

TALK 2025, JOB 2 – JOB 3:1-11, JOB 19:21-29

THE CURSING & LONGING OF JOB

Job's wife had told him: 'Curse God & die!'. When Job finally **does** speak, after a week when no words or food have passed his lips, he doesn't curse God, but he comes pretty close... He curses the day he was born. He wishes that this day was no longer in the calendar. He wishes the day would be swallowed in darkness & never remembered. He wishes that he had died at birth, rather than experience the overwhelming grief & misery he is going through.

And here's the thing. God lets him speak... In contrast, his so-called friends get jittery & start thinking that Job is speaking blasphemy against God. They try to silence him. They try to convince Job that he must have done something to deserve all this. That there must be some 'secret sin' that he has hidden until now. We will say more of his friends, his so-called 'comforters', next week.

Here's the thing. Any counsellor will tell you this. There was no need for Job's friends to start to challenge his words. To try to get him to eat his words. What would be the point in that?. He needs to be able to express exactly how he is feeling. And all they needed to do, as before, was to stay silent and to listen to what appears, at times, to be Job's unhinged ranting against God.

The bleakness of the overflow of Job's tormented mind speaks for itself. This needed to be expressed & this needs to be heard today. Why else would our Bibles include such a long & anguished diatribe in the face of suffering? We cannot & should not dismiss, or too quickly move on from, this desperate experience of personal darkness. In the same way, the longer we stay in the darkness at the foot of the cross, the better. Christians tend not to linger there, because we want to move onto the dawn of the Easter garden. We would far rather run & skip along to the empty tomb & the good news announced to the women. It's almost as if Christians actually prefer the Monty Python version of the cross, where Brian sings that ditty: 'Always look on the bright side of life'...

Like the friends of Job, we need to observe a humble & patient silence in the face of such terrible suffering. Let's do that now, for a moment, as we reflect on the 3rd chapter of this terrible & awesome book. As we think of the suffering of the people of Ukraine, the people of Gaza, as well as others we know... (QUIET)

... As I said, Job comes very close to cursing God. And God, for a v long time, does not interrupt Job's complaint. Later on, Job bewails what his life has become, compared to the blessings he knew before. There's this 'conversation' that develops between him & his so-called friends. In places it feels like an interrogation, or even a verbal battle. A battle for who will have the last word.

(Sometimes the small-group discussions at Alpha can feel like this. All those difficult questions. Christians often feel they have got to put right the wrong ways of thinking they have been hearing. But actually, sometimes silence can speak to people more than our words. It's important to allow God the room to speak. It's important for people seeking God to have the space to formulate their questions... And for them to have the space to think about what those questions might mean for them & what **God** might say in response...).

Job feels personally attacked by God. In his own words, he feels that he has been 'assailed' by God. He can't get his head around this. That the God he thought was so determined to bless him, is now, for some unfathomable reason, against him. Job complains that there is no way for him to appeal to God personally. No heavenly court he can make his case in. But his complaints are not all about God & God's apparent absence. Job complains of his day-to-day existence. His disease means he has become offensive to his wife. The disasters that have befallen his family means his reputation is in ruins. Before, he had this reputation as the most upstanding & blessed man alive. But now that his experience has become known to everyone, his name has become associated with disaster & God-forsakeness. And on top of all this, his best friends do not understand. They blame him for the disasters that have befallen him. No wonder Job seems completely inconsolable... Once they begin to argue with him, none of the words of his 'friends' seem at all helpful.

This may remind us of our attempts to support someone going through a really hard time. It seems that our own words ring hollow. Those scriptures that we often repeat somehow don't seem to have the same relevance. Whatever we say doesn't seem to be heard. But here's the thing. It's our actions, not our words which will speak louder. Being willing to spend time with someone in despair, is so much more telling than **anything** we can say to them. It's Christ's silence in the face of his accusers. It's Christ's silent agony on the cross which can speak to us, more even than his words from the cross, as powerful & life-transforming as these can be... Jesus spent many hours, hanging above a crowd

that mostly tormented him. He said very little during that time, as he identified himself with all the depths of human sin & suffering & sorrow.

