

What is Job Clinging to?

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Neil. Folks, let me encourage you to have those chapters open in front of you as we try and take in the breadth of these four wonderful chapters of Scripture.

These honest, these raw, but yet these glorious chapters of God's Word. And let me try and give us a picture that I hope we can kind of carry with us as we journey through these chapters today to help us see the kind of key thing I think that's going on.

You know, something that we often do with the kids when we're on holiday by the seaside is we get up early in the morning when the tide is out and we go crabbing.

Right. Ever been crabbing? Yeah. You go in the rock pools and you try and find some stuff. But if you're lucky, you'll see a crab. If you're fortunate enough, you might see some sea enemies.

They're always pretty cool to see or some sea urchins. We don't see an awful lot, if I'm honest, where sometimes we go. It's more the expectation that you might find something. But I tell you, without fail, what we see hundreds and hundreds of every time we go down to the rocks.

[1 : 04] We see hundreds of limpets. You've had that experience of finding a limpet, probably hit your foot before you touched it. Hundreds and hundreds of limpets. You know these little guys.

OK. Unimpressive. Unspectacular. And as far as I can see, I'm no mollusk expert, but as far as I can see, limpets are good at one thing and one thing only in life.

OK. They're good at clinging. That's all they do, isn't it? They just cling. And come calm, come rain or come raging storm.

These little guys cling. That's all they do. They cling. And what we're going to hear from Job today, I think, really simply, is what he is clinging to.

Now, remember the story so far. God has allowed Satan in this book of Job, this believer. God has allowed Satan to take everything from him. Isn't he? His children, his possessions, his health.

[2 : 07] And all of it is in an attempt to get this limpet dislodged from his trust in God. So what this has been all about, we've been privy to that as the readers in the opening chapters.

Remember that we are the, I think we have to see ourselves as the sinners in the stalls watching this happen. OK, this is what we've been privy to, that Satan wants to make Job curse God to his face.

Expose Job as a kind of prosperity gospel guy. He doesn't really want you, God. He just wants your stuff. So if you take the stuff away from him, it will expose the fact that he didn't really love you.

OK, and yet this man Job, in the height of the storm, as the waves have come painfully crashing one upon another through his pains and his questions that we've journeyed through, what we're going to see today is him tell us what he's clinging to.

In other words, we're going to see him tell us where his hope is. Where his hope is. And I guess I want us to see straight off the bat that his hope isn't in the place that we might expect.

[3 : 17] OK, I remember last year, not long after we went into lockdown, watching the news. And there was a clip of a poster that someone had put up in town. And it simply said, believe that this will pass.

OK, don't know if you saw that in the news. Believe that this will pass. That's what the poster said. In other words, keep going. Let's keep going, believing that this is going to get better.

You know, and by God's common grace to us as a nation, it looks like things are getting better. Do well to remember that for many people around the world, countless millions, it's not. But in our nation, it seems to be getting better.

I'm so glad to have my second vaccine the other day. God's common grace to us. But I remember at the time, reading that poster and thinking to myself, but what if it doesn't?

What if it doesn't? You know, we know, don't we, that life isn't as simple as that. I mean, friends, what of our struggles with mental health?

[4 : 21] What if they remain a constant battle for us on and off, on and off for the rest of our days? What if the pain of seeing a loved one suffer, the emotional scars that it leaves in us, what if they never really fully heal?

What if the difficulties of parenting and the emotional tiredness of it all and the relational tensions in our families remain a persistent challenge day after day after day, year after year?

What if the job that you hoped would come to fruition, the job that you poured yourself into trying to get with all the hopes and the dreams and ambitions that were tied up with it, what if that never comes to pass?

What if things don't get better? The thing for us to see today is that Job's hope is not in things getting better.

Job's hope, we're going to see it today. And indeed, this is right at the heart of the good news of Christianity, is that there is a better hope for this life, that there is a more sure and a more steadfast hope for this life, that God himself has made a way to happen.

[5 : 38] And it's one that he invites us as people, particularly as believers, to come and embrace. I love it that God in the Psalms is described as a safe refuge in times of trouble.

And Job is going to testify to that. So come with me to Job chapter 16 and let's take our seats again as the sinners in the stalls, as this man Job once again takes centre stage.

