

## Job 2:11-3:26: Depression to the Glory of God

I want to read the entirety of this chapter and I want to do it slowly because I think we have here arguably the deepest expression of sorrow and grief in the whole Bible. It is the grief of losing basically everything you have and having zero hope to move on. Interestingly, almost to add a level of depth, this is set in Hebrew poetry. It's a poetic lament wishing that he had never been born. **Read**

I think it's safe to say that for the most part we don't do grief very well. Even as Christians we don't do well when we are grieving. We don't know what to do with it when other people are grieving. We don't know how to take what we know about God and the world from the Bible and apply it rightly to situations of suffering.

Part of that is simply because we were not originally designed to suffer at all. Life in the Garden of Eden was not a life of suffering - it was a life of peace and joy. The Fall is what brought suffering into the world so there is a sense in which suffering and tragedy are *unnatural*. The fact that we suffer at all should lead us to conclude that something is really wrong with the world.

Ironically, it is through suffering that suffering will ultimately be defeated. We look to Jesus who suffered more than we can ever imagine to reverse suffering for his people for all eternity - ultimately to remove the suffering in hell we deserve for our sin, but also to remove all pain and sorrow and tears from our eyes. More on that in a bit.

But as Christians we need to get really comfortable with all kinds of suffering because suffering is part of God's grand design of spreading his glory.

The apostle Paul reminded the believers in **Acts 14:22** that "through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of heaven."

**Rom. 8:17** says "we are fellow heirs with Christ provided that we suffer with him in order that we might be glorified with him."

Did you know that the condition for entering heaven is suffering? No one is saved because they suffer. But if you are truly saved you will be called to suffer in some way to the glory of God.

I'm reading a biography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxas. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was born around 1900 and ultimately died attempting to assassinate Hitler. But he spent a year in America when black and white people were divided - black people had to ride in different train cars and buses. And he saw the suffering of many black people as a result of that. But he also saw that the black churches were flourishing in spite of the suffering they faced while the white churches were going off into liberalism.

Here's what he said about the difference: "the only real piety and power that he had seen in the American church seemed to be in the churches where there were a present reality and a past history of suffering" (Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer*, pg. 110).

It was godly suffering that gave power to black churches. While no one likes to suffer or grieve or feel sustained sadness, it is often the road God uses to bring glory to himself through us. And so I titled this sermon depression to the glory of God because although it often doesn't feel like it, God many times can use our depression and sadness and grief for his glory.

1) Sometimes the best thing we can do is show up and be quiet.

Most of us have heard enough references to this passage to know that this was probably the best thing that Job's 3 friends ever did. They showed up and they sat and they prayed with him. That's it.

**Rom. 12:15:** the way we genuinely love people is to rejoice with those who rejoice and what? Weep with those who weep.

This is the thing that these guys get really right. First of all, they show up. Again, we don't know exactly where they are all from, but it seems as though they hear of Job's grief and they make the trek to be by his side. To offer sympathy and comfort.

They're not blaming the system or the building code or political upheaval that caused their friend to lose all he had - not yet anyway. They just come. This is one of the best things we can do.

The other thing is they tear their robes and sit with dust on their head. In the OT putting on sackcloth - a rough, dark clothing - indicated grief and suffering. And putting ashes on your head indicated the same thing. They're telling everyone they are mourning with Job. This was also used in prayer. So they are likely sitting and praying with Job and for Job.

They're not preaching. I've cited **Rom. 8:28**: God's works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose." That's true, but not always the most helpful truth right in the midst of suffering because it can sound like the tragedy is a good thing in and of itself. Sometimes quiet company is the best.

Here's the reality: suffering is weird. It's weird because every situation is different. Not everyone with cancer suffers the same pains. Or if they do they don't deal with it the same way.

Not everyone who is on their death bed has the same concerns. Not everyone who loses a family member is affected the same way. Depending upon the loss, you might feel sorrow. You might feel relief because the suffering is over. You might feel numb or confused or indifferent. You might feel joy.

**Prov. 11:10**: When the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.

There are many children who are relieved at the death of a parent because of years of abuse. And the only consolation they have is that God is executing justice. That might sound mean, but that's a actual consolation the Bible gives us.

On the other end, some people who lose a family member that they're not sure was a Christian are consoled only with the hope that God is doling out mercy.

Sometimes the hardship is unforeseen. Sometimes it was our fault. We did something to cause our pain. Sometimes it's a combination. Sometimes it was nobody's fault. Sometimes it's everybody's fault.

Some people clam up, some people need to talk through it. Some people are over it in a week, some people it takes years.

Have you guys seen that grief cycle chart? Something happens:

- 1- shock and denial
- 2 - anger
- 3 - depression and detachment
- 4 - bargaining
- 5 - acceptance
- 6 - return to normal

That's sometimes true. Sometimes the order is mixed up, sometimes people go in cycles. Sometimes people skip parts altogether. Sometimes it's nothing like that.

How we've dealt with losing a job or disappointment in life or sickness or tragedy is not necessarily the right way to deal with it nor how someone should deal with it. Because we are human and unique, suffering is unique. Often the best thing we can do is show up and be quiet.

