

"The First Part of Job's Speech - Crying unto God"

Chapter Four Job 3 - 17

Andrew Davies



Can we turn again to the book of Job? We are looking at this remarkable book from the Old Testament and this evening we consider the first part of Job's speeches. There are two sections made to the speeches made by Job and we look this evening at the speeches that are recorded in chapters three to seventeen. As we shall see next time God willing from chapter nineteen on takes on a different tone and colour. But it's important for us I think to look at what Job said about his situation before the great cry of confidence and faith recorded in chapter nineteen. When we read the book we are conscious of a hidden purpose behind the scenes which Job was unaware of, a hidden purpose to his sufferings. We know because the prolog tells us about it but he didn't know about that hidden

purpose neither did his friends. So they and he together struggle to find a meaning and purpose to his sufferings. They don't realize that behind the scenes that there is a conflict-taking place between God and Satan. And Job is the battleground in that conflict.

As we saw last Sunday the explanation of his three friends for his suffering is very simple but limited. For them, Job must have sinned seriously for him to be suffering so grievously. God must be punishing him for his sins. And they hold that view inflexibly and with dogmatism. But Job knows that is not the case, he had not sinned in the way that they thought he had. And yet he is suffering, that is his agony and his struggle. Why is he suffering as a godly man? By insisting of the doctrine of exact moral retribution, by insisting on that, his friends were putting another thought into his mind. That God may have been punishing him for his he had not committed. He was suffering, why was he suffering? If he had not committed great sins, was he being punished for things

he had not done? And if that wasn't the case then God would be punishing him, like a pitiless torturer.

So how could God be God? And what was the point of continuing to trust God? It would seem according to the narrow view about suffering and punishment that his friends had that, it would seem that because Job didn't fit that particular point of view God was dealing with him pitilessly and with cruelty, intent on persecuting him. So the more they insisted that Job must have sinned for him to be suffering so the more Job began to question the goodness of God. And the real test was the test of his faith. The question facing us when we read this book and when we are confronted with sufferings like this is not whether people can be courageous or self controlled or stoical. But whether they can continue to believe in the goodness of God. Is it possible to go on trusting God when to all appearances there seems no reason to do so? That's the real dilemma facing Job. And if Job were to judge his sufferings from that point of view then they seem utterly pointless. They might justify a total rejection of divine goodness.

But Job is a man of faith and despite all the evidence to outward appearances, he continues to trust in God. But in the middle of that we see him crying out in anguish complaining to God about his condition and even in serious conflict as he tries to make sense of what's happening to him, and I want us to think about those three aspects to his struggle which are recorded for us in the chapters that I mentioned. We have already looked in a sense at chapter three and I want us to just look briefly through these chapters together this evening. We have already touched on chapter three on another occasion and in that chapter we have the cry, the first agonizing cry that came from Job's heart and lips when we are told he cursed God for the day of his birth. You remember that he had lost everything, all his possessions, all his family and his health. He had been exposed to taunts and ridicule in his mind and he was struggling to make sense of what was going on around him. And chapter three records his crying. He's almost at first too numb to speak; it's as if everything is unreal. The shock of one disaster after another reduced him to silence. And we are not told exactly how long it was for but for some time he simply sat in silence. He couldn't speak.

But then, suddenly this cry of anguish. If you know anything at all about bereavement I think you will understand something of what Job was going through. It was if his pent up emotions all of a sudden found an outlet. And in chapter three you have a frantic outburst of grief. He can't hold it in any longer. He felt he had lost God, that his life was pointless and useless and there's a note of desertion in what he has to say. "May the day perish when I was born, why did I not die at birth." That's frantic grief, "Why is life given to him who is in misery and why is life to the bitter of soul, the thing I greatly feared is come upon me and what I dread it has happened to me. I have no rest for trouble comes." That's the crying out of a man in deep anguish of soul.

Therefore, faith has to live with that. Faith has to live with great perplexity and sometimes deep unhappiness. It doesn't mean that faith is dead, it just means that faith co-exists with anguish. Trust co-exists with bewildered grief. The crying of a man who is deeply, deeply sad. That's the first aspect of Job's struggle and we looked at it before.

I don't think we need to say anything about it now but the second aspect which we read in chapter six and seven is his complaint. He, in these chapters utters a complaint; in fact, the heading in my Bible for chapter six is " My complaint is just." It's as though the darkness is deepening as one stage of grief follows another. And there are very often stages in grieving.

