

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

I Have No Rest, For Trouble Comes

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Job 3

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Job chapter 3. While you find that I'll remind you of the story that we began to look at last week. There was a man named Job, he was a good man, he was a godly man and he was a man in whom God delighted. God desired for this man's faith and righteousness to shine all the brighter so he directed the attention of the Accuser, the Satan toward Job. He placed limits, but he gave permission for the devil to torment Job horribly. The devil declared that Job would curse God when he lost his money, his business, his family and his health. He accused Job of not loving God at all. He said that Job only loved the good things God had given him. God was out to show that wasn't true. The devil goes out and he takes everything from Job. He leaves him with nothing! He takes his business, his wealth, his children and his health and all he leaves him with is his grouchy old wife who tells Job to curse God and die. But Job wouldn't do it. He collapses in the dust, but then he raises himself up to offer perhaps the purest prayer ever uttered by human lips.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

²²In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (Job 1:21-22. NKJV)

Job's friends arrive to comfort him and they find him sitting in the ashes of his former life scraping his boils with a scrap of broken pottery. They sat with him for seven days and seven nights and no one spoke a word, for they saw that his grief was very great.

Job is the first one to speak. His friends have wisely waited until he was ready to talk about it and now Job is ready. He wants to wrestle this out. He is confused, he is hurt and he feels lost. He is casting about not just for answers, not just for comfort, above all things he wants to recover the sense of his friendship with God. Do you know that feeling? Do you know the feeling of separation? Of distance? Jesus knew it. When he was on the cross he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" There are times in life when because of our suffering we FEEL a soul wrenching DISTANCE between ourselves and our Father and that is an absolutely awful place to be. That's where Job is right here. Now our plan for this morning is a little different than normal. We are into the poetic parts of Job and you don't treat poetry like you treat prose. We aren't going to dissect it word for word, we are going to listen to it and let it impact us. We'll read it straight through, without pause, and then we'll sit under it, reflect on it and draw out some principles on how to grieve and how to process the pain that visits us in life. Let me read to you:

¹After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his *birth*. ²And Job spoke, and said:

³ "May the day perish on which I was born, And the night *in which* it was said, 'A male child is conceived.'

⁴ May that day be darkness; May God above not seek it, Nor the light shine upon it.

⁵ May darkness and the shadow of death claim it; May a cloud settle on it; May the blackness of the day terrify it.

⁶ *As for* that night, may darkness seize it; May it not [£]rejoice among the days of the year, May it not come into the number of the months.

⁷ Oh, may that night be barren! May no joyful shout come into it!

⁸ May those curse it who curse the day, Those who are ready to arouse Leviathan.

⁹ May the stars of its morning be dark; May it look for light, but *have none*, And not see the dawning of the day;

¹⁰ Because it did not shut up the doors of my *mother's* womb, Nor hide sorrow from my eyes.

¹¹ "Why did I not die at birth? *Why* did I *not* perish when I came from the womb?

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

¹³ For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; Then I would have been at rest

¹⁴ With kings and counselors of the earth, Who built ruins for themselves,

¹⁵ Or with princes who had gold, Who filled their houses *with* silver;

¹⁶ Or *why* was I not hidden like a stillborn child, Like infants who never saw light?

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

¹⁸ *There* the prisoners rest together; They do not hear the voice of the oppressor.

¹⁹ The small and great are there, And the servant *is* free from his master.

²⁰ "Why is light given to him who is in misery, And life to the bitter of soul,

²¹ Who long for death, but it does not *come*, And search for it more than hidden treasures;

²² Who rejoice exceedingly, *And* are glad when they can find the grave?

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

²⁴ For my sighing comes before I eat, And my groanings pour out like water.

²⁵ For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me.

