

## THE BOOK OF JOB PT 3.

The book of Job is not designed to bring words of comfort. Or answer the why question about suffering. It answers neither of those questions. It is also not really a book about Job. Job is not on trial. God is on trial with his supposed policy that good people will prosper and bad people will suffer.

Satan said this was bad policy on behalf of God because it would mean that only reason for obeying God is so that you gain out of it. Job said that for God not to have this policy was bad because it would reflect poorly on God, who is meant to be just. Jobs three friend argue that this is God's policy to bless the good, and punish the bad, and so Job must be bad. The purpose of the book is to help us think correctly about God.

**God's 1<sup>st</sup> Challenge. Ch 38:1-21** Bit of sarcasm by God!

God starts with the big picture of creation – the stars, sea etc then he goes the smaller picture- animals. Today we know much more about both the big picture and the smaller picture.. The more we know the more it amazes us. But the realization is the same. We don't control these things. In the face of the created world we are tiny and insignificant. God's wisdom is just in another sphere altogether.

**Jobs Response. Ch 40:1-2** Job could not answer all these questions and so says he will be silent.

**God's 2<sup>nd</sup> Challenge Ch 40-41.** This talks of two creatures 1. Behemoth - some resemblance to a hippo. But hippos don't have strong tails v17 2. Leviathan - some resemblance to a crocodile. But crocodiles don't breathe fire. So great debate among scholars about this. Some say these are literal animals with poetic language and exaggeration. Some say maybe they are animals that are now extinct. Some say that these are mythical creatures. Ancient believed these beings were powerful spiritual creatures that could not be seen and described them with known animal characteristics. Very interesting and complex debate. But the point of what God is saying is this. You have no control over these things. You can't control a hippo or tame a crocodile. You can't control these powerful spiritual entities that you believe in. You have no control over these. But I do. I created them and they answer to me. You can't explain the physical world around you. So don't judge me on how I run the universe.

**Job's Reply. Ch 42:1-6** This time Job acknowledges God and his own weaknesses. Job does not demand that he has a right to know. He does not expect anything of God. He comes to a point of total acceptance. He is still covered in boils with no family and no possessions. He humbly submits to God. He receives no answers to his

questions. But he has seen something of God and that is enough.

**Restoration. Ch 42:7-17** God instructs Job to pray for his friends. And blesses Job with even more wealth and 10 more children. He lived to a ripe old age. Many have found this ending baffling. It appears to undo the whole argument and reinforces that God blesses the good. Most of the time our suffering is not fixed like this. There are not happy endings. And just because he is restored doesn't get rid of the pain he has suffered.

The point being made is that Job never earned these blessings in first place. They were a gift from God. They were not taken off him to punish him. But they were not given to him because he was good. It was given them because God is gracious. God loves to show favour to his children but the world is not bound to operate on this premise. We are not told why God sometimes does this and sometimes does not. This is where trust comes in. But we can see this as a foretaste of the world to come.

#### Key Truths from Job.

##### 1. The World is ordered by God's wisdom but does not reflect his justice.

God is just but the world does not reflect this. The world is partially ordered but not fully ordered. There is an element of disorder in the world that God has allowed to continue. This is reflected in both the sinful actions of humans and the existence of things like earthquakes and hurricanes and diseases. God in his wisdom is willing to allow injustice in the world. Sometimes that suffering is a means to a greater end. It can shape us to into the people God desires us to be. But that does not offer an explanation that justifies the suffering. Because God is just and loving he also grieves over the suffering of humanity. This truth is not meant to bring comfort to those who are suffering, it is meant to stop us blaming God, which is Job's error.

Paul says in Romans that the universe displays his eternal power and divine nature ie his greatness. It does not show us the full character of God. If the world were to reflect God's justice, there would be no room for humans in it, because we are sinful. Answers to questions about suffering and justice do not lie in our ability to devise a system by which the operations of the universe all fit in to a nicely ordered policy.

We have to acknowledge God's wisdom and realize that he control the world by that wisdom. It is more than just saying that we are not God. Job is teaching us we are not to reduce God to less than he is.



## 2. Suffering is not automatically linked to sin, and is the lot of everyone.

There is no logic to why some seem more prone to suffering. But we can never draw a link between a person's sin and their suffering. Not every thing a person reaps is something they have sown. The policy that God blesses good people and punishes wicked people is true in the sense that God loves to extend his favour to his faithful people and will judge sin. But we cannot apply this to any one situation.

We are created with nervous systems that warn us of pain and possible harm. If people lose the use of their nervous system, like those with leprosy, they find themselves in huge danger. We are created with emotions so this means we experience hurt. We are created for love but that also means we are subject to loss. Similarly the created order of tectonic plates and currents and winds mean that there will be suffering. Cells are created in such a way they can mutate and cause defects. Suffering is built into the universe and we are all subject to it.

## 3. God asks that we trust him.

This is really hard to do but this is the only answer that God gives. When we trust him we don't try to think about why God might have allowed something to happen or why He could not have prevented something from happening. We don't assume that God signed off on what happened either. We simply acknowledge that we don't know how God governs the universe. He is not disengaged from the world, letting it run wild. Neither is he micro managing every action.

Trust says that we ask how this suffering could be an opportunity to deep our faith in God. Suffering shatters the illusion that we are in control of life. Suffering shows us that we are not fully whole. Suffering causes us to look forward to the restoration of this world. Suffering causes us to realize our own weakness and that we need divine help. Paul says we are to welcome trials as they give us opportunity to share in Jesus suffering. I don't know of anyone who has reached that level of maturity to be honest

No where in the Bible does it suggest that God will remove us from suffering. Most often we don't see miraculous deliverance from suffering. It is not wrong to ask for it but a better prayer would be to ask God for help to respond and live well in the midst of suffering

Lord help me become more trusting, more dependant on you, more patient with others, more gracious.

Simone Weil says. " The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for it, but a supernatural use for it. "

The second way we can respond to suffering is to look forward to the new heaven and new earth. God in his wisdom has allowed this world to have a continued disorder, even in the midst of order. But God in his wisdom also allowed Jesus to enter this disorder to suffer and die. Paul says this wisdom seems foolish to many but he goes on to say that one day everything will come under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Every disordered piece of the world will be bought to order. Christ's suffering is a key part of that process of bringing order.

The Bible says that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see. We cannot see reasons for the stuff that happens on this earth. Faith is being certain in the middle of the pain that God is good and he has a good future for us.

The third way we are to respond to suffering is to help others who are in pain. We seek God's kingdom by working to relieve suffering and to bring justice. And around the world, in the bleakest places on earth, you will find Christians, - doctors, nurses, missionaries, builders lawyers, community workers. - as Christians have done for 2000 years. Christians have responded by working to bring justice, peace, blessing to those who are suffering. And we are to do the same in our context.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- When or where does creation leave you in awe?
- In what way does God's response leave you dissatisfied?
- What is the problem when Christians confidently say that a disaster, say the Christchurch earthquake, is God's judgement? How should we respond to those who say this?
- Does the fact that God suffered and still suffers help you trust Him in the midst of your own suffering?
- Where is there suffering in Invercargill where we as Christians need to be? How could we respond? As individuals? As a church? (any practical suggestions email me [keith@icbc.org.nz](mailto:keith@icbc.org.nz))
- What does trust in God look like in practical terms when we are going through our own suffering?
- What do you think the coming kingdom and world to come will be like? Describe it. Does it seem too unrealistic? How do we hold onto this hope in the tough times?
- If Job gives no comfort and no answers as to why, what is the best way to respond when people (Christians or non Christians) ask us why they are suffering so unfairly?



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS