**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE GRIEF OF THE GODLY**

**Job 3:1-26**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we reach what has been described as the darkest chapter in the book of Job. Job has thus far been presented to us as the ideal sufferer, a man who continues to trust in the Lord despite losing everything. It’s one of the most important lessons in the Bible, that God is still worthy of worship even if we lose everything but him.

We might ask, “What else is Job about?” Don’t we already have the main lesson here, that if we suffer, we should suffer like Job? When our loved ones die, or when our health fails, or when life comes crumbling down around us, we should also say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” and move on? But it’s not that simple, because suffering is not that simple.

Suffering is messy. Suffering is unpredictable. Suffering can disappear in the background of our consciousness only to suddenly come upon us and punch us in the gut. We can face it with composure one day and then have it knock us off our feet the next.

That was the case for Job. What comes out of his mouth in Chapter 3 is very different from what came out of his mouth in Chapter 2, because he’s in a very different place. This man who was composed and dignified in calmly accepting the will of the Lord has come undone. His grief is beyond description. He is full of anguish. His mind is filled with unanswered questions. And somewhat shockingly, he longer believes that life is worth living.

If you’ve ever wondered what’s going on inside the mind of someone who is experiencing immense pain, Job tells us in Chapter 3. This broken man puts into words the innermost thoughts and feelings of those who have lost what they love, and who have lost sight of the goodness of God.

This will not be an uplifting sermon, but it will be an important one, because it shows us that even the godly can grieve. Even those who are blameless and upright, who fear the Lord and turn away from evil, can experience and express immense anguish to the point that they wish that they had never been born. But more importantly, this chapter tells us that God knows. He knows all our pain, all our grief, all our suffering; and in the person of his Son, he has entered into that pain and suffered it himself.

The title of this sermon is **The Grief of the Godly.** We will divide our text into three points:

1. Cursing his Day
2. Questioning his Life
3. Longing for Death

(1) **CURSING HIS DAY**

Verse 1:

**1**After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.

This is not what we’ve come to expect from Job. After his exemplary response to his loss in Chapter 2, we have come to expect praise, worship, and submission to God’s will. Job has showed us that he is a man who had an exceptionally wise perspective on his suffering. He recognized that God was the author of both his joy and his suffering, and he was ready to submit to his will.

But not anymore. Not at this moment. At this moment, what comes out of Job’s mouth is a curse. He doesn’t curse God as Satan predicted or as his wife urged, but he gets awfully close. He curses “the day of his birth”, literally “his day”, the same word used in Chapter 1 when we were told that his seven sons would hold a feast “on his day” and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. What had been a day to celebrate had now become a day to curse.

His curse begins in verse 3:

**3**“Let the day perish on which I was born,
    and the night that said,
    ‘A man is conceived.’

If birthdays could breathe, Job wants his to die. He wants both the day of his birth and the night of his conception to cease to exist. He repeatedly uses the language of “darkness” in verses 4-6:

**4**Let that day be darkness!
    May God above not seek it,
    nor light shine upon it.
**5**Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
    Let clouds dwell upon it;
    let the blackness of the day terrify it.

**6**That night—let thick darkness seize it!
    Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
    let it not come into the number of the months.

The “darkness” that Job wants for his day is contrasted with the “light” in verse 4, which makes us think of Genesis 1. God’s first recorded words in Scripture are in Genesis 1:3 where he says, “Let there be light!” And then of course God separates the light from the darkness as he begins to put his creation in order. So when Job curses his day with darkness, he’s expressing his desire to undo what God has done. He wants to replace the light of God’s creation with darkness so that it’s entirely removed from history.

Like many of you, our family has a wall calendar hanging in our living room, and we use it to keep track of important days. When it’s someone’s birthday, we draw candles and birthday cakes and make the day really stand out on the calendar. But if you were to look at Job’s wall calendar, his birthday would be blacked out or even burned out, because he doesn’t want to celebrate it. He doesn’t even want it to exist. He wants it to disappear from history, so that when people look back at the archives of time, they would find his day missing.

