

I Wish I'd Never Been Born

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Job

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Bible Text: Job 3

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Gracious God and loving heavenly Father, as a church family we turn now to the Scriptures. We want to hear your voice as we read it and try to understand it. Come Holy Spirit, grant us a spirit of illumination. Speak to us in those secret places and dark places and cause the light of the Gospel to shine there. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now turn with me to Job 3 as we work our way through the book of Job. We are going to pass over the verses at the end of chapter 2 that introduced Job's three friends with something to say about them, Lord willing, next week. But we pick up the reading in chapter 3 and it is printed in your bulletin if you don't have your Bible with you. Job 3,

1 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 And Job said: 3 "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.' 4 Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. 5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. 6 That night-- let thick darkness seize it! Let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months. 7 Behold, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry enter it. 8 Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. 9 Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning, 10 because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes. 11 "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire? 12 Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? 13 For then I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept; then I would have been at rest, 14 with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves, 15 or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. 16 Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light? 17 There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. 18 There the prisoners are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster. 19 The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master. 20

"Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, 21 who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures, 22 who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave? 23 Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? 24 For my sighing comes instead of my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. 25 For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. 26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes."

But trouble comes. This is a very dark passage. Someone said at the end of the first service, "That was not a happy sermon." This is not a happy sermon. This is one of the darkest places in the Bible paralleled perhaps in but three or four other places. The closing of the 88th Psalm which in some translations is rendered, "Darkness is my only friend," that's pretty dark. Most of you have never been here, happily. Most of you have glimpsed it perhaps from afar. You've seen the thunder clouds form on the horizon. You've heard the rumbling of thunder. But you've never been here cursing the day in which you were born. You need to thank God that you've never been there.

What's the application for you this morning? Praise God that you've never been here. But some of you have and perhaps some of you are here right now, privately if not publicly thinking things that you never thought you'd think, uttering things perhaps just to yourself, outbursts. You vent. You never thought the Christian life would be like this. You didn't sign up for this. When you first trusted in Jesus, you didn't sign up for this.

Others have been here. Martin Luther, the Reformer, was here uttering on occasions the darkest of statements. Charles Haddon Spurgeon when somebody shouted, "Fire!" in a building holding thousands of people, perhaps upward of 10,000 at one point, there was no fire but there was a stampede and many were killed in the process and Spurgeon descended into a pit of darkness. He couldn't preach for several months. Moses utters some dark things. Elijah in 1 Kings 19, though Dr. Davis wants to spare you from psychoanalyzing Elijah overmuch, but he was certainly at a point where he asked the Lord to take his life. Jeremiah in chapter 20 quotes from this chapter verbatim, as though Jeremiah had memorized it. That morning after the night in which he had spent the night in the stocks, you remember and then the next morning I think when he goes home, he quotes this chapter.

Perhaps you are wondering why this chapter is here at all. I mean, what sort of Bible would it be if you were to have the opportunity to put it together yourself, would this chapter be in it? Probably not. Perhaps some of you are embarrassed by it. No Christian should utter statements like this.

You want to condemn Job. Did Job sin here? Of course. Of course. Duh. But it's not the point. You want to rush in and condemn him for the things that he has said quicker than God himself. But that's not the point. You need to listen to him. This is a curse followed by a lament. Verses 1 through 10 is a curse, 11 to the end of the chapter is a lament. Job is venting. Have you ever vented? Oh, in the throes of some awful unimaginably horrid

circumstance and you don't know which way to turn and, yes, you want to be able to say as Job said in chapter 1, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Do you want to be able to say in response to Job's wife, "Shall we not accept good at the hands of God and not evil?"

There is a background that we need to appreciate here, first of all. How come Job can say the things that he says in chapter 1 and chapter 2 and then say the things that he says in chapter 3? How come? What's up? Well, several things. Time. Job's three friends have come and they've said nothing. They have been there a week, perhaps that's the best thing they did.

Then in verse 1 of chapter 3, there is an indeterminate expression, "After this." How long after this? There is a rule of thumb, after someone has experienced a bereavement, it's not a hard and fast thing but it's a kind of rule of thumb, call them after six weeks, drop them a note, call them on the phone, send them a text and say you are thinking of them, praying for them. Six weeks. A week is an eternity, isn't it?

