the most disturbing words of the entire book of Job. And they are shocking.

You would have heard that as we read them together. Job is in a bad place because his suffering is so great. He is going through deep and dark despair and he can't take it anymore.

[ 1 : 05 ] And so the question that Job chapter 3 forces us to ask is this. Where is God when it hurts? Because the reality is that true believers in Jesus Christ do go through times of suffering and of deep and dark despair.

That is the reality. And so let's look this afternoon to see how Job 3 helps us in our suffering. I'm going to do that looking at four points together.

First of all, what Job did? Lament. Second, what Job felt? Despair. Third, who Job knew? God. And then fourthly, by way of application, why Job 3 matters.

So first of all, let's look together. What Job did? Lament. Now if you were here last week, chapters 1 and 2, we saw Job, the true believer, battered and bruised by suffering.

He didn't know why he was suffering. But as the reader, we do know why Job was suffering.

Because in chapters 1 and 2, we get a glimpse behind the scenes of what is the heavenly court.

[ 2 : 15 ] And we get to listen to the discussions between God and Satan. And we hear their decisions. God's decision, in fact, about why Job would suffer.

So God gave Satan permission to allow Job to suffer. We saw that last time. And Job was devastated by a series of tragic events in which he lost his family, his wealth, and his health.

And yet at the end of chapter 2, Job shows this remarkable faith and trust in God. Remember what he said? Look back, chapter 1, verse 21. Then again, chapter 2, verse 10.

He says to his wife, And then at the end of chapter 2, we left Job sitting. He's sitting with his three mates.

And he is devastated. And Job and his friends, they sit in silence for seven whole days. The tragedy and the trauma of Job's suffering left them speechless.

[ 3 : 32 ] And it's Job who breaks the silence by speaking here in chapter 3. And so we've seen Job suffer by losing everything around him.

And we have seen Job suffer physically by what happened to him. And now in chapter 3, we hear the anguish of the suffering within him.

Job opens his mouth and he curses and he laments and he questions. And so we move from the prose part of Job at the beginning to the poetry section.

And Job gives voice to his suffering. He expresses how he is feeling on the inside. And this powerful poetry is intense.

And it captures his pain. It expresses emotion in a much deeper way that prose ever could.

Because the imagery Job uses expresses the despair that he feels.

[ 4 : 31 ] And that's why we continue to read some of the great poets, the war poets like Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon. Because in poetry, they're able to capture the brutal reality of war, the sheer futility of war in poetic form.

And so Job responds to his extreme suffering by lamenting in what is a really sobering poem. Because Job cursed the day of his birth.

Get that? Job thinks it would be better to be dead than to be alive. And he starts asking the question, why? It's there in verse 11.

Why? Did he not perish at birth? It's there in verse 12. Why were there needs to receive me? Then again in verse 20, he's saying, Why is light given to those in misery?

Why? Why? Why? Now maybe when you have suffered, you have felt the very same. Maybe you haven't really suffered. And in the future, you will be asking, why?

[ 5 : 37 ] And so we may be wondering, as we look at Job's words here, Is it right to speak in this way? As a true believer, which Job is, should he be speaking like this?

And yet before we criticize Job's surprising, even shocking speech, It's worth hearing God's verdict on Job's speech.

Because listen to what God says at the end of the book. In chapter 42, verse 7, we read this. After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz, the Temanite, that's one of his friends.

The Lord said, I am angry with you and your two friends, Because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has. Chapter 42, verse 7. So what God does is he condemns the friends of Job for talking rubbish, But he commends Job for speaking the truth.

Now, Job did have to repent at the end for speaking wrongly about God. But Job speaks as a true believer. We saw that last week.

[ 6 : 42 ] It's clear. And so we should remember God's overall verdict on all of Job's speech As we listen to the rest of the book, and no less here.

And so we don't want to soften Job's words, But we should know that Job doesn't curse God here. His lament is genuine.

And his questions are seeking understanding in his suffering. But his words are startling. So if you glance down at chapter 3, you'll see Job speaks about darkness.

In verse 4, verse 5, verse 6, verse 9. About blackness, verse 5, verse 9. And about death, verse 11, 16, 21, and 22.

Which you'd tell all of us, if we haven't realized it yet, That it's not unusual for believers to go through dark and desperate times of suffering.

[ 7 : 39 ] The book of Job is telling us that very fact. So the experience and anguish and perplexity of suffering is intrinsic to the very nature of faith.

Even though this is not what we would ever want to experience, nobody wants suffering. Yet suffering is real. But what is unreal is a failure to acknowledge it.