By the way, we can know a lot of theology and not know how to apply it. Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz, Elihu - they probably knew more about God than most of us. If you look through what they say, they have a lot of theology.

They know a lot about God. They've got hundreds of biblical proverbs memorized. They're not pagans. They're just really misguided believers.

You can know a lot of Scripture and terrorize other people when they are going through tragedy. Sometimes, you can know very little about Scripture and be an amazing comfort.

## 2) Even the godliest people suffer severe depression. Read 3:1-10

This is the most severe depression imaginable. Chapter 3 is broken up into 3 basic sections. The first is where Job wishes he had died in the womb. The second is Job wishes he would have died at birth or in infancy. The 3rd section is Job longing for death. He wants to die.

Keep in mind, this was the man who twice God boasted as being blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. God himself proclaimed Job to be without equal in all the earth. And here we have 25 verses of lament poetry where he is wishing he would die.

And here's the thing we need to settle deep in our minds: depression is not intrinsically sinful. The most righteous man on the planet is neck deep in the darkest depression imaginable. God knew he would go through this, God orchestrated that he would go through this.

Jesus is called the man of sorrows. In the Garden of Gethsemane he is overwhelmed with sorrow and grief by what he's about to go through. Can you imagine going up to Jesus, "Hey, Jesus, what's the big deal? You'll die and rise again - no sweat. What's the fuss?" The fuss is that the wrath of the Father he's about to bear is real and terrifying. He keeps going because he knows what's on the other side of the cross - namely, the resurrection - but he's going through some deep water.

The apostle Paul says in **2 Cor. 1:8** that the persecution he endured was so bad he despaired of life itself. He was burdened beyond his own strength - he felt he had the death sentence.

King David wrote several psalms where he was burdened for his own life. Death would have been easier than life.

Have you ever felt like that? The grief and pain and hardship in life is so weighty you just don't want to go on. Or you do go on but you're numb and you just want it all to end? I've had a couple of times in my life like that. I wasn't going to take my own life, but I was kind of rooting for a meteor to hit me or stray bullet or something.

Even now I don't really like to look back on those times because it reminds me that the joy and the goodness I experience now are seasonal. It could be over tomorrow. And I know that, but I want to really embrace the good and the joy of life that I have now. And if I focus too much on the pain of the past it can rob the joy of right now. Yet as I get older there's always a sinking notion that the joy could come to a screeching halt.

Life really is like a roller coaster sometimes. Things often start very simple and calm and then you hit a point where it's up and down and upside down and life can be measured by how much screaming you're doing at any particular part of the ride.

This is what Job is tapping into. Why was I even allowed on the rollercoaster? **Read 3-6**

You've probably all seen the memes about how we're hoping we forget about 2020. This is essentially what Job is saying about the day he was born. "I wish we could just erase that day completely and my life with it." He wishes he had died in the womb. **Read 7-10**

When we hear of cursing we usually think of swearing. But in the OT cursing and blessing were huge themes. To bless someone was to pray God grace and mercy and compassion on them. And the OT saints saw these blessings as essential. You remember that Jacob wrestled the Lord all night to get a blessing out of him. It was crucial to have the Lord's blessing.

At the same time, the Lord's curse was the worse thing you could offer to someone. Job says let that day be cursed. Just like seamen cursed Leviathan - an ancient sea monster who could kill them in an instant - let that day be cursed. If you've ever been around sailors they're good at all kinds of cursing. Job says let them curse the day my birth.

This is not "I want to die" level of depression. This is "I wish that I had never been born" level of depression.

Job curses the day he was born because, like dominos being tipped over, that day ultimately led to this day. A day of suffering that was so great it overruled all other goodness and joy he had ever experienced.

So the thing I want you to pull away from here - either for yourself or someone else - is that just because someone is going through deep, deep depression does not necessarily mean they are in sin or are not godly.

It could be that the Lord has taken away. And it's going to take some time to work through that.

I read a really great book recently by Wayne Mack called *Out of the Blues*. It's a biblical theology of depression and how we can respond in a good way. Sometimes we're depressed because we're in sin and we know it and we're feeling the guilt of that. Sometimes we're responding badly to a bad situation. Sometimes we had big expectations and they weren't met. If you're struggling with chronic depression it might be a good resource to consider.

But one thing I wish he would have emphasized a little more is that sometimes we just go through profound seasons of sadness. And that's okay. In our American-there's-a-pill-for-that culture we just don't think it's okay to be unhappy. Or if we're unhappy for a sustained amount of time it's bad and we mousy have something really wrong with us. It's just not true.

Sadness, even profound sadness, is a mortal part of the human experience because of sin. It's not okay to be a jerk or sinful in how we deal with people. But seasons of sadness are normal. Our glory and our joy is on the other side of death.

Job goes on. He just wished he had never been born. He wishes he were still born. Next he wishes he had died at infancy. **Read 11-19**

Here Job is wishing upon himself that he would have died in infancy. This is really a grief. The death of a little one is one of the most tragic things we can imagine. I had a cousin I never met who died from SIDS - sudden infant death syndrome. No one knows why it happens. But I know I - and many other parents - have this small cloud every night I tuck my little ones into bed knowing that they might not be there in the morning.