Well, this happened to Job while the realization that this is not a dream, the realization that this is not a nightmare from which you are going to awake and discover that this was not true; that the reality and the unchangeability of death and bereavement, the loss of his children is real. "I thought I was going to wake up and discover that this wasn't real." Things have begun to sink in. A routine of loneliness has developed and life will never be the same again.

His friends, they have said nothing and whilst that may be a blessing, it may also be in itself an act of judgment. They've got nothing to say. Yes, we can psychoanalyze this and say that one of the first things that you should do to somebody who is experiencing bereavement or loss is to empathize, just be there for them. But perhaps the reason Job's friends said nothing was because they had nothing to say, nothing of any help, nothing of any value.

Maybe what Job's wife had said, "Curse God and die," maybe it has begun to echo in Job's mind and as his body begins to deteriorate because of the sickness that has now befallen him, the temptation, pondering the possibility that maybe that is the course of action that he should take. Or maybe it's the silence of God. Where is God in all of this? No word, no revelation, no vision, no providential confirmation. Nothing.

There is a background here that we need to appreciate and then, secondly, there are certain feelings, certain thoughts now given expression here that are shocking. He curses, verse 1, he curses the day of his birth. When a midwife said, "It's a boy!" and there was joy and celebration, that day he says, "Let it be removed from the calendar." His birthday, so that it had never been. "Let Leviathan," verse 8, we'll hear more about Leviathan in chapter 41, but it appears to be in the context a symbol of chaos and disorder and dysfunction. In the background in the Ancient Near East was an image of Leviathan as a god of chaos and maybe Job is borrowing from that. Should he have done? No, of course not, but he's venting.

Then he turns into a full blown lament. There are Psalms, not as dark as this, but there are Psalms of lament. He wishes he had never been born. Have you ever said that? "I wish I had never been born." Have you ever said that? Have you ever thought that? A battle of faith is erupting in Job's mind. His belief in God, his understanding of who God is, of what God is like. "Why didn't I die at birth?" And he describes it, a stillborn child that never sees the light. Why is light given to someone who's in misery? What's the point of existence? What's the point of life?

He longs for death. This isn't suicide. Can Christians commit suicide? Yes, they can. Yes, they can. They are buried, 15 to 20 of them in the course of my ministry. Yes, they can. They were believers who couldn't hold on. It's Roman Catholic theology that says that before you can assure somebody of eternal life, that there must be an act of the last rites which is impossible in the case of suicide and, therefore, in Roman Catholic thought, suicide is a mortal sin. That's Roman Catholic theology. That's not what Protestants have believed. Can Christians commit suicide? Yes, they can. But that's not what's here. This is an ache, a pain so deep that he cannot see how he can go on or what the point of going on is.

He speaks in verse 20 of misery and bitterness, and in verse 24, of sighing and groaning. His worst nightmares have become a reality. "I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes." Cynicism, yes, by the bucket-load. C. S. Lewis describes in his book, "A Grief Observed," following the death of his wife, "We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn,' and I accept it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course, it is different when the thing happens to one's self, not to others, and in reality, not in imagination. Not that I am in much danger of ceasing to believe in God, the real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about him." Yeah, that's where Job is too. He isn't being tempted here to become an atheist or believe that God doesn't exist, what he's being tempted to believe is that God is, well, like this. "The conclusion I dread," Lewis said, "is not there is no God after all, but this. So this is what God is really like. Deceive yourself no longer."

What do people mean when they say, "I'm not afraid of God because I know he is good"? Have they never been to a dentist? It doesn't really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist's chair or let your hands lie in your lap, the drill drills on.

Yes, that's the issue here. Job is being tempted to think that God is arbitrary, whimsical. You're just a plaything in the dispensation of sovereign Providence. Or worse, that there is, well, there is a mean streak in God.

Yes, shocking, isn't it? Shocking. Some of you are young Christians and you've come to know the Lord in the last couple of years and you're still head-over-heels in love with Jesus, with the Gospel, and your life is full and you feel the energy of the Holy Spirit empowering you day by day and you're a million miles away from this. And some of you, some of you are right here. You have thought these things, begun to doubt the character

of God, begun to reassess what you think God is like in the face of the trials and difficulties that you're passing through.

So let me ask in the third place: what do we make of this chapter? Let me suggest four things. First of all, this chapter is the infallible, inerrant word of God and, therefore, profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in the way of righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Not just the 23rd Psalm, not just the red letter sayings of Jesus in your Bible, a practice that I don't really approve of because all Scripture, all Scripture is the inerrant, infallible word of God, including this dark dark chapter 3 of Job. So it's got something to say to you. It's got something to teach you. It's got something to warn you about. It's got something to help you.

