

Why: The Gospel and Suffering

The Gospel, God's Sufficiency and Suffering

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THE GOSPEL, GOD'S SUFFICIENCY, AND SUFFERING Job 3-31

Good morning. If you have a Bible and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Job 3. Last week we looked at Job 1-2 and we saw Job's possessions taken away, his children pass away and then his health is striped out from underneath him and we left Job at the end of chapter 2 sitting in a trash heap with oozing sores and boils all over his body and yet in the middle of it saying, "*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away may the name of the Lord be praised*" (Job 1:21). We see Job glimpsing the sovereignty of God in his suffering and worshipping. That's when tragedy struck.

Today we're going to dive into when tragedy continues. It's one thing, it's an amazing thing but, it's one thing to respond with worship when tragedy strikes. It's an entirely different picture when suffering continues, suffering lingers, like many of you have experienced, not just at one time but for days, months, even years.

It begs the question, "What does the Word say?" And that's what I want us to dive into today. I want us to see the implications of the book of Job, not just for when suffering strikes, but when it lingers and when it continues. Job 3 in one sense doesn't make sense. Satan had challenged God, said, "Job will curse you if these things will happen." You get to the end of Job 1-2 both and Job doesn't curse God. He worships God and so you think, "Okay that's it." We're successful. We should just jump right now to chapter 42 and that's how many people try to read this book but there is a journey that happens between Job 2 and Job 42 that is real and I want to dive into it today.

I want you to listen to Job's words in Job 3,

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said: "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. That night—may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it. May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes.

Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins, with rulers who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the

light of day? There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest.

Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slave is freed from his master. Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3).

Isn't that heavy? Job finds himself one chapter later cursing the day of his birth and the picture here is after seven days of silence when he's surrounded by friends, so-called friends, a guy named Eliphaz, a guy named Bildad, an a guy named Zophar, and they've sat for seven days just looking at Job in a trash heap with sores and boils all over his body and for seven days nobody said anything. These words that we just read are the first words that came out of Job's mouth.

We're going to see an overview, kind of a bird's eye view, we'll be all over the place, but from chapter 3 to 31, Job enters into conversations with these three friends. And basically the way it works, after Job speaks here in Job 3 is Eliphaz speaks to Job, then Job responds, then Bildad speaks and Job responds, then Zophar speaks and Job responds. That happens three different times, three different cycles except one of them trails off at the end. The picture is a dialogue between a man who loves God, who is completely committed to God, who has worshipped God in the middle of his suffering, who is upright, blameless, fears God, shuns evil, all the things we saw last week, but he's wrestling with the mystery of God's ways. There's an honest wrestling all over the pages of this part of Job.

The Sufficiency of God in Suffering ... When the pain of suffering persists, God is still present.

What I want us to see is four pictures of the sufficiency of God in the middle of Job's suffering, four pictures of His sufficiency that I believe have huge implications for our lives when suffering lingers for days, months, and years.

Picture number one, when the pain of suffering persists, God is still present. What you'll see if you read through chapters 3-31 is you'll see Job in just about every single one of his speeches he addresses God in some way. He knows God is there. This is part of his wrestling. He's not necessarily doubting God is there. He knows the presence of God and the character of God, and he's wrestling with why these things are happening in light of the presence and the character of God.

In fact you look at what we just read, chapter 3, you might circle all of his questions and see the word they begin with. Verse 11, what word does his question begin with? - "why." "Why did I not perish at birth" (Job 3:11)? Verse 12, "Why were there knees to receive me" (Job 3:12), and you get to verse 16, "Why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child" (Job 3:16), verse 20, "Why is light given to those in misery" (Job 3:20), verse 23,

"Why is life given to a man" (Job 3:23)? As the pain in Job's life began to progress and settle in, this question rose to the top - "why?"

We want an explanation.

When the pain of suffering persists, we want an explanation. We want to know why. This is natural. It's not wrong to ask God why. But we're going to dive deeper next week into the purpose of God in suffering. Suffice it to say at this point we need to keep this question "why?" in proper perspective. I'm convinced that what Job is teaching us—this book is teaching us—is that in the middle of the pain of suffering we do not need an explanation as much as we need His presence.

