

Job 3-13

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[0 : 00] So, Job chapter 3 to 14. I need you to have a Bible open in front of you and it will keep you awake to turn to the various passages.

And one of the best things about family life, as families get older, when they meet up together and everyone is in one place, what happens?

And they begin to talk about what life used to be like. And they talk about what life was like at home and in school and in years gone by and in the war.

And all sorts of things happen. And you, as the younger member of the family, you learn a lot, don't you? You learn a lot by eavesdropping. You learn a lot by listening in on the conversation of others. And actually that, in some ways, is what happens in the book of Job.

We learn an awful lot by eavesdropping. We learn an awful lot by listening in on this conversation and this dialogue between Job and his three friends.

[1 : 04] And you hear quite a debate. You might say, I just can't understand how Job here in chapter 3 that Leslie read for us is the same Job that I read in chapter 1 and 2.

Do you remember that? The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. And when here he is saying, why, why, why was I born? Why should I be sustained? Why is life given to me? And so on.

And surely this Job who explodes in his distress, he cannot be the same faithful, blameless, upright Job. But yes, he can. Because what is the Lord's opinion?

When we look at all these dialogues and these conversations in the book of Job, you need to keep one verse particularly in mind. It's chapter 42 and verse 7.

Where the Lord says to one of Job's friends, You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. That is a real controlling verse. It's a key to the book of Job, chapter 42, verse 7.

[2 : 22] Yahweh, the Lord, said that Job spoke what was right about God. And you must always allow that to control the conversations in Job.

And so whatever you make of this, however we put it together, The Lord seems to be saying that Job is still the same faithful Job. He's pressed, he's under pressure, he's stressed, he is perplexed, he's at the end of his tether, But still, he is God's faithful servant even in his anguish.

And so we must keep that in mind. Now as we look at this conversation, I think it can teach us a couple of things. First of all, I want us to see how to afflict those who mourn.

That's what we're going to see. How to afflict those who mourn. And secondly, I want us to see how to benefit from miserable comfort. How to afflict those who mourn.

So we look at these chapters, we'll switch and back and forth. I want to try and take you through them to try and digest, coherently I hope, How to afflict those who mourn. And so you've got here the first round of discussions between Job and his suffering.

[3 : 34] So remember last week he's a man bereaved. He is a man humiliated. He's a man in pain. He's a man who is in his festering and in his nerves, they're on fire.

And please remember here is a man who's not so much bemoaning his losses as his loss. Because it seems what Job's experience is the hand of God seems to have gone out against him.

And he seems to have lost even the friendship of God. And so it seemed to him. And thought of the thinking of his gain. So we see this man and then we see his counsellors and his friends, They come to console him and speak with him.

Let's look. Let's see how they comfort him. And don't comfort him. And afflict him. Let's look at that basic contention. First of all, let's look at chapter 4. And you see there's a speech of Eliphaz.

And in chapter 4 you'll see the basic contention of Job's friends all the way through. So take Eliphaz's words in chapter 4 and verses 7-8. Remember, he says, Who that was innocent ever

perished?

[4 : 44] Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. That's basically their main contention.

You look again and again at what these friends are saying, that is the base from which they're coming. Who was innocent and then perished? Who was upright and then was cut off?

I mean, if you're upright, you will not experience the sort of trouble that you've gone through, Job.

Job, that is what they say. Who ploughs iniquity and sows trouble?

Well, what do you reap? You're just reaping what you've sown, Job. That's the reason you're suffering as you are. There's some sin. There's something that you're trying to cover up.

And that was just Job's problem, wasn't it? He was not conscious of any particular sin. Any particular sin that had brought on the chastening from God.

[5 : 44] It wasn't. That he says, we looked at last week. It wasn't that Job was claiming not to be a sinner. He knew he was a sinner.

He claimed to be a sinner. He confessed that he was a sinner. But what he's saying is that there was no particular sin that he'd done or he was covering up, that he was conscious of, that had brought all of this upon him.

He's baffled by it. And his friends are saying, no, no, no, Job. That is just not the way it works. Job is saying, you reap what you sow. You plough iniquity. You sow sorrow and you reap the sin.

So look at chapter 5 and verse 6. For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. You don't think, Job, that there's no just cause for this.

They say it in a kind of boring monitor. That is the score that is played throughout the book by his friends. That is their malady. They say there's no mystery in suffering.