So, without forgetting Job's loud curses in chapter 3, let us move along to thinking about his words in chapter 19. Now that is quite a leap. To 'speed read' 16 chapters of this book. But, as you read Job 19, it doesn't seem, to begin with, that Job's thinking has developed at all, across those many chapters. He is still talking here of God being against him, of God 'pursuing him' to do him harm... *And then, suddenly, out of nowhere*, Job seems to have a light-bulb moment. It's almost as if, from all that has gone before, someone else is speaking these words. If this book was a Psalm, the Psalmist would probably have inserted the Hebrew word 'Selah', between v. 24 & v. 25. 'Selah', we think, was a reminder to have a pause. To hold silence for a moment, before continuing. 'Let the world keep silence'... Something happened between those two verses & suddenly we can begin to hear God speaking, from Job's own lips.

He says, despite all he has gone through: ***'I know that my Redeemer lives...'***. Alleluia ! He goes on to declare (READ v. 25-27)... These are inevitably the words of this book that most of us are most familiar with. This is the moment we have all been waiting for, when Job moves on from cursing & complaining to longing & yearning to see God. What a moment that is... A moment we can pray that those seeking God on Alpha experience for themselves. A moment we long for also. A moment of seeking & finding that goes on to last a lifetime.

The Book of Job is a very long & a very deep book. And Job's experience of questioning God seems to last a lifetime. But here is the glorious irony of all Job's complaints. This is one of the delights of this book of personal grief. Hidden within Job's own words, even in chapter 3, where he seems engulfed in darkness & is most desolate, the light of God is glimmering. Even with Job's own words, which seem to lack any sense of faith in God, is the hidden presence of the Holy One.

So, for example, there are seven mentions of 'thick darkness' or 'gloom' or 'no light' in those few verses of chapter 3. Yet, daylight & dawn are still mentioned. When Job speaks of the 'morning stars', becoming dark, he is unwittingly speaking of his Saviour, Jesus, who is described in the NT as... 'the bright & morning star'. When Job mentions 'Leviathan' here in verse 8, he is again, without realising, anticipating God's final answer to him in chapters 38-41. God

speaks to Job of 'Leviathan' – the mighty & mysterious creature, the whale. We will think more of God's response to Job, later this month.

As I said before, Job speaks of needing a 'mediator'. The NT declares: 'there is one mediator between God & humanity – the man Jesus Christ'... So much of what Job utters, in his despair, speaks of God's plan to reveal salvation - in Jesus. Job, without being aware of it, pre-figures the glorious resurrection of the Suffering Servant, Jesus. In Jesus we have the hope of glory. Alleluia!

Job speaks of wanting to appeal directly to God, which is exactly what he is doing as he spoke these words. He says (in v.24 of chapter 19) that he wishes his words could be recorded, inscribed with an iron tool on rock. Well, God went one better than that. Job's words have been repeated across generations, in multiple languages... Job went on to have a much more enduring legacy than simply being rewarded for his faith, with a new family & much bigger flocks of sheep. The reputation that he thought was in complete tatters, has been completely restored. And the name Job is now synonymous with a person who endures awful suffering & yet still believes God. Someone who somehow develops an even deeper faith, through the experience of awful suffering.

One of the stories shared on the Alpha video this week is worth mentioning here. Alpha's theme on Tuesday night was: 'Why did Jesus die?'. And the story which particularly struck me this week, was the story of one of the young, Alpha presenters... He shared how he & his family had had to watch while his father was slowly ravaged by dementia, over the last 9 years of his life... Someone who had been such a wonderful parent to him, with such a keen mind, gradually transformed into someone very different. He shared how his father's death, in the end, came as something of a relief... Something there of the experience of Job, only without the 'happy ending'... And what that presenter finished by saying is what has really stuck with me. He was very honest in saying this: that the knowledge that Jesus too had suffered had been helpful for him. He didn't say that this had given him all the answers to the anguish his family had gone through, but that it had helped, on some level.

The suffering of Jesus does not take away the terrible suffering of Job, or even our own all-too-real suffering. But here's the thing. Here's the good news. God by his grace, still finds ways of speaking to us in our darkness. God still finds ways of shining the light of love into our hearts, through Jesus. God does not

insist on having the last word. In fact, it's Job's voice we hear in the final chapter of this book. But the fact is that God's ultimate word is indeed the 'man of sorrows', who died, rejected & alone on a Roman cross. The One who was sent & chose to die for us & who was raised from the dead for us. Alleluia! The living word of God speaks right into whatever darkness & difficulty you are going through right now. Can you hear what God is saying to you right now?