As little as 150 years ago infant mortality was just part of life. Right now, the average life expectancy is almost 80 years old around the world. For most of history before 150 years ago - the industrial revolution - the average age was 26. You know why? Because of infant mortality. Sure, people lived to 80 back then. But just getting out of early childhood was an accomplishment.

I read a biography of Adoniram Judson when my wife was pregnant some years back. He was a missionary 200 years ago. He had 12 children. His first child was stillborn on a ship going to India and had to be buried at sea. Only 4 of his children made it to adulthood. I'm reading this thing thinking "God, are you preparing me for something?" We live in unprecedented times in all of history where most children make it to adulthood. This is a grace.

**Side:** this leads to the question of where do babies go when they die? Job does not answer that question. I've heard some good people try to answer that question from Job but if we're honest with this we're not given a clear picture. And I don't believe the Bible does give us a firm picture.

The Bible certainly doesn't explicitly say all little ones who die are in hell. But neither does it explicitly say all little ones who die are in heaven. There's no discussion at all in the Bible of an age of accountability or condition of accountability. These are things I think we all wish were in the Bible, but are actually absent.

For something as common as infant death, we are given very little information except to say that we can trust the God who made those little ones to deal with them rightly. With all my heart I want to believe that every little one who has ever died is in heaven but if we are simply being honest with the information we have it's hard to draw a firm line in the sand on that. We are simply called to trust God's judgment.

Which makes it all the more profound when Job basically says: why wasn't this common tragedy my fate? Why didn't I go with many, many little ones who have died in infancy.

Here we see that the OT understanding of heaven and hell wasn't as clear to Job as it is to us on this side of the NT. In the OT, most people understood that there was Sheol - sort of the place where all dead people go. And if you read through the OT you get the idea that Sheol isn't really hell, even though that's where you're hoping your enemies go. It's the place of the dead. It also seems like there's a sorting process that happens in Sheol where the righteous are in joy and the evil doers are in torment and everyone is waiting for the final resurrection. But those concepts aren't really expanded on until the NT.

So when Job says the wicked cease from troubling in **Vs. 17** - he's not saying they get a free pass to heaven. He's just saying they're not around here anymore to feel the pain that Job is going through.

And then he wrestles with the issue of why? Why does God give life to people only for them to experience this extreme tragedy? Isn't that sort of sadistic? **Read 20-26**

Job longs for death. Let me just say a word about suicide because that should be part of our conversation as believers.

On the one hand we have to understand clearly that suicide is murder. It is not like sacrifice where we lay down our life so that others might live. It's taking our life so that we escape suffering.

And Christians rightly wrestle with this issue especially when someone who claims to be a believer commits suicide. I think we are right to be concerned. Those who claim to follow Jesus, of all people, should have hope even in the darkest circumstances. And suicide is the utter absence of that hope. So does suicide confirm for us that someone was never a believer in the first place?

I don't think it's wise to make that judgment in every case. Suicide is not the unforgivable sin, that would be blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

I think it's reasonable to have concern about the eternal fate of someone who claimed Christ and killed themselves, but I'm not sure that's definitive. Job teaches us that even the most godly people wish for death sometimes.

**Vs. 21** says they dig for death more than for treasure. Proverbs says we should dig for wisdom like treasure. Job says he's digging for death.

We need to be careful that we're not wishing people into heaven that clearly won't be there, but we also need to be careful we're not consigning people to hell who maybe were suffering in ways we can't possibly comprehend.

David was a murderer after God's own heart. Samson from the book of Judges committed suicide and his name is written in the hall of faith of Hebrews 11. It is possible for the elect to commit atrocities and still experience grace. Nevertheless, suicide - like any other sin - is not an option for us to consider as believers.

**1 Cor. 10:13:** No temptation has overtaken us which is not common to man. God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

If you are in agony or grief or know someone who is, know that God's grace will allow you to endure it. The grace is there whether we believe it or not.

**Turn to Psalm 42.** This is a psalm of deep depression. If you are in deep despair please talk to someone. Call me if you'd like. Call someone. Psalm 42 doesn't make it all our troubles better. But it does provide a little light at the end of the tunnel. **Read 5-11**

The psalmist is in despair and the thing that gets him through is that he knows that it won't always be like this. One day, there will be praise in his heart again. One day this season will pass. Even if the season lasts until death, there will one day be praise.

Courtney Andersen has said that there is a buoyancy of human spirit. Just like an inflatable ball can be sent to the bottom of the ocean and it can take a long time for it to float to the top, so too the human spirit can be crushed down by life but eventually over time rises back up again in praise to God.

Whatever season you're in, brothers and sisters, persevere in faithfulness to God. Through faith Christ has saved us, through grace he will protect us. And one day - 10,000 years from now - when we've known only joy and peace and grace, we'll have no less days to sing his praise than when we've first begun.

**Pray**