There is first of all the great sense of loss. The bereavement, the loss of family in his case of possessions, of health, of friendship. And the sense of God's presence has deserted him and that grieving, that stage in his grieving expresses it's self in different ways. In chapter six verse, three for example you find this heaviness on his spirit. He actually uses the word heavy, "Oh that my grief was fully weighed, and my calamity laid with it in the balances for then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea." I'm reminded of Milton's wonderful poem called Letherdise when Milton's friend died as a young man. Milton, John Milton the great English poet wrote a poem called Letherdise, which he has, these lines. " But oh the heavy chain now thou aren't gone are never must return." The heavy change. Heaviness of spirit. Job felt that, everybody whose suffered bereavement knows what that means. And you notice also in verse seven, that he losses his appetite, "my soul refuses to touch food" he's talking there about numbers of things to eat and they are as "loathsome food to me." He's lost his appetite; it's as if food doesn't matter any more. That's another stage in grieving, it happens to all of us. He mentions in the same chapter in verse four, verse eight, and verse thirteen his sense of helplessness. He can't control the situation; it's outside of his control. If only he could have stopped it all from happening, but he can't. He speaks about the arrows of the almighty within me. Now what could he do to fend off those arrows? "My spirit drinks in their poison, the terrors of God are arrayed against me." He's helpless. Verse 8 " Oh that I might have my request that God would grant me the thing that I long for." But He doesn't seem to be answering his request. God doesn't seem to be giving him what he longs for. He's helpless in this matter. Verse 13, "Is my help not within me, and is success driven from me?" Helpless, "Is not my help within me," there's no help within himself.

The sense of helplessness that has overcome him, that's another stage in grief. In v11 he speaks about loss of energy, "What strength do I have, that I should hope and what is my end that I should prolong my life?" He's not only helpless but he's lacking in reserves of energy and he's passive almost and weary in the midst of his grieving. That's a reality. He speaks in verses 14 & 15 about loneliness and disappointment with people. "To him who is afflicted kindness

should be shown by his friend even though he forsakes the fear of the almighty, my brothers have dealt deceitfully like a broke, like the streams of a broke that passes away." My brothers, the people who I thought would help me, they don't seem to understand. He's alone and disappointed with people who don't seem to have the imagination to put themselves into his shoes and to understand what he's going through. We must know if we've grieved at all what that means. And its where's as time passes. And for other people life resumes, it's normal phases, but for us the bereavement goes on and the loneliness continues and the pain and the grieving are continuous every day. Other people can't seem to understand that and in a sense, it's not to be expected that they should. But Job feels this loneliness and he feels the disappointment of other people.

And in verse 28-30 the end of Chapter 6 there he longs for human kindness and understanding, "Now therefore be pleased to look at me, for I would never look at your face, turn now let there be no injustice yes turn again my righteousness still stands, is there injustice on my tongue, cannot my taste discern the unsavory." He wants help, he wants kindness, even understanding, people don't seem to be able to help. I don't know if you've ever felt like that? If only some someone could put a reassuring hand on my shoulder, if only someone could tell me, "well I understand." Even if they can't possibly understand the depth of our sadness and our sorrow.

In chapter seven and the opening two verses there's a suggestion here of anger towards God. "Is there not a time of hard service for man on earth? Are not his days like the days of a hired man? Like a servant who.... desires the shade and like a hired man that eagerly looks for his wages so I have been allotted. months of futility". Who allotted job these months of futility? There's anger here expressed towards God and it's coming out. He actually in verse six describes himself like a weavers shuttle. "My days are swifter than a weavers shuttle" He's being shuttled back and forth like a shuttle on a loom when the weaver is working at it. It seems as if life is shuttling it back and forth. Who is holding the loom in his hands? What's going on here? It's an expression I think of his anger towards God

In verses, 7,8,9 are very expressive too. "Remember he says, remember that my life is a breath I will never again see the eye of Him who sees me no more, while your eyes are upon me I shall be as a cloud that vanishes away so he that goes down to the grave does not come up" He's just a breath, he's just a cloud.

So he speaks out in verses 11 and 12. He's going to give vent to his feelings, "I will not restrain my mouth, I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." This is the complaint of Job. He's not going to hold it in any longer. He even in verses 17 - 19 of chapter 7 begins to question human dignity. "What is man that you should magnify him, that you should set your heart on him?" What is this man that you should visit him every morning and test him every moment? "How long will you", he's talking to God

now. "Will you not look away from me and let me alone till I swallow my saliva. Let me alone." He's talking to God.

