

Faith Facing Facts - 2

Job 2: 11-13 - 3: 1-26.

Andrew Davies



The book is about faith facing facts. Particularly the fact of suffering and within that parameter the fact of the suffering of the good and the Godly and within that parameter the fact of the suffering of the good and the Godly to extremes to the very extremities.

That's the theme of the book, Can faith face facts? Can faith overcome them? Is it possible to trust God when everything around us seems to collapse? That's a very very important question.

Job's sufferings have already been described to us in the first two chapters. They came in three distinct stages. First, there were a series of natural disasters and human atrocities that overwhelmed him. Secondly he was overcome by physical ill health of the most severe and grotesque kind. Thirdly he had to live with the emotional fall back and effects of those realities and the emotional side of his sufferings went on and on without respite.

There was first of all the pain of bereavement, the heartache, the emptiness, and the loneliness. Then there was the anxiety that came with financial catastrophe, the awareness of being destitute, of having lost everything. To that was added the humiliation of losing so much and of being afflicted with a loathsome disease. And then if that was not enough the deep depression and the acute anxiety that settled over his spirit as the days past.

The situation did not get easier or better it seemed to get worse and he had to live with the long-term consequences of what had happened to him. Financial bankruptcy, loss of family life and health and extended awareness of darkness. So the pain grew more severe and the darkness deepened. He has no explanation at all of what was happening to him. There were no answers to his questions, there were no solutions to his problems. He simply had to live with the questions and with the problems.

We see more than he did. We see behind the scenes, we see the cosmic conflict going on, challenge from God to Satan and from Satan to God. We can understand something of the permissive will of God in Job's sufferings, but Job knew nothing

about it. He was simply immersed in the agony and in the distress of all that had happened to him. In bewilderment, almost he went on trusting God. It's interesting that he worshipped God. He worshipped God when he was told about his catastrophes and when his health was taken away from him. He still believed though darkness seemed to veil God's face although it seem to him there was no answer to anything that was happening to him he still trusted God. It was not just courage he showed or fortitude, He trusted God and he believed God and he believed particularly in the goodness of God.

Now that is a wonderful and remarkable thing. He is a man battered, broken, bruised, and bullied. And yet he continues to trust God. That is a remarkable thing. Many people have told me, back in Wales, particular when I had to conduct the funeral services of people who weren't Christians and who had been in the war, the 2nd world war particularly, many people have told me families of such men, that these men lost their faith when they went to the war. But it wasn't faith that they had, it wasn't real faith. Whatever they had, it wasn't real faith.

Real faith is the faith we just sung about...O for a faith that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe. That will not tremble on the brink of poverty or woe. But will no murmur or complain beneath the chastening rod but in the hour of grief or pain can lean upon it's God. That's the faith the writer of the hymn wanted asking God for and we see it in measure in this man Job. So the great theme of this book is facing facts and even overcoming the darkness that sometimes accompanies the mysteries of providence.

Now in the verses that Peter read earlier, you will notice that there is a new theme introduced into the story of the book. We have from chapter 3 on through to chapter 31 a series of speeches from both Job and from his friends, his three friends. And in these speeches, as they are sometimes called, these four men - the three friends and Job struggle, they struggle together with the problem, with a way of understanding what had happened and possibly even come to a solution. Why was Job being allowed to suffer in this way? Job maintained his own integrity, his own uprightness. His three friends were to say to him that he was not an upright and blameless man and to them, he was suffering because of great sin. Their solution to the problem was very different one from the one Job was struggling with. For them it was very simple - serious sin brought punishment. Job was being punished for serious sin. The punishment fits the crime; the punishment fits the crime that was their solution to the problem. Job knew that that was wrong. Not that he was perfect but he knew that that was wrong so they both three and he struggled together to understand what is happening and these chapters from 3 to 31 record both their words and Job's response to them.