²⁶ I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.” (Job 3:1-26. NKJV)

Before we begin sorting out principles on how to process and understand suffering we need to remember Calvin’s key. I told you last week that Calvin said that the key to understanding this book is to recall that Job makes a good case poorly and his friends make a bad case very well. Job makes a good case poorly. What that means for us is that we can trust the substance of what Job says, even if the volume and the antics are at times distracting and over the top. He does not sin in any of what he says, that’s not just the verdict of John Calvin, that’s the verdict of Almighty God. The Bible says at the end of this book:

⁷And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me *what is* right, as My servant Job has.” (Job 42:7. NKJV)

God says to Eliphaz and his friends: “You knuckleheads had it wrong, Job had it right.” So as we read the book we have to remember that Job has it right, as far as he can see. He doesn’t know what’s really going on, but he does have a true vision of God and he holds to that throughout. We’re not just looking to mine Job for his good theology, however, we are also wanting to learn how to process suffering in our own experiences and how to minister to other people in pain. So let’s do this; let’s take a look at how Job responded to this situation and then let’s begin to develop a definition of how we are permitted to grieve and mourn in times of suffering.

1. Job cursed the day of his birth

He says: May the day perish on which I was born, May a cloud settle on it, May no joyful sound be heard in it, May the stars of the morning be dark on it. Cursed be the day! Now we notice that Job is very careful not to curse God, he knows he can’t do that, so he curses the day of his birth. He’s angry, he’s sad, he’s emotional, but he is not out of control. This is like the dad who punches a hole in the wall because he is just so mad at his kids that he knows he better not even look at them. Do you know this one? I won’t force you to raise your hand, I’ll just confess on behalf of all of us that I know this one. When Madison was about 11 she developed some sort of brain cramp that prevented her from turning off lights. She would just wander through the house and turn on lights and then leave and leave them all on and it drove me nuts. And I would explain to her: “Honey, Daddy has to pay for that electricity and so it would be really nice if after

you left a room you turned the light off, could you do that for Daddy honey? So that we could eat food and buy clothes? Could you do that?" And she'd say: "Ooops! Sorry Daddy. Of course I can do that." But she didn't do that. I'd come home for lunch and she'd have been home and then gone back to school and every light in the house would be on. I could tell every room she had visited. The bathroom light was on, her room light was on, the laundry room light was on, the kitchen light was on, the microwave door was open and that little light was, doors would be wide open, heat flying out, meter arm spinning and I'd start to feel a stroke coming on, do you know this feeling dads? And so one night she was walking around the house turning stuff on and I said: "MADISON! For the love of all that is good and holy, could you please turn the light off in your room when you leave it to go elsewhere. Please. I'm begging you. For the sake of your dear father's health and sanity, just turn off one light, that's all I'm asking." And she said sweetly: "Yes Daddy". And then guess what happened? She finished her homework and she went upstairs to get ready for babysitting or something and the light did not turn off. And so I went into her room and I knew it was not a good time for daddy to talk to Madison so I just WAM!!! Turned off that light with my fist and the whole plastic outlet covering shattered into pieces. Now, was that super smart? Not really, but every man knows that there is a time to vent your anger in a safe, neutral and even altogether silly and irrational direction. You can't vent it towards the cause of your problem, so you vent in a silly direction. Not venting is not an option. You will have a stroke and something will pop right out of your eye socket if you don't release the madness. So you punch a hole in the wall or you hit the heavy bag or you curse the day of your birth. That's ok. In all of this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job is an animal, he is not God, he is just a created thing and when Job's friends criticise him for his irrational outburst Job fires right back in chapter 6:

Does the wild donkey bray when it has grass, Or does the ox low over its fodder? (Job 6:5. NKJV)

Job says: "Animals make noise when they experience emotion. I am not so arrogant as to deny that I too make noise under emotion. When I am struck, I moan and I bleed and I curse. But I am careful and I do not sin with my tongue".

Listen my friends, a donkey brays when it is hungry and when it is beaten with a stick and we are no better. Humans weep, we laugh, we cry, we moan, we curse. Now curse does not mean

swear, Job doesn't have potty mouth here, the Hebrew for curse is *kaw-lal* and means revile or express contempt. Job says: "I hate that I was ever born! If I could find the day of my birth I would punch it in the mouth!" It's silly, its off target but it is very human and it is not sin. So from this we find our first bit of permission in times of pain:

Permission: We can weep, we can moan, we can curse, we can lament – within limits.

There is a line, but you can walk up to it beat it with a stick.

