

Feeling Hopeless

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[0 : 00] If you've been here for the past three weeks, you'll know that we've looked at chapters 1, chapter 2, and chapter 3. And what we learned there is that by God's own admission, Job was a blameless and an upright man, who, God himself said, fears God and shuns evil.

And so God gave Satan permission to take away from Job his wealth, his family, and in the end, even his health.

To show that Job really, as God said, is like no other man, and that his faith is genuine. And Job proved God right.

He responded to all of this with the words, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. And the Bible says that in all of this, Job did not sin in what he said. And we're now in the main part of the book after that prologue, which is all written in poetry, from chapter 3 that we looked at last week, all the way to the last chapter in the book, 42.

[1 : 13] Rather than narrating events, the author uses poetry to report to us the words of Job, the words of his friends, there's four of them, and the words of God himself.

And what we saw last week in chapter 3 was Job's desperate first speech. And today we start looking at his friends' speeches.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, to begin with, will all have something to say to Job. And the way it works is that one of them speaks, like we saw with Eliphaz in chapters 4 and 5, and then Job will reply, like he does today in chapters 6 and 7.

And there are three, sorry, two full cycles with the three of them and Job going back and forth. And then there will be more speeches with a fourth friend and that God himself will speak.

Seven days and seven nights his friends sat with Job. They were in shock. They couldn't even recognize him when they saw him.

[2 : 24] They wept, they tore their robes, and they sat with him. And no one said a word, not one word, for seven days, because they could see, the Bible says, how great his suffering was.

But now Job has spoken. He's let out all of his pain, and he's cursed the day that he was born, in his lament, in chapter 3.

And so now the friends are going to give their two cents. The friends who were supposed to act as wise counselors, but will in fact prove themselves quite the disappointment for Job.

To the point that God himself at the end will tell them that he is not pleased with them. Above all, what is missing in these dialogues between Job and his friends is one thing.

Hope. There is no hope, you might have noticed in the wisdom that Eliphaz has to offer. And there is no hope in Job's reply to him either.

[3 : 32] So today I have three points for us, as we look at these four chapters. All without hope. Hopeless religion. Hopeless friendship.

And hopeless suffering. Let's begin with hopeless religion. Job's friends have a very clear view of the world, which is in line with the Jewish tradition.

And it's basically determinism. Determinism means that everything that happens was already determined by events that happened before that.

And so in this case, they have a very simple equation. You are faithful, you prosper. You sin, you're afflicted. Which isn't too different from today's prosperity gospel.

Eliphaz makes it clear that he embraces this worldview in chapter 4, verses 7 and 8. Read with me, 4, 7, 8. Consider now who being innocent has ever perished.

[4 : 37] Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. So Eliphaz is reminding his friend Job of these deterministic truths that probably Job himself had believed in up until this point.

Job, you reap what you sow. Remember? And Eliphaz allegedly even received a vision about it. A revelation that we see in chapter 4, verses 12 to 16.

He describes what seems to be a very scary vision that came to him. He struggles to sleep. There's even a spirit gliding past his face. It's a chilling experience, he says, that makes his hair stand on end.

But he builds all this tension as he retells the vision. But when the revelation finally comes in verse 17, it's quite disappointing, don't you think?

It says, Can a mortal be more righteous than God? So all the vision reveals is that man cannot be more righteous than God.

[5 : 52] In fact, he goes on to say in the following verses, man is weak, is fragile, and God cannot put any trust in him. So man is mortal, basically.

We don't know where Eliphaz thinks this revelation comes from. He doesn't really say. And if he really had a vision in the first place at all.

But it wouldn't seem like a vision that would come from God because of how hopeless it is. What it does achieve is making Eliphaz's position clear.

He thinks that Job is in trouble because he sinned. So you, Job, must stop declaring your innocence because no innocent was ever destroyed.

You, Job, have to stop declaring your innocence because a mortal cannot be more righteous than God. If God is afflicting you, then it must mean that you are in the wrong.

[6 : 51] How dare you think you know better than God? You're basically saying that God is wrong. Now, there's one thing that we have to be careful about as we look at the words of Job's friends today and over the next few Sundays.

And it's that we must not assume that everything they say is wrong. Because many of the things that they say are actually biblical truths.

But as we'll see, it's how they say them and it's also what they don't say that ultimately betrays a lack of wisdom that then will lead God to say in chapter 42, I am angry with you and your two friends because you've not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has.

So if we think about this vision, for instance, the central message of it is not wrong. It is true that man is not more righteous than God.

And the Bible misses no opportunity really to remind us that God is sovereign, God is just, God is righteous, God is perfect, and that we are nothing more than broken sinners.

[8 : 06] But if the message stops at that, then you're only left with a hopeless religion. What is missing? God's love is missing.

That love that makes us, these useless broken sinners, his very own children. Not acquaintances, not close friends.

We are his beloved children who are loved no matter what. There's one other thing that Eliphaz gets right in chapter 5, verse 17.

He says, Blessed is the one whom God corrects. And he says that Job should not despise the discipline of the Almighty. The obvious reference here would be Proverbs 3, 12.

The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. But again, the problem here is that Eliphaz is jumping to conclusions.

[9 : 09] He assumes that what is happening to Job is the result of the Lord's discipline. Which means that what he's offering to his friend at this specific point in time is utterly hopeless religion.

Now imagine with me, you are Job. And you know that you are right before God. And that isn't because Job isn't a sinner.

But it's because he didn't deny God. He wasn't hiding sin from God. He wasn't actively living in sin. And so imagine being him in that position and hearing that you lost everything because you are being disciplined.

And you must repent of your sin if you want God to restore you. What hope is there for Job? Absolutely none.

And so the truth is that Eliphaz has a simplistic and a short-sighted view of how God operates. It's a simplistic view of God because it assumes that there is this direct correlation between our relationship with God and our material blessings.

[10 : 23] in the here and now, determinism, as we said. And it's a short-sighted view of God because it assumes that the harvest is now.

Because while it's true that we will reap what we sow and we know that the Bible talks about rewards and punishments but it's called the judgment and it isn't until the end of times. We know that for as long as we are in this world there is hope for any of us to become children of God. And that's why the harvest will only happen then, not now. And ultimately, Eliphaz is offering a hopeless religion because he tells Job that it all depends on him. God's favor will come back if Job accepts his alleged discipline. And so on the one hand he's saying that man is weak and on the other he seems to think that man's fate depends on his own strength to please God. That's why Job himself says I have no more strength what are you asking of me?

[11 : 37] Do you see the contradiction? And it's a hopeless religion because all that seems to matter to Eliphaz really is that Job's wealth is restored. If you look at chapter 5 verses 24 to 26 you'll see that it's those same blessings that Satan argued were the only reason that Job feared God that Eliphaz is now listing as reasons for Job to fear God.

How ironic. So what this hopeless religion of Eliphaz does is project on God human behaviors. God is like this teacher who will give you a sticker if you behave well but will send you to the naughty corner if you don't. But if we go to the Gospel of John in chapter 9 when the disciples ask Jesus whose fault it was that the blind man was blind was it because of his own sin or was it because of his parents' sin?

Jesus says neither. He was blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him is what Jesus says. And on Jesus goes to perform a miracle and then be praised for it. Nothing to do with anyone's sin. And Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians that when he asked God to take his suffering away from him his proverbial thorn in the flesh God says my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.

[13 : 11] So the truth not the truth of Eliphaz but the truth of the Bible is that God works in mysterious ways. There will be times when what happens on this earth is a direct consequence of where we're at with God and we know we know from our own experience day in, day out that sin has negative consequences even here.