And in verses 20-21, the questions just pour out of him. Have I sinned? "What have I done to you oh watcher of men? Why have you set me as your target so that I am a burden to myself." And then do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity now I will lie down in the dust who seek me diligently but I will be no longer. He's speaking here to God as an angry man. No is it possible for a believer to be like this? A true believer, complaining, obviously it is, clearly it is. This is Job, the upright humble man who the Lord has chosen as a representative and as a made after his own heart.

Job is a believer; he's a godly, blameless upright life. He's not only crying out but also complaining. Very little hope here at this stage. There's a lot of wild speech, but you see his anger means something. This is not the indifferent, apathetic, careless anger of a man who is just stoical in his view of life. He's talking to God. He's not talking so much against God. But he's talking to God and he's pouring all his feelings out to God.

Now we may go through similar swings of mood. There's the first shock which silences us, then there's the crying, the anguish. The expression of our loss. Faith still goes on in the midst of the complaining, it still goes on living, it still trusts God, it still pours out its soul to God even though he doesn't understand what's going on. Well here is the complaint of a man who has also cried out to God. It's part of what grief really means. It shouldn't surprise us if we find that it's happening to us as well. There's the cry, then there's the complaint.

In chapters 9 & 10 & 12-14 & 16 & 17 we have the conflict that Job is going through. He's struggling here, he's trying to make sense of what's happening to him but he can't so there's a great conflict going on in his soul and in his mind. The reason really why I asked Ken to read 2 Corinthians Chapter 4 is that in that Chapter you have I think this conflict in Job's experience. The Apostle Paul puts it in a very, very helpful way. Remember those four contrasts that we read in 2 Corinthians 4: 8-9. Paul is talking about the treasure he has in earthen vessels and he says, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed," that's the first. "We are perplexed but not in despair." That's the second. "We are persecuted but not forsaken." That's the third. "We are struck down but not destroyed." Here's the paradox, here's the conflict, and it seems to me that though those four contrasts beautifully sum up these chapters 9-10 & 12-14 & 16 & 17 of the book of Job. Let me just indicate what I mean by that. Take that first contrast in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 "We are hard pressed or afflicted in every way but not crushed, hard pressed, afflicted on every side but not crushed." Chapters 9 & 10 of Job I think indicate that to us. It's clearly isn't it from ch's 9:2-3 that he feels overwhelmed by God's Justice and God's power. "I know it is so, but how can a man be righteous before God, if one wish to

contend with God he could not answer Him one time out of a thousand." What can I do to answer God he says?

"He removes the mountains," v5 "and they don't know." "He shakes the earth out of its place and its pillars tremble. He plants the sun and it does not rise. He seals off the stars, He alone spreads out the heavens and waves of the sea and He speaks about the stars in the sky. He does great things past finding out. The power of God the Justice of God, he's overwhelmed by it, of course. So what hope does he have?

So v14 & 15-18 express that, "How then can I answer Him, chose my words, to reason with Him. For though I was righteous I couldn't answer him, I would beg mercy of my Judge if he called and answered me, you multiply my wounds without pause, He will not allow me to catch my breath but fills me with bitterness." Where's his hope? He's crushed as it were, he's pressed in and yet he's not crushed. This is the paradox. He's in the grip of events, he's in turmoil of soul, he's at the edge of despair and in v21 - 24 he expresses all that. I'm blameless yet I do not know myself, I despise my life. It's all one thing. Therefore I say he blameless and the wicked, if the scourge slay sudden he laughs at the plight of the innocent the earth is given into the hand of the wicked. He covers the faces of its judges." If it's not He, who else could it be, who's in charge he's saying, who's in charge of the universe? " If it is not He, who is it? He's afflicted in every way, he's almost in the grip of a vice and yet you see that last cry is a cry of hope. "If it is not Him who else could it be? There's a seed of hope there, He's talking about God who is in control, he knows that, and he believes that even though he's in trouble.

