

Job 22-24

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[0 : 00] Into Job 22-24. Job 22-24. Charlie Brown, the cartoon character, Charlie Brown's always losing a baseball, and he's losing!

all the time. And Lucy consoles him and she says, Charlie Brown, you have to look at it this way. You learn more from losing than winning. And Charlie Brown says, that makes me the smartest person in the world. And so as we look at what faith gains in suffering tonight, I don't want us to try and be flippant or casual, in saying that you always learn a lot from affliction.

When faith is in the pit. And maybe that's where you are tonight. And you wonder, can I gain anything? At least a good deal of the time. But Job 23-24, I think I want to say, do say to us that we gain in our suffering. And we have to pick that up in chapter 22 with Eliphaz. You know Job's friend. Eliphaz has begun at round three, the third round of speeches in the book. And Eliphaz is basically singing the same old song. You remember Job has lost his wealth, lost his family, lost his health. And as far as he can tell, he seems to have lost his God. And that's what galled him most. That those losses seem to indicate the loss of God's favour. And as if Job is saying, I could forego the loss of all that, but I have to know that God is for me. And Eliphaz starts in again, and you know his position if you've been there the last few weeks. One thing he raised is this question to Job 22 and verse 3. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right? Or is it gained him if you make your ways blameless? It's a really interesting question because we know precisely, don't we, from Job chapter 1 and Job chapter 2 that it was a great pleasure to God that Job was a righteous man, that Job was a blameless man. He was a wholehearted man. God himself says to the accuser, he says, have you considered my servant Job? There's no one like him on the earth. He's a wholehearted and upright and blameless man. So on and so forth. And it was a great pleasure to the Lord, but Eliphaz doesn't seem to know that. But he repeats his thesis, and again his main thrust is 22 verses 4 and 5. Is it for your fear of him that he reprieves you? And enters into judgment with you? Is not your evil abundant Job? There's no end to your iniquities. Same song, 18th verse. He's saying, you see, it's not because you fear, is it? You don't reverence the Lord, you don't trust the Lord, what he's doing to you. You don't think all this has happened to you because of your godliness, do you, Job?

That all this has come upon you? Oh no, it's for a completely other reason. Surely your iniquities, your wickedness is great. There's no end to your iniquities. And there's the assumption that Eliphaz and his friends make, Job, the reason why you're suffering is because of your sin. But you're not fessing up. You're hiding something. It's for your sin that you're suffering.

Of course, that still abounds today, doesn't it? That something has gone wrong in my life because I've sinned. And obviously the conclusion is that Job must have sinned grievously. So Eliphaz mounts this kind of great white throne and he takes the gloves off and he starts accusing Job. So verses 6 to 11, in no uncertain terms. And he gives Job a record of the sins he must have committed. He says, for you've exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing. Strip the naked of their clothing. You've given no water to the weewee to drink. You've withheld bread from the hungry.

[4 : 30] And verse 9, you've sent widows away empty. The arms of the fatherless were crushed and so on. And therefore, verse 10, therefore snares are all around you and sudden terror overwhelms you.

Darkness that you cannot see. You think Job, Eliphaz says, that God is exalted in the heavens and therefore he doesn't see what you're doing, Job. And you are going to catch it. You're going to get it now. And then when Eliphaz gets through to this 20, he changes his tune a little bit and he announces this invitation. And he says, agree with God, Job. Good will come.

Verse 21, agree with God and be at peace. And therefore good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth. Return to him and lay up his words in your heart. Here it is, verse 23, if

you return to the Almighty, you will be built up. If you remove injustice far from your tents. It's a very moving and eloquent invitation to Job. And he basically says to him, Job, for the eighth time, we're going to sing the last verse of Just As I Am. And when we do that, I want you, Job, to get up out of your ash heap and to make your way down to the aisle.

