

Session 3

October 29, 2023

WHY DO WE SUFFER?

Job 30:26-31; 42:1-6

One of the hardest issues to wrestle with in the realm of theology is the so called “problem of evil.” The technical term for such a study is *theodicy*. And the simplest expression of it says something like this: “*If God is all powerful, He cannot be all good. And if He’s all good, then He cannot be all powerful.*” In other words, how could an all-powerful God—who *could* stop evil--allow it to happen? While theologians and philosophers argue over such weighty considerations, the rest of us simply live with it! God is good. He is also all-powerful. And evil still exists. But we can’t help but wonder...

Job’s story is the Old Testament’s best-known example of suffering. And while the ancient sage and saint never knew the reason he suffered, he remained faithful to his God, who is both all-powerful, and all-good. Three key words highlight this week’s lesson.

Fact (30:26-31). The facts of suffering are obvious and universal. First, everyone suffers. Job himself declared, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (14:1). That’s all of us! Second, suffering hurts! In the text, Job tells us just how many ways we can suffer. Suffering affects us *emotionally* (v. 26). We expect good things, and we get bad. We look for light, and we are hit with darkness. Suffering affects us *physically*. Job could not rest (v. 27) and the illness that struck him apparently caused his skin to blacken and peel off (vv. 28, 30). Suffering affects us *socially*. Among all the people, Job howled like a wild animal (that’s the general gist of v. 29), apparently without anyone coming to his aid. And suffering affects us *spiritually*. The lyre and the harp that were such prominent instruments for worship (see 1 Chron. 13:8), were here used for mourning instead. Indeed, it’s hard to praise when we are in pain! For reflection: *Remember, everyone suffers...and suffering hurts!*

Faith (42:1-3). To understand these verses, you need to remember the overall story. In a nutshell, Job suffered because God was bragging on him! (see chapters 1 and 2). For the most part, Job’s friends tried to convince him that he must have committed a terrible sin, and that God was punishing him for it. Even his wife encouraged him to “Curse God and die!” (2:9). No wonder Job called them “miserable comforters!” (16:2). Throughout, Job maintained his innocence. And to his credit, he never directly blamed God for his problems (1:22; 42:7-8). If Job did sin, it was his assumption that God was “not fair.” By the end of the book, “the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning” (42:12), but not before the classic face-to-face day of reckoning that begins with, “Who *is* this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me,” and takes up chapters 38-41. In this section, we see Job’s humble confession. Simply put, God is sovereign and can do what He wants (v. 2). His ways are higher than ours (see Is. 55:8-9), and He doesn’t need to ask our opinions or take our advice (v. 3). For reflection: *What do you see as the connection between God’s sovereignty, our faith, and the topic of suffering?*

Focus (42:4-6). After Job’s humble *confession*, we see Job’s humble *repentance* (v. 6). While confession relates to coming clean and agreeing with God, repentance demonstrates a change of thinking that leads to a change in behavior. In military parlance, it’s an “about face.” Verse 5

doesn't mean that Job heard some rumors about God. Rather it means that until now, he knew of God only by hearing *about* Him. After all this suffering and subsequent questioning, Job now knew God from personal experience. For reflection: *How did Job's suffering bring him face-to-face with God? Have you had a similar experience? Does suffering always bring us closer to Him?*