

### **Job Part 3**

#### **Struggling With Sovereignty**

So far in the book of Job in the first couple of chapters, we've seen the suffering of Job, a righteous man who, in an instant, lost his children, his fortune, his fame, and soon afterwards, his health, his support from his wife, and the admiration of his friends. He felt that the God who before had smiled upon him was now against him, and he didn't know why.

And his story was told to break up the false idea that suffering only comes because you've sinned. That was the prevalent idea in his day, and if people all thought that, they would have had no room for Jesus when he came because Jesus suffered greatly. So the story of Job prepared their nation for Jesus.

And also he has shown us how to think about our trials and suffering.

And as we've walked through these chapters we've looked at:  
Job's role in the story, suffering innocently.

We looked at Satan's role in the story, looking for someone to accuse of false faith that can only endure as long as their blessings do.

But what was God's role in this suffering and in ours? That's what we'll look at today in these passages.

Because how we answer that question: how is God involved in evil and suffering, will affect our view of God, and our view of God always affects how we live.

**What comes to our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.**

And when we suffer, we could wrongly view God as powerless, as uninvolved, as helpless, and as a result we have no real God to turn to in prayer.

Or we could view God as a monster who does evil things. Leaving us with a “god” we never would want to turn to.

And we also run the risk of assuming that God only and always allows suffering for one reason (to punish us) and as a result we can sometimes carry false guilt or feel like it depends on us to figure it all out so we can end the suffering.

So we will look at God’s involvement in Job’s suffering, talk about the reasons in scripture he allows suffering, but hopefully avoid the trap of giving quick and easy pat answers - this book gives some good answers about God, but they don’t come quickly, they come after many chapters of wrestling and weeping and confusion. And by inspiring this book, God is telling us that suffering can be like this: we don’t get it all, we can’t fix it by stopping some behavior all of the time, we don’t know what He’s up to and He doesn’t seem kind at times, or He seems distant, and that can be part of the suffering.

So let’s look back at the passage we looked at the first week in our study:

**Job 1:6-10 [6] Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. [7] The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” [8] And the LORD said to Satan, “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?” [9] Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? [10] Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. [11] But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” [12] And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.**

So Satan comes and presents himself to the Lord. He has been out and about on the earth, looking to accuse (“Satan” means accuser.) So Satan is out to get Job.

But notice that Satan isn’t the one who brings up Job’s name.

God is.

So that's strange. This means that the suffering of Job in this book probably wouldn't have happened had God not brought up Job's name. So God seems here to instigate the suffering of Job.

And then, in verse 12, God gives Satan permission to go out and afflict Job. So God doesn't do the harsh things to Job directly here, Satan does evil and God does not. But God does allow the evil to be done here.

So Satan goes out, sends disasters to destroy Job's livelihood and his 7 children. And Job's response:

Job 1:20–21

**[20] Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. [21] And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."**

Now that's weird. Job doesn't say "The Lord gave and Satan has taken away."

He says the Lord has taken away.

But clearly, Satan was the one who took away. So why is Job saying God did?

Maybe he was just suffering so much that he said some wrong stuff. I'd be saying crazy stuff if I lost what Job lost. And not everything everyone says in this book is true - it was all truly said and compiled in an artistic form here, but the friends, for example, say false things about Job and about God, and this book records them for us, but this book isn't saying, "These words are true."

So maybe when Job attributes all of this calamity to God he was wrong about that.

But, verse 22 actually does affirm Job's response:

**Job 1:[22] In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**

So Job, in saying, “The Lord took away,” does not sin here.

Ok, in case that argument seems a little weak, the story goes on and Job is then afflicted with sores and pain and fever and worms...

**Job 2:9-10 [9] Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” [10] But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

So Job talks like he is receiving everything He has received in life, whether directly or indirectly, from the hand of God.

And you can see in this story two truths about God that are clearly expressed in scripture but hard to hold together.

### **1) God is good and not the author of evil**

Satan is the one who directly afflicts Job, not God. God doesn't do evil.

**Psalm 136:1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**James 1:13-14 “13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**

So the Bible is clear that God is good, God doesn't tempt people with evil.

Everything God made is good (Genesis 1:31), so evil isn't something he made. Evil is instead an absence of good.

When you turn on a light, you are “making” something. When you turn off the light, you are withdrawing something, you aren't making darkness. You turn on a light and turn off a light, you don't turn on the dark. Turning off the light leads to the darkness.