[6 : 46] And the suffering of believers. There's no complexity. It's just all very, very simple. Do you see what they're basically saying? You've done something, Job, that has brought this on.

The thing that you should be saying, Job, is not why was I born, but what have I done? And once you acknowledge that in Job, then we can sing the invitation here.

And you can come and you can rededicate and you can repent and so on. And it will be much better. But that is their problem. That's their main conjecture. Now let's look at the various approaches they go through as they afflict this mourner.

Let's take Aliphaz in chapters 4 and 5. The basic approach of Aliphaz was a claim to personal revelation, if I can put it like that.

What do I mean by that? So here in chapters 4 and 5, I'm not so much concerned with what Aliphaz said, we've already noted that, but with the manner in which he came to his conclusion. The basis, that is, of what he said.

[7 : 49] And in chapter 4 and verse 12 and following, Aliphaz tells Job how it was that he came to have this insight. He said he literally had a kind of hair-rising experience.

He had a dream. He had a vision from the Lord. And he said it happened in the night, you know. And when deep sleep falls upon men, dread came upon me.

And a spirit slid past my face. Verse 15. The hair of my flesh stood up. When he heard something, speak to him.

These are the words of verse 17. Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure more than his maker?

I don't know why that's such an outstanding conclusion or revelation to be communicated. In fact, Job hadn't claimed, did he? He hadn't claimed to be more pure than God.

[8 : 52] All that he said was that he wished he had died. And why was he in such misery and so on. But Aliphaz is saying to Job that I actually, Job, have a special word from the Lord.

And that is the basis of the insight that I give to you. And I would say to you, you need to be very, very careful about people like that. And there are lots of people like that today. Who will say, the Lord has said to me.

Oh, he did, did he? How do you know? When my brother went to the church that he's in. He went to the church he's in a year before I came here.

And it's quite a renowned church. And there were lots of people that would come to him and say, the Lord said to me. And my brother would always say to them, which Lord? To which they would get very, very offended.

Or people would say this, and the Lord has impressed me with such and such a truth. That's applicable to your situation. Now it may well be. But I want to say, how do you know that that's the impression?

[9 : 55] How do you know that that impression is not just an impression? How do you know that it was the Lord that's impressed it upon you? I think we need to be very, very careful with these claims. Some people will say, I prayed a lot about this and this is what I think.

It doesn't mean what you think is right. Because you prayed a lot about it. I'm not saying don't pray. I'm not saying don't be impressed by apparently spiritual truth. But I am saying you need to be very careful that it's the Lord's wisdom.

We can be in error, can't we? I did have a man recently who was saying that the Lord was telling him to go and visit someone else in their church. Because he was concerned about the man's spiritual state and condition.

And he felt the Lord telling him to go over to this place and talk about it with this man on this specific day. So this fellow goes over to the man's place. The man's wife comes to the door and she says, my husband is out.

The fellow says, the Holy Spirit told me to come over here and speak to your husband. And the absentee's wife responded, if the Holy Spirit had told you to come over here and speak to my husband, the Holy Spirit would have made sure that my husband was at home.

[11 : 06] How are you going to watch these people? There's loads of them. Who've claimed of a special word from God. You have to trust them by the Bible. You need to be careful of those things because they can be wrong in their impressions.

And that can really afflict those who mourn. Next we have Bildad the Shuhite. Smallest man in the Bible.

Boom, boom. Chapter 8. He's Job's second friend, his lead. And I think we'd say that Bildad speaks with the voice of ancient tradition.

He wants to go back to what was said in the passage. Chapter 8 in verses 2 to 4. And that's Bildad's position, basically. And notice what he says to Job. He says, how long will you say these things? And the words of your mouth be a great wind.

It's a great line, isn't it? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hands of their transgression.

[12 : 08] It's pretty clear. Do you think God is unjustured? Do you think he twists what is right? If your kids got killed when their house fell upon them, well, they just had what was coming to them.

That's literally what they're saying. Bildad is very, very comforting, isn't he? And so on what basis does Bildad take this same position? Chapter 8 in verses 8 to 10.

For inquire, please, of bygone ages. And consider what the fathers have searched out. For we are but of yesterday and know nothing. For our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you utter words out of their understanding?

He's saying, Job, here we are. We're just plonked down on this earth. And for a little bit, for just this instant practically, this point in history, what do we know?

