

Job's Trials

1. Intro

- In this past week there's been many examples of suffering ... in our local community, nationally and around the world
 - Not just talking about the suffering of NSW rugby league supporters have to endure for another year
 - Last week Phil Walsh, the Adelaide Crows coach tragically killed in his own home
 - A man has just days to live after contracting CJD (aka mad cows disease) which affects just 1 in a million people
- As I scanned the SMH this week, there has been
 - Fire-bomb attacks, shootings, abuse, bribery of judges, racist comments about tennis players, bankruptcy, random assaults
- But it's not just what's going on out there
 - It's what's happening to us and the people we love
 - Depression, cancer, unemployment, bullying at school ... list could go on
- Inevitably when we're faced with suffering in our own life or in the life of those around us we know and love ... we end up asking two questions
 - Why question
 - How question
 - Why am I suffering? > why is this happening to me / her / him?
 - How do I deal with this suffering? > How can I cope with this?
- Everyone asks these questions
 - Doesn't matter whether you're a Christian or not
 - Why am I suffering ... and how do I deal with this suffering ... are questions we all want answers to
- Job gives us answers to these questions
 - Going spend four weeks looking at Book of Job
 - The Book of Job probes deeply into human suffering as we see him lose his family, wealth and possessions
 - In particular it deals with the question so many of us ask "How can God allow innocent suffering in this world?"
- But Job offers much more than that

- Even in the depth of his suffering, questioning and despair, Job continues to have faith in God
- Job gives us a great insight into the reality of suffering that we and others experience in this world
 - But more importantly it helps give us answers as to why it happens and how we can live well in the midst of it

2. Understanding Suffering

- When suffering hits, there are two basic ways to respond to it
 - Going to see that neither of these responses are satisfactory
- The more religious person starts to say "why is God punishing me?"
 - "Why is God allowing this to happen to me"
 - "What am I doing wrong?"
 - "Maybe I need to go to church more"
 - "Maybe I need to pray more"
- A lot of religious ppl think like this
 - Even ppl in the church can think like this
 - If you're sick, got cancer, facing trials ... people will say ... "you don't have enough faith"
 - If you're having financial problems ... "you need to trust God more"
- One response is moralism
 - The reason you are experiencing this is because you're not being moral enough, not being religious enough and God is punishing you
- The other response to suffering is not moralism but cynicism
- Whereas religious people see suffering as a punishment
- Secular people see suffering as the randomness of life
 - Their worldview is there is no God
 - Nobody is in charge of this world
 - Nothing is guiding or determining things
 - There's nothing you can do about it ... suffering is just part of living in this world
- If you don't believe in God ... this is the only conclusion you **can** come to
 - If this world is just the result of biological evolution and genetic mutations that have led to where we are today ... you have to conclude that suffering is just part of life on this planet
 - After all that's how we got to where we are

- Evolution by definition must include suffering because it's based on the principle of survival of the fittest
- That is, the strong overpowering and dominating the weak
- Religious people tend to think ...
 - you live a good life good things happen to you
 - live a bad life and bad things will happen to you
- Secular people see suffering as proof that there is no God ...
 - Because if there was a God he wouldn't allow suffering in this world
 - Or ... if there is a God either he doesn't care or he's incompetent
 - Therefore God of the Bible > all loving > all powerful God the Bible teaches us about doesn't exist
 - Therefore suffering just reality of this world > do your best to avoid it > hope you don't get hurt
- The book of Job shows us that those ways of responding to suffering are absolutely wrong ... and spiritual dead ends
- The religious person or the moralist who says you're suffering is because you're not living your life the right way
 - God is punishing you for something
 - You need to change and you need more faith
- The problem with this was of thinking is it's **waaay** too simplistic
- Because
 - What if the person does have faith?
 - What happens if they are devout believer?
 - What if what they are suffering has nothing to do with them or their actions?
- What this does is ...
 - It makes them think God is unjust > God isn't loving
 - It makes those who do have faith start to question their genuineness of their faith
 - "If I'm suffering these things I mustn't be a real Christian"
 - As a result it causes people to turn away from God
- Moralist view of suffering is problematic
- But there's a problem with a secular view of suffering as well
 - Secularist wants to say there is no God because suffering exists in the world