But let's not make Eliphaz's mistake of judging all the people's worth or faith or our own worth or faith for that matter based on our material blessings or based on our misfortunes in this life. If we are struggling to make ends meet if we are disabled if we're fighting an illness that is not what defines us not before God. it says nothing to God and it should say nothing to any of us about our worth as a person let alone about our faith. Because good for good and bad for bad is not how the God of the Bible operates. That would be a hopeless religion and it would be a hopeless religion because the hope of the cross is missing. Because the God of the Bible truth is is a loving God is a God who wants what is good for us. Is a God who gives us hope in the cross of Christ and calls us to fixate our eyes on heaven not on this earth.

[14 : 42] Asks us a God who asks us to take comfort in his plan of eternal eternal salvation for us. Not in a house not in a family not in good health which are amazing blessings if we get them but they are only for a time.

Our second point is hopeless friendship. Job is disappointed by his friends. It's as simple as that and he does not hide it.

He tells Eliphaz loud and clear and in beautiful poetry. He uses this image of unreliable rivers. He says in verse 15 in chapter 6 but my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams. He's talking about those rivers that overflow and destroy in the winter and dry up and stop running altogether in the summer. And so to describe his deep disappointment he says that he feels like a traveler.

A traveler who leaves his route to go and find this river that he knows of so that he can get water to continue on his journey. And he's confident that he'll find the water that he so desperately needs to keep going.

[16 : 09] But he gets there and there's no water and he perishes. Verses 20 and 21 in chapter 6 they are distressed because they had been confident.

They arrived there only to be disappointed. Now you too, he says to Eliphaz, have proved to be of no help.

So what is wrong with the way that Eliphaz is trying to be a friend here? There's three things I'd like to mention. I think in his friendship there is no kindness, in his friendship there is no truth, and of course in his friendship there is no hope.

The opening itself of Eliphaz's speech already shows that there is no kindness in his words. It really feels like he must have been biting his tongue for those seven days while everyone was silent. You can picture him just getting more and more eager to finally break the silence and say what he says in the first six verses of chapter four. So Job, you, the one who always encouraged those who were struggling, the one who strengthened faltering knees, now trouble comes to you and you are discouraged?

[17 : 33] And then he immediately attacks, should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways, your hope? So if you paraphrase, you've done something wrong, Job. If you can't find hope in your blameless ways, then maybe they're not as blameless as you'd like us to think.

And so again, try and put yourself in Job's shoes. You have lost so much that you don't even know what you are mourning anymore. Are you mourning your family?

Are you mourning your houses? Are you mourning your health? Your servants? Or maybe as Job thinks, it's not the truth, but he thinks that God has turned against him.

Is that what you're mourning? You don't even know. There's so much happening. Even your wife isn't helping with her advice to just curse God and be done with it. And so the one source of relief, that refreshing water that you're looking forward to at this point can only be your friends.

And here they are. They finally open their mouth and the first thing that they say is, eh, you made it look easy when it wasn't you. Not as easy now, is it?

[18 : 48] And Job calls him out. In verse 14 in chapter 6 he says, anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. Very strong words again.

By being a bad friend, you Eliphaz are not just letting me down, you're letting God down, you're forsaking the fear of the Almighty. So there's no kindness in what Eliphaz says and there is no truth. His response to his friend being in distress is so insincere. Instead of acting with love and kindness, instead of mourning with him and trying to encourage him, he seems to feel like what he needs to do is prove himself.

Job says in verse 21, still in chapter 6, you see something dreadful and are afraid. Job realizes that Eliphaz is scared of what he sees and reacts in line with that.

So this fear leads him to start just dishing out this half-baked wisdom, these unlikely visions, these dogmas of this hopeless religion that he is trying to sell.

[20 : 01] And again, Job pushes back. He says in chapter 5, verses 24 and 25, teach me and I will be quiet. Show me where I have been wrong.

How painful are honest words, but what do your arguments prove? He's saying, Eliphaz, I understand, I've been speaking very honestly, my words are painful, but what do your arguments prove?