What wisdom can we have? If we don't have a historical perspective. If we don't know what wise teachers have said in the past. If we don't see the errors of history, well, we're doomed to repeat them.

[13 : 10] Etc. We need to look, don't we, at the old teachers, at the wisdom, at the tradition that's been passed on. There's nothing about God's ways that wasn't written in the last century theology books.

That's what we're pressing upon you. The collected wisdom of the ages. That's our tradition. So we know it must be right. Because we've always believed it.

It's the voice of the ancient tradition. That's Bill Dan's point of view. It's the way it's always been. It's a tradition. It goes on the way it is. And we know, don't we, that we can get caught with that in the church in a number of ways.

Because if something's been the custom of our congregation, or the custom of our little denomination, or the custom of our particular tradition, well, therefore, it must be right. And you may even think the Bible teaches that, without going back to examine whether the Bible actually does authorise it.

And there is a way, isn't there, that a Christian and a congregation can get caught in the clutches of tradition. And I think that is when we cease reading the Bible.

[14 : 22] There's a certain freshness, isn't there, about the Bible. It is old, and the Bible doesn't budge, but there's a certain freshness.

And it helps to correct our traditions, and our customs. And there's a tradition that we must be aware of in the suffering of God's people as well. How often have you heard it said, like this, somebody will say, I know we're not supposed to ask why, have you heard that?

I know we're not supposed to ask why. Did you learn that from the Bible? Did you learn that from the Psalms? I don't think so. Did you learn that from the Book of Joan?

Well, no, you didn't. I think you've probably learned it, haven't you, from some kind of distorted English Christianity that teaches you to be a Stoic.

To grill and bear it. But it seems to me, isn't it, when you read the Book of Psalms, and you read the Book of Job, you have people crying out to God, and one of their first words is, why?

[15 : 35] And maybe we need to correct our tradition. And there's Zophar. Zophar, the name of the Bible, chapter 11. Zophar is a simple man. He doesn't care for these, and others with their masters in theology.

He wants to take the machete out and cut through all the undergrowth and just give you the same simple, plain truth.

Jesus is in chapter 11, verses 5 and 6. And he says, But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom.

For he is manifold in understanding, knowing then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves. And then we go into verse 7. Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? He is saying, there is a sense in which God's ways and God's wisdom are incomprehensible.

[16 : 35] And you can't understand them. We can't take it all in. And we can't reach the depth of it. We can't get to the height of it. There's a certain incomprehensibility about God's ways that we just can't put it all together.

And that's fine. So far, that's pretty good. But then he makes an error. You see what he does at the end of the last part of verse 6.

He says, Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves. Now what is Zophar saying? He's saying we just can't measure God's wisdom.

We can't comprehend all his ways. It's beyond us. But I know, Job, what this incomprehensible God is doing in your situation. His ways may be incomprehensible and far above us.

But I comprehend what the incomprehensible God is doing in your situation. He's contradicting himself. I'm standing outside the church this morning.

[17 : 39] And you're kind of watching the traffic go by. And somebody from the church is standing next to you. And they are arguing vehemently that there is no such thing as the colour yellow.

They're arguing with you there is no colour yellow. And then you see a row of cars go past. And the person next to you says, Did you just see that yellow Volkswagen?

He affirms something. And then what he says straight afterwards immediately contradicts it. That is the way it is with Zilpher.

You can't understand all God's ways by understanding what God is doing. He's contradicting himself. And you see him doing that here.

Well this is how to afflict somebody who's mourning. You can come at it from different angles. But as Job refers to his friends, they are worthless physicians.

[18 : 41] No help. All of them. And no matter what particular angle they come from, and we ought to see how it is they approach him, the one thing they will not allow is an element of mystery.

You see, that's essentially what all of them said, isn't it? There's no mystery in this Job. It's crystal clear what's happening to you. And so we need to take a few moments just to briefly evaluate their approach to Job.

So firstly, notice their theory. The bottom of their contentions is the basic point is this. There's an insistence on simplicity. There's only one basic explanation.

That if one of God's people is suffering, it's because that is some punishment for sin. Or chastening for that sin. And it's all done in order to bring them back to God. Now there is a sense.

There is a sense in which that kind of thing is true, but it's not the whole picture. But they are saying it's the only way it can be. You don't think, Job, do you?

[19 : 49] You surely don't think that this is cause for nothing. That nothing has brought this about and so on and so on. You don't think there's no cause behind this. That's what they're saying.

