

Job's Friends

1. Intro

- Spending four weeks looking at the OT book of Job
 - Over the past two weeks we've been looking at Ch 1-3, we've seen that the book deals with the issue of suffering > especially the issue innocent suffering
- Now inevitably, when you are dealing with the issue of suffering, people end up asking themselves two questions
 - The Why question and How question
 - Why? > Why is this happening to me?
 - How? > How can I cope / deal with this pain and darkness?
- Today we're going to tackle Ch 4-37 of Job
 - Pleased to know that I'm not going to read through all 33 chapters or preach on 33 chapters
 - But today we're going to look from a bird's eye view on what these chapters are saying
- And as we look at these chapters we're going to be addressing more of the 'How?' question
 - How are you meant to cope with suffering?
 - How are you meant to deal with it and get beyond it
- Now when you and I are going through dark and painful times in our life ... who or what are we most likely to turn to for comfort
 - Friends!
 - Our friends are often the ones we turn to in a crisis to comfort us
- In Job 4-37 ... we find Job seeking comfort from his pain and darkness he is dealing with ...
 - And his friends gather around him to comfort him
 - Except ... they don't manage to comfort him at all
 - In actual fact we see they are miserable comforters
- Today going to look at
 - how you can find comfort in your times of pain and darkness...
 - how you can cope with the times of despair and suffering in life

- As we do ... we're going to see there is bad comfort > other times better comfort
 - But there is a friend who gives the best comfort for us in our suffering
- Bad comfort > better comfort > best comfort in our suffering

2. Bad Comfort in Suffering

- 2:11 ... Job's friends - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, hear of all that has happened to him ... they travel to where he is to sympathise and comfort him
- And when they see the distress and anguish Job is in and they weep aloud, tear their clothes, sprinkle dust on their heads and mourn with him
 - For seven days they just sit in silence
- If only they had left it at that and not opened their mouths
 - Because when his friends begin to speak, that's when things go pear-shaped
 - They're comfort would have been a blessing if they'd just refrained from speaking
- In Ch 4 all the way through to Ch 37 we have this dialogue between Job and his friends
 - And it stems from Job's lament in Ch 3 that we looked at last week
 - Recall in Job 1-2 Job had lost everything > wealth, family, health, the lot
 - In Job 3 we read how he was so distraught in his pain and darkness that he wished he cursed the day of his birth
 - He wished the day he was born had never happened
 - Or because he was born, he wished that he had died at birth and never seen the light of day
 - Such was his grief he reasoned that if had never been born or died at birth then
 - he wouldn't have to go through all this suffering
 - he would have peace, rather than grief and turmoil
- And after listening to Job lament his situation and express the raw emotion and pain of what he is going through ...
 - Rather than empathise and listen and love Job ... his so called friends spend the next 33 chapters taking turns to lecture him
- Starts off in Ch 4 & 5 with Eliphaz speaking

- Then Job replies
- Then in Ch 8 Bildad speaks > Job replies
- Then in Ch 11 Zophar speaks > Job replies
- And they go through this cycle two more times, three times in total
 - Each time they get more and more frustrated and assertive with Job > more & more self righteous > more & more entrenched in their opinions

- And we're going to see as we look at what they say to Job ... that rather than be a comfort to him in his suffering, they actually add to his suffering
 - Better if they had never spoken
 - Let's check out what they say

- **Suffering is your fault**
- The main point his friends have to say to Job is ... this suffering is your own fault > "Job, You reap what you sow"
 - Eliphaz says in 4:7-9
 - *Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. ⁹ At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.*

- See what he's saying?
- Innocent people don't perish / upright people aren't destroyed
- If you are reaping trouble you sowed it > he goes on in 5:6
 - *For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.*
- If you see wheat growing in a field ... you don't say "Oh, that wheat just sprang up"
 - There's no way will wheat spring up from the ground by itself unless its planted
 - If you plant wheat, you reap wheat
- And if you're reaping trouble in your life Job ... it means you planted it

- Bildad joins in the party too making a similar comment in 8:3-4 he says
 - ³ *Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? ⁴ When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.*
- He's saying ... the reason your children are dead Job is because they sinned
 - They got what they deserved

- Eliphaz pipes up again in Ch 22:5
 - *Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?*

- **Repent and God will restore you**
- Not only do they tell him what's wrong ... they tell him how to fix it
- They say when men hear a problem their default response is to go into fix it mode > they want to give a solution
 - Wife tells her husband of a problem she's having with kids or at work
 - Husband starts telling her what to – you need to do this, if you do that and this ... and then it will be all right
 - In his mind he thinks he's helping ... in her mind ... she's not interested in solutions ... she just wants him to listen and empathise