And I want you to join me in a prayer of repentance. And Eliphaz, in moving and beautiful and eloquent terms, gives an utterly irrelevant altar call to Job. He says, now is the time to repent, Job. [6 : 09] He does it beautifully. And if you are Job, what do you do? Well, in chapter 23, Job doesn't really respond to Anaphaz. Not really. His faith is still struggling. And Job goes off in search of God, the true comforter. And that's what helps us tonight. What does faith gain?

And what does Job's faith gain when he's in the pits? Well, first of all, we can see that faith gains assurance when it's suffering. Assurance. You see that in chapter 23. What Job wants, what his desire is, if you notice, is he wants an audience with God. In verses 3 and 4.

For that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat. I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know that he would answer me. And understand what he would say to me. I could put my case before him. Oh, that I could just sit down with the Lord and talk it over with him. He wants an audience with God. The problem is with that is you can desire that, but it doesn't necessarily bring it about. Just because you want it. And that was Job's problem in verses 8 and 9. It was the problem of the absence of God or, or better, the hiddenness of God. Verse 8. Behold, I go forward, but he's not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him. On the left hand, when he's working, I don't behold him. He turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. I can go to the east, I can go to the west, I can go to the north and the south, but I can't find him. God is hidden.

He doesn't give me that audience. And you say, but we are New Testament Christians. We're New Testament Christians. I'm not denying for a moment what the book of Hebrews teaches us. But the fact is that in our distress is we are, we frequently can come, can't we, to our Heavenly Father, and we can come seeking him, and we do pour out our distress and our problems to him. But that doesn't necessarily mean that we get to some instant point of clarity on those problems. I do think there's a certain kind of Christian thinking that's prevalent even in churches like ours, or sentiment that seems to assume that all you've got to do is take it to the Lord in prayer and dump it there. You dump it at his feet. That's a good thing to do. But it makes another assumption that if you do that, there's some way that God will immediately show you with real clarity what is going on. But that clarity doesn't necessarily come. Where do we get that idea from? Sometimes I think we get that idea from kind of misplaced or wrong Christian sentiments. We have this idea that if we come into intimate fellowship and communion with our Lord, we enjoy that, we enjoy that. But somehow he talks to us or he makes everything instantly clear. He clears his ways with us. But that isn't always so, is it?

There is a sense, isn't there, where many Christian believers in the depth of their distress could repeat word for word what Job says in verse 8 and 9? In fact, many of you could just repeat that, couldn't you?

[9 : 40] In dark times in your life. And there are times when God seems to hide himself. Or at least he doesn't seem to divulge his secrets and what he's doing. So, but another problem, not only the hiddenness of God, but also a certain fearfulness of God. You notice in verse 13 and following, but he is unchangeable.

A better translation would be, he is the unique one. And who can turn him what he desires he does? Verse 15, therefore, I'm terrified at his presence. What's Job saying? Job's saying, I want an audience with God. I have a desire to meet with God. I want to lay my case before God, but he hasn't granted me that quest. Or that privilege. And yet, at the same time, I am in dread of God. Because, you see, he's not someone that I have on a leash. I don't control him. He is the unique one. And God does what he pleases. And I don't manipulate God like my friends have a God that they can manipulate and control, but I don't have that kind of God. And there's a sense in which God causes me dread and so on.

And in the midst of seeking this audience with God and this clarity from God, which he does not get, because God seems to have hidden himself from him, there's this dread and fear of God that would come about in the midst of that in verse 10. In the midst of this verse 10, you have this remarkable verse.

[11:19] Job expresses that he knows the way that I take in the midst of this. There's that assurance. Just look a little closer at verse 10. It's literally, he knows the way with me.

He knows the way with me. Now, whose way? Without going into the technicalities of it. It's better to translate it by referring to God's way.

So that was better to translate the first line in verse 10. But he knows his way with me. What is Job saying?

