

**WISHING THE PAST
AWAY**
**SERIES: SHATTERED: THE STORY
OF JOB**



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Job 3
Second Message
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Job 3

I'm usually much more of a dog person than a cat person. How many of you are cat people?

Interestingly, at our recent men's retreat, we did an ice breaker where you had to identify with specific statements. Not only did very few of the men identify with "I'm more of a cat person than a dog person", but they received the strongest "boos" from the rest of the men.

So I'm usually a dog person, but a few months ago, one of my daughters got a kitten and named her Mira. This kitten was the cutest thing. She was playful and mischievous and snuggly and fun. All of us fell deeply in love with her. She was precious.

We were training her to be an outdoor cat and one night after she had been outside for a few days, we couldn't find her at bedtime. We figured she'd be back by morning. But one day passed and then another.

I couldn't believe how much I missed this kitten. I would walk around the neighborhood looking for her. We put up signs. Driving up to my house, I would imagine seeing her by the front door in the basket she used to sleep in. But she wasn't there.

We never did find Mira. It surprised me how much grief I felt over that little kitten. And in the midst of that pain, I realized that I was only experiencing a taste of what others have felt. Some of you have lost children, spouses, or other loved ones. You've seen marriages end and illness win. You've lost jobs or faced complicated legal situations. I can't begin to understand some of that pain.

Last week Dan Westman kicked off our new series in the book of Job called "Shattered." This book tells the story of a man whose life is broken into pieces. I know that some of you feel like your life has been shattered. How do we deal with grief? What happens when loss and pain overwhelm us, and we can hardly think straight?

Last week we saw Job lose his business, his livelihood, most of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. This week we're going to see how he responds. He'll go through three distinct phases of grief. First, he'll curse. Secondly, he'll lament. Finally, he will simply express the depth of his pain. Each of these phases resonates with us differently. But in all of them, we find Job wishing that this painful story he is living had never happened.

I think this will be helpful to us because we tend to do the same thing. In the face of pain, many of us find ourselves wishing the past away.

Last week Dan suggested that one of the most significant purposes of this book is to shape how we view God. God doesn't show up much in our passage this morning. But, Job's language will show us a great deal about how he sees God. His mourning is set in direct contrast to God's work of creation in the world.

Today we are going to be watching Job mourn. While we want to make some observations, our goal is not to criticize his process. We have to recognize that getting a window into Job's heart as he grieves is a holy gift. The point is not to learn from his mistakes so that we can do it better.

We can think of Job's story like a roadmap. It can help us identify some of the sections along the road. Maybe we are even made aware of a few pitfalls that we can avoid. But, there is no jumping to the end.

Many of us want to discover the kind of deep relationship Job had with God, but without going through the suffering Job endured. We want a shortcut, but there is no shortcut in life. There is no quick path. It's the process which Job goes through, with the Lord, through the pain, which leads him to his destination. How could we think we might get to the same place without taking the same path?

We don't look for suffering, but we will encounter it. Job's story is a guide for us as we process our own pain and grief. It's an encouragement and comfort and

a challenge. Let's follow Job's path of mourning and see how it helps us with our own suffering.

Cursing the day

We're going to be looking at all of Job chapter 3 today. Although this chapter is a bit lengthy and repetitive, it's helpful to get us into Job's state of mind and to experience what he's feeling. We'll start with the first 10 verses.

Job 3:1-10:

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."

This is an intense passage. Job curses the day of his birth and just for good measure adds the night of his conception. At first, this seems to be a conflict with how we saw Job respond to his life falling apart last week. Last week, he was so calm after losing everything. But the Bible is a book about real life, not a storybook. Job is a person, not a character. Real people are heroic in one moment and fall apart in the next. Our responses aren't always consistent. Job's response strikes me not as a conflict, but as powerfully realistic.

That being said, most of us haven't cursed the day of our birth. This kind of response was more common in ancient culture. Jeremiah said something similar in Jeremiah 20:14, "May the day I was born be cursed." I even found a list online of "10 Verses About Regretting Your Birth."