- Well, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are typical men and they are getting straight to solution mode
- So after identifying the problem ... that Job is reaping what he sowed ... now they start to tell him how to climb out of his misery
- And their solution is ...
 - repent and turn to God and you will be blessed
 - repent and God will reverse your fortunes and restore you

- Bildad says in Job 8:5-6
 - *But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, ⁶ if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.*
- Zophar says in Job 11:13-19
 - *"Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, ¹⁴ if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, ¹⁵ then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. ¹⁶ You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. ¹⁷ Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. ¹⁸ You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. ¹⁹ You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favour.*
- Eliphaz says in Job 22:23-26
 - *If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent ... [s]urely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God.*

- So you see the essence of what they're saying to Job?
 - "The reason you are suffering like this Job is because you're guilty of sin
 - "You're reaping what you've sowed"
 - "It's your fault ... so stop you belly-aching, stop your blubbing, pull yourself together, forget the lamenting ... you've only got yourself to blame"
 - "So examine your life > figure out what you're doing wrong / where you're not obeying God > repent > make amends with God and everything will work out fine"

- That's a terrible way to try and comfort someone in such pain and darkness
 - They lacked love, they lacked empathy and they lacked wisdom
 - So it's no surprise about half way through their lecturing in 16:2 Job calls them "*miserable comforters*"
 - They offer no comfort in his suffering ... just bad, miserable comfort

- **Implications**
- The reason Job's friends are so misguided in what they have to say is because they fail to understand the complexity of God's plans and purposes and the broken world we live in

- Job's friends have this very simple theology. They think
 - God is absolutely in control
 - God is absolutely just and fair
 - Therefore he always punishes the wicked and blesses the upright
 - And so if you're suffering Job it's because you've sinned and God is punishing you

- They view life like a vending machine where you put the right money in and you get what you want
 - They think put in the right religious behaviour and rituals and you automatically get the blessing you want > if you don't then bad things will happen to you

- But their theology is misguided
- We know, and Job knows, that he hasn't done anything to deserve all this suffering he's going through
 - God said twice in Ch 1-2 that Job is blameless and upright and a servant of God

- We know all of Job's suffering has come about as a result of Satan's accusation to God and the genuineness of Job's faith
- His suffering has nothing to do with him being guilty of sin

- His friends have no space in their worldview for the notion of innocent suffering
- So all they're left with is offering pat answers to his problem
 - You're suffering because of your sin, so turn back to God

- **Application**
- God's world, plans and purposes are bigger and more complex than we know
- For someone to say like Eliphaz they know why someone is suffering is cruel and misguided

- Sadly this is what many churches / Christians will do to people who are suffering
- They'll give simplistic, pat answers
 - If you're sick > it's because of a lack of faith
 - If you're not prospering financially > it's because of lack of faith

- Illustration – Danny Nalliah
 - In 2009, the worst bushfires ever to hit Australia swept through rural Victoria killing 173 people
 - Pentecostal church pastor Danny Nalliah told the media the fires were God's judgment on Victoria passing laws that permitted doctors to perform abortions legally
 - He said that Victoria burned because it has passed sinful legislation
 - He made a direct connection between sin and suffering

- He was speaking just like Job's friends
 - Showed no love, no empathy and no wisdom to those who were mourning and suffering in the wake of that tragedy
 - He had no authority or way of knowing the reason behind that disaster
 - And to proclaim he knew why ... was wrong

- How could he know?
 - Look at Job, look at Joseph, look at the man born blind in the gospels
 - No one can know from their vantage point what God is doing

- To do so is just being a miserable comforter and adding to a person's trials

3. Better Comfort in Suffering

- These middle chapters of Job shows us how not to comfort those who are suffering
- Job's friends misunderstood the sovereignty of God
- They self-righteously assumed the sinfulness and guilt of Job
 - They lacked love, empathy and true wisdom
- While they offered bad comfort to a suffering friend, the Bible shows us a better comfort in suffering
 - It comes when we find friends who understand the realities of innocent suffering and therefore able to offer us love, empathy and wisdom that Job's friends did not
- What does such a friend look like?
- How can you be a better comfort to someone who is suffering
- **Love**
- To be a better comfort than Job's friends means we need to love them
 - 1 John 3:18 - *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*
 - Job's friends didn't truly love Job > they just want to lecture him and tell him he was wrong
 - If you want to be a friend who provides comfort to those who are suffering, seek out ways to show that in action and truth
 - Don't be like be like Job's friends ... all talk and no action
- **Empathy**
- To be a better comfort than Job's friends, means we need to show empathy towards them in their suffering
 - To sit with them
 - To listen to them
 - To cry with them
 - Rom 12:15 tells us to '*mourn with those who mourn*'
 - Far better to listen and be with them than to try and provide solutions to things you don't fully understand
- **Wisdom**

