

Mid-Week Bible Study: Hard Questions about Pain & Suffering

Week 3:

Text: Job 11:13-16; 23:8-12; John 9:1-3

INTRODUCTION

True suffering has nothing to do with personal preferences; no one chooses to go through pain, heartache, or tragedies. And we can't just "leave the room." But like the person who married into a football family and realizes the "suffering" is her own fault, many people take the same view of pain and troubles. They assume they're suffering because of some sin or failing in their lives. The Book of Job will give us a clearer insight into the role our sin may—or may not—play in our suffering.

Setting: Job is an example of ancient wisdom literature that seeks to answer a difficult moral or ethical question. In this case, it deals with the reason for suffering. While the genre is wisdom, it's important to remember that Job was a real person suffering real pain—though not because of sin. In John 9, Jesus addressed this same question of suffering with His disciples. Like Job's friends, they assumed all suffering was punishment for sin. And like Job, Jesus debunked their errant theology.

Point: God's actions are often beyond our understanding, but we can trust Him

RECAP FROM LAST WEEK: Most of the Book of Job (chapters 3–37) centers on the opinions and advice of Job's three friends, his defense, and a final speech by a young man named Elihu. When we come to Job 38, however, it's God's turn to speak. *"Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind. He said: Who is this who obscures my counsel with ignorant words?"* (Job 38:1-2). For two full chapters, God questioned Job, and in the process, showed the distressed man just how little he knew.

JOB 11:13-16

Verse 13: Here Zophar one of Job's friends urged him to redirect his heart, to put it back on solid footing with the Lord by turning from his evil ways.

- In Biblical times and even now, people assumed that suffering was always a direct relation to one's sin.
- Yet we know that this is not always the case for Job for chapter 1:1 begins by highlighting Job's complete integrity.

Verse 13b: Zophar also encouraged Job to spread out your hands to him. This phrase was not about job's need to worship but rather Zophar believed his needed to repent.

Verse 14: Job's friends continued to push the concept that Job needed to repent here. Yet this time the instructions are negative accusatory theme.

- They told Job that he needed to remove the iniquity in his hand & that he has allowed injustice in his home.
 - This continue theme is sad because here job is going through the worse season of his life and his friends instead of comforting or encouraging him decide to accuse him.

Verse 15: Also continued to the accusations about job's sinful lifestyle. By telling Job the results that come from such repentance.

- That his head would be held high and free from fault.
- The word fault in Hebrew is used to describe a blemish on a potential sacrifice.
 - Therefore, his confession would make job qualify to be a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God.

Verse 16: Zophar summarized his position in job's suffering by attempting to offer hope that if and when Job took his advice that his season would shift, and the pain and sorrow would no longer haunt him.

The rush to judgment demonstrated by Job's friends should remind us to be careful with our own attitudes toward those who are hurting.

- **Read Matthew 7:1-5, John 7:24, and Galatians 6:1**

It's tempting to believe we have all the answers to a given situation when we likely don't understand the questions.

Q: What is your reaction to Job's friend's advice?

JOB 23:8-12

Here in these verses we find the part of Job's defense against the accusations from his friend Eliphaz. In the chapter 27 Eliphaz accused Job of being dishonest in how he dealt with people. He believed that Job has amassed his wealth, influence and power taking advantage of people. And reminded Job that God was not too pleased to see what he had done. Which is why he was being punished.

Verses 8-9: in these verses Job clarified his thoughts on God's presence.

- If I would find God, he would plead his case to him like a lawyer.
 - Job's statement here suggest that he could not feel God's presence in his suffering.

- **Read Mathew 27:46**

Verse 9: While Job struggled to feel God's presence the fact that he states that God was a work in both the north and the south. But he simply could not see him. This statement suggests that he never denied that God was not still working on his behalf.

- Job was confident that God was still with him in his suffering just out of his eyesight but not out of God.

Verse 10:

Q: How has suffering refined your faith?

Job here confessed that even in the silence and his blindness that God was still looking out for him.

- He said "he knows the way I have taken"
 - Here Job's faith fuels our faith that nothing escapes God's notice.
 - Your struggle, prayers, cries, and problems God knows all and still knows what you deal with.
 - **Read Hebrews 4:15**

Verse 10b: (When he tested me, I will emerge as pure gold)

- Job's faith here is remarkable. He has been accused of being guilty of his own suffering. He has seemingly lost everything.
- And yet he attributes his suffering to simply a test of integrity from God.
 - We must learn to embrace the suffering as one of the ways God is refining and shaping us. It may be that very challenge or struggle that God is using to prepare us for something He wants to do through us in the future.

Verse 11: (I have follows his tracks)

Job continued to assert that he was not responsible for this suffering.

- Job was saying he was sinless, but he refused to admit to sins that he had not committed.
 - **Read Psalm 1:1-2.**

Verse 12: (departed from the commands)

- The Hebrew used indicates that job had done his best to follow God's directions.
- We know this because he said I have "treasured" God's word.

JOHN 9:1-3

Jesus saw a blind man, but the disciples saw a theological discussion. They did not discuss how they could help this man; their focus was on what had caused his blindness. The disciples bought into the same erroneous notion expressed by Job's three friends: sin was

the root problem of this man's blindness. To their way of thinking, the only issue was who sinned. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2)

- Unlike Job's friends, the disciples did not necessarily assume the man was guilty, though they didn't exclude the possibility.
 - Some rabbis of the day argued that prenatal sin in the womb was possible. But that would mean he was judged before actually having a moral understanding of good and evil.
- The other option was the man's parents. Which mean that because of their sin God punished their child making him blind.
 - This portrays God as capricious and cruel.
 - **Read Ezekiel 18:20**

Verse 3: Jesus quickly corrected His followers' faulty theology by focusing on the purpose of the man's ailment rather than the cause.

- Instead of assuming somebody had sinned, He shared that the man's blindness would set the stage for a display of God's power.
 - **Read John 11:4**

Q: *When have you seen God glorified in the midst of suffering?*

- Just as Job grew closer to God through his suffering, the blind man would experience God in a brand-new way—a way that would not have been possible without his blindness.
- This blindness was not caused by sin, but it would result in an outpouring of grace and redemption.

CONCLUSION

- **Confess.** All suffering is not a result of sin, but sin can lead to suffering. Ask God to reveal any sin in your life. Confess that and thank Him for His grace and forgiveness.
- **Honor.** Ask God to show you how He wants to strengthen you during a time of suffering. While dealing with difficulties, look for ways to honor Christ.

Encourage. Everyone's experience with suffering is different, but share with someone how God helped you, strengthened you, and brought glory to Himself during a time of hardship or suffering