He gives us identification.

Now I want to give you this truth and I want to explain it to you. We want an explanation. What does God give us? God gives us Himself. If there was any opportunity God had to give us an explanation for suffering and evil, this was the book. This was the time. Instead we see Job wrestling with the presence of God all throughout. You see it here in chapter 3:23, *"Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in" (Job 3:23)?* God's done this. Sovereignty, just like we saw last week.

Flip over to chapter 7, look at chapter 7:17. Job's wrestling again. Listen to what he says, *"What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention" (Job 7:17)?* Verse 18, *"You examine him every morning and test him every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant" (Job 7:18-19).* He's wrestling with the presence of God.

Fast forward all the way to the very last chapter in the book, Job 42. We'll dive into this more in-depth the last week of the month but look in Job 42. Look at verse 4; this is where the whole picture is headed. Job encounters God personally in a very poignant powerful way at the end of this book and listens to what he says. Job 42:4, *"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'" Listen to verse 5. Job says, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5).* This is the whole point, part of the whole point of the book of Job is to show us wrestling with the presence of God and ultimately the power of the presence of God in the middle of suffering. We want an explanation. God gives us His presence, Himself.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Well I'd still like an explanation," and we still have those questions. But do we really want an explanation? Do we really need an explanation? Think about it with me. Two simple illustrations.

A couple years ago, it was actually just after I started preaching and filling in here, I broke my wrist playing flag football and I remember my brother took me to the emergency room and we got there, checking in, and the nurse asks that question that just doesn't make sense, "What level of pain do you have? How bad does it hurt, 1-10?" and I'm like, "Very. It hurts." I'm writhing in pain.

Now what do I need in that moment in my pain? Do I need the doctor to come and show me the x-ray and give me a medical explanation with all of his expertise about how my wrist is broken, at what part, and how this happens, and the whole history, and how it led to this point? No, I want him to fill me with something and fill me with something fast that can take care of this pain. What I need is not an explanation. I need something to fill me, meet me at my deepest point of need which is not intellectual.

Another illustration—I have a lot of things to learn in marriage but this I think I have learned, I think I continually have to learn this over and over again. But when my wife Heather is going through difficulties, when she is going through struggles, what I've learned is that her greatest need amidst her struggles is probably not my explanations. I'm guessing there are some ladies who would say amen to that. She probably doesn't need my advice, probably not my summary of why this is going on. What's her greatest need at that point? It's presence.

The beauty of this picture in Job is that we don't see a God who is distant up in heaven doling out philosophical explanations for why this is happening. Instead we see a God who is right with Job every single step of the way and this is gospel. It's gospel. We do not have a God who is distant, far off from us. We have a God who is with us, a God who became like us, and who is able, Hebrews 4 says, "To sympathize with our weaknesses." Are you broken? He was broken. You've been rejected? He's been rejected. Are you hurling? He hurt. Do you cry out? He cried out. You ask why? Listen to Him on the cross, "My God, my God," what? - "why have you forsaken me?" He is familiar with our struggles and the reminder I want to give you from this overall picture in the book of Job is to remind you that God has not abandoned you. He never abandons you. He is with you in the middle of your suffering. He is with you. You are not alone. Job is going to feel alone over and over and over again because of his friends' counsel. You'll see this. But the whole conclusion that he comes to is that, "I'm not alone, I see you." When the pain of suffering persists, God is still present.

When the gifts we enjoy are gone, God is still good.

Second picture, when the gifts we enjoy in this life are gone, this is the sufficiency of God, He is still good. When the gifts we enjoy are gone, God is still good. Now this takes us back again to the setup in Job 1-2. Satan had challenged God and said, "Job worships you God because you pay him to worship you. Look at all the gifts he has. Of course he worships you. Take away the gifts, he won't worship you." He takes away the gifts. Job worships at the end of Job 1. He's still got health. Job's health is taken away, and Job comes to Job 2:10 and he says, "I received good from God and trouble from God."

This is the picture, Job is showing Satan, the world, us that even when the gifts we enjoy are gone, there's wrestling there and there's prevalent wrestling all over chapter 3-31, but God is still good.