Once we realize what Job was actually doing here, I think we'll find that it's a lot closer to our typical response than we may think.

Job's language evokes the creation story. His curse repeatedly involves darkness, clouds, the stars, and the morning. The creation story in Genesis is all about God bringing order to chaos. But Job is cursing that order and wishing for chaos to return. Even the Leviathan was thought to be an ancient creature of chaos. That's why commentators call Job's curse a "chaos incantation."

Job is asking for uncreation. He doesn't want everything uncreated, only his life. He has seen the path that his life has taken and he wants to erase it from the history books. He claims that he would rather not have existed at all than to live the life that God has written for him.

God's creation is not a one-time event. God is always creating. He writes our stories as we live them out. He is the author of our very lives. When Job curses the day of his birth, he is wishing away the story of his life.

We may not curse the day of our birth, but don't we do the same thing? Maybe we don't wish away the whole story of our lives, but don't we wish away certain parts?

Even though I'm incredibly grateful for everything God has given me, I struggle with discontent. I think back over choices I've made and wonder if life would have been better if I'd chosen a different path. I regret things that happened to me. Sometimes I wish my life had taken a different path.

This is what Job is doing: he is wishing for the uncreation of his story. We can be sympathetic to Job. We do the same things. But we can also recognize in his curse a refusal to accept his story. And if we're honest, we can see even in ourselves that this is not a great place to be. We hope that Job will eventually get to a deeper place.

And we can long for that deeper place ourselves. As we walk with God, we can accept our story.

Here's how Dallas Willard describes that deeper place that we can get to:

We will never have the easy, unhesitating love of God that makes obedience to Jesus our natural response unless we are absolutely sure that it is good for us to be, and to be who we are. This means we must have no doubt that the path appointed for us by when and where and to whom we were born is good, and that nothing irredeemable has happened to us or can happen to us on our way to our destiny in God's full world.

"It is good for us to be, and to be who we are."¹

Do you believe that? Is it good for you to be? Job didn't believe that in this particular moment. He wished that he never was. I've been in that place too. I suspect some of you have as well. Maybe you're there right now.

Our culture makes this hard. We live in a world where anyone is one good idea away from fabulous success. We look around us, and everyone's lives seem to be put together and working. I remember a billboard from years ago that said, "With thousands of jobs out there, one of them has to be better than yours."

It's easy to think, "it's good to be *them*, but not to be me."

Let me tell you something you already know: God created you. God is writing your story. It is good to be you. God's story in your life, even amidst whatever pain or mistakes or failures you are facing, is a good story.

After every phase of God's creation in Genesis, we are told that he looked at what he had made and declared it good. This is true for you. It is good for you to be, and it is good for you to be you.

Believing in the absolute sovereignty of God is critical. You can't mess things up. God didn't make you as a mistake, and you can't ruin his plan. As Willard said, "Nothing irredeemable has happened to us or can happen to us on our way to our destiny in God's full world."

But if that's true, then what do we do with all our suffering? We can't deny it. So what do we do? Sometimes it seems like it is more than we could bear. Job felt that way. Let's see where he goes next.

Lamenting his life

In the first part of this speech, Job describes a curse he is invoking. Now he moves to more of a lament. He is wishing that he had died at birth or shortly after. That may seem like it's essentially the same thing, but it isn't.

Job 3:11-23:

"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?"

You probably noticed that there was one word repeated many times in this lament. It's the question that most of us have asked when we face pain. You find it all throughout the Scriptures. Jesus even asked it on the cross. One simple earnest question: "Why?"

This question is unlike most questions because it is not a quest for information. It may start that way, but answering this question never helps.

David Kessler has written several books on grief and he says, "In all my decades of working with those in grief, no one has ever said, 'Yes, I'm so satisfied with these answers.'" ²

Job's friends will spend dozens of chapters trying to answer the question "why" and none of it is helpful. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask that question when you go through suffering. You have to ask it. But realize that what you're after is not information. You don't need or even want an answer. You just need someone to ask this question to. You need a friend to hear your "Why?"