Let's look at the matter, this evening, from two perspectives: - How do we respond to the sufferings of others? and then how are we to respond to our own sufferings? If you like the response here of the sympathizers and the response of the sufferer to serious suffering, because here were these three men looking on, here was Job in

the midst of it all. Their response and his response to what happened I think are interesting for us and we have some very valuable lessons I am sure to learn from them.

Think first of all about their initial response of Job's friends - his sympathizers, recorded in verses 11-13 where we are told that the three of them, and they are named, made an appointment to come together and meet and to mourn with Job and to comfort him and when they saw him from a distance, they wept, they torn their robe, they sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven and they sat with him on the ground seven days and nights and no-one spoke a word to him because they saw that his grief was very great. They sat with him; they wept with him in total silence.

What do we do when people suffer? What do friends of ours, neighbours, colleagues expect from us when they are suffering? Well they clearly expect and we ought to give genuine sympathy, real understanding of their position and their situation. And at first to their credit these three men did that. They sat in silence. Their presence, I suppose in a way, was itself a comfort to this man. Maybe he didn't want to say anything to them because very often when you're grief stricken it's very difficult to speak, it's very difficult to know what to say and if you do very often your emotions come immediately to the surface so it maybe that he just didn't want to say anything to them and they to their credit said nothing to him. In a sense words would have been inappropriate. They simply exposed themselves to his grief and shared it. They excepted it and silently they sat in the midst of it with him. Now that's real sympathy. We are told to weep with those who weep. There's a sensitivity here to his condition, which I think, does these men great credit. Who was it who said silence is golden. We talk too much, we say too much and sometimes what we say and when we say it are inappropriate. So three men sit with the man and share his grief. It is part of our psychology today and part of the way in which we have been programmed psychologically that we expect solutions to problems. If you have ever been involved in counseling you will have come across this idea that there must be solutions to problems. People today are looking for answers, solutions, so you have the counseling idea, you have the concept of counseling competence and of psychiatric and psychological expertise.

Now I am not for one moment saying that competence in counseling and expertise in psychiatric and psychological care are not extremely valuable. All I'm saying is that we expect solutions. We can not very often now days live with problems. That's part of our trouble as human beings, we don't know how to live with problems. We must, we must have answers. However, we may have to live we problems, we may not know answers and may not be given answers. There are deep valleys; there are dark forests, where there is little or no light. So that silence and tears and the sympathetic presence of another may be the right response very often.

There is a celebrated or was a celebrated psychiatrist in England by the name of Professor Eisink. He is now dead, but he did a number of tests as a psychiatrist in

which he exposed a number of his patient's to psychiatric care of different kinds of psychiatric care, through drug therapy, through electrical convulsion therapy and sometimes through psycho-analysis. And then he exposed a similar number of patients simply to sympathy, to loving, caring sympathy. And to his amazement, he discovered that more people responded to the second than to the first. Now I'm not saying that there isn't value in the first, I'm simply pointing out that very often what people need is the kind of sympathy that these three men gave to Job at the beginning initially when his pain was overwhelming.

When they opened their mouths the problems began and they aggravated his woe but at the beginning were proper, right, and helpful. There are times when that is true, there are times when all we can do is weep together, just stand together just in silence in the presence of God, acknowledge His will, acknowledge His sovereignty and just in a way that is perhaps more helpful than words, at an intuitive level, share the burden of grief and suffering that another person may be carrying.

That's the initial response of the sympathizers and there's a great deal that we can learn from it. But then notice with me in the second place, Job's initial response to his sufferings, because in Chapter 3, we have Job opening his mouth, he is the one who opens his mouth first, before his three friends say a word, he speaks and what he says in a sense astonishes us. He cries out in Chapter 3 in anguish of heart, he can not hold his emotions in any longer. There is almost a frantic note in what he is saying as he is struggling to understand God's ways. The agony is deep even desperate.