Now this is where his friends really come in because what they propose is a theology. Now I want us to be careful here. You read Job 3-31 and you listen to Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar speak and you'll hear them say some true things, some good things, some theologically sound things. But this is the danger. What they're doing is they're taking truths, theological truths, and they're twisting them and distorting them in the way they are applying them to Job's situation. All of a sudden these theological truths, good theological truths are becoming horrible counsel for Job.

And basically their counsel is this, "Job, God blesses, God prospers the righteous and God afflicts the wicked. God blesses or prospers the righteous and He afflicts the wicked or the unrighteous." Since Job is afflicted then he must be what? - unrighteous. "Therefore Job your problem is you're unrighteous. You've done something to dishonor God and therefore the way to make it right is to get righteous, to turn back to God, and everything will be okay."

Let me show this to you. Go back to chapter 4. We'll look at Eliphaz first. Listen to 4:7. Listen to what he says. He says Job, *"Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish"* (Job 4:7-9). Let me encourage you, on a side note, when someone is walking through suffering, not to quote Job 4:7-9. This is what he's saying there. "The way I've seen it, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. You're obviously reaping it right now." This is the picture. "You've obviously done something wrong."

Go over to chapter 5:18. We'll step back even one verse to verse 17. Listen to this. Now there's some truth, grains of truth in here. Listen, *"Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword"* (Job 5:17-20). What's wrong with that advice? But you look at how it's being applied to Job and what Eliphaz is saying here is that, "Job, obviously you've done something wrong so if you'll just get right with God, everything will be okay. It's that simple. God will change things if you'll change, repent, turn from your wickedness and your sin." That's what Eliphaz says.

You get to chapter 8 and you see Bildad and he takes it a step deeper. Listen to the boldness of Bildad. Look in verse 2. Bildad says this, *"How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right"* (Job 8:2-3). Listen to verse 4, *"When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin"* (Job 8:4). Did you catch that? Bildad just said your children died because they were sinners in that house. That's why the wind came and blew the house down, because your children had sinned. Then he brings it to Job, *"But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be"* (Job 8:5-7). This is the same advice Eliphaz has given. If you just get right with God, everything will be prosperous.

Then you get to chapter 11 and you see Zophar entering into the picture. Now all throughout Job is claiming to be innocent. Now we know, we know Job wasn't perfect. Job's not saying he's perfect but he's saying exactly what we know from Job 1-2. There's nothing he's done to warrant what is happening here. Zophar rebukes him for it. Look at chapter 11. Look at verse 4. *"You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.' Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin"* (Job 11:4-6). Then you get down to verse 13. He gives the same advice we've been seeing. *"Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by"* (Job 11:13-16). It will be as water gone by if you'll just turn away from sin.

All throughout here Job is saying, "No, no God brings affliction not just on the unrighteous, He brings affliction on the righteous. In fact, sometimes it seems like God brings prosperity among the unrighteous and affliction on the righteous." He's wrestling with this and his friends are putting forward this theology that says God always blesses the righteous and He always afflicts the unrighteous.

A false gospel ...

The reality is it's poor theology and it's theology that is being proclaimed throughout much of contemporary Christianity today, so called Christianity. You trust God, you follow God, you obey God, you will prosper, have a great life, successful. You disobey God, you don't trust God, then you will not prosper. Things will not go well with you. What I want you to see here is a false gospel and a true gospel. A false gospel sees suffering as evidence of the displeasure of God.

Now I want to be careful here. I want to be careful because definitely in Scripture we see the effects of our sin; the consequence of our sin brings trouble and brings suffering. There's no question. Again, this is where true theological things twisted to apply to all suffering become very, very bad counsel, unbiblical, ungodly counsel, which is what's happening here. Yes there are consequences of sin but the picture here is Job has not done anything to warrant this. This is happening to him and God is afflicting the righteous. A false gospel sees suffering as evidence of the displeasure of God. It's what many people believe. Many people say, "If I just have enough faith then God's going to bless me." You see it all over the TVs.