2. Job asks why he was ever born

We see that in verse 11:

"Why did I not die at birth? *Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?* (Job 3:11. NKJV)

There are times in life when you look at how things stand and you decide that on the whole, it might have been better if you'd never been born. Have you ever felt that way? Well, according to the Bible, it's not a sin to feel that way. Job felt that way. He looked at his life and even though there had been so many good days, the pain that he felt now in having lost his 10 children and having lost his health and everything else that had happened, made him say to himself: "On the whole, this pain makes that pleasure irrelevant. I would rather have never had, then to have had, loved and lost." Do you remember the old saying: "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all"? Job disagrees with that and that is no sin.

Permission: We can ask hard questions; we can question the value of life.

3. Job wishes he were dead

We see that in verse 13:

¹³For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; then I would have been at rest (Job 3:13. NKJV)

Job in his sorrow begins to think longingly and perhaps not altogether realistically about death. He sees it as a place of rest and social evening. Everyone dies, king and slave, rich man and poor, good man and evil. They die and they rest together awaiting judgement. This looks very attractive to Job because as we find out later, all he wants is to get face to face with God so that he can know whether he is still God's friend. His desperate desire is to know whether this pain implies the loss of God's favour and friendship. He wants to stand before the Judge and know his status. He'd rather wait with the dead than suffer with the living. Now, to say that Job does not sin with his lips is not to say that he knows everything about the afterlife. Scholars agree that the knowledge of the afterlife was a developing doctrine in the Old Testament and this is a very old story so we can't expect Job to have a terribly developed understanding of final things. Nevertheless his understanding here is not too far off from what we find in later books of the Old Testament. The Old Testament generally treats death as the end of trial, it suggests that all souls await judgement in a form of conscious rest. They seem to know where they are, they seem to have either anticipation or dread of judgement. Some rest in peace, others rest in torment. Job isn't too focused on the theological detail, he just wants to rest and he wants to see God and find out his status. And that is no sin. In times of extreme suffering, pain and anguish we are permitted to despair of life, we are allowed to wish we were dead. We can long for release. This is not sin.

Permission: We can despair of life, we can wish we were dead, we can long for release

4. Job wonders what the point is

Look at verses 20-25:

²⁰ “Why is light given to him who is in misery, And life to the bitter of soul,
²¹ Who long for death, but it does not *come*, And search for it more than hidden treasures;
²² Who rejoice exceedingly, And are glad when they can find the grave?
²³ *Why is light given* to a man whose way is hidden, And whom God has hedged in?
²⁴ For my sighing comes before I eat, And my groanings pour out like water.
²⁵ For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me. (Job 3:20-25. NKJV)

Job says: “What is the point of life anyway? God controls us by his Providence, he hedges us in and pours out difficulties and sufferings on us. Why is God so interested in us? What does he

want? Why are we so important to Him? Why won't he just let us die so that we can have peace? What is the point? Job says: "I thought I was doing right, I thought I had done everything to keep suffering at bay and yet here I am, the most despised of men, what is the point even of trying to do right if all men end in sorrow."

Those are some pretty probing questions. That's pretty direct talk. Can you get away with that kind of thing? Yes. In all this Job did not sin. When you are going through deep valleys and painful trials you CAN ASK BIG QUESTIONS. You can. Suffering makes us think about the nature of the world we live in. Suffering reveals the shocking naiveté of those who think they can live their best life now. Suffering reveals that whatever you may think, however arrogant you may be, NO MAN CONTROLS HIS FATE! The rich and the poor, the weak and the strong ALL GET CANCER, their kids ALL HAVE CAR ACCIDENTS! Being rich did not keep John Travolta's son from dying tragically before his time, being POWERFUL did not keep President Roosevelt from getting polio and becoming a paralytic, being RIGHTEOUS did not save Steven Curtis Chapman's daughter from being run over by a car, a car driven by her older brother. If bad things happen to GOOD PEOPLE and POWERFUL PEOPLE and RICH PEOPLE then does this world even makes sense? Why even try and be good? Why even try and be rich? Why even try and win if in the end everybody loses? It is no sin to ask those questions in times of difficulty and trial.