Now, a good question to ask ourselves as we try and take in the breadth of these chapters and everything that they contain, is to ask ourselves, why are they here? Why are they here?

Here's what I want us to do in the time that we have remaining. As a congregation this morning, I want us just to think about three reasons why they are here. Okay, ready for this?

Here's number one. I take it that they are here firstly to expose the folly of Job's friend. Because Bildad, do you see him?

[6 : 39] He's back on the scene. And we met him last week and here he is again, offering his opinion as to why Job is suffering.

We're back in at chapter 18. You know, it was Rebecca McLaughlin who said, she's a Christian author, she said, sometimes we love people best by acknowledging that we don't understand. You feel the love in that, the warmth in that statement? Sometimes we love people best by acknowledging that we don't understand. Well, that's not the approach that Job's friends have taken, is it? See what Job calls them at verse 2 of chapter 16.

He calls them miserable comforters. Do you see it? Miserable comforters. And you feel his pain in that phrase, don't you? Guys, you're not helping.

You've not helped. Through my tear-filled, question-ridden, physically sore, sleepless nights, and restless days that he talks about there at verse 16.

[7 : 45] Job once again declares his innocence in the sight of God. Verse 17. And he's saying to his friends, I won't find a sensible one among you. Okay, that's why we're jumping around a little bit today, but it's the kind of breadth of it to help us see it.

Verse 10 of chapter 17. I won't find a sensible one among you. You're not helped. You're not helped. And so Job has said this, you're miserable comforters, you've not helped.

I'm innocent in God's sight. And yet Bildad, having heard what Job has just said, he doesn't agree.

He doesn't agree. And you can hear his frustration come across as he launches into his response at chapter 18.

He says, why are we counted as cattle in your sight? Verse 3. In other words, why do you treat us like we're stupid? You know, listening to what we have to say, because I think the thing we need to understand is that in Bildad's mind, the world works in straight lines.

Okay, have you ever look at a map of the city centers of places like Glasgow and New York? Okay, it's why they're filming that film, aren't they, in Glasgow? Because it's a lot cheaper than doing it in New York, but you still get the same thing.

[8 : 57] What do you get? You get grids. You get grids, don't you? This street goes straight to that street. This lane intersects with that lane at that point.

Everything is neat and in straight lines. That's why I love these kind of places. It appeals to my sense of neat and order. But in Bildad's mind, that's how he sees the world. Straight lines.

And we have to say that it is largely true, of course, isn't it, of the world that God has made, that there is order. He sovereignly governs all things. But, you see, in Bildad's mind, that order, that straight lines means that the law of cause and effect, action and consequence is directly in play. You behave good. You get reward. But if you go down sin street, at some point you are going to intersect with suffering street. It's his world for you. It's his world for you, isn't it?

Sin leads to suffering. And so surely in this neat and ordered world that God has made, that that is what explains Job's predicament. And you see him express it in verse 3.

[10:09] In the language he uses, the similes, the metaphors. He says, God deals with the wicked like a man putting out a light. Again, just see that snuffed out.

Like one who set a trap for them. You see his conclusion at verse 21. What he effectively says, Job, what's happening to you?

It just goes to show that really you don't know God. Which is such an insensitive thing to say, isn't it? Now let me give you two gaping gaps in Bildad's view of the world.

And particularly his understanding of how God works. Firstly, friends, there is no room for grace in Bildad's view of the world. No room for grace. The thought that this God, because of who he is, out of his mercy, he wouldn't treat us as we deserve.

In my experience of doing the Christianity Explored course, I've done several here in my time, that the most hotly debated evening is not the evening on sin and judgment.

[11:16] The most hotly contested evening is the evening when we look at grace. Every time. The notion that we don't need to do anything to be right with God, except to trust wholly in Jesus and on his work on the cross for us.

People instinctively hear that and say, that cannot be right. I cannot be right. Surely we must have to do something to be right with God. Surely he looks at the good deeds.

Surely we're better than that person. That means we're more qualified. I always find that when people hear what I do for a job, they instinctively, more often than not, they start talking about the good things that they do in life.

