

Job 2:11-3:26 – “Asking the Right Question”
Psalm 74
2 Corinthians 1:1-11

February 12, 2012

In Job’s lament, he refers to Leviathan.
Who is Leviathan?

Leviathan is a sea monster in ancient mythology.
The Canaanites spoke of Baal as the god of life and order,
Yamm (the god of the sea) and Mot (the god of death)
Leviathan was the great sea monster that arose against Baal.
Baal could not defeat Leviathan alone,
and so he called on the war-goddess Anat to rescue him.

In other words, Leviathan is a really powerful, nasty sea monster
that can wreak havoc even among the gods!

Job brings up Leviathan in the context of his curse on the day of his birth
and the night of his conception.
Leviathan is the sort of monster that might be able to mess with time!

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 74 says
12 Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.
13 You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.
14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
15 You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams.
16 Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun.
17 You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

I want you to hear the connection between God’s power over Leviathan,
and God’s power over day and night.

Psalm 74 will connect this with God’s triumph over Pharaoh and Egypt –
“you divided the sea by your might”
and will ask God once again to deliver his people from exile and death.

We should sing Psalm 74 remembering how our Lord Jesus Christ
crushed the head of the serpent in his resurrection from the dead –
but also asking that the God of peace will crush Satan under *our feet* soon!

Sing Psalm 74
Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Introduction: Job's Comforters (2:11-13)

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.*

We saw last time Job's three day descent into hell.

Job went from being one of the greatest men of the east
to being a nobody – an outcast on the ash heap of the village.

Now Job's friends come to comfort him.

What does it mean to “comfort” someone?

Not just “soothing” – not just “there, there, it'll be okay!”

These friends have made an appointment – they have arranged together –
to come and provide *comfort*.

What they set out to do is help assure him “that whatever disaster he has undergone fits into a predictable universal pattern.” (Estes)

The word “comfort” will become a significant word in the book of Job.

They have come to comfort him – to assure him that this is normal.

If it is normal for the innocent to suffer –

if it is normal for God to strike down the blameless and upright –
then Job is not quite sure that he likes ‘normal’!

But who are these friends?

Since the names of the three friends are not Hebrew,
it is not obvious to us what they mean.

Eliphaz the Temanite –

Eliphaz is a common Edomite name,
and Teman was a leading city in Edom.

So this one is easy to connect to the Edomites.

Bildad the Shuhite –

Bildad *sounds* like some Moabite names – but is otherwise unknown;
Shuah was one of the sons of Abraham by Keturah,

so we are left with a decent guess that Bildad comes from the same general area.

Zophar the Naamathite –

Zophar also has some general Edomite/Moabite connections,
but with no good candidate for a location (though Naamah is a city in Judah)

But when you take the three friends together,

the general idea is that these guys are from an Edomite milieu.

In other words, they are not Israelites – but they would have some Abrahamic background.

We certainly have a privileged seat in this debate.

We already know that God is just – and that Job is innocent.

We already know the background.

On the heavenly stage, Yahweh has proclaimed Job to be blameless and upright.

On the earthly stage, Job has endured the loss of *everything*,
the death of his children, the loss of his earthly possession,
even his wife's support.

Now his friends – three experts in ancient wisdom – will seek to make sense of this.

How can a just and upright man suffer without cause?

As they approach the town they see Job from a distance on the ash heap.

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.

If they didn't recognize him, then why did they weep?!

If all you saw was a derelict on the ash heap outside of the town,
why would you weep?

There are always poor fellows on the ash heap...

If you mean by "recognize" – that they saw that it was Job –
then they *recognized* him all right!

But recognition can also mean "to acknowledge" –
and they did not *acknowledge* that this was their friend, Job.
All these horrific things could not have happened to Job!

And so they raised their voices and wept –
(imagine the ululating of the modern middle east) –
and they tore their robes
(just as Job had done).

They are mourning his death,
as Job has entered a state of living death, as it were.

And they sprinkle dust on their heads toward heaven.

This is an interesting phrase.

Sprinkling dust on one's head is a normal part of mourning –
but "toward heaven"?

We don't know exactly what this means,
but it suggests that there is some appeal toward God in this act.

Job's friends are here to share in his sufferings –
they are here to bring comfort in his affliction –
they are here as spiritual physicians to give wisdom to one who is perishing.

But the horror of what they find renders them speechless.

They have nothing to say.

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.*

One could argue that this is the best thing that Job's three friends do.

They sat with him *on the ground* (in the ash heap,
with torn clothes and dust on their heads)
for 7 days and 7 nights –
in silence.