You've done a lot of talking, but clearly not much listening. Job opened his heart in chapter 3, but Eliphaz was not listening. He wasn't listening like a friend. He was just waiting for his time to talk and say just what he had already set his mind on.

Did any of what Eliphaz say prove that Job was indeed guilty in front of God? No, it didn't. Did this stop him? No, it didn't.

He just went ahead anyway, but there was no truth in his accusations. And so finally, his friendship lacks hope. It lacks hope because not only is Eliphaz not showing Job his own love, he's also failing to point Job to God's love.

[21 : 15] He is pointing Job to a calculating, an eye for an eye, a disciplining kind of God. There's nothing wrong with what Eliphaz says about God at the end of chapter 5, where he describes him as the one in control of creation, the one who wounds but also binds up.

But again, it's what's missing from his description of God that is the issue. Because he's pointing Job to this God who will be kind to you if you are to him.

He's not pointing Job to a God who loves you no matter what, a God who knows you intimately, who understands, God understands what you're going through, a God who is the refuge in the time of need.

And so Eliphaz, unfortunately, in his friendship to Job, offers no hope to him whatsoever. And so as a simple application for us here, let's be friends who offer kindness, who offer truth, not our own

truth, but the truth of the Bible, people, and who offer hope, the hope of the cross.

I don't know if you find that it can be quite tempting to feel like you're sitting at test when you're called to comfort a friend. We might feel like we have to prove that we know the right thing to do, that we know what God would want them to do.

[22 : 48] Maybe we feel like God's spokesperson like Eliphaz did here. But in doing so, we risk getting it all wrong. Because the main thing we have to make sure is that we're acting out of love and not to prove ourselves as friends.

We are not there to recite Bible verses, let alone confuse our friends with thoughts, visions, dreams that we thought we might have had and are not quite clear on ourselves.

We are there to show them the love of Christ. We are there to remind them that the only secure hope that we have in this life is God's love for them.

But God's love for them as it is described in the Bible. Everything else can disappear in an instant. And our hope is not just on God restoring our material blessings in this life, as Eliphaz seems to think.

Our hope is in spending eternity with God. And so whether our friend who is struggling is a child of God or not, it's his love that we want to point them to.

[24 : 01] But, and here comes the difficult bit, in order to do so, we have to know and we have to be experiencing that love ourselves. So we need to be sitting with our Bibles, we need to let the Spirit equip us in order to be kind, truthful, hopeful friends.

I have been an Eliphaz when my mum came to me in distress while fighting her cancer. If I had been more in communion with God through his word, chances are in my conversations with her, I would have talked a bit less about how lucky she was actually having it, that there were people in worse situations than hers, that she should toughen up a bit.

And I would have probably prayed with her more, I would have probably comforted her more by reminding her that she is loved by the God who created her and sent his son to die for her sins. Finally, our third and last point is hopeless suffering, as we look at Job now. Job is in absolutely agonizing pain.

pain. He told us in chapter 3 and he keeps telling us here. And I think, I know it's been a long reading already, but I'd like to look again at some of the words that he uses to describe his pain because the whole point of Hebrew poetry in here is to help us feel the pain that Job is feeling.

[25 : 34] So chapter 6, verses 2 and 3, if only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales, it would surely outweigh the sand of the seas.

And then in verse 4, the arrows of the Almighty are in me. My spirit drinks in their poison, God's terrors are marshaled against me.

Verses 8 and 9, all that I may have my request that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let lose his hand and cut off my life.

And finally in chapter 7, verses 15 and 16, which we just read, I prefer strangling and death rather than this body of mine. I despise my life.

I would not live forever. Let me alone. My days have no meaning. He doesn't even attempt to hide that his pain is so great that he just wants it all to end.

[26 : 35] He would rather be dead than keep suffering the way he does. That's why he says in verse 3 of chapter 6, no wonder my words have been impetuous.