The church that they grew up in, the Sunday school that they attended, the fact that they loved the Boys Brigade, the fact that their community does a food bank, the fact that they're good and lawful citizens trying to do their bit.

It's obviously deeply ingrained in us, friends. We're all people who like to think of the world in straight lines, that we can earn our salvation. We can be right in God's eyes to the things that we do.

[12:19] That's how Bildad sees the world. There's no room for grace in his understanding of who the Lord is. And secondly, he sees no reason and no sense for Job to be waiting and trusting as a believer.

The thought that God might have bigger purposes here in this story for his glory. Of course, the ones that earlier on in the book we became privy to is the reader and that are working themselves out through Job's suffering.

All of that, that waiting and trusting in the Lord. Bildad's thinking, Job, you're wasting your time. You're wasting your time. No room for grace and no room for waiting in the world, the way that Bildad sees the world.

And of course, friends, grace and waiting on the Lord, aren't they the two wonderful truths of the Christian life? The words of the old hymn by William Cowper, sung by believers down the generations.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.

[13:34] I take it these chapters are here firstly to expose the folly of his friend. And I take it secondly there here to help us enter the depths of his pain. So as we enter chapter 19, what would appear to be true is that because of what Bildad has said and how he has said it, things have taken a turn for the worse for Job.

He's made it worse. And I take it in our relationships with one another, friends, as a lesson there that we need to strive with great care, not just with our word choice, but our word tone as well, as we seek to help one another.

Words that come from our mouths that build up and don't tear down. Words that come from our lips that encourage and don't dishearten. Words of truth. Because look at what Job says, verse 1, How

long will you torment me and break me in pieces with your words?

There's the effect that Bildad's words have had on Job. And Job tells us, doesn't he, how he's suffering. And again, we plunge ourselves into the pool of his pain to see how he's suffering. He's suffering physically. Verse 20, My bones cling to my skin. Hear him describe it. Perhaps him describing just how deep and painful the sores in his body have gone.

[15:03] Or it might just be him telling us how malnourished he is. He's thin. He's not eating right. He's not sleeping. It has an effect, doesn't it, on your body. He's suffering physically.

He's suffering mentally. Verse 7, Hear his cry. Even when I cry out, talking to God, there is no answer. There is no justice.

I always remember my friend Wayne Sutton, who's a pastor down at Crubber's Christian Centre. He always talked about openly, and some of you might remember this from our weekend away a few years ago, talked about his mental, what he called a breakdown a number of years ago.

And he talked about how all he could do for that time was go into a room at the front of his house and just stare out the window at the Pentland Hills. That's all he could do.

And just pray. As he mentally suffered. Something of that isn't there in what Job is going through. He's suffering physically.

[16:01] He's suffering mentally. He's suffering socially. And I want you to see this one.

Particularly verse 13. What does he say? He says, My family are far from me. And hear what he's describing.

Verse 14. My friends have failed me. And in verse 19. Even my closest friends, even my most intimate friends have turned away from me.

And what he's doing is he's describing the spiraling sense of isolation and loneliness that he's feeling. He's suffering. And we have to enter the depths of his pain.

And I take it, friends, that as he wants these words to be recorded, we see that later in chapter 19, I take it that as we read this, that we have to understand that there will be at times, there will be and there can be, these kind of things that are the experience of the Christian believer.

Maybe that's you this morning. Maybe you are struggling physically. Maybe it is you're struggling mentally. Maybe you are struggling emotionally. Maybe you are struggling socially.

[17:10] And I'd encourage you, if that is you today, please do reach out. Please do reach out. The wonderful thing that God has done in giving us as a church community to walk through life together.

And maybe off the back of that, you deeply resonate with what Job is saying here. And particularly you relate to what Job says at verse 21.

What does Job so desperately want? For someone to have pity on him, do you see? He doesn't need his friends' lectures.

He needs his friends' love. He needs their presence. He needs their prayers. He needs their sympathy. He needs their tears of affection.

He doesn't need lectures. He needs the love of his friends. And I take it we're challenged at this point to think about the way that we can show love and compassion to one another as a church family.

[18:17] Friends, think about it right now. Who do you know that needs love and support right now? Maybe you are privy to something. Who can we show love and support to right now?