And isn't it ironic that that is exactly what the Lord implied in chapter 2 and verse 3. Can you just go there with me? Because it says there, listen, in chapter 2 verse 3 that God said to the accuser, you still incite me at the end of the verse, you still incite me against him to destroy him, and here's the point, without reason.

You might have trouble putting all this together. I just want you to notice that behind the scenes, in what nobody could see, the Lord has already said that there was a sense in which Job's suffering, this faithful, devout servant with whom God is well pleased, that he was suffering in one sense without cause.

God has said it. So there was a mystery to it. And Job's friends were saying, no, no, no, there must always be a reason.

And this is it. What are you covering up, Job? You see, it's not that Job's friends didn't speak the truth. They often did. In fact, when you read their speeches, it's one of the confusing things, isn't it?

[21 : 11] That in lots of their speeches there's much truth about God. In those speeches. And it's beautifully said. It's just what they said that is true does not apply to Job.

That's where the problem comes in. And so we need to be very careful and realise in humility that this whole matter of God's people, and I'm not talking about everyone, I'm talking about Christian people, when believers go through deep waters, we really don't know always why at all.

and it may apparently have a great deal of mystery and perplexity to it and we need to freely invent that. There's another issue, not just for their practice, I want us to look at chapter 6 where Job assesses that.

And that is that they didn't realise, or they didn't take into account Job's condition when he spoke. So look at chapter 6 in verse 2. They didn't realise, or they didn't take into account Job's condition when he spoke.

So if you notice in verse 2 and following, he says something like this, let's pick it up in verse 3. Oh that my vexation will wade and all my calamity laid in the balances.

[22 : 39] He's saying, I'm in misery I'm in such distress, what kind of misery and distress are you in verse 3? For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea. It's no wonder that I'm bursting out with emotions that you folk can't handle.

He says, no wonder my words have been rash, no wonder I've spoken in anguish, no wonder there's so much fire in my talk. Notice what he says in chapter 6 in verse 26.

He says to his friends, do you think that you can reprove words when the speech of a despairing man is wind? Do you think that you can reprove words when the speech of a despairing man is wind?

What's he saying? He's saying something like this, so you hear my words that I say, you hear my verbs and nouns and adjectives and so on, you hear what I say but you don't realise that my speech is a speech for despairing man.

I'm a man in despair. My nerves are frazzled, I'm in pain, I'm frustrated, I'm in great distress because I think that God has cut me off.

[23 : 54] And you think that I'm going to carefully formulate my words and precisely hone them as though I've studied this and written it out of a theological library. I'm in the pitch for goodness sake.

No wonder my words are what they are. And you don't hear the emotion. And you don't hear the frustration and you don't hear the anguish. You can merely say, I think you've got a split infinitive there, Job.

Or I think you should have used a different word there. I think it's not nuanced enough what you're saying, Job. Don't you think you should have used an adjective there, rather than an adverb?

You see, they heard his words, but they didn't really hear him. And Job's essentially saying is this, look, if you're going to comfort me, don't judge.

Don't judge everything that I say in such cold terms and clinical terms, but rather realise the condition I'm in. I don't know much about dogs.

[25 : 06] I'm not a great dog lover, as you know. But, I've really searched out for an illustration, it's difficult to find an illustration on this, but when you have a dog on heat, that's not the normal dog's

behaviour, is it?

Is it? I've got that right now. So you go to a house and the dog is on heat. I'm not going to be any more graphic than that, but that's not the normal dog's behaviour, is it?

You don't know, well that's how that dog always behaves. It's irregular. The dog grows bananas, he's nine puppies a few months later, but you don't judge your dog by when your dog is on heat. And you don't judge God's people by the words that they say when they're in the depth of distress, and in the despair of their soul. You don't analyse their sentences grammatically.

You need to realise the condition out of which they speak, out of their heartbreak, pouring out their complaints. And that is why when we go to one another and somebody is in great distress and they're going through great suffering, the first thing that you don't want to say to them is, well of course you know Romans 8 is 28, don't you?

[26 : 23] That all things work together for good for those that love him. I love Romans 8, don't you? Romans 8 28. It's a precious verse. And there will be a time, God willing, when that person comes through the struggle and he or she is willing to consider it, and that verse may well be a real comfort, but sometimes the best thing you can do is just be quiet and listen.