What were you expecting, Eliphaz? And it's not because I've become a fool like you think, it's because of the utter misery that I find myself in. This anguish and misery that's heavier than all the sand in the world.

And that's heavy. But his suffering is hopeless, hopeless, and it is hopeless because he's unable to see beyond what is happening to him.

And so he thinks that God is at war with him. His arrows are in me, he says in verse 4. And then in verses 19 and 20 in chapter 7, he's speaking directly to God and he says, will you never look away from me?

Or let me alone even for an instant? Why have you made me your target? Job misunderstands why he's suffering. He thinks that God is attacking him.

[27 : 42] He doesn't think that there is something bigger at play here, that God in his infinite wisdom as part of his cosmic plan knows better. And the truth is that we don't know.

We don't know why God made Job suffer like this. But we know that God wasn't attacking him. We know from the first two chapters that God thought highly of Job and loved him.

God is not against him. But Job cannot see that in his pain. So what do we learn from Job's suffering?

I think one thing that we learn is that we can suffer, we can mourn, we can be in communion with God at the same time. The Bible is full of examples of godly people honestly talking about the pain that they're going through.

Many of the Psalms are all about that. And as we see here, that pain can be so great that it makes you wish you'd rather die. And so if any of us are feeling like the pain is just too much and we don't want to suffer anymore, God is not calling any of us to put a smile on our faces no matter what.

[28 : 58] He's not telling us go around and tell the world that the moment you become a Christian, all the problems disappear. There's no more suffering. Never does the Bible lie to us and pretend that life is a stroll in a park the moment you become a Christian.

And so I personally find it liberating to see an upright man like Job show us that we can be honest about what we're going through. We can take it to God and ask him why.

As far as we can see Job doesn't contemplate suicide as an option here. He does ask to make it stop. Jesus himself asked to be spared his suffering but your will be done, not mine is what he said. So if you're ill, if someone you know is ill and you feel powerless as you watch them suffer, if life is tough because of broken relationships, because of loneliness, we all go through difficult stuff at some point, but some of us much more than others.

Well, no one is asking us to pretend that we're okay. Talk to God, talk to friends, scream if you need to. You're not being a good Christian by smiling and saying fine when people ask you how are you.

[30 : 21] And if you're not a Christian and you've been led to believe that Christians are deluded people, we think you pray and problems go away. And that's not what we believe.

It's not what the Bible teaches us either. So please go check for yourself in the Bible. Please come speak to us. And the Bible, as you investigate it, will show you something that we learn, I think, from Job's suffering to here.

And with this we'll conclude. And it's that in our suffering we should run to God, not away from him. Job asks God to look away from him, to leave him alone.

But God takes no pleasure in seeing us struggle. He is our loving creator and saviour who promised not to leave us.

Jesus says in Matthew 28, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. When we are suffering, there is no better refuge than the cross.

[31 : 25] Because the cross is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. Our suffering is for a time. It's terrible pain. No one pretends it isn't.

It's extremely difficult. But the fact itself that we have a book, like the book of Job, in our lives, tells us that God knows about that pain, that he understands it intimately.

And so we can be sure that in our suffering, he is there with us. And he is the one who gives us hope that suffering is not all there is to life.

Suffering only features in this broken world for a time. And so in our suffering, let's run to the cross and let's ask God to be with us and give us the strength that we so terribly need every day to keep going when everything seems too much to deal with.

Let's ask his spirit to remind us of the certain hope that one day it will all be over and we will be in the presence of our good and loving God.

[32 : 35] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you because at the cross we find hope. Hope that one day we'll be with you.

Lord, we thank you because at the cross we find love. Love like no other because you sacrificed your son out of love for every single one of us.

Father, we thank you because at the cross we find refuge. We find comfort in our suffering. And so Lord, we pray that by spending time in this beautiful book, by the power of your spirit, we will learn how to suffer well and how to comfort well those who suffer.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.