If you happen to be that friend who receives the "Why?" of someone in suffering, don't try to answer the question. That isn't what they are looking for. Just be with them.

Job's pain is so great that he asks why he didn't just die at birth. What he is going through is so terrible that he is willing to trade away his entire life to avoid it. Job wants to give all that he experienced and achieved and lived through to escape this pain.

His pain is so intense he can't think about anything else.

A few weekends ago on our men's retreat, I went for a run in the morning. Somehow I banged up one of my toes—the middle toe on my right foot. For the rest of the day, my toe hurt. So much good stuff happened on that retreat. The talks were powerful and men were sharing deeply. We had a ton of fun during free time in the afternoon and some incredible conversations.

But throughout all of that good stuff, my toe hurt. And it changed my experience. One little toe—the middle toe of my right foot—could make all of those incredible experiences a little less meaningful.

This is what pain does. It can blind us to everything else we are experiencing. And that is a great design principle. When we're going through painful things, we often need to stop and ignore everything else to focus on the issue.

When we are suffering, it is hard to keep our suffering in context. We can't see anything but the pain. We are blinded to everything else in our life. There is so much blessing and so much beauty, but we lose sight of it for the pain.

The exaggeration of Job's question is its own answer. How ridiculous to trade all of life away. His entire life has been filled with so much. Even his suffering can't wipe out all the blessing.

Once we can accept our story, we can move toward putting our pain in its place. Suffering is not all there is. There is so much more. It may seem like the pain wipes out all the other good stuff, but that is just not true. We have to see our pain in light of our whole story. We can put pain into perspective.

I was talking with a friend of mine a while ago who had recently finished medical school. He was reflecting on the experience and said, "If I had known how hard it was going to be, I wouldn't have done it." In hindsight, he was glad that he did do it, but if he could have seen the whole path when he started, he wouldn't have had the courage to begin.

I wonder if a lot of life is like that. We can't know the story, and we can't imagine what suffering might befall us along the way. But remember that God is writing the story of the world. God is writing Job's story. He is writing our story. Consider this: God knows how hard everything is going to be and *he still writes the story.*

In some ways, this is unthinkable. Imagine that we assembled a giant cosmic scale—one of those old

fashioned scales with two sides that hang in the balance. Then we piled up all of the world's suffering on one side—the wars, the genocide, mothers losing their babies, fathers losing their children, natural disasters, terrorism, and oppression; the extent of evil in the world.

Think of how much weight tips that scale. That's where a lot of people abandon faith. That point is where Job is. When we suffer, this exercise goes from being abstract to being personal. The question of how God could allow so much pain in the world becomes one of how God could let *me* suffer so much.

But if what we believe is true, we have to ask, "What is on the other side of that scale?" What makes all of this worth it? What could possibly justify the kind of grief and suffering that humanity has endured?

As we follow Job's story, we will see a hint. We won't get there immediately, but we know that it is there. That hope is not a naïve optimism. It's not a crutch or a childish wish as some people would have us think, because there is evidence for that hope. We don't only see pain in the world. We see beauty and courage and sacrifice and love and intimacy and vibrancy and creativity, and these things give us a window into the goodness of God.

What we will discover in the book of Job is that sometimes going through that suffering gives us a new appreciation for what sits on the other end of that scale. We can imagine the glory that must outweigh the suffering of the world. But when we experience the glory which offsets the suffering in our lives, we see God in a whole new way.

Expressing his pain

Once we accept our story and put our pain into perspective, we are finally able to look at that pain honestly and helpfully. This point is where Job gets to. At the end of this chapter is his most vulnerable and honest expression of pain. He isn't getting aggressive with a curse. He isn't hiding behind a question or waxing philosophical. He's just sharing how deeply he hurts.

Job 3:24-26:

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."