Either by just simply putting on a brave face or pretending that we are fine when we aren't. How are you doing? Yeah, I'm fine, thanks. When we are anything but fine.

And I guess this is because we've been conditioned by the shallow nature of contemporary Christianity. With this insistence that we should always enjoy a good life.

And we should always be happy all of the time. Or even the shallow wrong teaching that would suggest that you deserve a good life.

[ 8 : 38 ] That God owes it to you to give you a good life. Where we are always happy. We are always healthy. And maybe we're always wealthy. But our worship experiences should always be joyful.

Joyful praise. But never tearful lament. And of course, there's nothing wrong with enjoying a good life, is there? There's nothing wrong with enjoying joyful praise.

We should thank the Lord for his blessings. We should sing of his goodness. But we live in this world. And if we open our eyes and look at the world, we'll see suffering.

And if we open our Bibles and read our Bibles, we'll know that we cannot expect a pass. That 100% of the time, we will never suffer.

There are times to lament. And so if all we've got is a triumphant, victorious, happy-clappy, name-it-and-claim-it kind of Christianity, it is going to be no help when we're hurting or when we're suffering or when it feels like God just isn't there.

[ 9 : 49 ] But that is how Job felt. And sometimes we will too. One of my former theology lecturers in Aberdeen, Carl Truman, who taught me church history, he wrote an excellent journal article a number of years ago.

It's got the best title of any journal article I've ever heard. And here it is. It's called, What Can Miserable Christians Sing? What Can Miserable Christians Sing?

There's no better title for a journal article. But Carl Truman's point is that we have basically neglected to sing the Psalms in our public worship.

And he says it's due to the fact that a high proportion of the Psalter is taken up with lamentation, with feeling sad, unhappy, tormented, and broken. And of course, these are not the emotions that our culture expects or thinks we should be feeling.

We want to be healthy, wealthy, and happy. And so Truman says, A diet of unremitting, jolly choruses and hymns inevitably creates an unrealistic horizon of expectation which sees the normative Christian life as one long triumphalist street party.

[11:02] A theologically incorrect and pastorally disastrous scenario in a world of broken individuals. And so he says in the Psalms, God has given the church a language which allows us to express even the deepest agonies of the human soul in the context of worship.

And he says the Psalms give the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax necessary to lay your heart before God in lamentation. And isn't that what Job does here?

He lays his heart before God in lamentation. And so our point of application before we move on is that we are going to be helped by doing this too, by lamenting.

By responding to suffering and lamentation is consistent with faith in God. It is not inconsistent. So being a believer doesn't mean you'll never suffer or ever be in despair.

You will. After all, we follow a suffering savior. And so like Job, it is natural to lament when suffering by giving honest expression to the deep and dark despair we feel.

[12:12] And so Job's lament here plays an important part in Job surviving his darkest hour. And so as we listen to him and understand the place of lament within the Bible, then we shouldn't neglect its important role in our suffering too.

Okay, that's our first point. What Job did? Lament. Secondly, what Job felt. We'll get into the text now. He felt despair. He had been plunged into the depths of despair.

Verse 3, he says, May the day of my birth perish and the night that said a boy is conceived. We should know Job is not cursing God here.

And nor is Job actually planning to take his own life to commit suicide. But his suffering is so great that he is wishing he had never been born. Verse 4, That day may it turn to darkness.

May God above not care about it. May no light shine on it. He's talking about the day of his birth.

And he's wishing it just disappeared into oblivion. Verse 5, May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more.

[13:18] May a cloud settle over it. May blackness overwhelm it. He wants darkness to swallow up that day. And so in verse 3 to 5, you'll notice that he curses the day of his birth.

But then in verses 6 to 10, he also curses the night of his conception. Verse 6, So he doesn't even want that night to be in the calendar.

He wants it erased. He doesn't want any cry of joy as his parents make love and conceive him.

Verse 8, May those who curse days curse that day, the day of his birth.

Those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. So who's Leviathan? You might wonder. Leviathan is and was a sea monster in ancient literature.

And remember, this is poetry. And so Leviathan is meant to be symbolic of darkness and evil. The personification of darkness and evil, if you like.

[14:29] And he symbolizes the enemy of God and of God's purposes. And in a sense, we've already met him in Satan. This evil in chapter 1 and chapter 2.

And then we also meet Leviathan again at the end of the book of Job in chapter 41. With another further vivid description of evil and of Satan himself.