- What they're doing is implicitly blaming God for suffering
- If God was real he would do something about this
- But to blame God for suffering and claim God doesn't exist is inconsistent / illogical
 - Can't blame God for suffering if you think he doesn't exist
 - Either you are committed to the worldview that God doesn't exist and therefore you have to accept that suffering is just a random reality of life in this world
 - Or if you want to blame God for suffering there you have to accept that God exists
- But you can't have both > can't mix those two together
 - Can't say there is no God and blame him for suffering
- And when a secular person concludes that suffering is just part of living in this world and there's nothing you can do about it ... then they are left with no hope!
 - So when you see or experience suffering you just despair!
- So you see, moralist view of suffering leaves you despairing because you question the genuineness of your faith and the justice of God
- Secularist view of suffering means you are left with no hope, no answers because suffering is just a part of biological evolution
- So ... is there something else?
 - Is there something that does give us hope and answers that doesn't leave us questioning our faith or the just character of God?
- Yes ... that's what we begin to see as we turn to Job 1-2

3. Why am I suffering

- Right at the start we are introduced to a man called Job
 - Don't know a lot about him or where he lived or when he lived
- What we do know about him
 - Blameless and upright
 - Not saying he was without sin ... this is a relative judgment > compared to others he was blameless and upright¹
 - Very, very rich

¹ Like Noah in Gen 6:9

- *v3 - seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen (1000 oxen) and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants*
- Blessed with a large family > 10 kids > 7 sons, 3 daughters
- This guy's the Bill Gates of the ancient near east

- v3 - *"He was the greatest man among all the people of the East*
- None like him in the land
 - He is the epitome of someone who has made it in life
 - Health, wealth and happiness
 - Honour, renown, success
 - **And** he was godly
 - He feared God and shunned evil
 - So godly was he ... he would offer sacrifices for sins of his children as he interceded for and cared for the spiritual needs of his family

- After we're introduced to Job we have this cycle of conversations and events
 - Conversation between God and Satan
 - Job experiences trial
 - Job's response to the trial
 - Cycle repeats itself in chapter 2

- v6-12 we have this interaction between God and Satan
 - Angels come to God, and for some reason Satan is there as well
 - God asks "where have you come from"
 - "What are you doing here?!"
 - "What do you want?!"
 - Satan says "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it"

- God poses question to Satan v8
 - *"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."*
 - This is the key point in book of Job
 - Whole story of Job and why he suffers emanates from this question

- Basically God is putting Satan in his place saying
 - "See my man Job, he loves me and he is a godly man with real integrity, piety and faith"

- Satan's reply v9-11
 - ⁹ "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰ "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

- Basically, Satan is cynical about God's claim about Job
 - "Job doesn't love you for who you are!"
 - "He loves you for all the stuff you've blessed him with"
 - "You've put a hedge of protection around him
 - "Take away his stuff > his blessing > his protection ... bring some suffering we'll see what he really thinks about you!"
- Satan saying ... "Job doesn't love you for who you are ... he loves you because you give him good things"
 - He's accusing Job of being a worshipper for hire

- But the flip side of the argument is Satan is accusing God that he's not worthy of being loved for himself
 - He's accusing God that he's not good enough to be loved for who he is ... so he needs to bribe people like Job for their love, praise and affection by blessing them with good things

- Satan says to God ... "hurt him, make him suffer ... and then we'll see he's not so righteous and faithful"

- Surprisingly God says v12
 - "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

- **Aside – is God playing games**
- If you're like me at this point you're probably thinking ... hang on ... what's God doing here?
 - He's playing games with Satan and using Job for sport
 - What type of God does that?
 - That's not fair!
 - You're going to put Job through all that for some heavenly bet!
- Why would God allow this?

- But God is not playing games ... like all things ... God has a good plan and purpose in what he is doing
 - God's purpose in all this
 - To disprove Satan's accusation and uphold his character by allowing Job to go through these trials and **prove** that He truly is worthy of our love and worship in and of himself
 - His aim is to uphold his own glory through Job as Job continues to love and trust God despite what is going on
 - God will not have Satan making false accusations that undermine his credibility, glory or character
 - So he allows Job to be tested in order to prove that both
 - God **is** worthy of our love and trust alone; **and**
 - Job's faith is genuine and true; and therefore
 - Satan's accusations are completely false
 - So God allows Satan to go out and afflict Job and take away his blessings to see whether his accusation is true