In some ways, this is the most relatable of all his statements. He's having physical symptoms of his suffering—sighing and groaning. At the end, he mentions four words: "ease", "quiet", "rest", and "trouble". We heard those words in the last section. This is what he would have had if he had died at birth. We can relate to those words too; some of us are desperate for rest and quiet and ease.

But the most haunting phrase comes in the middle. "The thing that I fear comes upon me; what I dread befalls me."

All the things that happened to Job weren't just random events. They aren't just generic bad things. In chapter 1, we read that he used to offer an extra offering for his children after a feast just in case that they sinned in their hearts. These children were precious to him. He was desperately afraid that he would lose them. Then that is exactly what happened.

What parent isn't afraid of losing their children? Once you have a child, you feel their pain in a way you couldn't have imagined beforehand. All parents are desperately afraid of losing our children.

So again: we don't say this to criticize Job, but to put his pain in a new light. Losing his children was something he had worried about, something he had probably lost sleep over. It was what he dreaded. And still, it happened. Still, God allowed this to happen.

Job's cry is heartbreaking and disturbing. It makes us uncomfortable. It leads to personal questions and theological doubts and stirs up our own fears. This is what happens when you verbalize your suffering. It takes form and shape in the world. The horror of it is made real.

There is also a freedom that comes when you articulate your pain. Your grief is shared with another. It doesn't just fester within you. It's out there. I consider these some of Job's most vulnerable and important words: "What I dread befalls me." These words are heartbreaking, but beautiful. There is no loss without love. When we see into Job's heart like this, we witness something holy.

This is a critical example for us. When we suffer, we have to give voice to it. When you suffer, express your pain.

Some of you have seen your worst fears come true. You've shared that with me. Some of you are afraid that

your worst fears might come true. Some of you are doing all that you can to make absolutely sure that you are protected from those fears.

I have a memory from college of worshipping in this church. I've attended here since 1995. I remember sitting in the pews—I even know where it was—and thinking about my faith. I realized that I hadn't faced much pain. I wondered how my faith would hold up in the face of real suffering.

I haven't seen my worst fears come true. I certainly haven't experienced the kind of pain Job has. But I've suffered. I've faced darkness and despair and depression. I never thought when I was a college student in those pews that I'd face the things I've faced.

Instead of wondering whether my faith would survive the pain, now I've found myself wondering how I would have survived that pain without my faith. My faith has been refined so that walking with Jesus through these trials has been the only way to survive.

Here's the truth: you might face your worst fears and what you dread might befall you, but you will not be destroyed by it. You will not be abandoned. You will not disappear or cease to exist or fall down a pit of darkness never to return.

There is hope, even when your worst fears are realized. That hope begins when you express your pain. Invite someone into that pain.

Conclusion

When we suffer, everything changes. I think of the loss of our kitten—how hard that was—and what a small taste of real grief that was. If you haven't faced grief yet, you will. You might even find your worst fears coming true.

It's okay to be in pain. It's okay to lose hope. It's okay to lament. It's even okay to curse the day of your birth. You are part of a community that will carry your hope for you. All of this might be part of your process to grieve the pain of your story. It could be a long process. Job's was. But when you walk through this grief with others and with the presence of Christ, something will come of it.

We can get to a place of accepting our own stories. We can put our suffering in context with all of that story. And then we can express that pain. We can be honest about the extent of that suffering, even if it is the thing

we feared most in the world. But we can trust God that our suffering will not destroy us.

We're going to take some time right now to consider our stories and our own suffering. Maybe you are suffering right now. We all have something we're going through. Maybe you're in a great place, but you understand that suffering will be part of following Jesus. Let's take a few moments with Jesus. Express your pain. Or ask God for strength when you do face suffering. Maybe you just need to accept your story. Whatever it is, invite Jesus into it.

Endnotes

1 Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 337-38.

2 David Kessler "5 Ways to Process Your Grief and "Why" Questions After a Loved One Dies," *Tips on Life & Love*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.tipsonlifeandlove.com/self-help/5-ways-to-process-grief-and-why-questions-after-loved-one-dies>.