

Keynotes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on 1/5/2022

Series: "Seeing God through Suffering"

Pt 6 "When anguished reason fails"

Text: Job verses 13-24

Scripture references from the ESV

Job 9:13-24 "God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab.¹⁴ How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? 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. ¹⁷ For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; ¹⁸ he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. ¹⁹ If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?

²⁰ Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.

²¹ I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life. ²² It is all one; therefore I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. ²³ When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity^[a] of the innocent. ²⁴ The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges— if it is not he, who then is it?

- Please read the whole of **Chapters 9 and 10** in your Bible before reading these notes

It's not fair! This is so often our cry when someone acts unjustly against us, from childhood onwards. It becomes our comfort cry when we are wronged in any situation even as adults. We may feel that sense of injustice for others too when it seems that nothing has been done to help someone in need.

- What happens when it is God whom we think has acted unfairly or unjustly?

Many people, when something has gone wrong in their life or the life of someone they love, blame God for it. They feel he has not treated them fairly and they want nothing to do with him. As Christians, most of us probably cannot imagine feeling like that, but it is possible that at times the idea might pop into our mind that life, under the sovereign control of God, is not fair. Even if we don't feel like that, we may well come across others who do.

- How does God meet us in those times when we feel life has not treated us fairly?

- How do we help people who are struggling with God because of injustice and unfairness in their life?

The book of Job, where we meet a blameless man who is suffering more than he deserved, helps us wrestle with these questions.

In one day, Job lost his wealth and family, and then later he lost his health. His friends, who came to comfort him, added to his suffering by accusing him of hidden sin and concluding that his suffering was so great because of his sin.

Their theology is summed up by Bildad:

Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers (Job 8:20).

The friends cannot imagine that God would afflict a blameless person, because that would make God unjust. Job had taken the same view (9:1-2a see p4), and would have expressed the same argument to someone else but now

Job found himself in deep suffering and was unable to make sense of it.

In these chapters, he wrestles with the character of God, and though he comes to a wrong conclusion

about God, he also comes to a place where he longs for Christ.

Job asks the question: **How can a man be in the right before God? (9:2b)**. Though Job is not sinless, God says of him that he is blameless (1:8 see p4). In the opening chapters, we are told that Job is suffering, not because of some heinous sin, but because God is proving to the angelic and demonic world, and to us, that he (God) is worthy of praise just for who he is, not for what he gives. Job doesn't know why he is suffering but he knows that

he has not committed the sins that deserve the kind of suffering he is experiencing

Job feels that this is not fair. Indeed, it feels unjust and he wants to argue his case with God. He wants to go to court with God and for God to justify him, declaring him blameless, and so proving that his suffering is not because of some great sin. Job wants to be in the right before God. (23:3-7 see p4).

What Job wants is to be able to stand in God's presence as the blameless and upright man he is.

Remarkably, **Job**, having lost his wealth, family, health and the respect of his friends, **longs for God**.

- He is **not** longing for the restoration of the material things he has lost
- He is longing for the restoration of the God who has afflicted him without cause

What we long for reveals the functional god that controls us. If we long for material things, or even for our family, then those are our functional gods. When they are taken from us, life seems not worth living and God is seen to be unjust and not worthy of our worship. Job struggles with the justice of God but he is not willing to curse God and die despite all that Satan levelled at him. He still holds fast to God even though he cannot understand what God is doing in his life and even though he feels that God is acting unjustly.

That is the sign of a true believer whose heart is right before God. Even if they struggle with the character and nature of God, and what God is doing in their life, they still long for him.

Job wants God

Specifically, Job wants to lay out his blamelessness in God's court and to hear God justify him. However, he sees four reasons that hinder him coming to God. Those four reasons lead Job to a wrong conclusion about God, but at the same time lead him to a longing for Christ.

1. **God is unsearchable (9:3-10 see p4).** Job recognises the greatness of God (v4), and gives examples of God's wisdom and might (v5ff). He understands that God is the creator of all things and therefore has sovereign power over everything. God can choose to shake the earth through an earthquake, or snuff out the light of the sun.

God has the power to do these things, even if it does not make sense to us (v10).

Under the sovereign hand of God, things happen in this world that we, as mortals, cannot understand. He is God and we are not, and they don't make sense and appear unjust because we do not have the infinite wisdom of God.

Job knows that God's wisdom is above his wisdom (9:3-4 see p4) and it is this that leads Job to hesitate in coming to God. When God starts to question Job, Job has to fall silent as he had anticipated (9:3 see p4).

