

Resting in the Whisper
Job 2-31, part 2

We are continuing in our sermon series through the Old Testament book of Job. As a portion of what is called wisdom literature in the Bible, this book is intended to help us maintain our faith as we wrestle with suffering, pain, and grief in this life.

Just to review where we've already been in the series, Job, who was a righteous man, a man who loved the Lord and followed the Lord, has lost everything. His children, his wealth, and his health. His wife urges him to curse the Lord in response, but he refuses.

Chapters 2 through 31 give us this discussion or debate, really, between Job and three of his friends who come to comfort him. Last week I tried to give a general overview of what Job's friends tell Job in his suffering, and it was basically this over and over again for all of those chapters: Job, only sinners suffer. You have suffered, therefore you are being punished for your sin. If you want to get out of this season of suffering, you need to repent and return to God.

This is what has been called "retribution theology," the belief that all of our suffering is God punishing us for our sins, and all of our blessings are God rewarding us for our faithfulness.

So, again, here is Job, in this incredible time of pain and misery, and those who he considered friends come to him and say, Job it's all your fault. Repent. Part of Job's reply is to say to them, you guys are miserable comforters. If you wanted to comfort me, you aren't doing a good job.

So last week we considered what Job's story can teach us about the horizontal aspect of suffering. That is, how do we relate to one another in our suffering? How can we be better comforters for one another, something the New Testament specifically calls us to?

This morning, we are still going to focus on those same chapters, but I want to give focus on Job's words. How does he reply to his friends? And most importantly, how does he respond to God? And as we do that, we're able to consider another important truth about suffering: What effect can our faith have on our grief? And then vice versa, what effect can grief have on our faith?

And this is really important because, for the one in the middle of suffering, both perspectives are simultaneous: horizontal AND vertical. We are trying to interact with others who are grieving with us and trying to comfort us, sometimes they do well,

sometimes they don't, but we are also undoubtedly interacting with God in some way. Sometimes we do well, sometimes we don't.

So Job serves as an example for us this morning, as someone who has a faith in God but circumstances in life really test that faith. Something that all of us can relate to.

So, we've heard from Job's friends, now let's hear from Job.

Again, we will be looking at a number of verses within a large range of chapters, so follow along as best as you can. I'll try my best to give you the highlights of his speeches and prayers.

Important to understand in this story is that it is not only Job's friends who hold to a retribution theology. Job actually does too. And his experience in life causes this crisis of faith. All of a sudden, much of what he thought about God is in question.

Three main points Job argues:

The first thing Job wants to say in response to his friends and his circumstances is: **I don't deserve this, because I am innocent.**

Job 27:2-6

2 "As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, **3** as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, **4** my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. **5** Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. **6** I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

He says, "I have lost everything, but I will not let go of my righteousness. I won't let that be taken away from me too."

Later in **Job 31**, Job makes a final plea, maintaining his innocence in every way he can think of - he's been honest, he's maintained sexual integrity, he's cared for his servants well, he's been generous with the poor, he hasn't put his hope in his wealth, he hasn't rejoiced in his enemy's sufferings, and more. In every way possible, he maintains he is innocent.

Someone who believes that they've been falsely accused and the victim of injustice, won't plead guilty. They would rather have their case heard in court so that they can prove their innocence. This is Job's wish. He uses a lot of legal language in arguing for his innocence before God.

Job 31:35

Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!

In other words, I wish I could hear the charges that seem to be brought against me, because I have no idea what they could be.

Job 9:15-16

15 Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. **16** If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.

Job 9:33-35

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.

Job 10:2-7

2 I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. **3** Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked? **4** Have you eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees? **5** Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years, **6** that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, **7** although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand?

So, Job over and over again in the face of these accusations from his friends and his theology, is saying, I don't deserve any of this. I am an innocent man.

The second main argument from Job: Since I am innocent, **God, then, must be unjust or cruel.**

In Job 21, for example, Job is answering his friends who are maintaining God's justice...

Job 21:7-9, 34

7 Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? **8** Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. **9** Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them.

"If God really was just, then why do the wicked prosper?"

In Job 24, he charges God with more injustice by saying...

Job 24:1, 12

1 "Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days?...**12** From out of the city the dying groan, and the soul of the wounded cries for help; yet God charges no one with wrong.

“It’s like God looks at what is going on and he withholds judgment on the wicked and he withholds help for the righteous.”

In chapter 29, he identifies the removal of his earthly blessings as proof of God’s rejection of him...

Job 29:2-4

2 “Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, **3** when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, **4** as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent

So, again, a major response of Job is that because he is innocent, God must be unjust. The scales of his just are out of whack.

The third main argument from Job **God is indifferent or absent.**

Job 23:2-3, 8-9

2 “Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.

3 Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!...

8 “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him;

9 on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.