So, in verses 1 -10 he curses the day that he was born and that description there of Job cursing the day of his birth is the most moving and powerful description of a man in almost complete depression. "May the day perish on which I was born and the night in which it was said a male child is conceived". "May that day, the day of my birth be darkness, may God above not seek it may the light not shine upon it, may darkness and the shadow of death claim it, may a cloud settle on it, may the blackness of the day terrify it, and for that night may darkness seize it, may it no be included among the days of the year, may it not come into the number of the months, may the stars of it's morning be dark" and so on. "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?". He is in agony. He cries out to God and curses the day of his birth.

Then verses 11-19 is a cry through intense anguish of heart "Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breast that I should nurse? For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; then I would have been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, Who built ruins for themselves, or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver; Why wasn't I hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light?" Notice the why? Why? Why?. He is crying out. He is in anguish. Why Lord? Why?

Then he confesses his complete bewilderment and uselessness in verses 20-26. “Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, Who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; Who rejoice exceedingly, are glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden and whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes before I eat, I can’t even enjoy my food, my groaning pour out like water. For the thing, I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes”. He feels he’s lost his bearings, he’s lost God even, he’s life is useless and meaningless, he is bewildered by it all, and he can’t find an explanation.

It’s a picture of absolute and utter desolation and the words are hot, they’re exhausted, they’re desperate words, he’s sanity is under attack, he’s faith is under attack, he’s almost immobilized by what’s happening, he’s restless, he’s anxious, he doesn’t know where to turn, he’s heart is pounding within him. This is Job’s first response in words to all that has happened to him. Moreover, we may be shocked. We may be slightly discomfited by it.

We feel that somehow this is incompatible with real faith speak like this? How can a man who is a real believer curse the day that he was born? How can he speak words like this? How can he feel so utterly useless and hopeless? Where is his faith? We say. But we are the ones who are wrong if we think like that. And if we do think like that then we have never been remotely near where Job was. If we’d been anywhere near to where Job was then we would understand perfectly what he is doing here and why he was doing it, because faith does not mean the absence of conflict, it doesn’t mean the absence of desperation. That’s not faith. People who long for death but it does not come and search for it more than hidden treasures, is that faith? Well, I am not at ease, nor am I quiet I have no rest for trouble comes, is that faith? Faith has to live with great perplexity, with great anguish, and sometimes with great misery.

Peter reminded us earlier of William Cooper, the man who wrote the most exquisitely beautiful hymns, as well as some of the greatest poetry in the English language, and yet who suffered all his life from a most serious mental disorder.

Now that man had to live with continued mental ill health, continued psychological depression and yet he has given us, through the hand of God, some of the most beautiful hymns that have ever been written. Here is a real faith co-existing with anguish, with desperation, with chronic mental ill health. You remember when our Lord, drew near to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus they were very sad and cast down in heart and He saw that. He just simply walked with them and then asked them what was the matter and without the hint of chiding or scolding, He listened to them. And they poured out their hearts to Him.

Now that really is the kind of care and the kind of sympathy we need to show to people. And what our Lord was really doing was seeing the people behind the

words. He was looking, behind what was being said or by behind what was appearing to Him, to the heart of the people, to the condition of these two people and He went straight for that condition and He sort to help them. But He saw that faith was there, of course there was a great deal of unbelief to, He put his finger on it, He spoke to them of their unbelief, but He told them that their unbelief was foolish. He said oh foolish man and slow of heart to believe. It was foolish, it was slow of heart, but it wasn't wicked and it wasn't hard of heart. Wickedness and hardness of heart are one thing, foolishness and slowness of heart are another. Here were two people, who were certainly foolish and slow of heart to believe but never the less in their heart there was that root of faith and our Lord knew that and our Lord knows that even in the condition of people like us. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised when we discover that even men of faith like Job say things like this.