But here, Job wants those who curse days, like magicians, to rouse Leviathan, this great sea monster, to curse the day of his birth.

He doesn't want that day to ever have been. And so verse 9, And so he's complaining here that his mother's womb didn't stay shut.

Again, it's a poetic way of saying he wishes he had never been conceived. Because you see, if he hadn't been conceived, then he would never see pain. He would never have to endure pain and suffering.

[ 15 : 39 ] And that's the depth of Job's despair. But he takes it to another level in verse 11 by asking the why questions. Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb?

He continues to plumb the depths of despair. He's already cursed the day of his birth. But obviously it happened because he's speaking. And so now he wishes he was stillborn.

That he had never even seen the light of day. These words are hard, aren't they? And obviously Job wasn't stillborn. And yet he continues to riff on this bleak birth theme.

Verse 12, Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? He's saying, Why was my mother there to welcome me into this world?

Why were her breasts filled with milk so that I could be fed? Couldn't she just have died in labor? And couldn't he just have starved to death because she couldn't feed him?

[ 16 : 47 ] It's dark. It's all despair. It's all death. Because the next image that Job uses in verse 13 to 19 is that of the grave. Just glance down.

He's thinking of this place in the Old Testament called Sheol, which is the Hebrew word for the place beyond the grave, the place of the dead. And Job sees this as his great resting place.

By thinking, If only he was dead, Well, then he'd be at peace rather than have to suffer in this life.

And he continues to question why in verse 20 to 26.

And we'll come to this final agonized questioning in a moment. But we need to feel the despair of Job because it's real. His suffering was so great that he questions whether it would be better never to have been born.

And so where is God in all of this? MCS Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia, wrote a great book on his wife's death.

[ 17 : 54 ] And it was his reflections on her death called A Grief Observed. And he expresses a similar feeling to Job. He says, After that, silence.

You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. And so Job curses. He laments.

But he doesn't curse God. Like C.S. Lewis, Job feels that God is silent. That the door is shut. But the reality is, God is there.

And that's why Job's lament is like he's standing at a closed door. And he's just waiting for that door to be opened. It is dark and silent on the outside. And Job continues to speak, seeking some kind of light, some kind of revelation on his suffering.

But even in his darkness and in his despair, Job not only knows something, Job, more importantly and more significantly, knows someone.

[ 19 : 15 ] Because he's conscious that he must deal with God. And that takes us to our third point. What Job did? Lament. What Job felt? Despair. Who Job knew?

He knew God. He knew God. Job was a true believer. And we see this at the end of his lament in verse 20 to 26. So Job hadn't forgotten God.

If he had forgotten God, if God wasn't there, what would be the point of Job even asking why? So look at verse 20. Why is light given to those in misery and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?

So he's asking, where does light come from? Who gives light to those in misery? Well, God does, of course. And who gives life, he's asking, to the bitter soul?

God does. Light comes from God. Life comes from God. They're gifts from God. They've been given by God. And now we're not trying to sugarcoat Job's words here.

[ 20 : 31 ] He does question God, but he can only question God because he recognizes that it's God that he has to deal with. It's impossible for Job to forget about God it's impossible for Job to forget about God's ways and how God may choose to work.

He's conscious of all of this. So verse 23. Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? Again, who gives a man life and light?

God does. And who hedges a person in? Again, God does. And so Job is saying, God has hedged me in. Interesting, this word here, hedged, echoes the words of Satan in chapter 1, verse 10.

Satan complained to God that God had put this hedge around Job and was protecting him. So there's that idea of a protective hedge. But now Job experiences a different kind of hedge, not one that keeps suffering out, but one that locks Job in, where he feels so hedged in by suffering that he just can't escape.

And Job's in no doubt that God has done this. God hedges people in. And so Job knows that God is sovereign even when and even if life is hard.

[ 21 : 59 ] So God hasn't changed in Job's mind even if Job's feelings about God have. And there's this tension between fact and feeling that perplexes Job.

And that's why Job's lament basically begins this journey of wrestling with the problem of suffering, which is so helpful for us and for our world. Because Job is aware of God's activity, he's even aware of God's presence when God seems absent.

Job just can't avoid God. He hasn't cursed God like his wife suggests. Instead, it seems like he is clinging to God and he's asking why, because he knows that God hears his questions.

And of course, he's got a desperate faith. Things are bleak and dark, but he still has got faith. And that's why Job says, verse 25, what I feared has come upon me.