I remember when this hit home for me sitting in a house church in Asia with Asian believers who were risking their lives in a little village to worship Christ and study His Word in the middle of the night. We were sitting there and they were asking questions and this lady who was sitting near the front knew a little bit of English, lived in the city and had a TV. She said, "Teacher, sometimes when I'm watching TV I get stations from the United States and every once in a while I'll get a church service from the United States," and she said, "I see preachers dressed in very nice clothes and in extremely nice buildings," and she said, "Many of them say to me that if I have enough faith I too can have all of these things." She wasn't indicting anything. She was asking honestly. She said, "I come to our worship services. We're gathering late at night in secret, risking our lives, and most of us are dirt poor just trying to get by," and she looked at me, she asked this question with all sincerity, she looked at me and she said, "Teacher does this mean that we don't have enough faith here?"

This is the gospel that we are exporting to the world and it's not just health and wealth preachers on TV, it's us. It's the people who are surrounded by stuff and material possessions and things and we tack God on the end on Sunday and we say He's given us all this stuff and we trust in Him and He gives us all this stuff and the reality is we are people in a church culture that have so exalted the gifts of God above God Himself, the stuff above the Giver, and that's idolatry. At the core it's idolatry and it's a false gospel that says when we don't have those things we should point the finger at God and ask, "why are you allowing this to happen?", "why are you ordaining this to happen?", "why are these things being taken away?", "why am I suffering?"

The true gospel ...

A false gospel sees suffering as evidence of the displeasure of God. The true gospel sees suffering as a means to, get this, a means to more deeply treasure God. This is a radically different way to look at Christianity and to look at our lives. Suffering is a means to more deeply treasure God. This is what Job is learning and what he's showing us, showing Satan and the world and us that when all of these things are taken away, God is still a treasure to be had and He's good. This is the picture.

Think about it practically in our lives. If you had to reduce suffering, and I don't want to pretend like suffering is not a very complicated thing, but if you had to bring it down, isn't suffering when the things we enjoy in this world are taken from us? Maybe it's our reputation or our esteem among peers. Maybe it's our success. Maybe it's our job. You lose

your job and are suffering. Maybe we lose the house or the car or some stuff or maybe it's a lot deeper than that. Maybe we lose friends because of something that happens. We lose some friends. Maybe it's we lose our health. Maybe we lose our sight or our hearing or our ability to walk and begin to experience suffering. Maybe we have cancer or some other disease and begin to experience suffering. We lose our health. Or maybe we lose a loved one. Maybe we lose a mom or a dad or a husband or a wife or a child; when these things in the world that we enjoy are taken from us, it's suffering.

Now here's the picture. If God is our treasure, above and over all of His gifts, then when one of these gifts is taken from us, in some way taken from us, then where does that drive us? It drives us deeper to the treasure who is God because we have one less thing, even one less great good thing to lean on in this world and God becomes a deeper treasure in our lives. I'm not saying there's not pain in losing that thing, or there's not tears in losing that person, or there's not hurt, there's not a deep sense of loss or pain. There were pain, tears, and heart in the Garden of Gethsemane for Christ. It's not some easy happy go lucky picture, but it is a picture of saying that even when the best things of this world are taken from me all they do is drive me deeper to my treasure in God. This is why Paul says in Philippians 1, "To live is Christ." How do you say this and really mean it? How do you say, "To live is Christ and to die is gain"? Here's the only way you can say that. Because it drives you where, all you've got is God. You've lost everything this world has to offer, everything and all you've got is God. That's why he says, "I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far," because he knows that the treasure over here is better than all of these things put together, better than my wife, my two boys, and all the great things this world has to offer. God is better. He's better. He's a treasure and suffering drives us to treasure, God.

So when the gifts we enjoy are gone, when the house is gone or the job is gone or money's not there anymore, when we can't get pregnant, when you don't find that husband or wife that you're longing for, or when your sight is gone or your hearing is gone or your ability to walk is gone, or when your loved one is gone, God is still good. This is Job 13:15, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," because He's a treasure above all those things. This is a radical way, different way to live in our culture today. When the gifts we enjoy are gone, God is sufficient. He is more than sufficient because He's present and He's good.

In the confusion of our circumstances, God is all-wise.