And in the same way, all that God creates is good. If He withdraws the good, He hasn't created evil, evil is the absence of the good. God can withdraw the light without actively creating the dark.

The Westminster Confession says that God "neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."

So when evil had been done to us, when we have been sinned against, we have to affirm that that is not God's work. Because God is good and only does good.

But we also believe that:

## **2) God is sovereign over all things - God rules over everything.**

In this story, Satan has to get permission from God to afflict Job. He can only go as far as God lets him. Satan is on a leash.

We believe that God is God - which means that He is all powerful, he could instantly fix everything if He wanted to. He is all-knowing, which means he knows everything, including the future. We even go as far as to say that He is ultimately in control of everything.

**Isaiah 14:24 24 The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand,**

**Ephesians 1:11 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,**

Even evil doesn't happen without his permission. Satan doesn't afflict without God allowing it. Even Satan is ruled over by God.

**Mark 1:27 says, "He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."**

When Christ commands Satan, he obeys Him.

So God is good and God is over all things, on the throne.

But the world doesn't look to us like both of those things are true.

Our lives don't always look like a powerful God is in control. Things go very wrong, we go through pain that makes no sense. And most of us can read the news and see that, as bad as things are for us, there are people who have lives that are non-stop horrible nightmares.

Can we look at their situation and say, "God is totally in control, totally powerful, and very good."

We might think, "So if God is really good, then he can't be all powerful, it looks like He's incompetent," or "If God is really God, he must be cruel - because he allows and seems to ignore so much suffering."

**So this calls into question God's existence.**

And if He exists, it calls into questions his trustworthiness. How can we trust a God who allows all of this?

So how do people answer this?

**1) Some become atheists** - and this is happening all around us.

As technology has opened up the world and given us a window into the unfathomable suffering around the world, it makes it harder to believe that God is God and that God is good, and there is less social pressure to pretend to believe, so many don't believe there is a god.

Because all of this stuff is happening that is evil, and that just should not be.

The world looks like a world that emerged out of chaos sometimes, not out of design. Those who hold to evolution as the ultimate theory of everything can explain all this meaningless evil - because the world is a meaningless place. Atheists can explain the chaos very well.

**But here's what atheism can't explain:**

It can't explain why we know this stuff is evil, and it can't explain why we just intuitively feel like things shouldn't be this way.

How do we come to believe that there's something wrong with the world?

If naturalistic causes are the reason for everything, where do we get the idea that things should be any different?

Things are exactly as they should be in a world that came out of chaos.

So why are we so horrified when people oppress the weak. That's just natural. Why does our conscience tell us that shouldn't be?

While an atheist can explain the chaos very well, they just can't explain why we know it should not be so. It should be exactly like it is if nature is our theory for everything.

Now obviously, accepting atheism is not an option for a Christian. So what we often try to do is get God off the hook for the problems in the world:

## **2) We try to get God off the hook by changing our beliefs about him.**

Usually we try to get God off the hook for the way things are in the world by redefining him.

### **A. We say that God is not in control.**

We say what the deists say, that God made everything, wound it all up like a watch, and stepped away while he lets it run its natural course. He doesn't intervene. But that contradicts the scriptures we looked at earlier, as well as many others:

**Matthew 10:29-30 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.**

Or we say that God is not God - there are some limitations to God - he doesn't really know the future, so bad things that happen can surprise Him just like they surprise us.

**Psalm 139:1-6 1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.**

Or we say that God has limited himself and won't impose on man's free will to do evil things. But not all bad things in the world come from man's free will - no human in this story made a sinful choice that caused Job's suffering. (Satan maybe, but he isn't a human.)

But even if we say evil comes from human free will, this still doesn't get God off the hook - because why would he chose to limit himself, especially considering the damage it would do.

If I see a crime and I could stop it, am I not obligated to stop it? I should fight in that situation.

And if I don't, and the police come to take the report, and I tell them what happened, and I saw the whole thing, but didn't stop it, and my whole reason for not stopping it is, "I don't want to mess with free will", would they say, "Yeah, I'm glad you didn't, I'm glad you're a nice guy."

No, they'd say, "What is wrong with you that you don't stop it when you could?" It's normally good to leave people alone, leave them to their own free will, but when their free will hurts someone, there should be a sense of duty to intervene and stop them - even against their will.