He continues in verse 7:

**7**Behold, let that night be barren;
    let no joyful cry enter it.

The night of his birth was punctuated by a joyful cry as his parents welcomed him into the world. But here he’s saying “let no joyful cry enter it”. “Let that night be barren”. He doesn’t wish that his mother had been barren, only the night that he had been born, because his anguish is directed to his very existence and not to his parents.

In verse 8 he says,

**8**Let those curse it who curse the day,
    who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.

Here, Job is calling on others to join him in cursing the day. He’s summoning the magicians and sorcerers of the world who claimed to have power over Leviathan, the gigantic beast that represented disorder and chaos, and calls them to marshal all of their power against his day as well.

In verse 9 we see a beautiful poetic illustration of a sunrise. There’s still the faint glimmer of stars in the sky. There’s what he calls a “hope for light” after an evening of darkness, the anticipation of a bright and sunny day. As the sky begins to change, it’s like the sun slowly showing its eyelids which are still closed, but are about to open in radiant light.

Job takes this image of beauty and erases it:

**9**Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
    let it hope for light, but have none,
    nor see the eyelids of the morning,

Why? Verse 10:

**10**because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
    nor hide trouble from my eyes.

Job wants his day to die because it didn’t keep him from trouble. His day is the reason for his suffering. If his day did not exist, then his suffering would not exist. And his suffering was so acute that all he could think of was erasing his life so that he could erase his pain.

This is not the same man we saw in Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, Job knew that it was better to be blessed for a time than to never have been blessed at all. “The Lord gives”, he said, “and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord”. But that’s not how he feels now. At this moment, he has come to believe that it would have been better for him to not exist at all than to have experienced the pain of having all his blessings taken away.

(2) **QUESTIONING HIS LIFE**

But of course, it is impossible for Job to curse his day. He has no more power to rewrite history than he has power to rework creation. And so, he turns from cursing to questioning, which leads to our second point.

The question of “why” is one of the most common questions asked of God in Scripture. “Why have you forsaken me?” “Why do you delay?” “Why do my enemies triumph over me?” But here, Job doesn’t ask God a question. Nor is he asking his friends. He’s not even asking himself, because he’s not looking for answers. He’s just venting. He’s giving expression to his anguish, and it comes out with the question *why*.

**11**“Why did I not die at birth,
    come out from the womb and expire?
**12**Why did the knees receive me?
    Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?

Job is questioning why his birth had to be successful. We grieve over a stillborn baby. Job longs to have been one. He wishes that he had come out of the womb dead, or that his parents had abandoned him rather than receiving him on their laps, or that his mother had refused to nurse him and nourish him. If any of that had happened, he would have been spared from his current suffering.

Job tells us why in verse 13:

**13**For then I would have lain down and been quiet;
    I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,

Job wants death because he wants “rest”. He wants to be at peace, to be able to lay down in quietness, and to sleep without having nightmares, because he doesn’t have any of that right now. The boils on his body continue to burn with pain. His children are dead. His wife wants him to curse God and die. He suffers alone, because his three friends have nothing to say to comfort him.

Job wants rest, and if you have suffered, you know exactly what he’s talking about. You don’t want wealth. You don’t want recognition, or success, or even pleasure. All you want is a day without pain. You want to be able to lie down and dream without care, or worry, or grief.

Job wants rest so badly that he would be willing to take death at birth over the life that he has lived. He would have gladly exchanged the joys of marriage and fatherhood, the prosperity of being the greatest of all the people of the east, and even the experience of walking in fellowship with God, for the simple gift of rest.

In verses 14-15 Job considers those who already have this rest:

**14**with kings and counselors of the earth
    who rebuilt ruins for themselves,
**15**or with princes who had gold,
    who filled their houses with silver.

He wants to join the great men of the earth as the dead men of the earth. Those who once rebuilt ruins and filled their houses with gold and silver on the face of the earth now lie within the earth, but Job isn’t afraid of that. He wants it, because they’re the ones who can finally rest from the pain and sorrow of this world.

But there’s another reason why he’s thinking about kings and princes:

**16**Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child,
    as infants who never see the light?
**17**There the wicked cease from troubling,
    and there the weary are at rest.
**18**There the prisoners are at ease together;
    they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
**19**The small and the great are there,
    and the slave is free from his master.