In other words, I’d love to hear from God, but it seems like he is nowhere to be found. He’s walked away from me. He doesn’t care about my situation, which means he doesn’t care about my suffering.

Job 30:19-23

19 God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. **20** I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. **21** You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. **22** You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.

23 For I know that you will bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living.

All in all, Job’s replies to his friends and to God is: I’m innocent, so God must be unjust. He is indifferent to my situation, which further proves him unjust!

Again, Job’s friends and Job believe the same retribution principle, *but* it leads them to polar opposite conclusions. The friends remain stringent in their belief; all sinners suffer and the righteous prosper. Job on the other hand, believes that should be true, but he also sees that the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper, so he is tempted to believe that God is unjust, cruel, and absent.

FAITH AND GRIEF

Now, what we see in Job is the experience of a man whose faith is in crisis. There is real tension here for Job. But notice, **it is not that his experience causes him to walk away from faith in God, but rather, it causes him to question what he believes about God.**

And this is common for us when we walk through painful seasons isn't it? We often walk this same path - "I thought I understood who God was and how he related to the world and me, but now because of this thing that has happened I have my doubts. Maybe he isn't who I thought he was. Maybe he isn't really loving. Maybe he isn't really all-powerful. Maybe he isn't all-knowing. Because if he was those things, then surely this pain that I'm experiencing would have been prevented."

C. S. Lewis wrote a book, titled, *A Grief Observed*. And it is a very honest and personal book filled with his own reflections about the grief he was experiencing after the loss of his wife to cancer. Again, it is really honest, you hear a man, like Job, wrestling with his faith in the midst of his incredible pain. And at one point he writes about this exact experience that Job is having. He writes, "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'" (*A Grief Observed*, 6-7)

Again, like Job, it wasn't that Lewis would become an atheist. It wasn't that he would be tempted to deny God's existence, it's just that he might be tempted to deny God's goodness. And you might be tempted to do the same. You believed in a God who is a loving Father and a Good Shepherd, but you experienced or are experiencing now some painful season and all of a sudden you aren't as sure anymore. You're praying and praying, but nothing seems to get better, so you wonder if he hears your prayers or even cares at all.

It is moments like these when our grief is affecting our faith, whether or not that faith is biblical. What you thought was true about God and his relationship to you isn't playing out like you thought it would.

C. S. Lewis in his book even describes that feeling of God's abandonment. He, like Job, wants to know where God is, why isn't he answering, why doesn't he feel near to me?

He writes, "Where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become." (*A Grief Observed*, 5-6)

What Job—and Lewis—walked through is not uncommon to us all. Our faith affects our grief, but our grief can also affect our faith. We need to be careful then, which is given the priority.

So, when our grief and our faith seem to be at odds, what can we do? Is there anything we can learn from Job's replies and prayers? There is plenty, but I will focus on just two.

What can we do when grief influences our faith?

1. **Be honest with the Lord.** If you find yourself in that space, be honest with the Lord about it, because he knows your heart and mind already, no need to be hypocritical, pretending that everything is ok when it isn't. Be honest with the Lord.

Job is clearly doing this chapter after chapter, putting his pain into words, and this is what so many of the psalmists do as well...

Psalm 102:1-2

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you! **2** Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

Psalm 142:2-3

1 With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. **2** I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.

In those times when you feel like the grief and pain that you are carrying causes you to doubt God's goodness or care or sovereignty, you can go to him with that.

I do think there is a warning though. We should be careful because telling God what we think at times isn't what we *truly* think, it is just what we think will offend Him. In our anger and pain we just want to inflict pain on someone else, especially the person we feel is the cause of our pain. It feels good to bite back, to make that harmful comment, but C. S. Lewis likens us to an animal who growls and bites at the veterinarian who is caring for it. Honesty is the goal in our prayers, not combat, and there is a difference.

2. Be honest, but at the same time pursue humility.

Again, there is great tension in the words of Job. On the one hand, he is angry. He is innocent and yet he suffers. On the other hand, in other places as he is processing his pain, he can't help but recognize the majesty and incomprehensibility of God.

In fact, there are glimpses of humility at times, even in the midst of pouring out his pain and frustration.

Job 26 is an incredible example of this. He is answering Bildad...

Job 26:1-4

1 Then Job answered and said: **2** “How you have helped him who has no power! How you have saved the arm that has no strength! **3** How you have counseled him who has no wisdom, and plentifully declared sound knowledge! **4** With whose help have you uttered words, and whose breath has come out from you?”

He’s being sarcastic here with Bildad. He’s saying, wow, it’s a good thing God has you to help him! It’s an honor to speak to someone so wise that he has God completely figured out!

Then Job goes on to speak as if Bildad has no idea what he’s talking about when it comes to God’s greatness...