What about Elijah? A man who had rounded on those prophets of Bale and who under God had been so gloriously used in that contest of Mount Carmel and then just a matter of hours almost later running for his life and going a journey into the wilderness and sitting down under a broomtree praying that he might die and saying to the Lord "I am no better than my fathers". A child of light walking in the darkness. So there is tension here, the tension of true faith co-existing with deep depression and terrible darkness. We know God as Job knew God. We know that God is good. We know that we are in God's hands, but it seems sometimes that God is against us, that he is our enemy. So we are conscious of darkness, we are conscious of difficulties not answers and we something which surprises us, perplexes us and we are perplexed so much that sometimes we can only do what Job did and that is to cry out to God.

We know that Job was doing something wonderful. We know that. We know that there was something remarkable about this man and wonderful taking place. In a sense we who read the book are given, an insight into what was happening which was denied to Job. We had the privilege of reading the first two chapters so to speak. We have a glimpse behind the scenes, we can see God and Satan in conflict and we can see this man Job as the one whom the Lord has chosen as the battlefield between himself and Satan and we can see Job in the midst of all his anguish trusting God and thereby proving the omnipotence of God's grace and giving the lie to Satan and so God is seen to be the great God of heaven and the good God who loved this man, even though everything was going wrong with him, we can see all that and we can understand what Job was doing but he can't. He is just in the middle of it all. All he can see is the frowning providence.

He can not see the smiling face, and reminded of that other the hymn of John Newton's which links with the hymn I just quoted earlier on or the one we sang earlier on, do you remember this hymn of John Newton? He's really saying something really profounder here and it's not a hymn that can easily be sung - I asked the Lord that I might grow in faith and love and every grace might more of his salvation know and seek more earnestly his face. There's the desire of this man John Newton he wants to grow in grace, he wants to be more aware of God's

salvation he wants to see more of his face. And he says - it was he who taught me thus to pray and he I trust has answered pray but it has been in such a way as almost drove me to despair, What are you doing with me Lord? Your answering me my prayer for growth and for grace, but what a strange way you have taken, I hoped he says that in some favoured hour at once he'd answer my request and by his love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest, that's what I wanted. I wanted the Lord to shed his love abroad in my heart, to constrain me by his love, to subdue my sins to give me rest. Instead of this he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part. Yeah, more this his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my woe, crossed all the fair designs I schemed, blasted my gauds and laid me low, and he doesn't understand it. Lord why is this? I trembling cried, were Thy pursue thy worm to death, he feels like a worm. Are you pursuing this little worm to death? why don't you leave me alone Lord?, why are you doing this to me?, he doesn't understand it. 'Tis in this way the Lord replied, I answer pray for grace and faith. This is the way I have chosen to answer your prayer. It's not your way, it is the way I have chosen. These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set the free and break thy schemes of earthly joy that thou may seek thy all in me.

No, that's not easy, that's difficult. But it's really what was happening to Job. And when darkness seems to veil his face, what do you do? There are days like that. What do you do? I rest on His unchanging grace. When all around my soul gives way? What do you do? He then is all my hope and stay.

You see there is something about saving faith, real faith, and vital faith that is unconquerable. Faith may splutter, it may almost disappear. It may cry out in anguish, it may struggle with doubts, with dangers, and with inner turmoil. It may look as if it is going to be extinguish altogether. However, it goes on living. Real faith will not die. It won't give in; it won't lie down, in the face of appalling trouble it hangs on. That's all Job could do. He could only hang on. Hangs my helpless soul on The. Yes, Wesley knew what that meant. He's hanging on, he's desperate. He will not let God go. He continues to cling to God and slowly in the stories we shall see we see him beginning to climb out of the pit of depression and he finds his feet again but it was slow and it didn't happen immediately and there were a lot of very hot and anguished words in the middle of it all. But real faith won't die, it can't die. It's God's gift. It's vital. It's saving. It's divine.