 - In devastating succession Job experiences great loss
 - Sabeans came and steal his oxen and donkeys and killed his servants
 - While servant still telling him this news ... another comes to tell him some great fire from God consumed all his sheep and servants who cared for them
 - While servant still telling him this news ... another comes to tell him the Chaldeans had come and stole his camels and killed his servants
 - v18-19 ... while he's still trying to comprehend all this loss ... another servant come and tells him his all his 7 sons and 3 daughters have all been killed when their house collapsed on them

 - In space of 5 mins ... Job has lost all his wealth ... and all his children
 - Lost literally everything
 - Tragic enough losing one child ... let alone 10 in one day
 - On top of that he's got no money, no super, no investments > he's got nothing

 - Cycle repeats in Ch 2
 - This time God allows Job to be afflicted with sores all over his body
 - Even his wife gives up on him

 - **Implications**
 - ***Job's suffering is a mystery***
-

- What we see here Job never finds out why he has been suffering
 - Even at the end of the book when God and Job are speaking ... God never tells him!
 - God doesn't say
 - "Now listen, Job, this has been really hard I know ... I've been meaning to tell you something ...
 - "Do you realise that as a result of what you've been through you are going to be known around the world and for millennia to come people are going to be inspired by you ...
 - "So you see ... all that suffering will be for good"
 - God never says that ... all he says is ... "who do you think you are Job, I'm God I know what I'm doing"
- Job's suffering is a complete mystery to him
 - God has his reasons ... but Job doesn't know why
 - You and I know why because we were able to read about the interactions between God and Satan
 - But Job doesn't know
 - It's a complete mystery
- And friends ... that's one of the great lessons for us from the book of Job when it comes to suffering
 - Sometimes there's no obvious answer as to why you are going through what you're going through
 - Sometimes there is ... if embezzle money and get caught I go to jail ... that's obvious (I'm not by the way!)
 - Sometimes God is working towards something that is bigger than us
- See this in the Bible
 - Joseph in Egypt > retell
 - Man born blind - John 9 > retell
 - Disciples ask "*who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*"
 - "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned,*" said Jesus, "*but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*"
- **The Divine Weaver**
- When Lady Diana was tragically killed in Paris in 1997, Liana and I were travelling overseas

- And we remember stopping to look at the flowers and notes left at a memorial set up by the gates of one of the royal palaces
- Found this poem
 - *My life is but a weaving > Between my Lord and me; > I cannot choose the colours > He works it steadily.*
 - *Sometimes he weaves sorrow > And I, in foolish pride, > Forget that he sees the upper, > And I, the underside.*
 - *Not till the loom is silent > And the shuttles cease to fly, > Shall God unroll the canvas > And explain the reason why.*
 - *The dark threads are as needful > In the weaver's skilful hand > As the threads of gold and silver > In the pattern he has planned.*
- The great lesson that Job learns at the end of the book is to realise that
 - he's not God
 - he's not in control of all things God is
 - he's not privy to the plans and purposes of God
 - He gets to realise that there's more to life and this world than himself
 - Job is totally humbled by that realisation
- We need to remember this world doesn't revolve around us
 - We are but a speck in the machinations of this world that has been around much longer than us and will continue to be so long after we are gone
- And so we can never know everything
 - We can't expect to understand all that God is doing
 - Sometimes he has plans and purposes that extend beyond our immediate comfort
- **Application**
- You might say ...
 - "Well that's well and good for God ... but what about us who have to endure suffering"
- Well there's actually a blessing that comes to the person who suffers and doesn't know why
 - Because what it does is it confirms whether or not your faith is real or not
- When Satan sees people like Job loving God he accuses you
 - "You're not loving God for who he is"
 - "You're loving him for yourself"

- "You're a Christian for yourself > you're a phoney and you know it"
- And he causes you to doubt the genuineness of your faith

- Only way you will ever know if you love God who he is and not for yourself is through suffering
 - Otherwise you'll never really know
 - Job loses all his things > wealth, family, health ... but still worships God
 - And Satan's accusations are proven false
- Only way for Job to know whether he loves God truly is to allow him to suffer and not know why

- You often hear people say
 - "I could handle this suffering ...
 - if I could just understand why it is happening
 - if I could see there was a bigger purpose in all this
 - if I could see there was some good that was going to come out of this"
 - In other words you would be serving God for the things / for the outcome ... not for who he is alone