Well, Job is saying something like this. That even though I can't put it together, what on earth God is doing, and even in God's hiddenness, and even in the dread of meeting with his God, he nevertheless has this confidence, he knows his way with me.

And even if he never tells me the reason, if he never makes it clear, what he's trying to do, I can be content. I can be content that he knows his way with me, and it is wise.

[12:42] Well, that's not just the kind of trial that Job was going through that can distress Christians. We know, don't we, the Apostle Peter tells us that there are multicolored, multifaceted trials, and it can take many different forms.

Charles Hopkins, the Virgin, was a great 19th century preacher in London. And when he was a teenager, a young teenager, just after he'd come to Christ, he was about 13, 14, and he said on one occasion, I'd been raised in a godly home, I'd never been raised in a home that was blasphemy and bad language, or anything like that.

He says that 13, 14, there would come into my mind the most evil, blasphemous thoughts of such a nature that I'd clap my hand over my mouth to stop me saying them.

Let me speak what had been suggested to him. And a distress Virgin greatly, as this kind of thing attacked him again and again and again. And at last he went to his grandfather.

His grandfather was a minister. His Virgin loved his grandfather, and he told his grandfather what he was struggling with. And then his grandfather, he said to his grandfather, I'm sure I'm not a child of God, for if I were a child of God, I would never have thought sightness.

[14:06] And his grandfather said to him, nonsense, Charles. It is precisely because you are a Christian that you're being tempted in this way. Those thoughts are not your thoughts, they are not your children.

They are the devil's brats that he delights at the Christian's door. And so on. In his autobiography, and later on in his maturity, Spirits reflected on this kind of situation.

And he said this. He said, I believe that it is a shallow experience that makes people always confident. He's talking of Christians.

That makes people always confident of what they are and where they are. Because there are times of terrible trouble that make even the most confident child of God hardly know whether he is on his head or on his heels.

Do you hear that? There are times in the Christian life of terrible trouble that make even the most confident child of God hardly know whether he is on his head or on his heels.

[15:10] And some of you know what he's talking about, don't you? Faith can be in the pits. And even in the pits, though so often God gives you this same assurance of Job, even when the pit is mucky and you've got no foot-putting, he makes his people able to have that.

That basic grounded conviction that nevertheless he knows his way with me. And sometimes faith gains assurance in the pits.

It's as if the everlasting arms of God have such a long reach that they reach down and stretch down, even supporting the pit itself.

And so the Jesus disciple, in the midst of it, can say he knows his way with me. Faith not only gains assurance, secondly, faith gains compassion in the pit. At least it frequently does.

That comes out in chapter 24, verses 1-7. And here Job is struggling with a problem. It's the problem of the seeming indifference of God to suffering and injustice and evil around him, verse 1.

[16:24] Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty? And why do those who know him never see his days? What does it mean?

It seems to mean something like this. Why doesn't God set certain judgment days on the calendar, along the way of history, where he blots out evil, and he vindicates the right?

Where he delivers people from their oppression and distresses, and where he punishes evil and wicked people. Why doesn't he do that? Why does he have certain days when he puts everything right? Why doesn't he intervene?

Things go on and on and on and on, and God, he seemed to be indifferent about it, and he seemed to do nothing at all about the situation. And then he gives a certain instance in verses 2-12.

It's a running picture of the injustices and the evil and the sins of society, of evil men who've got power. Look what he says in verse 3. They drive away the donkey of the fatherless.

[17:30] They take the widow's ox for a pledge. What does that mean? She's a widow. There's no social security. There's no government assistance.

She's in debt to a creditor. She doesn't have anything as a widow. No support. The only thing she had was an ox to provide for herself. It's the only means by which she can make a living. And the creditor takes the ox as collateral for a loan, leaving her desperate.

Totally desperate. And so Job goes on. Look at verse 6. They gather their fodder in the field, and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man.

And these workers, they lie all night naked without clothing, and they've got no covering in the cold. And they're wet with the rain of the mountains, and they cling to the rock for lack of shelter.