- Job is hindered in coming to God because he feels that God is surely too great to take notice of human beings, and would not listen to him even if he could lay his case before him (v16 above).

2. **God is invisible (9:11 see p4).** Job understands that God is spirit. When he is near, you cannot see him. There is a sense of the absolute otherness of God that makes him seem elusive to mere humans.

- Job is hindered from coming to God because he wondered how he could come into the presence of a God he could not see. He did not know if God was even there.

3. **God is unaccountable (9:12 see p4).** Job understands that God is the sovereign creator of the universe and is not accountable to anyone. No one can say to God ‘What are you doing?’ even when he takes things away from them.

God does not need to answer to us

The apostle Paul also tells us this (**Romans 9:20-21 see p4**). In Job’s mind, there is no point in trying to ask God why he, a blameless man, has to suffer, because God does not have to answer. It would probably make things worse (v20 above).

- Job is hindered from coming to God because he had absolutely no hope of having his case heard before
God.

In his anguish and with his limited knowledge of God, he now draws a wrong conclusion.

4. **God is unjust (v22-24 above).** Job can only conclude that, given the sovereignty of God over all things, God must be unjust. Job’s worldview has completely collapsed. He believed with his friends that God is just, running the world justly, and therefore good things happen to good people and vice versa.

As he processes his pain, he has come to see that this worldview doesn’t stack up. Job knows that:

- he is blameless – he hasn’t committed the kind of sins that deserve the suffering he is experiencing
- God is ultimately sovereign – Job has given testimony to God’s control over the universe

- God could have stopped the suffering but he hasn't chosen to do so (v17 above)

In Job's eyes, all this can only mean that God is unjust. Job's only options appear to be to just get on with life, though more suffering might come, or try to clean himself up with religious rituals, though he believes God will still find him dirty (9:27-31 see p4).

Job is in a desperate place, despairing of ever being able to come to God (9:32 see p4)

From this desperate place, he looks outside himself to seek another to help him. He wants an arbiter (9:33 see p4):

- One who could stand in the gap between God and himself, putting his hand on God and on Job
- One who could take the rod of God away from Job because he himself was acceptable to God.

This would change everything for Job (9:35). Job's suffering continued with the cry for a mediator unanswered but

is there one who can bridge the gap between God and man? We do need an answer.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

(1 Timothy 2:5)

Jesus stands in the gap and provides the answer to all Job's reasons for not being able to come to God.

- God is too great to take notice of humanity but **in Christ, God became one of us to lift our humanity to the throne of God**
- God is elusive because he is invisible but **in Christ the invisible God has been made visible**
- God is unaccountable but **in Christ we see God submitting to his own unfathomable wisdom. Jesus got no answer to his cry on the cross – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**
- God was acting unjustly but **in Christ we see the justice of God as a truly sinless man suffered for the crimes of humanity and satisfied the justice of God**

'It's not fair' is a cry for justice and **that cry for justice is met in Christ**. In Christ:

- Our wrongs are put right so that we can come into God's presence
- The wrongs we see in the world will one day be put right when he returns to judge the earth

- This world will be recreated to become a place where there is no injustice or suffering

When we struggle with the fairness of God and of life, **we need God to speak.**

We cannot fathom out God solely from his actions in the world

We need God's own revelation of himself. His greatest revelation of himself is his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, who

- touches both God and man, because he is the God man
- Understands our life in a fallen world because he has experienced it first hand
- Reveals God to us in a living, personal intimate way, assuring us that he cares for us in our suffering

'It's not fair' does not always have an answer this side of eternity, but

We can trust in a God who has experienced the unfairness of human suffering and who promises to be with us in our own suffering, granting us all the grace we need

9:1-2a Then Job answered and said: ² "Truly I know that it is so:

1:8 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?"

23:3-7 Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!

⁴ I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.

⁵ I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me.

⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me.

⁷ There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted for ever by my judge.

9:3-10 If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times.

⁴ He is wise in heart and mighty in strength —who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?—

⁵ he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger,

⁶ who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble;

⁷ who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars;

⁸ who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea;

⁹ who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;
¹⁰ who does great things beyond searching out, and marvellous things beyond number.

9:11 Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

9:12 Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'

Romans 9:20-21 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use?

9:27-31 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer',

²⁸ I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent.

²⁹ I shall be condemned; why then do I labour in vain?

³⁰ If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye,

³¹ yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me.

9:32 For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together

9:33 ³³ There is no ^[d] arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.

9:35 Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.