Third picture, in the confusion of our circumstances, God is all-wise. I want you to turn with me to Job 28. Job is part of a group of books in the Old Testament called the Wisdom books and they're pictures of wisdom. And tucked away close to the end of these discussions is basically a hymn to wisdom and I want you to hear this picture of the price and value of wisdom and the relationship between God and wisdom and man and wisdom. Look at Job 28:12, key passage in the book of Job, verse 12,

But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or sapphires. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond

rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold.

Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears' (Job 28:12-22).

Listen to verse 23, though, here's the contrast. Nobody can find it. *"God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding'" (Job 28:23-28).*

The picture is wisdom is this valuable jewel that can't be found by anyone except God. God alone knows where it dwells. Now I want us to think about this, three facets of wisdom when you put them together and this will inform what you've got in your notes, three facets of wisdom. You've got knowledge involved in wisdom; God alone knows where it dwells. You've got perspective involved in wisdom. He sees things from the ends of the earth. Then you've got experience involved in wisdom. He created all these things. He confirmed wisdom, appraised wisdom, tested wisdom. So contrast the limited wisdom of man for a moment with the unlimited wisdom of God. Then we'll bring that to bear on suffering.

The limited wisdom of man ...

The limited wisdom of man. Why do we lack wisdom? It's because we lack one of these three things at different points, at every point. We lack first of all knowledge. When someone makes an unwise decision, oftentimes it's because they didn't know all the facts. Have you ever been in a situation where you make a decision then you find out something later and you think, "Well if I'd known that before, I would have done something differently." We lack knowledge. We don't know all the factors that are involved.

Second, we lack perspective. Sometimes our perspective is jaded or distorted. We don't know how other people will perceive this decision we make. We don't know everybody's point of view. We lack perspective on what would be the wisest decision.

Then third, we lack experience. We know that if we've been through a particular experience then we're wiser because of it. If you go through an experience for the first time, you don't know what to do. You go through it for the hundredth time, you've got a little better idea what to do. There's a wisdom that's there. That's the reason our wisdom is limited is because we lack knowledge, even the smartest of us in this room. We lack perspective, even the most sensitive of us in this room, and we lack experience, even those who have been through the most in this life. We lack these things.

The unlimited wisdom of God ...

Compare that with the unlimited wisdom of God. What about His knowledge? God has perfect knowledge. God always has all the facts. God never finds out later, "Oh if I'd known that I would have done something different back here." He never says that, not once, because He knew it already, knows everything, every factor involved at all times in all of history. He never finds out any new information. You don't fill God in on something He hasn't thought of. He has perfect knowledge.

Second, He has eternal perspective. He views the ends of the earth, sees everything under the heavens. God understands, sees how every single detail of the universe affects every single person in the universe, not just every single person but in all time, for all of eternity. God has a perspective that is completely and totally eternal and completely and totally all encompassing.

He has eternal perspective, and third, He has infinite experience. He established the wind and measured the waters. He makes decrees for the rain and path of the thunderstorm. In other words He's got some experience doing this governing of the universe. He created it and He's governed it and He's governed it forever perfectly wise. He's not a rookie when it comes to wisdom, when it comes to the experience any one of us will go through.

Now bring that to bear on the sufficiency of God in suffering. Absent an explanation to the why questions, how can we trust God in the darkness and when the darkness continues day after day, week after week, or month after month, or year after year, or whatever that looks like in your life? How do you trust God? The only way you can trust God is if you know that He has perfect knowledge. He knows everything, He knows every circumstance and every factor that's at work here. There's nothing He's not aware of.

He has eternal perspective. He sees what right here will do to affect this person in eternity. He sees what happens right here and how it will affect you for eternity. He has eternal perspective.

He has infinite experience. God as Father, this is Luke 11:11-13, He gives good gifts to His children and the wisdom of God reminds us that God always gives what is best. I will not pretend this is an easy truth when it comes to suffering but it is a bedrock truth. Even when you get the call that your loved one has passed away and you fall down on the floor weeping, there's a confidence that can be had even there that says, "God you know what is best. I don't know what is best. You know what is best." Amidst the confusion of our circumstances, God is all-wise.