You know, I was reading a book about the human body the other day, one of the kids. And I know there's doctors here today who I'm sure will know much about more than this than me. But this is my layman's understanding of it, right? We're reading this book and the author's talking about how sometimes you have a cut in your skin.

You ever wondered how scab forms? Right? What happens is your body, when the cut comes, your body works extra hard to pump blood to that part of your body that's suffering.

And that's why the scab develops to shield it and protect it from the outside. So what your body does when something's hurting, just vroomf, we're sending blood. You don't want to be that kind of Christ-centered community.

Something's hurting, somebody's hurting in the body, vroomf, we're sending people, we're there. We want to help, we want to love. We're present. We care. And let me just give you one holiday reflection.

[19:23] You know, from reading Luke's gospel. Try and do this on holiday every time I go away on holiday. Just take a book of the Bible and just immerse myself in it devotionally. Right? So going

through Luke's gospel. And friends, I don't think I've ever noticed just how many times Luke records Jesus having what on people?

Pity. The word compassion. Right? Let's give me a few of these. The story of the widow losing her son, Luke 7. Right? None of these are easy. Enter into the people's pains as you read about them in the gospel.

The widow loses her son. Jesus has what on her? His compassion. He tells a parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke chapter 10. Not just a story about how we can be better people.

Of course, that is part of it. But it's also in the context him describing what he is going to do as the ultimate Good Samaritan. And what happens? There's a man at the side of the road. What does the Samaritan have on him?

Pity. Compassion. Give you two more. Jesus meets the ten lepers in Luke 17. Jesus, son of David, have what on us? Have pity.

[20 : 28] Have compassion. Same thing, Luke chapter 18 with the blind man who's outside Jericho who presumably is Bartimaeus. He shouts out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

The exact same cry. And Jesus does. He does. Oh, friends, what a Christ we have.

Charles Spurgeon declared all those years ago, I have a great need of Christ, but I have a great Christ for my need.

Jesus, the one who has pity and compassion on us, it's almost as if our infirmities, our sorrows, he is drawn to us in that moment. Then I went to get my jab the other day, got the jab, felt a bit peely wally, there's a good Scottish term for you, had to go and sit.

Ambulance man comes, we're chatting away for ages. He says, why did you get into this business of being a minister? Answer, Jesus. Never met anyone like this.

[21 : 33] Never read of anyone like him. All power, all compassion, who is like him? Who moves towards us in our sufferings. What we sing with the kids, Jesus, strong and kind.

Friends, can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

This is who he is. I take it these chapters are here to help us enter the depths of his pain and thirdly and finally, I take it that they are here to encourage us to embrace the source of his hope.

Come with me to chapter 19, verse 25 onwards. This is the time we have left. We'll just look at this section and to some of the most famous and the most glorious words in the Bible.

What is Job clinging to? He is clinging, do you see it, to the phrase, his living Redeemer. Now, a Redeemer in a context, someone who in your family line steps in when somebody dies, takes financial and practical responsibility for you and your family in your time of need.

[22 : 48] That's what a Redeemer does. Someone from the outside in your family comes in and takes responsibility. Now, Job might not know the precise how this is going to happen, but you see how his confidence is that at the end of the course of his life, God will vindicate him.

That's what his confidence is in and he will do it through this living Redeemer. And after death, he will stand and he will see God.

That's the rock that this limpet is clinging to. That is what Job's hope is in. And that's the confession as we turn to the pages of the New Testament. is very similar to the one that Martha makes to Jesus in John chapter 11.

If you wondered where we were going with that. Now, the context of Martha's confession is not a philosophical discussion. Her brother has just died.

Right? Just journeying with people young and old, the pain of that never gets any easier. Enter into her pain. Brother has just died. Her world is turned upside down.

[24 : 01] And feel the pain in Martha's confession. Lord, if you had been here. Right? If you'd been here. Where were you, Lord? Of course, in the context, John has told us that Jesus delayed in going.

But he's also told us that Jesus loved them. He loved them. And yet, this was all about them understanding something much more profound about who he is. Where were you?

Jesus says to her. Your brother will rise again to which she responds, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Again, do you see, it's so similar to Job's confession.