- The only way to be sure you're loving God for himself alone rather than for what you are getting out of him ...
 - you've got to be in a position that gives you nothing ...
 - where you're getting nothing out of serving God
 - That's the reason why you can't know why you're suffering

- If you want to learn how to love God for God alone ... then you you've got to be willing to let God put you through the wringer

- When it comes to understanding our suffering ... we can't always know why ... and it would be presumptuous to expect otherwise
 - But suffering actually teaches us to love God for who he is alone and not because of the life he's blessed us with

4. Dealing with suffering

- What's amazing as we read these chapters is how Job responds to these tragedies that come into his life
 - Not just one thing ...
 - **Everything** this is taken away from him

- It really is the worst kind of suffering you can imagine anyone experiencing
- Yet despite all of that ... look at how Job responds
 - 1:20-22 – *"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*
- This really is amazing
 - Despite his suffering Job **worships** God
 - Despite all that he has gone through ... he continues to **trust** God
- How does he do this? How is he able to deal with suffering so well?
- What lessons can we take from Job to help us deal with suffering in the way Job does
- How can **we** know how to trust God in our suffering ... even when we don't know the reason for our suffering?
- Three reasons
- **God is sovereign**
- First he knows God is sovereign
 - He says to his wife in 2:10 - *Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*
 - He knows God is in control
 - He knows God has all things under his care
 - Even the good and the bad
 - He knows all things come from God
- So even when we experiences the tough times ... know that God is sovereign > he's in control and over all things
- **God is gracious**
- Secondly he knows God is gracious
- Job knew all that he had was a gift from God
- He doesn't lose everything and shake his fist at God and yell
 - "these things that you've taken away from me ... there all mine"
 - "I earned them / I worked hard for them"
 - These homes / children / health / job ... how dare you take them away from me"

- What does he say?
 - *1:21 Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.*
 - "I came with nothing ... I am leaving this world with nothing ... everything I get is a gift from God"
 - "They're all on loan > they're all gifts of God's grace"
- Like Job ... we need to hold onto goodness and grace of God when we're suffering
 - If you don't ... if you hold onto ... if you build your life around other things ... then when they're taken away ... then we suffer
 - If we say to ourselves
 - "I've got this name / credibility / this business / this money / these achievements ..."
 - If the utmost foundations of your life are your things ... then suffering will inevitably be pulling you away from the utter most foundations of your happiness
 - That's what suffering is!
 - Suffering is taking away something important to you
- But if like Job you build your life on God ... and though you certainly love having happiness / family / friends and loved ones / wealth / status
 - The ultimate happiness comes from knowing God
 - The ultimate love is God's love
 - The ultimate family is God's eternal family
 - The ultimate riches are riches of heaven
 - The ultimate status is the status God gives you as one of his beloved children
- Then what suffering will do is drive you deeper and deeper into the true source of love, happiness, satisfaction and joy ... instead of making you madder and madder and sadder and sadder
- Need to hold onto
 - Sovereignty of God
 - Goodness and grace of God
- ***Suffering of a greater Job***
- Third thing we have is something more than Job had
- For us Jobs today who are suffering and have no idea why ... we have proof that God is good and loving and doesn't impose suffering for nothing

- That's to look at the suffering God inflicted on another Job > a greater Job
 - One who truly was righteous > not relatively righteous ... but truly was without sin
 - One who truly was an innocent sufferer
 - One who didn't just lose his earthly riches but lost his heavenly riches
 - One who didn't just suffer sores on his body but suffered death on a cross
 - One who didn't just lose his family but was abandoned by his heavenly Father
- We know for sure that God is good and can be trusted because he was willing to let his son go through the greatest suffering
 - Greater than Job's
 - Greater than ours
- Jesus Christ suffered ... not so that we **wouldn't** suffer
- But because he loves us
 - And as with Job he did it to prove that Satan accusations about us and our worthiness are completely false
- God did this for you ... and for me ... despite our failings, despite our sin ... despite our mistakes
 - He loved us ...
 - not because of what we bring
 - but for who we are alone
- For those reasons ...
 - **We** can be strengthened to love and trust God
 - Not because he blesses us with a happy life
 - Not because he puts a hedge of protection around us
 - But love and trust him for who he is alone
- He's a good God, who is totally sovereign and totally in control
 - Sometimes he permits suffering for his good plans and purposes
 - But we know for sure that his plans and purposes are good
 - Because he was willing to let his own son suffer as well
 - And he did it all for our eternal good

PRAY