

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 20/3/2022

Series: "Seeing God through Suffering" Part 3"

"Loss, Lament and Worship" Text: Job Chapter 3

Scripture references from the ESV

Job 3 (see page 4 for the rest of the chapter): 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.

We have lost the language of biblical lament.

Because of that, we have no way of processing our deepest suffering and our significant sorrows in a way that glorifies God, strengthens our faith and leads us to worship. Suffering is an inevitable aspect of life, though the degree of suffering is different. Some people only seem to have very light troubles, while others never have a moment when the weight of sorrow lifts from them. Whatever degree of suffering you experience, from the moment you are born, you begin a life where suffering is inevitable.

You may find ways of dealing with it, but often these are wrong ways.

- a) **Avoidance:** We anticipate suffering and find ways to avoid it. For example, we might avoid speaking up for the truth to avoid being cancelled for doing so.
- b) **Fighting:** When we try to fight through trouble, we end up bitter and angry towards God, those who are dear to us and our entire life and circumstances.
- c) **Stoicism:** We might try to just grit our teeth and get through it, feeling that this is just our lot in life.
- d) **Escapism:** In our culture, there are so many ways to escape. We might watch endless TV, try retail therapy, use mind-altering substances (even chocolate comes under this heading), or meet with friends just to have a good time. We

often make use of comparison to make ourselves feel better about our own problems, saying (for example) it could be worse – I could be living in Ukraine. However, those ways don't actually deal with the sorrow. They only mask it, and in some cases add to the suffering.

- Even if we avoid one trouble, we can't avoid the next one.
- Stoicism and fighting leave us hardened to life and to those around us
- We feel guilty because of the time we have wasted in front of the TV. Retail therapy didn't bring joy but has left a hole in the budget. Substances leave us with a headache and dependency. When our friends leave, we are alone again with our sorrows. Comparisons don't take the pain away because our sorrows are significant.

Those ways of trying to deal with our trouble, sorrow and grief do **not** glorify God as being the treasure of our lives, the sustainer of our souls, and the sovereign King to whom we must submit. We need a different way. The godly people in the Bible dealt with their significant sorrow, trouble and grief through lament.

The secret to glorifying God in our suffering is learning to lament

Mark Vroegop's book entitled *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* (see p4) talks of why lament is necessary and right, what it is and how we can do lament in the right way. He says:

- Lament is how you live between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God's sovereignty.
- Lament is how Christians grieve.

We need to recover the language of biblical lament especially in our sung worship. We sing about being a new creation with 'joy that knows no limit'. Perhaps we might sing *Trust and Obey*, which contains these words: 'Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear can abide while we trust and obey'. Yet is that true?

- What happens when we are trusting and obeying and we are plunged into the deepest sorrow?

- What happens when we can't sing of the joy that knows no limit because our hearts are weighed down with sorrow, not because we failed to trust and obey God, but precisely because we did trust and obey?

When that happens, we need lament

Job 3 is probably one of the darkest chapters in the whole of the Bible. There is good reason to plunge into the depths of darkest despair that we find in it. We need to learn how to lament and how to rightly grieve as Christians in a way that glorifies God, leads us to hope and ends in true worship. How can we learn this?

- 1) **Lament is birthed in the deepest grief.** The suffering of 21st century Christians in the West does not compare to Job's suffering in any way. Over the course of one day that began like any other day for Job, he lost all his wealth and all his family apart from his wife. We read his response in **Chapter 1:20-21**.

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."

Only the grace of God at work in his life enabled him to say this. The suffering hasn't ended, however. Satan then afflicts Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head. Job is suffering the deepest grief and

it is out of this deepest grief that his lament comes.

So far, he has not spoken against God. He has not cursed God. He has sat silent for seven days and seven nights but now the anguish in his heart rises up and pours out in deep lament.

- Job is an example to us that you can be a godly believer and still suffer deeply. In those times, you discover that the sentimental songs that can be found in Christian worship do not fit the bill.

We need the language of lament

- 2) **Lament verbalises heart pain.** Satan had accused Job of only fearing God because of the good things God had given him. He said that if all that was taken away, Job would curse God. When Job starts to lament, he does curse but he does **not** curse God. Instead, he curses the day of his birth and the night of his conception. (**vv3-7** above, **9-12, 16** see p4). We are meant to feel the

weight of this deep grief of the blameless man who is suffering so intensely. At this stage, he is not asking why he was suffering or why God allowed it, or why do good people suffer while evil people have a life of ease.