Job 26:5-14

5 The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. **6** Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. **7** He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing. **8** He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not split open under them. **9** He covers the face of the full moon and spreads over it his cloud. **10** He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. **11** The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke. **12** By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab [*not the woman Rahab from Jericho, but a description of sea creature*]. **13** By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. **14** Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?”

It’s like he’s saying, Bildad, you think you have God all figured out, but in reality, you have no idea - and neither do I. None of us completely understand him. None of us can grasp his magnitude, power, wisdom, or holiness.

Job identifies two important truths about God. His transcendence and his immanence. That God is far above his creation. Far above you and me. So far that we can’t understand him or know unless he were to reveal himself to us.

And in speaking to the ways that God has worked in these incredibly powerful ways, Job says he has revealed himself to us, **but all that we see and know is merely a whisper**. His power is incomprehensible. It is like thunder. But again, in comparison to all that God is and all that he does, we’ve only heard a whisper.

So here’s Job, in all of his pain, all of his grief, yet he does believe that God is majestic, transcendent, incomprehensible, and all-powerful, but it’s as if he is not applying it to

his own situation. It's always easy to give the right answer to someone else, it's often harder to say it to your own heart. He should have reminded himself in all of his accusations of God's injustice and indifference, that maybe, just maybe, he doesn't have the full picture.

Again, Job does believe that what we know and grasp of God only scratches the surface of his transcendent nature and work. He has whispered, but he is thunderous in power.

His is a power that created all things. A power that sustains all things. A power that raised Jesus from the dead. And it's a power that can work all things together for good.

And so Job's statement of God's majesty—which by the way foreshadows his conversation with God at the end of the book we will see in a few weeks—Job's call for Bildad to demonstrate some humility, was a call he should have heeded himself. And it's a call we should all heed when the pain of life threatens our faith in God's goodness and sovereignty.

The choice we face in those moments comes down to this: **Will God's incomprehensibility and majesty confound you or comfort you? Will it produce frustration in you or will it produce faith in you?**

Recognize when we are wrestling with the work of God in our lives, we are wrestling with a whisper of who he is and what he has done. And when we come with critical complaints about God's work we express an arrogance of incredible magnitude. Who are we to doubt God's good work in our lives?

ILLUS. - You might have saw this online, but just a few weeks ago, a video went viral on social media and it was a person sitting on a flight, they were still their gate, but they were filming a maintenance worker applying what looked to be like duct tape on the wing of their plane.

Now, I've never really had a fear of flying but that is not a sight I would want to see out my window. Again this video went viral and it caused thousands of people to think the absolute worst of this airline. I mean, what kind of airline puts duct tape on their wing? That doesn't seem professional. That doesn't seem safe. Granted, that's how I fix things, but I don't work on airplanes!

Well, eventually the airline had to address the video and it turned out that what they were using wasn't duct tape at all. It did look similar but it was actually a special tape made of aluminum which is used for very minor, temporary repairs and is approved by the FAA.

How often do we think the worst and speak the worst of people and situations that we don't actually fully understand? Isn't that wrong? How much worse is it when we are critical of God and his work?

It's been said that "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life but you might be aware of three of them."

If we were to use Job's imagery, we could say, "God is thunderous in your life, even though you only hear a whisper."

GOSPEL

However, even though we only have a "whisper" from God, he whispers good news. We have the incredible privilege to live on this side of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who is the incarnate Word of God.

And while we might want to know all the purposes of our suffering and what it is God is doing in each and every situation, for now, we have to trust in his work in the gospel to reassure our hearts of his goodness.

This is what Paul does so often...

Rom 8:31-32

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Rom. 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

That verse alone can provide endless opportunities for reflection and rest and hope.

So without minimizing pain and suffering, when your grief has outsized influence over your faith, be honest with the Lord, pursue humility, return to the cross, and be reassured of God's goodness and love for you.

CONFESSION

We often doubt the justice, goodness, and power of God, and that is especially true when we are walking through seasons of pain and suffering. It is good and right for us to be honest with him, to confess it to him, and approach him with humility asking that he would renew our faith in him, so let's do that right now...

PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Because of the work of God through Christ and his Spirit, we really can have peace now and forevermore. So, let's stand and continue in worship this morning...

VERSES

Job 27:2-6

Job 31:35

Job 9:15-16

Job 9:33-35

Job 10:2-7

Job 21:7-9

Job 24:1, 12

Job 29:2-4

Job 23:2-3, 8-9

Job 30:19-23

Psalm 102:1-2

Psalm 142:2-3

Job 26:1-4

Job 26:5-14

Romans 8:31-32

Romans 8:18

John 14:27

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Review and restate the "retribution principle."
2. How have you been tempted to believe this theology?
3. Have you ever felt God was absent or hidden? What did you do in those times?
4. How does the metaphor of a "whisper" describe our knowledge of God?
5. How might this encourage us in our times of suffering?