And she probably doesn't understand the how. Right? She knows something of the what, but she doesn't understand the how. Do you see, Jesus answers her how, not with a how, but with a who.

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

[25 : 03] In other words, Martha, I am the living redeemer. Your world is turned upside down. Your pain is real.

But I have your life. Just in case you thought that was a cold response from Jesus, very next scene, he is at the tomb weeping because of the carnage that death, because of sin has brought into the world.

You know, we so often go to celebration services of people, don't we? But I think there is a right and proper place to grieve as a Christian that death isn't real. Sorry, death isn't the way it's supposed to be.

And Jesus weeps, but he weeps. And in case you thought that was an unfounded response, know that he is the one who speaks and Lazarus rises. Jesus who is all compassion, all pity, and he is all powerful.

And Jesus who would himself suffer physically, mocked, beaten, Jesus who himself would suffer mentally as he sweats drops of blood at the sheer terror of the cross that is ahead of him in the garden the night before.

[26 : 22] And Jesus who would suffer socially, abandoned by his friends, betrayed by the, one of those who was closest to him. Jesus who would go to the cross to pay the price of our sin on the cross with his blood as he, the truer and greater Job, entrusts himself to his father who judges justly.

and Jesus who on the third day rose again as God vindicates him in the eyes of the watching world. Friends, a great question to ask as we come to the Old Testament is what difference does it make to this that Jesus has come?

What difference does it make? Well, it means how much more can we declare in him that Jesus our living redeemer lives?

I take it they are here thirdly to encourage us to embrace the source of his hope. And now just as we close let me tell you just a really short story about two friends of mine.

I won't tell you their names just to protect them a little bit but I'll tell you a tiny bit of their story just because it continues to speak volumes to me. Right? A number of years ago they lost their first son who lived tragically only a handful of days and I cannot begin to fathom the depths of pain that they felt and the scars that they will carry with them but you know what they called them?

[28 : 00] They called them Joshua. Okay? The man in the Bible who leads God's people into the promised land. Joshua, I'm going to do this really quick. Joshua, the Hebrew name, literally Yeshua, Jesus.

And it was their way of declaring in everything that's going on that they were tying their eternal destiny and that of their son to that of the greater and the truer Joshua.

The one who will do right, the one who will make all things new, the one who loved us, and the one who will take us to the promised land. Friends, what are you clinging to?

What are you clinging to? Here's the thing, going back to my limpets, right? You can be the Sylvester Stallone of limpets. You can be the strongest one there, but see if you're clinging to a weak rock, all it's going to take is a wave that is stronger than the rock that you're clinging to, and boom, you're gone, right?

Contrast that if you're a weak, an unspectacular looking limpet, and yet you're clinging to a strong rock. There is no wave that is coming that's going to hit you.

[29 : 20] Your life could not be in a better place, and the waves will come, but because your rock stands strong, so will we, friends. So will we.

The strength of our rock is the strength of Christ, our living redeemer, and boy, do we have a solid rock in the one who declared, I am the resurrection and the life.

So, friends, what are you clinging to? Job says, my redeemer lives. So here's what I want us to do. I just want us to be quiet for a few moments, just as we close our time together, and I trust that, friends, that the Lord by his spirit will be moving amongst us as we respond to his word this morning.

Let me encourage you to bring your prayers to him in the silence. And then I'm just going to read one thing as we close in prayer. So why don't we do that together?

Just in the silence, let me just read these words slowly of a hymn by Stuart Townend. And just allow the truth of what we've read today to speak to you.

[30 : 36] There is a hope that lifts my weary head, a consolation strong against despair, that when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit, I find the Savior there.

Through present sufferings, futures fear, he whispers courage in my ear, fear, for I am safe in everlasting arms, and they will lead me home.

Father, thank you that you love us. And so, Father, we pray for everyone here today, Lord, each of us individually who perhaps are suffering in different ways.

O Lord, we pray that you would help us be a community that cares, that loves, and particularly for those who are hurting just now, Lord, would you be ministering to them.

Thank you, Lord, that in Christ, with sins forgiven, standing righteous before you, that he will lead us home. And so, Father, we commit this time to you, Lord, in Jesus' wonderful name we pray.

[31 : 56] Amen. Amen.