I don't always do well at this (my childhood nickname was "the Orator") –
but my father taught me that often the best thing to do is simply to sit in silence.

As parents – and perhaps especially as fathers – we like to "fix" things.
We want to say something that will make everything better.
But sometimes, when my child is crying,
the best thing I can do is simply hold them – in silence.

Of course, there is a time for silence, and a time for speech –
and they would not have been faithful friends if they had remained silent
when Job asked for speech!

But their seven days and seven nights of silence demonstrates their commitment to Job.
They are not merely fair weather friends.
Unlike the friends and family who only show up at the end of the book
to rejoice with those who rejoice,
these three friends will mourn with those who mourn!

Seven days is a normal period of mourning for the dead.
Some have suggested that this is mourning for Job's children –
but there is nothing in the text that would suggest this.
Everything in the text points to the idea that they are mourning Job's entrance into death.

(He is not officially dead yet –
but he has lost everything by which life is normally measured:
all of his worldly goods are gone, so he has nothing to pass on to his children;
but then again, he has no children, so his name is as good as dead;
and what is more, he is on the brink of death himself,
so there is no *real* chance that he will beget any more!

He is, for all intents and purposes, dead!)

The most upright, godly man in the world is suffering.

How should he respond?

How should his friends respond?

We start with Job:

Job's lament takes three approaches –
he curses the day of his birth –
for if that day had died, then he would never have been born!
But if he had to be born –
he wishes that he had died at once, rather than endure this!
And if he had to survive the day of his birth,
he wishes he was dead *now!*

We need to take seriously what God will say at the end of the book –
that Job speaks rightly of God!

After all, Job *will* speak truly!

He will continually defend his own innocence –
and he will insist that God alone must answer for why this is happening.
Job understands that the justice of God has been called into question
by what has happened to him!

In a world governed by a just and holy God,
this should not have happened!

His wife had urged him to “curse God and die.”

But Job will not sin with his lips.

He will not curse God – but he *will* curse the day of his birth!

David Clines gives us some good tips for listening to Job:

“For a book that is so dominated by intellectual issues of theodicy,
it is amazing to find here not one strictly theological sentence,
not a single question about the meaning of his suffering,
not a hint that it may be deserved,
not the slightest nod to the doctrine of retribution.
All that will come, in its time,
but here we are invited to view the man Job in the violence of his grief.
Unless we encounter this man with these feelings
we have no right to listen in on the debates that follow;
with this speech we cannot overintellectualize the book,
but must always be reading it as the drama of a human soul.” (104)

If Job seemed to be “denying” his feelings in chapter 2,
no one would accuse him of that in chapter 3!

1. Reversing Creation: Curse the Day! (3:1-10)

¹ *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.’*

a. Let That Day Be Darkness! (v4-5)

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.

Do you remember how in the beginning, God said, “let there be light.”

And he called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”

Well, if only God had said of the day of my birth: “let there be darkness”!

And do you remember how darkness fell on the Egyptians?

If only the day of my birth had been blotted out in the primordial darkness!

And not just darkness!

I mean deep darkness – I mean a darkness that can be felt –

a darkness that enshrouds you in death!

You know Psalm 23? - “the valley of the shadow of death”?

That’s what “deep darkness” means!

Isaiah spoke of how the people who walked in “darkness” have seen a great light,

“and those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.”

I wish *that* deep darkness had shrouded the day of my birth!

I sought to be a faithful servant of my God –

but now I walk in the valley of deep darkness –

I walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

If only I could know that he is with me –

his rod – his staff – *they* would comfort me!

What comfort can you give me?

But if the day of my birth should be shrouded in darkness –

the night of my conception was worse!

Because the night I was conceived guaranteed that “that day” would surely come.

b. Let That Night Be Barren (v6-10)

- 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.*
- 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.*

In the beginning God set the sun, moon, and stars for fixing the days and seasons.
If only thick darkness had blotted out the night of my conception.

If only that night had been barren –
if only there had been no “joyful cry” that night,
and the eyelids of that morning had never opened.

For if I had never been conceived,
then I would never have been born –
and none of this could have happened to me.

What I need is for some malevolent power to go back and erase that night from history!
Some monster – some dragon – some Leviathan
to rise up and devour that night!
If only there were a sorcerer powerful enough to raise up Leviathan
from his watery grave –
maybe he could erase the past!

But what’s the point!
I curse the day of my birth –
but no curse can change the fact that I was born!

But at least I can lament that I did not die at birth!