In v33-34 he speaks about the mediator. "Nor is there any mediator between us." He says. He's talking about God and him. "He's not a man as I am that I should answer Him, that we should go to court together nor is there any mediator between us who may lay His hand on us both." But he believes in mediation. There's a sense in which there's hope here, the seeds of faith are there, the seeds of hope are there and in chapter 10 He speaks to God quite openly and quite clearly. Verses 8-10 "Your hands have made me and fashioned me, a intricate unity, yet you would destroy me, remember I pray that you have made me like clay and will you turn me into dust again. Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese." But he's talking to God, he's expressing his sense of being in God's presence and in God's hands and so on in verses 8 & following of ch 10

So, he's afflicted in every way, but he's not crushed. The germ, the seed of faith is there. Even though he's like a bruised reed and the dimly burning wick. And then the second sentence that Paul used was, "Perplexed, but not in despair." I think that's a very good description of chapters 12 & 13 of Job. "Perplexed but not in despair." You see the perplexity coming out in chapter 6:12. "The tents of robbers prospered and those who provoke God are secure in

what God provides by His hand." That perplexes him, like the Psalmist in Psalm 73, "Why do the wicked seem to flourish and the ungodly suffer?" And in v7-10 "Ask the beasts and they will teach you, the birds of the air, they will tell you, speak to the earth and it will teach you, the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this in whose hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." So it's God who's in charge, its God whose involved, its God whose behind all that's happening. He's perplexed by that, even terrified that God's awesome power, v13-14 "In Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding, if He brakes a thing down it cannot be rebuilt. If He imprisons a man there can be know release."

And yet at the same time, while he's perplexed he's not in despair because he pleads with God particularly in chi 13 & verses 13 and following, "Hold your peace with me and let me speak, then let come on me what may why do I take my flesh and my teeth and put my life in your hands? Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him, even so I will defend my own ways before Him. He shall also be my salvation for a hypocrite could not come before Him. Listen diligently to my speech and to my with your eyes, see I have to bed my case, I know that I shall be vindicated. Who is he that will contend with me? If now I hold my touch I perished." He's perplexed but he's not in despair because he can plead with God. He wants to go on trusting Him.

And then the third sentence that the apostle used was. "Persecuted but not forsaken." And really, that is what Job is saying in Chapter 14. "Persecuted but not forsaken." Look at the first six verses of chapter 14. "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow, and does not continue. And do you open your eyes on such a one, and bring me to judgment with yourself? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day." That's what he's really saying and he is worthless and useless. In v7-10 For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again. And that it's tender shoots will not cease." 14:8 Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; 14:9 Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. 14:10 But man dies, and wasteth away: yea, man gives up the ghost, and where is he?" He feels so helpless, so useless; "if a man dies shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, Till my changes comes." V17 My Transgression is sealed up in a bag and You cover my iniquity. It's as if God is his persecutor, He's against Him and yet in the midst of this questioning, this agony this sense of being persecuted there's the glimmer of hope.

V12 of chapter 14: "So man lies down, and does not rise till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be aroused from their sleep. Till the heavens are

no more they will not awake nor be aroused from their sleep." The little word, "Until, until" you have it there in v13, O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest Keep me secret, until," that little word until. "Thy wrath is past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! There's hope here, it's a glimmer of hope, it's here, and "shall he live again It's as if he is saying, all is not lost, it appears to be but all is not lost. "Persecuted but not forsaken."

And then the fourth sentence that Paul uses, is that sentence, "Struck down but not destroyed." And chapters 16-17 express that in a very beautiful way. "Struck down but not destroyed." Job has been struck down, not only by events, but also by his miserable counsellors as he calls them. Verses 1-5 Then Job answered and said, I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are you all. Shall vain words have an end? Or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as you do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." Instead of helping Job these men had been abusing him and casting him down. Job says if I was in your position I wouldn't know what to say to help me, but you seem to know what to say. So these miserable counselors strike him down. And even what he feels to be God's attack upon him. Verse 6-17 16:6 Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased? 16:7 But now he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company. 16:8 And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face. 16:9 He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. 16:10 They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me. 16:11 God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. 16:12 I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. 16:13 His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and do not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. 16:14 He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant. 16:15 I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in then dust. 16:16 My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; 16:17 Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure. Yet at the same time while the situation looks hopeless, he's looking up. He's speaking to God. He's looking out of his distress and he's looking into heaven, so the direction of his looking here is upward. Verse 18-21 of chapter 16. " 16:18 O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. 16:19 Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. 16:20 My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. 16:21 O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbor! For when a few years are finished I shall go the way of no return." He's talking to his great God in heaven, he looking upwards and in chapter 17:

verse 3 17:3 Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me?" He's calling upon the name of the Lord. So here's the conflict between these paradox's, afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not disappearing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed." Real faith continues to exist even though the circumstances in which it lives may be deeply depressing and very oppressive.