Look at verse 9. Look how cruel these people are. There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast. And they take it as collateral for a loan. He talks about those destitute.

[18:41] In verse 10. They go about naked without clothing, hungry. They carry the sheaves. Do you see that? How ironic, how tragic. They're hungry, and yet they work for this farmer, and they carry the sheaves of grain.

They carry food, but they can't eat it. And then in verse 11. They tread the wine press. But they suffer thirst.

And the guy they work for, he gets the wine, and he drinks it, and then he sells it for profit. But they can't even drink of it. And it all comes down to the end, verse 12.

He says, God charges no one with wrong. God pays no attention, literally. God pays no attention to wrongdoing. And this all takes place.

And God, what are you doing? You don't seem to care, says Trump. And then Job goes on in verses 13 to 17. And he says, there is the people who do things at night.

[19:44] They murder. They commit adultery. They break up families. The thief. And they do their thing at night under the cover of darkness. And God, you don't seem to restrain them. And so there's this long, vivid picture of wrong and injustice.

Of sin. Of powerful people who crush others. And it's as if he's saying to Eliphaz. Now, look at this kind of data. Look at the data, Eliphaz. You realise that those poor people, who don't have sufficient clothing and shelter.

Are you going to say that they are in a condition because of their sin? I tell you, that is not so, Eliphaz. Why are they in that condition? It is because there are wicked men who have power and who crush them.

And it comes about because of the actions of sinful men and evil men who have got the power to do what they want. How come God brings no attention to that and so on? Now you might say, what does faith gain in this?

And as you look over that description that God gives in verses 2 to 12 of 24. I think it may be that there's more than just an argument with his friends going on here.

[20:57] If you read those words carefully, I think you see a compassion in the way that they're described. Job's sympathies are aroused for their suffering of others.

It's not as though it's the only time. In chapter 31, Job will go into a long description indicating and saying how he constantly, as a matter of his whole life, had always sought to show compassion. He details it himself in chapter 31. So it's not something new. But it could be that as Job looks upon the suffering of others, and as he describes it in verse 12.

For out of the city the dying groan. And the soul of the wounded cries for help. It arouses his own mercies. His own compassions.

His own sympathies. As if he kind of suffers with them. And that can happen when faith is in the pits. Faith can gain compassion in the difficult place.

[22:02] Because then, to a greater degree than at other times, it understands as it's something of the despair and the darkness and the suffering of others when we experience it ourselves. Samrall Rutherford.

Lived in the early 1600s. Graham. He modernised all his letters on his book. He couldn't read them. Samrall Rutherford was a brilliant man.

A really intellectual giant. But he was a very sympathetic man. He was settled as a pastor in Anworth. A village in Scotland. And when he was there in about 1630, his wife died. Several years later, his mother who was living with him died. Two children died in that month of Samrall Rutherford in Anworth.

Ten years after his first wife died, Samrall Rutherford married again. In that second marriage, Samrall Rutherford had five children.

[23 : 06] And four of them died. When Samrall Rutherford died, there was only one child of those five to remain with the mother and widow in her last days.

Samrall Rutherford preached a sermon where he told his congregation this. He said, I know that there is a true sorrow that is without tears. And I know that there is a real sorrow that is beyond tears.

And when he said that in one of his sermons, when he preached that, I guess that the people who were listening realised that he knew what he was talking about. That somehow what Samrall Rutherford had gone through had given him a kinship and a oneness of what sorrow was like. That he was known as one who could ably comfort others because he had gained that compassion in the pit. And I think that's what the Apostle Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians chapter 1.

2 Corinthians chapter 1, you know it, he's praising God. And he speaks of this, he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

[24 : 24] Who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction. With the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The language is a little cumbersome, but the logic is clear. Paul seems to be saying that even in our afflictions, the Lord is preparing comforters. He is making comforters of us so that we can, with that same comfort that we've received, comfort other believers who are in the same affliction, any affliction.