This is gospel. Christ, 1 Corinthians 1, wisdom of God, foolishness of the world, wisdom of God. Why crush your Son on a Cross, God? That doesn't make sense. Why are you doing this? Why? Because He has perfect knowledge of every single one of our sins, he has an eternal perspective that 2,000 years later you and I would be sitting here worshipping Him for the salvation we have from all of our sins and He has infinite experience. He has designed our salvation to reconcile us to Himself. All glory be to God for His great wisdom.

Tozer put it best. I love this quote and he said, "With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?" God is infinitely wise and we honor Him, we honor God when we trust him in the dark because He is the one who holds wisdom. In the confusion of our circumstances, God is all wise. He is present, He is good, He is wise. These are pictures of His sufficiency that ultimately lead us to this last picture.

In the depth of our despair, God is our hope.

In the depth of our despair, God is our hope. I want you to come back with me to chapter 3 and I want you to see this continuing dialogue with Job and his friends. I want you just to get a glimpse and we're just going to fly through a couple different places. I want you to

see the depth of Job's despair. You heard it in chapter 3:11, *"Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb"* (Job 3:11), and it just gets more depressing after this.

Go over to chapter 6:8. Listen to what Job says. All these are words from Job. Verse 8, *"Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I would still have this consolation—my joy in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One"* (Job 6:8-10). Chapter 7:13, "Oh that God would crush me," he said in chapter 6. Chapter 7:13, *"When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning"* (Job 7:13-16). Do you ever feel that? Days have no meaning. Even to where he's saying, "I prefer death."

Get over to chapter 10:20. See the despair here. He's longing to die. *"Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness"* (Job 10:20-22). Keep going to the right, chapter 14:13. Listen to what he says to God. "If only," verses 13-14, *"If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me"* (Job 14:13)!

Chapter 16, very end of chapter 16:22, Job says, *"Only a few years will pass before I go on the journey of no return."* Chapter 17:1, *"My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me. Surely mockers surround me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility"* (Job 17:1-2). You get to the very end of that chapter, verse 13, *"If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother' or 'My sister,' where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust"* (Job 17:13-16)? You see this increasingly seemingly hopeless picture in Job's life.

This is the depth of despair and it really kind of climaxes in chapter 19. Look at 19:13. This is where he kind of brings it all to a point.

He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien. I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me. I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh (Job 19:13-22)?

It is the depth of despair. You feel the weight of this, the honesty in this. I can't go on, I don't want to go on and those who cared about me before were eating away at my flesh; depth of despair.

Now don't miss it. He's crying out for hope in the depth of his despair and he brings it to a point here and I want you to listen to what happens next. It is one of the most beautiful passages in all the book of Job. Listen to verse 23: *"Oh, that my words were recorded, that*

they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me” (Job 19:23-27)!

Wow, Job reaches into his language and pulls out this word, “Redeemer”. The same word in the book of Ruth describing the champion of the oppressed, the same word in Proverbs describing the defender of the weak, and the same word in Exodus that describes the deliverer of the captured. Job says, “I have a Redeemer,” a vindicator who lives and in the end – isn’t that a great phrase? This is not the end. Job says this is not the end, this is not the end. “In the end I will see Him.” I’ll see Him in what? “In my flesh I will see God, after my skin has been destroyed.” What a great picture.

Boils gone, sores gone, cancer gone, disease gone; in the end, after my skin has been destroyed, in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see Him, not another. I will see with my own eyes, how my heart yearns within me. This is the picture, this is the hope that Job clings to in the depth of his despair and I believe it’s twofold and I want to bring it home to our sufficiency of God and our suffering in this room.

He will heal our bodies.

Twofold hope that he clings to, number one, God will heal our bodies. He will heal our bodies. Job clings to this. Job believed that he would have a new body, one day see God, and we know this. This is gospel. This is Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, resurrected Lord, resurrected body. This is Romans 8:23 and following. We know that our suffering here is not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. The creation groans as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the—what? The redemption—the redeemer—of our bodies. Romans 8. God brings redemption to our bodies.