Secondly, this chapter teaches us we need to be sensitive to what believers can and do experience. We need to be sensitive to that. Tomorrow morning, I will do what I almost always do on a Monday morning, I get onto an aircraft, a Delta aircraft, particularly in Columbia, not a new Delta aircraft, one that has some miles on it, and often bits and pieces of the interior rattle. I listen to an address, half listen to an address, from the flight attendant and she will tell me, or he will tell me, that underneath my seat or in the side of my seat in a pouch there is a life vest and a whistle and a tiny little light that will come on if you hit water. It's so terribly comforting. This is 2015 and all you have is a whistle and a little light. That's it. You are going down at 500 miles an hour from 35,000 feet possibly hitting water and it's Jesus time. This life vest isn't going to be of any help to you whatsoever but I have never, I have never gotten down and looked for this life vest. I've never checked. I've never said, "Stop! There's no life vest under my seat!" I'm glad it's there and I assume it's there because I may need it one day. I can't imagine the circumstances in which I may need it but I may need it one day and so I'm glad it's there.

I'm glad Job 3 is in the Bible. I hope I never need it. I do not believe I have ever been where Job is here. I do not believe I've ever been there. Oh, I've glimpsed the clouds on the horizon, for sure. I've glimpsed some darkness approaching but I've never been here. I've never cursed the day I was born. I've never blurted out to God, "I wish I had never been born." But some of you have. Some of you have, and at that moment, you may be assured that you are not alone, that others, believers as strong and powerful and righteous as Job whom God says is a godly man, find themselves here.

There is another lesson, it's an important one, I think. It's extraordinary to me that God doesn't rush in and say to Job, "Stop! Stop saying this!" To rush in with judgment and condemnation. In fact, God doesn't say anything until chapter 38. Should Job have said the things that he said? No, of course not, but isn't it extraordinary that God is patient with Job? We know of Job's patience, or so called patience, his perseverance, but oh, the patience of God.

Joni Eareckson Tada, 19 years old, she dives off a cliff into the sea never realizing the shallowness of the water. She is a quadriplegic. I have the distinct honor and privilege of substituting for Joni at a Ligonier conference. Now that is difficult to do when they're

expecting Joni Eareckson Tada and I turn up. This is what she said. "For some odd reason, however, it comforted me to realize that God did not condemn me for plying him with questions. I didn't have to worry about insulting God for my outbursts in time of stress and fear and pain. My despair wasn't going to shock him. God according to the book of Job is never threatened by our questions. So did I find answers for the deepest darkest questions about life in total paralysis? Just one," she said, "and it is enough. 'O, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out.'"

Don't be too quick with your judgments and your condemnations when others find themselves in extremely dark places. Learn something of how God counsels Job.

Then, finally, the Hebrews 4:15 principle, "We do not have an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin." What does Jesus know of the darkness of Job 3? He knows what it is to come before his heavenly Father and say, "Father, I don't want to go down this road. Is there not some other way?" He knows what it is to find himself in a Providence in which he seems to lose all sense of God's presence and love and assurance and he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We have a Savior who knows what it is to feel as though God has abandoned and forsaken him. What a Savior.

So if you find yourself in a dark place, I remember going to some caves in Northern Ireland, the name of which now escapes me, but Dr. M. I'm sure will know. There are underground caves and you walk in and then you're on a little train and then you got on a boat. There was a lake inside and there were lights on the wall and then all of a sudden they turn the lights off and they say, "Put your hand in front of your face," and you can't see it at all. Nothing. No ambient light. Nothing. Have you ever experienced that? Maybe that's where you are right now. So crouch down and feel the ground beneath you and there is a footprint. It's the footprint of Jesus because he has been there before you.

"We do not have an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin." I have a Savior this morning who knows the darkness of Job 3 and I can go to him and lean upon him and say to him, "Carry me because I can't take another step. Lift me and place me in your arms because I don't have the energy to go on." And he will help you and he will sustain you and he will carry you all the way through.

Father, we thank you. This is a dark dark passage and perhaps some of us are confused by it, and then there are others here who know all too well the darkness of which it speaks. And we thank you, thank you for an extraordinary wonderful Savior who has been right here, stood in the darkness and he's my Savior and he's my friend. To those who walk in darkness and have no light, wrap your arms around them, Lord Jesus, we pray. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.