So even if the free will argument were valid, it still doesn't get God off the hook for allowing people to do evil.

And also, this view doesn't help us recover from tragedy at all:

But if human free will can trump God, then what assurance do we have that nothing more will happen to us that God can't stop? What about the guy who wants to use his free will to hurt me and my family? Is God powerless against his free will too?



Then I really can't believe that all things are being worked out for my good, because people's free will is not being worked out by God at all - he's not allowed to touch it.

So changing God's attributes, and making human will superior to God's will isn't biblical, and it doesn't solve the problem anyways.

So if we can't become atheists and we can't change the definition of God, what else do we do with evil in the world?

One response is to know that God does allow evil, for a time and within limits, for some greater good to come about.

God does not directly make evil, God does no evil. But God allows it for a time and for a purpose.

### **Why might a good God allow suffering?**

**The Bible gives a number of reasons that God does so. None answer every question, and none apply to every situation.**

#### 1) **Discipline for sin** -

**Deuteronomy 8:5 "5 Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you."**

God does, sometimes, allow suffering in the life of a Christian as a correction. This isn't all suffering (that is a mistake Job's friends will make - to assume this must be why Job is suffering when it isn't why.)

But some of our suffering is the Lord disciplining for sin, or even allowing us to reap what we sow so that we will change and turn to Him.

But again, this isn't why Job suffered *at all*. This isn't why Jesus suffered *at all*. So this isn't always the reason for suffering.

#### 2) **To teach** - so we grow spiritually and learn to live more wisely. Hard times sober us, strengthen us, and teach us to hope in God.

**Romans 5:3-5 “3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

Sometimes there isn't a specific sin, but our suffering still grows us, increases our faith and hope in God. And Job's suffering did some of this, but this story didn't start with God saying Job needed to learn a lesson. This wasn't the first reason for his suffering.

Sometimes our suffering is to teach us, but not always.

3) **As a test of our relationship with him -**

**Jeremiah 20:12 “O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous.”**

There's some of this in Job's trial. God knows our hearts, but we don't know them. And sometimes the trials test whether we “fear God for no reason,” or love and follow Him because of his gifts and not because of Him. God allows us to see the content of our faith with tests and trials and suffering sometimes.

4) **To allow eternity to be brighter and sweeter -**

**2 Corinthians 4:16-17 [16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,**

When you wake up from a nightmare that you've lost your job, you probably appreciate your job more the next day. And the nightmares of this life will make eternity, in contrast, even more glorious for those who believe.

5) **For communion**

It's often our pain that sends us running to God. And most of us could say that the times we have experienced God's closeness the most have not been in our times of ease, but times of fear and pain and grief and loss.

*"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" - CS Lewis*

**Psalm 9:9-10 "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."**

So there are reasons that God allows pain, even through the work of the evil one.

But be careful with this.

When you go through trials, it's worth examining yourself and the situation to see what you can learn. It's worth hearing from some good friends who can help you think it through and maybe see God's hand in it.

But sometimes, part of the suffering is that it doesn't make any sense to us, God seems far away in it, God seems like He is against us.

Beware of comforting with pat answers.

Beware of saying that, "If you're righteous, these 5 biblical reasons for suffering will eliminate your need to wrestle, and could cure the suffering." You don't sit at a bedside with someone who is in agony and tell them, "here are 5 reasons you might be suffering." You pray, you cry, you help, you certainly answer questions as they're asked.

The book of Job is 42 chapters - there is a lot of wrestling and back and forth.

The book of Job invites us to wrestle. Because sometimes part of the suffering is how strange God seems to us.

It's not that the trials are physical but in God we always have our clear and immediate spiritual answers, and those answers give us all the comfort we need right now.

It's not always that way. (Often it is - we turn to God and find great comfort.) But Job's confusion with his circumstances wasn't easily solved.

Remember, we know more about what caused Job's suffering than Job did. He didn't see what happened in the divine counsel.

So rather than comfort himself immediately with pat answers and Christian cliché's, look at chapter 3 - we'll survey Job's initial response:

Job 3:1-11

**[1] After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. [2] And Job said:**

**[3] "Let the day perish on which I was born,  
and the night that said,  
'A man is conceived.'**

**[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.**

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

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

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

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

**[11] "Why did I not die at birth,  
come out from the womb and expire?**

God seemed to curse Job, sending these sufferings that were specifically described as curses for sin in Deuteronomy. And Job replies “with a curse of his own,” cursing the day of his birth.<sup>1</sup>

Job is using some strong language to curse his own creation. He almost reverses the language of God in Genesis 1 - God says “let there be light” and Job says “let that day be darkness.”

