

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 27/3/2022

Series: "Seeing God through Suffering" Part 4"

"The best thing to do – say nothing? Text: Job Chapter 2

Scripture references from ESV

Job 2:11-13 (see p4 for full chapter) Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. ¹² And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. ¹³ And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

Caring for the church is the responsibility of everyone within the church

It is not just elders, deacons or home group leaders who are to do the caring. We all have a part to play, as we can see from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Paul expected the church to be a place where everyone was involved in seeking to comfort one another. (**2 Cor 13:11** see p4). He issues the command '**Comfort one another**', at the end of a letter which began by showing us (**2 Cor 1:3-4** see p4) that:

God comforts us so that we are able to comfort others

If a church is to be a place where we comfort one another in our significant suffering and sorrow, how should we do it, and how should we **NOT** do it? After all, we have all been on the receiving end of well-intentioned words of comfort that have added to our sorrows, and have all done the same thing to others.

Job is a man who trusts and obeys God, and yet this leads him into suffering. In a single day, he is stripped of all his wealth and buries his ten children. Later he suffers painful boils from his feet right up to his head. Job knows nothing of the accusations against him and God expressed by Satan, nor of the challenge made by Satan that if God takes everything away from Job, he will curse God to his face.

The response from Job's wife (**2:9** see p4) appears to be encouraging Job to do just that, but we need to have compassion, remembering that she, too, has lost her family and their wealth and has seen her husband reduced to a pitiful figure. There is nothing she can do to help him. Her words could be part of Satan's attack on Job. Yet Job speaks out of his own suffering and gives words of comfort to help his wife. Though he says she is speaking **as one of the foolish women**, he is in fact commending her, not calling her foolish. Instead, he directs her to the goodness of God (**2:10** see p4). In his own deep grief, Job, as a loving husband, is seeking to comfort his wife.

Who will comfort Job? (**2:11** above). It seems as if the arrival of his friends will bring the comfort he needs at this time of significant suffering, and perhaps also show us how we can comfort others.

Sadly, these friends are an example of how **not** to comfort. They start well, and we can learn from them, but as they go on, they fail to support Job properly, actually adding to and prolonging his suffering. These friends are unable to comfort Job and the same will be true for us if we rely on human wisdom.

Ultimately, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who comforts his people.

Any comfort we give will only be real comfort as

The Lord Jesus Christ works through us to comfort others

The three friends are loyal, grieving, wise and silent.

1. **Three loyal friends** (v11 above). These friends are more than just Facebook friends, who communicate with us via social media and have to be prompted by an automatic reminder to wish us Happy Birthday. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar actually came to visit Job. They didn't have the option of social media of course, but even

if they had, they would still have visited in person. **Proverbs 18:24** says 'A man of many companions may

come to ruin, but **there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother**'. The three friends were that kind of friend.

They weren't local to Job and all lived in different places, yet they planned their visit so that they all arrived at the same time. That was a complicated and time-consuming exercise. It probably took weeks before they first got the news about Job, then more weeks to communicate with one another about the arrangements, and more weeks again to travel to the place where they were to gather. Job refers to '**months of emptiness**' (Job 7:3 see p4), which probably describes this period of being alone in his suffering.

Even though these friends later added to Job's suffering, there must have been a moment when he was comforted that these three men had taken such great trouble to come and visit him.

2. Three grieving friends (v12 above). When they see Job, he is unrecognisable.

He is a lonely figure whose only comfort is a piece of broken pottery which he uses to get relief from the pain and itching of the boils on his body. The weight of Job's suffering has brought emotions that have disfigured Job.

The calamity has gone deeper than just Job's skin.

It has taken Job to a place that had been alien to Job and was alien to his friends. He was so broken that all they can do is weep. This type of weeping is a loud wailing that happens in Eastern cultures, particularly when a relative has died. They tear their robes and sprinkle dust on their heads. The latter is a symbol of death – the body has come from dust and returns to dust. The friends identify with this symbol of death as they contemplate the death of Job's children and potentially the death of Job. Here are men who

weep with him who weeps.