And that's a great help to us because we may wonder whether we will be able to survive in the crisis of live and we may struggle with all sorts of questions and difficulties and we may not have answers to problems and we may have our doubts and our fears and we may be depressed and sometimes even desperate. So will our faith hold, will we hold our ground in the end. Yes, when all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay. Curse God and die says Job's wife to him. He can't, we won't and he doesn't. He says a lot of things to God that he should not have said but he will not surrender his trust and confidence in the goodness of God. Real faith is unconquerable. Real faith will overcome. This is the faith that

overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world. Our faith is the victory because it is God's faith and it overcomes the world. Whatever the world can throw at us, whatever the devil can throw at us, real faith can face the blackest hour and go on trusting in the Saviour, trusting in the merit of our beloved Saviour.

And we do have Calvary. Thank God we know that the Lord himself has been in this vale of tears. That our Lord has come down into this world of our, the perfect, holy, undefiled, innocent, Son of God, the innocent man - Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He has been here, the just and he died for the unjust. He not only bore pain, suffering and anguish and many of the psychological distresses that are described for us in Job's experience, He not only bore all that, but He bore in His own body our sins and the penalty of our sins and the wrath of God against us for our sins. He bore that. We shall never have to bore that. We may have to go through real pain; real suffering, real anguish, but we shall never have to suffer the pains of hell. We shall never have to suffer the wrath of God against our sin. We shall never have to suffer condemnation for our iniquity because Jesus paid it all.

Therefore, whatever we have to suffer, we cannot begin to estimate the sufferings of our Saviour. And He was just a man, a pure and holy man of course, but a man and as you look at the cross. What an insignificant horrendous thing it is, there on that cross, a scrap of humanity just a man, a small man, compared with the vastness of the universe, a scrap of humanity hanging on a Roman gibbet but through those stripes, we are healed through those wounds we are made whole. Through that death we escaped from death. The sufferings of Jesus Christ the Son of God, the perfect, just and holy one, are the way in which we are to look through our sufferings to God and as we do that we know that our Saviour is with us. And he is with us as the man of love, the crucified, He still bears in heaven the wound that he bore here on earth, rich wounds, yet visible above in beauty, glorified.

So when you're passing through the shadow of death, What do you know? Well, He is with us. It is wonderful to have the doctor and the nurse or loved ones with you but He is with you. And nobody but He can help you through that valley and it's only the valley of the shadow of death because death can not harm you. It's only the shadow so you pass through it into the light of God's eternal presence. Job himself knew something about that as we know from his triumphant cry of faith in chapter 19 - I know that my redeemer lives.

Just yesterday, I was reading an article in the newspaper about Chris Patton who was, as you would probably know, the governor of Hong Kong before Hong Kong was handed back to the Chinese and Chris Patton was a very strong man, and a very bold man and a very honest man. But he said something in this article which I found immensely impressive. He said, though I miss what I was doing in the life of politics, he is now living in the south of France, there are many things in my life that are important to me he said, but the most significant thing in my life is - the resurrection. Now I don't know where he stands before God, but he understands that in his life the most important thing of all is the resurrection. That is to say,

from death our Lord Jesus Christ was raised to life again so that in our sufferings we know that there is a way into heaven itself and sometimes it may be the path of bearing. We have not only to do but we have to bear. Whether we are doing or whether we are bearing we are still I trust able through God's grace to put our confidence in Christ and lean our helpless souls on Him.

That's what Job did and we thank God for this book. We thank God that there is an honesty and a realism about this book that helps us because if you've ever been through it, if you've ever known how to curse the day of your birth, if you've ever felt useless and helpless, if you've ever wished to take you're own life, if you've ever had suicidal thoughts, then stand here with Job because Job had been in the same place. But in the midst of it all, he trusted his Saviour. And Saviour whom he trusted kept him.

So it's not the greatness of our faith is it that keeps us in the end? It's the greatness of our Saviour. But even so faith is a great thing and it's a gift of God. What we are to do is to lay all our cares and anxieties upon him who says I care for you. I am trusting The Lord Jesus. Trusting only Thee for full salvation great and free.

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