Faith gains compassion. Thirdly, I want us to see that faith can gain understanding in the pit. Faith can gain understanding.

Chapter 24 and verses 18 to 25. This is quite a difficult passage. And I'm going to use the NIV, I think, which is better here than the ESV is.

And here what Job is saying, I mean verses 18 to 19, he's referring to the wicked, and he's basically saying they are foam on the surface of the water.

[25 : 40] That's basically it. They are foam on the surface of the water. And that their portion of the land is cursed. And as heated rods snatched away the melted snow, and the heat snatched away the melted snow, so the grave snatches away those who've sinned.

Sin is our judge. And then he says, doesn't he, in verse 22, he says, if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.

But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. Verse 22. That's wrong. Sorry, I printed out the wrong passage. Let me look at chapter 24, verse 22.

Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power. They rise up when they despaired of life. He gives them security, and they are supported, and his eyes are upon their ways.

They are exalted a little while, and then are gone. They are brought low and gathered up like all others. They are cut off like the heads of grain. Now, there's a problem with what scholars and with what commentators wrestle with.

[27 : 12] They look at this passage at the end of chapter 24, particularly verse 18, and they say, this can't be right. And so, do you hear Job's words at the end of verses 24?

Those words sound like Aliphaz. They sound like Bildad. They sound like Zophar. Verses 18 to 25 sound like something that Job's friends would say.

They can't be Job's words. He's capitulating. As Job caved in, is Job saying in verses 18 to 25, you fellows were right all along?

And you'll see that the ESV in verse 18 puts in inverted commas, can you say, you say? But that's not there. They want to make it clear, the ESV, that Job is quoting his friends.

And so, the translators have said, well, this is, this is what you fellows are saying. This is what you guys say. And then he quotes it from verses 18 to 25.

[28 : 20] And that is possible. Sometimes, the Hebrew didn't have kind of kind of speech marks. And so, it is possible that you could quote someone without English folks realizing he's doing that.

But I don't think there's real indication that he is doing that. So, what are we to make of this? I think we should take it straight. What's that mean? I think Job is saying something like this.

In verses 18 to 25, there's an element of truth in what you three friends are saying. It is true that the wicked, are exalted for a little while and then they're gone.

It's true that the grave does snatch away those who've sinned. It's true that the unrighteous and the wicked do get their comeuppance. He is saying there's an element of truth in that.

But that's not the whole story. You see, Job, especially in chapter 21, has tried to get his friends to look at the whole data. So, look at the whole amount of evidence that you have in society and life.

[29 : 30] And if you look at all the evidence, you come away perplexed. There is this society saying, there is a sense in which those who do wickedly and those who are unrighteous, they're frequently punished.

But it's also true that some of the wicked and some of the righteous so on are not punished. That's what he said in chapter 21. He said, remember their investments.

Do you remember the wicked's investments? They always pay off. Had a profit. They go to parties. They always have fun. They don't get smashed up in car crashes with a drunk driver. They don't lose members of their family. They don't get cancer and so on.

They always get what we think they ought to get and so on. So Job is basically saying you have to look at all the data.

And he's coming away with a balanced view. Job never really said that God is hostile always to the righteous and he's in cahoots with the wicked.

[30 : 33] He's not saying that. But Job does seem to be saying something like this that it is true that the righteous do prosper but the unrighteous prosper as well.

Disaster does hit the wicked but disaster hits the godly too. And so when he seems to be agreeing with his friends in chapter 24 verses 18 to 25 he's really putting the balancing act in there.

He's essentially saying that God's truth is complex. God plexes me. And if I look at all the data I can't boil it down into one simple formula.

He's come to that understanding. And faith sometimes gains understanding in the pits and that might not help very much. You see Job is not coming away with a neat faith and everything ticked off.