Now there’s a lot of discussion, a lot of debate in our day over whether or not God heals people of cancer or disease or other sickness. People ask is God able to heal people of cancer or disease or other sickness. What’s the answer to that? Absolutely, there’s no cancer that God can’t overcome. There’s no disease that’s too big for God. So is it okay then to pray for healing like that? Absolutely, ask God, pray to God, show His power like that. But when you pray like that, do not forget the other truths that we have seen here in Job. Do not pray as Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar would have you pray, thinking if you’d just have enough faith, if you’d just believe enough, if you’d just get things right enough in your life, then it would happen. This is false gospel. We’ve seen this. It’s false gospel just believe it will happen. Have enough faith. Obey God enough; be right enough and it will happen.

The reality is we’re seeing this in the book of Job, you may be wholehearted in your obedience to God and completely faithful in your obedience to Him and the reality is you may have the worst form of cancer or disease known in this life and you may never be delivered from it in this life. I’ll say that one more time. This is truth. You may be wholehearted and completely faithful in your obedience to God, husband, wife, children, honoring Him and you may be struck tomorrow, today with the worst form of cancer or disease and you may never be delivered from it in this life.

Does this mean that God would then be choosing not to show His power in your life? That is most definitively not what that means because the reality we’re seeing here from Job 3-31

is this: even when the pain and suffering persists, even when the depth of despair is dark, you still have hope and there is a power from God that I believe in many ways outweighs power to heal temporarily in this life, a power from God to sustain and say in the middle, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him."

There is a term in our day that has become common. The term is "cancer survivor". And the idea is that if you have cancer and you live through it, then you're a survivor. You've beat cancer. Apparently if you have cancer and you don't live through it then you're not a survivor. You've lost to cancer. That is not true.

Here's why it's not true biblically. Here's why it's not true in light of what we've seen here. If you have cancer and you live through it, it doesn't mean you've won anything. In fact, if you have cancer and you live through it, but you still don't treasure God, then you have lost. In fact, cancer at that point has won because you're still convinced that you can live this life on your own apart from the treasure who is God. But when you face cancer and it drives you to treasure God more than life itself, more than anything this life has to offer, then you win regardless of whether or not you live or die. You're a cancer survivor. You win.

You want to see the power of God? When two individuals from our church family found out that they had deadly forms of cancer, they said, "My hope is in God." When they were told the odds that were against them, they said, "My hope is in God," because comfort in cancer doesn't come from odds. It comes from God. When they went through surgery, they said, "My hope is in God," and when they went through grueling chemotherapy week after week after week they said, "My hope is in God," and when they received more bad diagnoses and more bad doctor's reports and more news of days or months to live, they said, "My hope is in God," and when I visited each of them by their bedside the week before they passed away, they whispered in their pain, "My hope is in God," and when they breathed their last breath, you know what they breathed? They breathed, "My hope is in God." That's surviving cancer. That is surviving cancer and I say that because when they breathed that last breath and said, "My hope is in God," they were immediately transformed into the presence of Jesus Christ and they said, "I know my Redeemer lives! I know my Redeemer lives and in the end I am standing upon the earth with Him and after my skin has been destroyed in my flesh I now see God. I myself see it with my own eyes. How my heart has yearned within me for this." That's surviving cancer. That's surviving cancer. That's walking through the middle of suffering and seeing the sufficiency of God. He does heal. He heals eternally. He is our Healer. He heals eternally.

We will see His face.

He will heal our bodies, praise God, and second, this is our hope, He will heal our bodies and we will see His face. The picture here is a foreshadowing of Revelation 22:4. If you don't have Revelation 22:4 underlined in your Bible, circled with stars all around it, let me encourage you to do that. If you don't live every day based on Revelation 22:4 let me encourage you to do that. Five words in the New Testament, "*They will see His face*" (Rev. 22:4). This is the hope that wakes us up in the morning, that's with us when we lie down at night, it's with us when we're in the hospital bed, it's with us when we're walking through this struggle or that struggle. There is coming a day that I will see His face, I'll see His face, I'll glimpse His greatness in all of its fullness. This is worth it. Amidst the depth of our despair He is our hope.

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