And it is no sin to feel overwhelmed by the attention of God. Job speaks about this many times. He feels like he is trapped inside a hedge that God has put around him and that he is a hamster in a plastic cage. God keeps doing things to him and he doesn't know why. What does God want? Should I run on the wheel? Will that make things stop? Should I nibble at the water bottle thing? Will that make you leave me alone? What do you want from me? Why do you care about me? What does it matter to you whether I worship or curse, believe or don't believe, love or don't love? Who am I that I matter to you? He asks that again and again. He asks it in chapter 7:12ff:

- ¹² *Am I a sea, or a sea serpent, That You set a guard over me?*
¹³ *When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, My couch will ease my complaint,'*
¹⁴ *Then You scare me with dreams And terrify me with visions,*
¹⁵ *So that my soul chooses strangling And death rather than my body.*
¹⁶ *I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, For my days are but a breath.*
¹⁷ *"What is man, that You should exalt him, That You should set Your heart on him,*
¹⁸ *That You should visit him every morning, And test him every moment?*
¹⁹ **How long?** *Will You not look away from me, And let me alone till I swallow my saliva?*

²⁰ Have I sinned? **What have I done to You, O watcher of men?** Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself?

²¹ Why then do You not pardon my transgression, And take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust, And You will seek me diligently, But I *will* no longer *be*.” (Job 7:12-21. NKJV)

These are holy questions church! You have to know God to ask questions such as these. The fool under trial says: “Well then, this proves that there is no God or that God is not powerful and he is unable to protect me from harm. Or this proves that God is not good and everything I thought about him is wrong”. No! Those are the questions of a fool but these questions that Job asks, these are the right questions! Right? I mean, why would think that because God is good and in control that you would live in perpetual sunshine and ease? Is not God the same God who TESTED Abraham? Is not God the same God who CHASTENS THOSE WHOM HE LOVES? Thus trials cannot prove his lack of goodness or lack of power, it is not the EXISTENCE of trials that a wise person seeks to understand it is the MEANING!! What do you want from me God? Tell me and I will do it! How long oh God?! What have I done? Have I sinned? Show me and I will repent! Is there an area of weakness? Show me and I will address it! And the wise man also cannot help but wonder at the dignity of man that he would consume so much of God’s attention and creative activity. Job cannot believe he occupies this much priority in the creative work of God. Am I the SEA that you spend so much time forming me? Am I a great sea monster occupying such an exalted place in the ecosystem? I am just a man. Why do I matter so much to you? That, my friends, is an excellent question. What is man that you should exalt him? Job sees his suffering as EXALTATION! It proves his worth in the eyes of God. Job wishes he were worth less so that God would move on to other things but he marvels that he means so much. Those are good questions and they can and should be wrestled with in times of deepest trial.

Permission: We can wonder at the Providence of God, we can find his attention overwhelming.

This is no sin. This is our permission. This is the place we are permitted to occupy when we find ourselves the centre of God’s attention and when we find ourselves sitting in the front row of what Calvin called The School of Affliction. We are welcome here because we are human.

Very briefly then, in the time we have left, I would like to identify the boundaries. There are lines we must not cross if we would glorify God in our suffering. Let’s quickly point them out:

A Discussion Of Boundaries and Limitations:

1. We cannot stop worshipping, as though God were no longer God

At the height of his suffering Job was still a worshipping man. The Bible says:

²⁰Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and **worshipped**.

²¹And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; **Blessed be the name of the LORD.**” (Job 1:20-21. NKJV)

Even Job’s friends agree that worship must never cease even in the midst of deepest suffering:

“Remember to magnify His work, of which men have sung. (Job 36:24. NKJV)

“You have to look at the whole picture of what God has done from beginning to now and you have to magnify that, you have to praise God for who he is and what he’s done. He’s still the Creator, he’s still the Sustainer, he’s still the Saviour! And you still need to sing.” That’s true counsel.