The only thing that you can say is that he seems to be coming away with a true faith that's based on what's right and what's actually there. Rather than a simplistic way of looking at things like his friends were.

[31 : 39] They didn't take into account all the details. He's not saying to his friends that life is simple.

He's saying it's far more complex. And if you look at everything Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz you will be baffled by God's ways.

And he's saying I've come to the place where I have to say God's ways perplex me. But that is a fuller understanding of God than what you three have. Now I'm paraphrasing Job but it seems to me that is where he's coming from.

Does that ever help? I think it does. In a limited extent. Just because you understand something better doesn't mean it's going to bring you relief.

But it may help cut away a few of your problems. let's say you borrow my car and let's say my car has got a problem that you know when you don't you know the alarm that goes off with the seatbelt.

[32 : 44] You know when you don't put the seatbelt on the beep beep beep if I say to you listen you can put the seatbelt on but the alarm is just going to keep going just be aware of that. You take the car wherever you're going.

And you get in you turn the ignition on the beep starts going you put the you buckle the seatbelt in but the beep keeps going. It keeps going until you turn the car off where you've arrived.

It keeps going whether you've got your seatbelt buckled up or not. The alarm keeps going. Well if you know that ahead of time when you get in the car how does that understanding help you? Well does it help you?

In one sense it doesn't. It doesn't take the annoying alarm away does it? But you can at least feel yourself. You know that you've got to endure this annoying alarm and you also wonderfully know that when it happens it's not your fault.

You've not done something wrong. It's not something you did. It's a degree of understanding. Now of course that understanding doesn't solve the whole problem but it does add value. And I think the book of Job is trying to give Christian people a balanced view.

[33 : 58] To be able to say I am perplexed by God's weight. And to know that that is actually a true position of faith than oversimplifying and trying to put God in a box and pretending that you completely understand him.

Frequently frequently you will say if you have true faith I do not understand what God is doing. And though I look at it from all the angles he baffles me.

And you have maybe more faith than somebody who seems to be so confident that they know what God is doing. Because you see the Bible tries to help us to keep that together.

I think the book of Psalms really helped us on this. Psalm 1 we sang it do you remember Psalm 1? It's like the Apostles Creed that talks about the righteous and the wicked. That righteous prosper in everything they do.

The wicked perish. It's the I believe six short verses and then you go to Psalm 73 we sang that two weeks ago. And when you go through Psalm 73 it seems to be saying Psalm 1 is not always cracked up to be.

[35 : 07] And then you get to Psalm 73 and you get to exactly the same conclusion as Psalm 1. But the difference is Psalm 73 doesn't state it in short crisp sentences like Psalm 1 does.

It takes you 28 verses to lay down the struggle and what it costs. But Psalm 73 finally comes to the point where he saw that Psalm 1 was true after all.

And faith in the Bible can say I believe and this is what I hold to. But oh what it's cost me to come to believe that. It's like the book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs a great bulk of the book of Proverbs is here is the way of the righteous here is godly living live like this way and you will prosper. That's a broad simplification of the book of Proverbs.

The book of Job and the book of Ecclesiastes come along and they seem to say we've lived that way and we're not prospering. And I know that's an oversimplification but I oversimplify it in order to point out that balance is right at the heart of the Bible.

[36 : 20] That it says in Proverbs this is the way to live and prosper but there are exceptions.

Proverbs basically says here are god's normal usual ways of working live this way and enjoy his blessings and yet at the same time god gives us Job and Ecclesiastes to say there are ways that God uses that we don't understand.

Ways that will baffle you, ways that will mystify you and you need to be prepared for that. And you keep them together. And faith gains that understanding even in the pits.

And sometimes says I don't understand what my Lord is doing. But we're not always in the pits. Are we in that place in Psalm 40 where the psalmist writes he lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the miry bog and set my feet upon a rock and put a new song in my mouth.

Maybe you're not there yet. Maybe you're still in the pits. Let's pray.