God brings light out of the deep darkness, and Job says, “Now let the gloom and deep darkness take it all back” (verse 5). God speaks life into existence, and Job tries speaking barrenness into existence (verse 7).

He is taking issue with God allowing him to live.

And he describes his ongoing life as torture:

### **Job 3:20-26**

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

Why keep me alive?, he asks.

And he says, “God, you’ve hedged me in.”

Remember when Satan came before God, and God said Job was a great guy, Satan replied by saying:

**Job 1:10 [10] Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.**

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<sup>1</sup> Dane Ortlund, Piercing Leviathan, p. 21.

Now Job is saying, “You put this hedge around me to keep the evil in and the good out.”

**Job 3: [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.” (ESV)**

Job, who is more righteous than we are, doesn’t respond to his suffering with easy pat answers. He doesn’t lack feeling or grief. He doesn’t quickly jump to an easy conclusion. He wrestles out loud with, “This does not make sense, it seems cruel, why was I even born if this would be my life?”

Be careful of thinking that feeling of closeness with God in suffering is guaranteed or instant. Part of the suffering can be the spiritual confusion.

Some good answers coming to that at the end of this book- but we can let this hang for a few weeks before we get there.

But let me give you an important piece of the answer that Job didn’t have yet.

### **Job 9:32–35**

**[32] For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,  
that we should come to trial together.  
[33] There is no arbiter between us,  
who might lay his hand on us both.  
[34] Let him take his rod away from me,  
and let not dread of him terrify me.  
[35] Then I would speak without fear of him,  
for I am not so in myself. (ESV)**

The best answer we have is the cross.

We don't have all the answers for why God allows the specific kinds of suffering that he does.

But the reason can't be because he doesn't care.

It can't be because he doesn't understand the situation.

It can't be that he's removed from all this.

All of the pain we experience, he experienced on the cross and more:

- 1) The father experienced the loss of a son
- 2) The son experienced the infinite pain of rejection by his Father
- 3) Jesus experienced loneliness, rejected by God and forsaken by his friends
- 4) Jesus experienced injustice - falsely accused and tortured.
- 5) Jesus experienced physical pain beyond what most of us will experience.

He suffered too.

So can we make sense of all the suffering in this world?

Of course not - I'm telling you I can't make sense of most of it. I can just have confidence in it that God is in control of it and good through it, even more so because of the cross.

### **Prayer of Confession**

Father, you are God and we are not. You are the Creator and Sustainer of all things. You are omnipotent, all powerful; omniscient, all knowing; you declare the end from the beginning; you see the effects of every action. You alone are capable of working all things together for our good. And you have proven your love by sending your Son to us. So we affirm again the fact that You know it all, You see it all, You have power over it all, and we trust you because of your love.

Yet we confess that often we try to take you place. We sit in judgment on you, as if we were the all-knowing ones. Forgive us for our arrogance. Forgive us for the desire we feel to be in control of it all.

Jesus, we thank you that you proved that you can work all things together for our good in your death and resurrection. Thank you that you always fully trusted the Father. Thank

you that you willingly drank the cup the Father had for you. And you turned evil on its head, allowing the greatest evil ever done to produce the greatest good for us. Thank you for the sacrifice you made for us, and the way you asserted your Sovereignty for our good.

Spirit, we pray that you would convict our hearts when we begin again to step into the place of God. When things feel out of our control and we become anxious, remind us of your good control. When life doesn't make sense and seems senseless and harsh, remind us of the cross, where things that seemed that way were worked for our good. Help us to know your sovereignty, embrace your sovereignty, and rejoice that you are God and we are not.

### **Assurance**

#### **Joel 2:12-13**

**[12] “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; [13] and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. (ESV)**

#### **Sermon Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Discuss some recent trials, difficulties, or suffering that you've experienced. Can you see any reasons for them at this point?
- 2) Have you ever experienced a trial that was acute, but the fellowship with God seemed extra-strong because of it?
- 3) Have you ever experienced suffering that was exasperated by God not making sense or seeming far off?
- 4) How can we endure in suffering that doesn't make sense?
- 5) Why do you think God inspired chapter 3? Why does He want us to know how Job responded to these trials initially?