In other words, Job saw death as the great equalizer. Death is the one force in life that levels the playing field between the small and the great. The wicked cease from troubling. The taskmasters stop shouting commands at their servants, and the slaves are free from their masters.

Job is speaking as a man who had just suffered at the hands of the wicked. It was the Chaldeans and Sabeans who deprived him of all his wealth and servants. They were the reason why the greatest of all the people in the east had now become the poorest. And so, he longs for death to bring absolute, uninterrupted equality, for death to impose perfect justice, so that both “the small and the great” lie equal in the grave.

It’s revealing that Job looks not to God for justice, but to death. In these moments of greatest grief, he doesn’t pray to God for justice. He doesn’t wait on God to make things right. Instead, he looks to the cold, unloving face of death, because he can’t bear to look to the One who has taken away his rest.

Perhaps that’s you today. Perhaps you’re experiencing the crushing weight of grief and sorrow, and you’re looking anywhere but God. You’re fine with counselling, or medication, or your own sense of optimism that life is going to get better. Perhaps you would even welcome the final release of death. The only place you’re not looking is God. You may be speaking *about* him, but you’re not speaking *to* him. You’re looking everywhere for a solution except to the One who actually has the power to lift you out of the ash heap and restore you.

If that’s you, then these verses tell us that God knows how you feel. After all, this isn’t the first time he’s seen one of his servants struggle with whether they could trust him. God saw Job, his finest man, refuse to speak to him, trust him, and place his hope in him. And God didn’t destroy him. He didn’t even rebuke him. He just waited. He waited in the kindness and steadfast love of his fatherly heart for this broken, despairing man to quiet himself before him and trust him again.

(3) **LONGING FOR DEATH**

But we’re not there yet. Before it gets better, it gets worse, which leads to our final point: Longing for Death.

In a series of questions in verses 20-22, Job wonders aloud about the injustice of his situation:

**20**“Why is light given to him who is in misery,
    and life to the bitter in soul,
**21**who long for death, but it comes not,
    and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
**22**who rejoice exceedingly
    and are glad when they find the grave?

Job is asking, “Why can’t I just die?” Job would love to die. He longs to die, like a man longs to find hidden treasure. A terminal cancer diagnosis wouldn’t bring him sorrow. It would bring him exceeding joy. But it’s just not coming. Death remains elusive, and for Job, that feels unjust.

This is where Job finally acknowledges the presence and agency of God. Verse 23:

**23**Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
    whom God has hedged in?

Job isn’t talking to God, but he is finally talking about God, and here he acknowledges that it is God who has hedged him in. Even though it feels like Job’s way is hidden from God because he’s turned his face away, God is still the one who is preserving his life and keeping him from death.

Job isn’t wrong about that. Remember what Satan said in Chapter 1 when he said to God,

“Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?” (Job 1:10)

God’s hedge of protection was supposed to be a comfort to Job, but now it seems like a curse. God’s decision to uphold his life and to restrict Satan from taking his life is keeping Job from the very thing that he longs for. His death.

David Clines writes,

“The hedge has become a prison wall rather than a wall of defence.” – David Clines

That’s one of the things that suffering does. It makes us think of God’s blessings as curses. Even the blessing of life itself is seen as a curse, a prison wall to escape from rather than a gift to enjoy.

Job is clearly a broken man, but we need to understand the difference between someone like Job and someone who is suicidal. Job is saying, “I want to die”, but the suicidal person says, “I’m going to make myself die.” There’s a difference between wanting your life to end, and actually planning or taking steps to end your life. Nowhere in this poem does Job muse about the things he’s going to do to himself, because he knows that it’s not his right. It is God’s right to decide how long we live and when we die. So even as he complains about God’s hedge, he submits to it and doesn’t do anything more than that.

Job ends with a final description of why he longs for death in verses 24-26:

**24**For my sighing comes instead of my bread,
    and my groanings are poured out like water.
**25**For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
    and what I dread befalls me.
**26**I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
    I have no rest, but trouble comes.”

No ease, no quiet, no rest; only trouble. Trouble brought about by his birth, and trouble brought about by God. He is living through the very trouble that he most feared. It wasn’t the loss of his possessions or wealth. It was the loss of his children. That’s why he offered sacrifices for each of them on their birthdays. He practiced preemptive intercession because he wanted to shield them from God’s discipline and judgment in case they sinned. But in the end, it made no difference. The thing he feared had come upon him, and what he dreaded befell him.