2. Reversing History: Why Did I Not Die at Birth? (3:11-19)

a. Death – Would Have Brought Me Rest (v11-15)

- 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.*

If I had died at birth, then I would have had rest and quiet.
Why did my mother have to nurse me?
Why didn't she just throw me out onto the rubbish heap?

I got here anyway!

I could have spent the last decades at rest.
I know – you don't normally of death as a place of rest and quiet –
you normally think of the grave as a place of trouble.
But after all I have endured – even the grave would be a place of quiet peacefulness
compared to the misery I now face!

b. Death – the Great Social Leveler (v16-19)

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.*

Until now, I was numbered among the great – among the princes of the earth –
but now I am brought lower than the lowest of the low –
death would be a relief from the burdens of the world.

It would have been better for me if I had died as a child,
than that my children had died before me –
my goods and possessions taken by force –
and my life brought down to ruin.

You might want to say to me,
“But Job, you don't understand! God has his reasons!”

Don't talk to me about reason!
This is *not* the way the world is supposed to be!

3. Reversing Wisdom: Everything Has Gone Wrong (3:20-26)

a. Why Is Life Given to One Who Longs for Death? (v20-22)

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?*

All I want is death!

But I cannot find it.

I understand that in the future you people will be really good at mining and digging.

Have you found it yet?

Have you found the grave?

Can you tell me how to get there?

Have you searched out to the farthest limit – the ore in gloom and deep darkness?

Why am I still alive?!

What am I doing in this upside down universe in which the upright servant of the LORD suffers?

What have I done to deserve this?

(And don't you dare say that "O Job, you're just a sinner" –

that's what these three are going to say – and they're wrong!)

Why is light given to him who is in misery?

I am not asking this question out of intellectual curiosity.

This is *not* a philosophical question!

If all you have are "intellectual" answers for me –
then go away.

If all you can say is that "God has his reasons" –
then shut up and don't waste my time!

Just let me die!

b. Why Is Light Given to a Man Whose Way Is Hidden? (v23-26)

²³ *Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?*

I had thought, for all these years, that God had put a hedge around me to protect me.

I thought that God had blessed the work of my hands,

and my possessions increased in the land because God had hedged me in.

And yes – he has hedged me in.

He hedged me in to trip me up!

My way is hidden – and I cannot walk in it.

I am trapped in this hedge that God has planted around me!

²⁴ *For my sighing comes instead of^[b] my bread,
and my groanings [my roarings like a lion] are poured out like water.*

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning...
I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax; and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
You lay me in the dust of death...
[Truly!] dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me..." (Ps 22)

²⁵ *For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.*

The Fear of Isaac now terrifies me! (Genesis 31)
The curse of Egypt now falls on me.

Moses had said to the rebellious and idolatrous Israel:
"you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot,
but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart
and failing eyes and a languishing soul.
Your life shall hang in doubt before you.
Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life." (Dt 28:65-66)

That's me!
The curses of Egypt have fallen on me!
Death, destruction, disease.

That was supposed to happen to rebellious Israel –
not the faithful servant of the LORD –
not one who is blameless and upright, who fears God and turns away from evil!

²⁶ *I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, but trouble comes."*

Conclusion:

Job is right.

If you treat the problem of evil as a philosophical problem –
as an intellectual problem –
then you make a mockery of the real, human suffering that *is* the problem of evil!

But that doesn't mean that the problem of evil has no solution.

It just means that there is no *intellectual solution* – no *philosophical solution*.

The solution to the problem of evil – the problem of unjust suffering –
is the suffering Servant.

The solution to the problem of evil is a *historical* solution.

It is what God did in history in sending his son –
it is what the eternal Son of God did in taking our humanity to himself,
and becoming the innocent suffering servant.

There is no comfort in intellectual abstractions.

While there is some comfort in saying, “God will make all things right in the end,”
that is *only* comforting because of what God did in Jesus.

You probably know that the book of Job never answers the problem of unjust suffering.

But the book of Job sets up the answer.

There is no other way for the Servant of the LORD
to dwell in the house of the LORD forever –
except he first pass through the valley of deep darkness –
the valley of the shadow of death.

And indeed, the renewal of creation – the renewal of history – the renewal of wisdom –
will only come when the one through whom God created the heavens and the earth
will himself walk that path through that valley of deep darkness!

If comfort means assuring the sufferer that his suffering makes sense
in the cosmic scheme of things –

then no comfort has any power or meaning except the comfort of the cross!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all
comfort, 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. For as we
share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.”
(2 Cor 1:3-5)