- Rather than offer pat answers that seeks to explain more than we know ... far better to offer wisdom of things that we do know
 - That suffering is a reality of this world
 - That suffering doesn't mean God has abandoned us
 - That suffering won't last forever because God has promised to deal with it

- CS Lewis famously said
 - *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."*
 - Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world

- And while can't pretend to know, like Job's friends, why God is allowing suffering a person's life ... we can still help them to see the possibilities as to why that **might** be happening

- God allows suffering for many reasons > it could be
 - Teach you something about himself
 - Teach you something about yourself and your need for him
 - Undermine your trust in things of this world and see that he's the only one you can truly trust in
 - Teach you to rely on him more than on your own strength
 - To see the brokenness of this world
 - The futility of our idols

- There is a wisdom we can share that offers some hope and rationale for a person's suffering ... without claiming to know for sure
 - Certainly without assuming a cause and effect relationship between their suffering and their sin

- Better comfort in suffering comes when we show love, empathy and biblical wisdom

4. Best Comfort in Suffering

- Having well meaning friends will help ... but is it enough?
 - Is it enough to have to have friends such as these ... even if they are able to show love, empathy and wisdom?

- It's been said that *'it is not suffering that destroys a man, but suffering without hope'*

- Whether you are Christian or not ...

- You need more than just well wishing friends to get through the pain and darkness of real suffering
- And the best comfort in suffering comes when you have a friend who can give you real hope
- **Love**
- While our friends will love us in our suffering
- Jesus love for us is greater
 - Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:13 – *greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*
 - Jesus Christ shows in his great love for us we do have hope in our suffering
 - Because Christ's sacrifice
 - assures us of God's love for us
 - assures us of God's plan to restore us and this world
 - assures us that God's plans for those who trust him are ultimately good ... even if he allows you to suffer now
- We have hope in our suffering because we have the ultimate friend in Jesus who was willing to laying down his life for us
- **Empathy**
- In Christ, we have someone who truly empathises with us
 - Heb 4:15 Jesus sympathises with us in weaknesses
 - And because he suffered himself ...
 - not just the physical pain of being beaten, flogged and executed on a cross
 - but also the great emotional pain of being separated from the Father as he bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world
 - And because has had to endure suffering far worse than we ever will ... he truly knows what we are going through
 - And he's not indifferent to it
- When Jesus sees his friends Mary and Martha mourning over the death of their brother Lazarus ... he weeps
- When Jesus sees people who are lost, disabled, hurting, ostracised by society ... he shows compassion on them
- Jesus knows our suffering > he is able to truly empathise with us in it
- **Wisdom**

- In Christ we have a friend who gives us true wisdom about suffering that gives us hope in our suffering
 - Because Christ ... sheds light on the problem of suffering that many of us wrestle with

- Secular people will say that
 - because you're suffering, God doesn't exist
 - or if he does exist he doesn't love you enough to do something about it
- Religious people like Job's friends say you're suffering because you deserve it > you are being punished for your sin
 - In 4:7 Eliphaz says - "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?"
- Religious people like Job's friends and secular people have no place for innocent suffering in their worldview
 - They cannot accept it can happen

- But Jesus shows us that there can be such a thing as innocent suffering that isn't meaningless
 - Because when Jesus Christ suffered in our place on the cross for our sin ... he was truly innocent
 - Not relatively innocent like Job ... but without sin altogether
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21 - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - Jesus shows there is one who was truly innocent ... and yet he suffered for a reason

- Without Christ we can only make sense of suffering by concluding that anyone who reaps trouble it's because they sowed trouble
 - But in Christ we know that's not true
 - Because Jesus Christ reaps what we sowed
 - We sowed trouble, we sowed sin and he reaped it
- And so he suffered innocently for us
 - And for those who trust in Christ and therefore know that they are assured of an eternal life without suffering ... that was far from meaningless

- So you see friends ... the best comfort in our suffering is to go to the one true friend we can have in our times of pain and darkness
 - For he loves us so much he was willing to lay down his life for us

- He knows what we are going through, for he suffered much more than us
- He helps us to make sense of suffering, for him in we see that innocent suffering can happen and not be meaningless

- So the best comfort we can find in our suffering is come to Jesus
 - Come to Jesus and your trust in him who suffered for us ... so that one day will no longer have to suffer
 - And as you do you will have a sure a certain hope

- *For 'it is not suffering that destroys a man, but suffering without hope'*
- And in Christ, our true friend, we have a hope that can sustain us through it

- **Heidelberg Catechism**
- That's the reason why you can say this
 - Opening statement from Heidelberg Catechism
 - Statement of faith developed by Christians in Germany during Reformation in 1563
 - *Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?*
 - *A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

PRAY