That is how Job’s first speech ends. It doesn’t end with a hopeful note, or a prayer, or a reminder of God’s promises. It ends with these two, dreadful words: “trouble comes”. That’s all Job foresees for his future. Trouble has come, and trouble will come, and he won’t receive rest from his trouble until the day that he dies.

**CONCLUSION**

So what do we do with this dark chapter? Let me briefly suggest three things.

**1. Godly people may grieve like Job**

I wonder if you’ve ever shown up at church broken and full of sorrow. You woke up crying on your bed, or despairing of life, or wishing that you didn’t even exist. But you somehow get yourself ready and go to church thinking that you might find some comfort. But when you arrive, you look around and see everyone smiling and laughing and wearing their Sunday best, and you wonder, “Am I the only one here who’s suffering? Am I the only one who doesn’t feel like raising my hands during worship, or talking about God’s faithfulness, or celebrating God’s goodness?”

Job Chapter 3 tells us that you’re not the only one, because even the godly grieve. And if we believe that godly people don’t grieve like Job, we’re either cold-hearted or we haven’t suffered very much at all. There are more people having a Job-like experience than you know. I know that because I’m a pastor. I talk to more people who are crying in a single month than most people talk to in an entire lifetime.

If you’re suffering, you’re not alone. If you’ve thought that it would have been better if you had never been born, you’re not alone. Grief and sorrow aren’t signs that you’re less mature or that you lack faith. They’re signs that you’re a human being living in a broken and fallen world.

Godly people may grieve like Job, and the sooner we recognize that as a church, the sooner we can stop grieving in isolation and start grieving together as a body. That’s one of the marks of the church. We carry each other’s burdens. We bear each other’s pain. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep.

**2. Godly people don’t have to grieve like Job**

One of the reasons why Job grieved the way he did was that he thought that God had abandoned him. He thought that his way was hidden from the Lord, because he had turned his gaze away from him and left him on his own. And that was a terrifying thought. He thought that the God who had blessed him and prospered him, the God who was *with* him and *for* him was now *against* him for some reason that he did not understand. He thought that he was left not only without his family, but without his God.

But we know that God hadn’t abandoned him, because we know what God said about him in his heavenly councils. “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” God was still *with* him, and God was still *for* him, and Job could have found immeasurable comfort from that assurance.

One commentator wrote,

“The hardest part of his suffering need not be the feeling that he is deserted by God” (H.H. Rowley)

If you’re a Christian, you are going to suffer. But the hardest part of your suffering never needs to be the feeling that you have been deserted by God. Yes, there are things that we can do that grieve the Spirit and break our fellowship with God. When we sin and don’t repent, God lays his hand of discipline on us and makes us feel the weight of our guilt. But he will never abandon us. Even his discipline is done out of love. He is present in our joys and our pains, so that we never have to suffer alone.

**3. Godly people remember the One who didn’t grieve like Job**

We may be tempted to say that no one in the Bible suffered quite like Job, but that wouldn’t be true. As great as it was, Job’s suffering only provides a faint outline for the suffering of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the greater Job, not just in *what* he suffered, but in *how* he suffered. Jesus literally suffered hell on earth, the divine withdrawal of his Father’s presence. He didn’t just *feel* like God had abandoned him. He *knew* that God had abandoned him, not because he sinned or did anything wrong, but because he took our sins upon himself and suffered the penalty of God’s perfect justice in our place.

But in his moment of deepest sorrow, Jesus didn’t just vent. He didn’t just speak into the air as one who had stopped trusting in God. He directed his words to the Father in prayer. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And as he breathed his last, he prayed, “Into your hands, I commit my spirit.”

Jesus is the greater Job, and he is worthy of our trust, he is worthy of our imitation, and he is worthy of our worship. Wherever you are in life, whatever you may be experiencing, whatever burdens you may be carrying, you can trust in him. He knows your pain. He suffered it on the cross. Come to him, and you will be forgiven, restored, and given fresh hope for a brighter day in the presence of God forever.