And listen to one of God's children express their despair and doubts and their questions about their heavenly father. So how to afflict those who more know briefly and secondly, I want us to look at the other thing, that is how to benefit from miserable comfort.

I want to take you through something that recurs three times in the passage, so in chapter 7, come with me there, in chapter 7 and verse 7, notice what he says, remember that my life is a breath, my eye will never again see good, I'll come back to that, but look at Joel speaks again in chapter 9 and verse 28, and he says, I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. what's he doing there? What is he doing there? He's been talking to his friends in chapter 9, and then in chapter 9 in verse 28, he turns and he speaks to God, and so in verse 28, the you, he's talking to God at that point, now he reverts briefly back to his friends, but then in chapter 10, he speaks to God again, and you see it happening in chapter 13, verse 20, okay?

Chapter 13, verse 20, only grant me two things, that I will not hide myself from your face, again directed to God. chapter 12, 13, 14, that's Job's third speech, and in chapter 13, verse 20, he says, grant me two things to me, I will not hide myself from your face, and again he's talking about God.

[28 : 42] Same thing happened in the rest of chapter 13, in all of chapter 14, that's addressed to God. Now do you see what Job is doing? He speaks to his friends, in response to what they say, but in the middle of that, each time, each of his speeches, he turns, to God in prayer.

And you see it in chapter 7, if we go back there, chapter 7, verse 7, he's been speaking to his friends, and then he turns to God, and he says, remember that my life is full of breath, my eye will never again see good.

How do we know he's talking to God? Because in the Hebrew that verb remember is singular. It's not remember, plural, all my friends, but remember singular. He's turned to face God.

It's interesting, isn't it? That Job makes that turn and addresses God. And I want you just to notice the candour and the anguish of his prayers. So look at verses 11 and 12 of chapter 7. Therefore I will not restrain my mouth.

I will speak in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea or sea monster that you set a guard against me? And so on and so on.

[29 : 54] Do you see the directness? Do you see the fervour with which Job speaks and complains to his God? In fact he even says in verse 17 what is man that you make so much of him?

What does that remind you of? What is man when you hear that's our mate? It's as if he's saying I know what's our mate says Lord I know about how you make the stars and the work of your fingers and in light of that what is man that you are so mindful of him and care for him but oh I wish I could reverse our mate I wish I could press the rewind button on that.

Why do you make so much of man? Why do you afflict me? Why do you come after me? Why do you draw such attention to me? Why don't you turn away from me? And he's saying that to his Lord. Why have you made me like this? And what's the significance of that? And I think this you see Job does talk about God to his friends but then in verse 7 in this instance he turns and he speaks to his God.

One writer has said Job's friends speak about God Job speaks to God and that makes him the only authentic theologian in the duck.

[31 : 18] You see what Job is doing? Job complains about God to God without denying God. Job complains about God to God without denying God.

He feels forsaken by God and yet he comes to God. And you see the freedom he seems to have. When he can't get his friends to listen to him he pours that distress out to a God who will listen to him.

To a God who will hear. I don't know whether you have someone and you say to me you are the only person who I can talk to like this. But you have a God in the Bible to whom you can talk to. And I know there's an element of risk in this. And I know we need to be careful. But do you see what Job is teaching you? Job is teaching you that the Lord God of Israel and our God has a large capacity to hear people's frustrations and perplexities.

And you can talk to this God and you can say why? And you see when that happens when you have comforters who actually afflict the one who mourns well not all is lost.

[32 : 42] Because their comfort forces Job to turn to his true comfort. He learns the art of complaining prayer. He brings his complaints about God to God.

Robert Murray McShane he was a Scottish pastor he died at the age of 29 and there was an event that really shook Robert Murray McShane when he was a very young man it was the death of his brother the death of his older brother David whom Robert loved deeply and David was a very sensitive and a deeply spiritual man he passed away at the age of 26 and Robert Murray McShane's friends noticed that it shook Robert and a change came over his life there was a certain seriousness after David's death there wasn't before and so on and a few years later after Robert Murray McShane was a minister he wrote to one of his elders on a particular day and he said it was 11 years ago today when I lost my loved and loving brother and began to seek a brother who cannot die and there's that principle isn't there that you know that sometimes when human comfort fails or even aggravates us it will turn us to our true comfort and our true help how to afflict those who mourn well we've seen it and I've got some advice for you don't do it but if you do you may only teach someone how to really pray let's bow our heads in the silence of