Don’t let your pain rob God of glory. If you let your troubles shut your mouth you validate the accusations of the enemy. The devil mocks us and seeks to rob God of praise. He says that we don’t really love God we just love his gifts. When we stop praising God in our loss we prove the accuracy of those remarks! We rob God! We slander him. We dishonour him and we show ourselves faithless. If your throat is too raw from crying, at least LIFT YOUR HANDS!! Let us be your voice and you show your agreement and you shut down the lies and the slander of the accuser. Let the world go up in flames and still let us bless the Lord! God is WHO HE HAS ALWAYS been whether we walk in sunshine or rain.

2. We cannot blaspheme God, though our understanding of Him is challenged

Job cursed the day of his birth, but he did not curse God and he never charged God with doing wrong. There is a point where lamentation becomes betrayal and where questioning becomes accusing. There are things we cannot say as saved people. We cannot say God is wrong, we

cannot say he is weak, we cannot say he is mean, we cannot say he is unfair. Those things are not true or God is a liar. We can mourn, but not as pagans. Paul says this to his churches also:

¹³But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13. NKJV)

We can ask questions, we can moan and lament but not in a mindless way, not without some limits, not to the extent that we say things about God that are not true. We know some things that are not affected by our trials and we must not deny these things even in our pain.

3. We must not lose hold of the few things we know for certain

We'll end with this related truth. The word "hope" in the Bible means something a little different than it does in our culture and in English. The Greek is *elpis* (*el-pece*) and it does not imply the absence of certainty. It means simply a looking forward with expectation. In English, hope has kind of a subjunctive sense, a sense of constant ambiguity, maybe it will happen, maybe it won't. That's NOT how Biblical hope works. Biblical hope is the CERTAINTY of things expected and relied upon because they are PROMISED in Scripture. The Bible says that when we sorrow we must not lose hope. We must not lose hold of the things we have been promised as though they are untrue. They are still true. We have some anchors that no storm can threaten. Let me leave you with just a few. These things are true every day, in every circumstance and no matter your feeling, no matter your balance sheet and no matter your mental state. These things ARE TRUE and they cannot be shaken:

- i. God is good.

How do I know that? JESUS SAID SO in our readings this week.

No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. (Mark 10:18. NKJV)

You may not be all that good, your neighbours may not be all that good, your friends may not be all that good but GOD IS GOOD and he is GOOD – ALL THE TIME. That never changes.

- ii. God is in control.

How do I know this? Because we read it in our readings last month:

You alone *are* the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. (Nehemiah 9:6. NKJV)

God is LARGE and IN CHARGE the Bible says and that is true ALL THE TIME.

iii. God loves the world

This world is not God's little science experiment. He's not a mean little kid with a magnifying glass trying to find out how fast ants can run when their butts are on fire; GOD LOVES THIS WORLD! How do I know? Because I learned about that in Sunday School. John 3:16 says:

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16. KJV)

I've known that since the 70's, that's why I know it in the KJV. That's OLD SCHOOL TRUTH right there and its true ALL THE TIME. God is not whimsical or mean-spirited in his Providence, he loves us and these trials are for our good. I may not be able to explain how when I'm hurting but I will not stop believing that to be true.

iv. Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life

I don't even need a new Scripture verse to believe this last one, it comes from the same old verse. Here is something I know that you can never take from me. Whosoever believeth in him – not just believing that he exists – the devil knows that and he's no Christian, I'm talking FAITH! Whosoever puts their FAITH in Jesus. Whosoever BELIEVES that he is GOD IN THE FLESH; that his every word is THE WORD OF GOD; that he is THE LORD, that he is THE SAVIOR, that HIS BLOOD PAID FOR MY SINS that HIS DEATH IS MY DEATH, that his RESURRECTION IS MY RESURRECTION, that HIS SPIRIT is in MY HEART – whosoever believeth that, that one will never perish but shall have everlasting life. I believe that. I believe that if I hold faith in Jesus in this life, no matter what it throws at me, no matter how hard things get, if I just keep on BELIEVING ON HIM, I will not perish in hell, I will see my Jesus face to

face and all will be well. I don't even know whether he'll answer all my questions when I see him, but I don't think I'll even care. I will see Jesus; and it will be enough. You hold on to that and you will survive the storm. Jody, will you come and lead us.