Sometimes that is what we need to do when someone is suffering. The Hebrew word that is translated as sympathy is actually closer to the word 'empathy'. Sympathy understands the pain someone is going through, but empathy:

- feels the pain they are feeling
- enters into the suffering and shares in the feelings of that person.

One of the reasons God takes us through suffering is so that we can rightly empathise with others and rightly share in their feelings.

Then we can weep with those who weep and say I know what you're going through.

Yet empathy isn't the same as giving comfort.

- Comfort is a word meaning to alleviate sorrow or distress, or give emotional support.
- Empathy enters into another's feelings and may be expressed in weeping with them. It doesn't give comfort
- Comfort is active and must **speak words** to the heart and mind

If these three friends are going to offer comfort, and not just empathy, then they must speak into Job's heart and mind. As we look at them, we can hope that they will speak helpfully into Job's sufferings.

3. Three wise friends (v11 above) Eliphaz came from Edom – a place renowned for its wisdom. It is a reasonable assumption that Bildad and Zophar were also men with much learning and wisdom. They think they are wise when they start to speak but we will soon see that their wisdom was deficient.

It was worldly wisdom that failed to rightly understand God and what God was doing. They don't really have anything to say.

4. Three silent friends (v13 above). Is the best thing to do to say nothing? We could look at **v13** and imagine

that these friends are doing what is best. To sit in silence for seven days and seven nights with a grieving

man seems like a kind, wise thing to do. There are times when it is appropriate to say nothing when people are suffering, when it is right to simply hold the hand of a person grieving or give them a hug.

However, to be silent for seven days and seven nights in the face of such suffering raises some questions.

- a) Is it possible that they spoke to each other **about** Job, but not **to** him as the text might imply? That would have been unkind.
- b) Are they grieving Job's imminent death? Seven days and seven nights is the period of mourning for a dead person, and that time of mourning for Job's children had long gone.

c) Are they saying nothing because they just don't know what to say? Human wisdom has failed them and left them ill-equipped to speak words of comfort.

These are three loyal friends who feel deeply Job's suffering, but for all their supposed wisdom, they are unable to speak words of comfort to Job. Job is still experiencing the loneliness of suffering despite them sitting with him.

So, is there anyone who can and will speak comfort into Job's life? In his deepest sorrow and suffering,

Job needs to hear God's voice, as we do.

If we are true believers, we do have a friend, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is:

- Truly loyal – he left the splendour of heaven to come to earth for us
- Truly empathetic – he has been tempted in every way we are yet did not sin
- Truly wise – with the wisdom of God

He does not stay silent because he is the one who knows what to say to us.

a) Ultimately, Jesus is the one who comforts us.

Through his word, by his Spirit, God speaks into our significant suffering to reveal himself and to show us that he is sufficient for us in our sorrow. We pour out our hearts to him in lament and he responds by speaking his word into our suffering and our sorrow

- to assure us that he has hold of us and will work all things for our good.
- to assure us that he loves us and that his presence is with us.

Sometimes he does this while we are reading the Bible on our own but often

He uses other people to speak his words of comfort to us.

Christ is the one who comforts us, and he may use us to comfort others. For us that means:

b) We are to point people to Jesus.

The first mistake Job's friends made, and one we often make, was

They tried to fix the problem but missed the person

They tried to make sense out of Job's suffering, but in the process missed Job who was suffering. Everything changed for Job when God spoke and revealed himself to

Job. The friends needed to show God's greatness to Job rather than condemn him or try to fix him.

If we are going to comfort one another we need to put ourselves out to see people, and enter into their suffering with true empathy. We need to read the word with them, asking God to show them something that is appropriate to their suffering, so that they get sight of the glory of God.

A person who is suffering does not need our human wisdom.

They need to get sight of the glory of God, revealed in his word by the power of his Spirit.

Job 2: Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ³ 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? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." ⁴ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵ But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."

¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"^[a] In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

¹¹ Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. ¹² And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. ¹³ And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

2 Cor 13:11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 Cor 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Job 7:3 so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.