Jesus spoke about the bruised reed that he would not break and the dimly burning wick that he would not snuff out. That's Job, that's Job. One wonders whether he was thinking of Job, where not sure about that. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." That's real faith. It's paradoxical, "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Here are the horns of the dilemma. Here's the conflict."If a man dies shall he live again?" Appearances say no, and the secularist, the materialist says that our bodies when they die become atoms, they go back to the earth, that's the end of us. The brain ceases to exist, personality ceases to exist, we cease to exist, that's the end of us. "If a man dies, shall he live again? The materialists say no, "The only way you will live again is through you children." That's the struggle, that's the way in which Job is exercising here his faith in the midst of this conflict. And it comes out, it usually To call and I will answer you, that if you should desire the work of your hands." He's talking to God; he's expressing something of his trust in God even though He can't understand it and His ways.

"Is there a mediator between us who may lay his hand on us both?" These are the indications of a real faith. "Even though our witness is in heaven, surely my evidence is on high." The bruised reed, the dimly burning wick, it's there, real faith is there. "Put down a pledge for me with yourself, yourself." He's talking to God, to his heavenly father, Faith lives, faith will not die, he in conflict but he know that God did with him. That's real faith, that's faith that really faces facts. It's not the kind of superficial faith, that so many folk have, the faith that only has a limited number of facts and it can only face up to them. But the dark side of life it can't face, the dark side of life. That's not real faith, if faith cannot take in all the facts, it isn't real faith. But real faith can look at all the facts, all the bewildering facts, all the dark shadows in the universe and it will still live. It may

Splutter a times, it may cry out in anguish on occasions, it may struggle with doubts and fears and anger and inner turmoil from time to time. It may look as if it may be extinguished; it may look as fit someone is going to suddenly crush it or put out the dimly burning wick so that there's nothing left. It may look like that but it wouldn't die. The bruised reed will become strong again, the Lord knows how to take it and remake it and rebuild it, and begin to make music with it. He knows how to take the smoking flax that's almost out and with His hands as it where, His grace and spirit gently blow upon it so that it burns again brightly. Real faith want lie down, real faith will not die. In the face of the most appalling trouble, it hangs on. That's all he can do here, that's all he's

doing really is hanging on, but he hangs on. "I'm clinging to you Lord, I'm clinging to you, your right hand is holding me.

So Job is clinging, God's right hand is holding him, that's faith and he continues to cling to God slowly. You see him begin to climb out of the mire and finding his feet again and in a sense of course he's reached bedrock hasn't he. He's come right down in the pit to bedrock and when you're on bedrock you can't go any further. John Bunyan said, "He that is down need fear no fall." He can't get any lower, but the lowest part of Job's despair is bedrock. When he reaches the bottom of the pit he finds that there's a rock there.

That's the remarkable thing about real faith. There's a rock there, "The Lord is my rock, the Rock of my Salvation, "When all around my soul give way. May He then be all my hope and stay." That's real faith in a real Saviour, Job for all his agony and anguish knows that, Knows that and as we shall see next week he begins to find his feet again and when he finds his feet again he looks up out of the pit. Do you remember his wonderful cry? "I know that my redeemer lives." Yes he's still in the pit however, he's still in the depth of despair however, he's still down there in the depth but he's looking up and as he looks up he knows that his redeemer lives. What a great help and comfort this man's faith is. What a great help and comfort this realistic book is.

None of the nonsense of this modern kind of Christianity that can not take in the dark, sometimes we are like little children, we don't like the dark, of course we don't, who does? Though the shadows and the curtains are moving, you imagine all sorts of things during the dark, but you see darkness is not darkness to God, it's darkness to us. It's not darkness to God. "When darkness veils His lovely face." And what the Hymn writer is saying there is about his inability to see the lord's face. "When darkness veils His lovely face." What do you do? "I rest on His unchanging grace." You can't see His face but you have His grace, you have his help you have his presence, you have His strength.

We may struggle too like Job with all sorts of questions, with all sorts of doubts and fears. We know that "it is well with our soul," "yes we know that love abiding no change my heart shall fear and safe is such confiding for no change here, the storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid but God is round about me and can I be dismayed?" That's faith and it's a glorious thing, it's a precious gift from our heavenly father to us. So lets go on trusting him, lets go on believing Him, lets remember that even though we may have in terms of our circumstance fallen into the pit of despond and depression and it seems as if nothing remains for us but to die we find our feet on the rock, bedrock and from that vantage point we look up and then we begin to climb up and God brings us out in to the fresh air and sunshine of His love again, and it's part of His mercy that he does. What wonderful thing it is to have a faith that

faces all the facts and to have a God who is able to strengthen us and help us in the midst of them all.

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