What I dreaded has happened to me. He's acknowledging that suffering wasn't beyond the realms of possibility for somebody like him. So he's clearly given this issue of suffering some reflection in his life if he feared it could happen to him.

[ 23 : 23 ] Yeah, one day he realized, I could suffer too. And of course, he doesn't want it. Nobody does want suffering. But Job knew he wasn't exempt from suffering.

And that's why, as we read Job's lament, I don't think we should read Job's lament primarily as hopeless despair. Despair, obviously, is there. But there's a glimmer of hope.

Because even though it will take time for that glimmer to turn into a ray of light, there is hope here. Because Job knew God well enough to know how God works, even if he doesn't like how God is working.

And that's so important for us to grasp. Because the better we know God, and the better we understand how God works, and nothing is impossible for God in terms of his work.

God can do whatever he chooses to do in order to do his work. The better we know God and how he works, then the better prepared we will be for suffering, right?

[ 24 : 27 ] And so there's what Job did, lament. There's what Job felt, despair. There's who Job knew, God. And then fourthly, finally, why Job 3 matters.

Three points of application here. Learn, trust, and walk. Learn to lament, trust in God, walk by faith. So firstly, learn to lament. Speak honestly to God about how you feel.

It's not as if the almighty God, the all-knowing, sovereign God, doesn't know what's on your heart. Of course he does. Job didn't need to pretend.

Job didn't need to offer these pious platitudes as he voiced and as he articulated how he was feeling to God. Job's words are raw and real in response to his painful suffering.

And whether Job was speaking to God or not, God heard what Job was saying. He heard the cries of his heart.

[ 25 : 35 ] And God loved Job. Twice we saw last week, God called Job, my servant Job. And so never think that you can't cry out to God in your pain.

It is actually the best thing that you can do. Learn to lament. And I reckon the more familiar we are with Job and the book of Job and also the book of Psalms, the more instinctive lamenting or lamentation will be for us.

Because lament is just as much an expression of genuine faith as praise is. And so it's got a part to play in our suffering. But it's also got a part to play when we seek to help others who are suffering as well.

How can we weep with those who weep if we have not learned to lament? To learn to lament, second, trust in God. Despite Job's cursing, lamenting, questioning, he hadn't forgotten about God. He knew God was sovereign over all things, even if he felt like God had abandoned him. Him. And so when we suffer, we've got to cling to what we know about God.

[ 26 : 47 ] Remember God's character. Remember God's ways. And rely on facts, not feelings. Don't rely on your feelings.

They're not always the reality of the situation. Trust in the facts about who God is. And then thirdly, walk by faith. Now, nobody's pretending that life isn't difficult or that suffering isn't painful.

It is. But like Job, we will go through tough times and we will be really confused about what is going on. And so trusting in God in a world of suffering means that we will need to walk by faith and not by sight.

In all of life, of course, but especially when we suffer. Because ultimately, the best is yet to come. That's what the Bible teaches us.

For God's people, the time is coming when suffering will be no more. And God will end it once and for all. And you might think, well, that's a bit of a cop-out, isn't it?

[ 27 : 55 ] Dismissing suffering in this life by saying, well, there's just pie in the sky when you die in the future. And yet the reality is that only Christianity can offer hope in suffering.

Atheism can't offer hope in suffering. Other religions can't offer hope in suffering. Only the Christian faith can. Why? Because it tells us God is there.

God knows. God even uses suffering in his purposes. And God promises that it will end forever one day. And so God alone helps you and me make sense of suffering.

But how do we know? Well, because Job's suffering in darkness actually anticipates a greater suffering in a deeper darkness.

And it took place at the cross where Jesus died. Job is suffering. But he's pointing us to the true man of suffering.

[ 28 : 59 ] Jesus is the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. Jesus is the ultimate innocent sufferer. And yet he died in deep darkness.

Remember when Jesus hung on the cross, darkness came over the land for three hours. And the darkness was a sign of God's anger at human sin and evil, which causes suffering.

And in this darkness, remember what Jesus cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And God's anger at sin and his judgment on it fell upon Jesus Christ.

And so while Job longed to die as a way of escaping suffering for himself, Jesus was willing to die as the way for us to escape the suffering of God's punishment for our sin.

And while Job wanted to escape life, Jesus willingly gave his life. He died. And he rose to life again so that he could open up the door of eternal life for us with no suffering forevermore.

[ 30 : 10 ] And that's why Paul could say in Romans chapter 8, consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. And so we do this, remembering Jesus, the one who plumbed the depths of darkness for us.

And he did it so that we need never be alone when we suffer. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.