He is asking why he had even been conceived, why he hadn't died at the moment of birth or been left to die as a newborn child. If any of those things had happened, he would never have seen all this trouble. He ends this lament by wishing he was dead. (vv 20-22 see p4). Job is not suicidal. He knows it would be a sin to take his own life, since life is God's to give and take. He sees no way out, and he is expressing the deep grief in his heart. Lament speaks out the deep sorrow in our heart with raw honesty. We can even ask the question 'why?'. Our hymns and songs don't help us much with the language we need for this.

Instead, we need to make use of the Psalms to find the words to use.

The Psalms are a rich treasury of prayers given to us by God to use in speaking out our significant sorrows.

3) Lament hopes in God. There is hope even in the darkness of this passage.

"Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul (v20)

There is utter despair in this verse, yet Job is not being stoic, or ignoring the pain.

Instead in his deep suffering,

he is pouring his energy into dealing with God.

In the midst of his distress, Job wants to discover the God who is treating him like this. He does this by asking questions, and now he is asking 'Why'? We only ask questions of those we know to be listening – those who will give us an answer. Deep in his soul, Job entertains the hope of getting an answer. We see from this that:

Lament is not an unfaithful response to suffering.

Rather, lament is the desperate cry of a person whose trust and confidence are in God. Even though God might seem absent, lament reaches out to God in hope that he will listen, he will answer, he will come and he will help.

4) Lament ends in seeing God. Job will come to see God with his eyes of faith.

After much lament and questioning, God will speak into Job's life and Job will

see. This series is entitled **Seeing God through suffering**, and the Psalms of lament show us that

lament opens up the way to God.

We need to hold on to some key points:

a) Godly believers do suffer. God himself testifies to Job's blamelessness so we can see from Job that

righteous people can and do suffer deeply

Suffering is not the result of a lack of faith. That is a lie. Job is a man who is trusting and obeying God – a faith filled man who nonetheless suffers. He points us to another faith filled man who also suffered:

- A perfectly righteous man who experienced a much deeper darkness than Job
- A man whom God commended, but who in his deepest agony asked 'Why?'.

That man is the Lord Jesus Christ who, on the cross, cried out: **My God, my God, WHY have you forsaken me?**

All through Job's suffering, God was present even though Job couldn't feel his presence and the same is true for us.

But when Jesus died on the cross, **God was absent from him** because the eternal Son of God was bearing our sin so that even in our deepest suffering we would never be forsaken and would still have God's presence in our lives.

If we are believers in Jesus, we are followers of a righteous man who suffered and we can be sure that our suffering is not necessarily a sign that we failed to trust and obey.

b) Godly believers make use of lament. Lament is the language God has given us so that we can reach out to him. Jesus made use of the laments in the Psalms, and when we do the same, the Lord is speaking not just to us, but through us and in us. As we do this, we fellowship with Christ in a wonderful way that leads us to see him. That doesn't mean our suffering changes instantly. Coming out of our significant suffering takes time.

- It is a process that God takes us through because he is revealing himself to us through the pain and suffering.

As we make use of the language of lament that he has given to us, then we meet him in the Psalms. Christ draws near to us and the song that rises up in us is his song so that we are perfectly in tune with our Saviour even when nothing has changed around us. We need to learn the language of lament and **Psalm 13** is a good place to start.

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

**² How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?**

³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

⁴ lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Please note that Pastor Tim will preach from Job chapter 2 (Job's friends) next week on Mothering Sunday. That section is not being left out, but this sermon on Chapter 3 was inappropriate for that day.

Job 3:1-2, 8-21 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.

² And Job said:

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?

¹² Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?

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

¹⁴ with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves,

¹⁵ or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver.

¹⁶ Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light?

¹⁷ There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.

¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.

¹⁹ The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.

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?

²⁴ For my sighing comes instead of ^[a] 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.”

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy by Mark Vroegop. Published by Crossway 2019 ISBN 978-1433561481 or on Kindle.

Other quotes from the book:

Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God

Without lament we won't know how to process pain. Silence, bitterness and even anger can dominate our spiritual lives instead.

Without lament, we won't know how to help people walking through sorrow. Instead, we will offer trite solutions, unhelpful comments or impatient responses.

What's more, without this sacred song of sorrow, we'll miss the lessons historic laments are intended to teach us.