

Last week as he began his sermon on Job 1 Matthew spoke of the pain and suffering of the people of Cumbria reminding us that suffering is a regular part of our world. This week we have seen the tragic accident on the South Africa Zambia border that cost the lives of three young students. We live in a world where there is much suffering and so often we can't make sense of it. We ask the question why, be it from an armchair as we debate the philosophical question, or from a metaphorical wheelchair as we ask why has this happened to me or to someone I love? But often suffering doesn't make sense. We just cannot see why it has happened.

At the centre of the book of Job which we began looking at last week is the suffering of Job and much of the book is about Job seeking to understand why he is suffering.

As we open chapter 2 those who were here last week will feel we are on familiar ground and those who weren't will feel you haven't missed much, though you did!

1. Another courtroom scene

V1 sees us back in the courtroom scene of heaven with the sons of God coming before God and there again is the Satan. As he says in v2 he has been roaming the world, and Peter reminded his readers that "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

In words exactly the same as 1:8 God pointed Satan to Job, but this time God added the fact that Job still maintained his integrity despite Satan's baseless accusations against him and despite all that Satan had done in destroying his wealth and family.

However Satan's accusation in v4 was that Job was part of the 'self preservation society'. In effect Satan was saying to God, "come on there's still a hedge round him. OK he's lost a lot but just watch threaten his life make him ill and he'll curse you. He is after all only a fair-weather believer!" Then in words similar to 1:12 God gave Satan permission to bring suffering to Job but he placed a clear limit on what Satan could do "but you must spare his life" (v6).

God gave Satan permission to cause Job suffering. That is what is at the heart of this book of Job. We are given this glimpse into the origin of Job's suffering that Job didn't have. So as we carry on in following weeks we need to remember that Job doesn't know what we know. It is a bit like having read an Agatha Christie book and then rereading it knowing the ending and seeing how it comes together in the book. Here we see that Job's suffering was because he was faithful to God and because God allowed Satan to cause him to suffer.

How does that sit with you? So often we hear people ask, "what kind of God is he if he sees so much suffering and does nothing about it?" But here we see God allow Satan to bring suffering? Whether we view it from armchair or wheelchair we ask what is going on? It is a question that will stay with us through the book and beyond because in many ways the question is not answered in the book.

Having been given that permission Satan acted v7 and Job was afflicted with painful sores.

2. Job's response

Having suffered the mental, emotional and spiritual pain of losing his possessions and family Job now suffered physically. The question was how would he respond? Would he curse God? Would he show Satan that Satan was right and that Job's faith was only skin deep, cut the skin and faith disappeared?

Firstly Job separated himself off from others. V8 speaks of him sitting among the ashes, presumably on the ash heap that would have been outside the city. He went outside the city walls to suffer and

Secondly, for a while at least, he suffered alone. He was isolated. His wife could not understand his reaction to what had happened. Her view was that he should curse God and so hasten his own death. Not a great pastoral example! But it is true isn't it that suffering isolates us? The families whose children died this week in South Africa must surely think as the world focuses on football in South Africa "how can you do that? How can you be thinking about football while my daughter, my son lies dead?" Job suffered alone and suffering does that it isolates us while the rest of the world for some odd reason seems to go on as if nothing has happened.

Thirdly Job showed acceptance of God's sovereign will. Job was a true man of God, a true believer and his words show that in v10 "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" The words echo what he said in 1:21 "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." He may not have been able to understand but Job accepted it was God's will that he should suffer.

Centuries later Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane would draw aside isolated from his sleeping friends and submit to the will of the Father that he should suffer and die and then he would be taken outside the city and be crucified.

Fourthly in all this Job did not curse God. He certainly was suffering and he did not understand why he was suffering but he did not curse God.

As we go on into Chap 3 we see he was no stoic. There is not much stiff upper lip as first in vs 1-10 he wished that he had not been born, then in vs 11-19 wished that he had died at birth and finally in vs 20-26 wished that he could die. Someone has described chapter 3 as the "harshest words that Job utters".

He felt the pain and he knew what suffering was but as we see at the end of 2:10, "Job did not sin in what he said". He did not, as Satan said he would, curse God. So Satan has failed and God's trust in Job has been vindicated.

What we are seeing in Job is that he still believed that what was happening was not without purpose and that above all God was in control. He accepted, 2:10, that the trouble was from God. That idea may not sit easily with us if we are followers of Christ and it certainly doesn't sit easy with many people who are not followers of Christ. I remember many years back my Dad saying to me "I can't believe in God I have seen too many bad things in the war."

In other words my dad was saying that evil and suffering meant that either God was not good or that God was not in control.

However Job, even though he was struggling to understand what was going on, held firmly to his faith in God who was in control and who is good.

3. What does this say to us?

Well I think I want to say two main things and then perhaps others will come out either as I answer questions later on in the service or as we continue the series in coming weeks.

a. God is sovereign over all and therefore he is sovereign over suffering. It was God who gave permission to Satan and who set a limit on what Satan could and could not do. God was in control. I feel I should add that while it isn't mentioned here our God is a good God and therefore all that he

allowed to happen to Job was for ultimate good and not for evil. As one writer put it, "Satan may cut like a knife, but in God's perfect, loving hands Satan is but a scalpel in the hands of a surgeon, working to heal, not wound." So when we suffer that suffering is not because God has abandoned us, nor is it outside the power of God as if Satan were some rival power equal to or greater than God. God is sovereign and he is in control even when we suffer.

b. I want to suggest to us from this and from the rest of Scripture that **suffering is part of the life of the believer**. It is part of the normal Christian life – ouch.

We see here that Job suffered and he suffered because he really was a true believer.

Jesus suffered and died because he was obedient to the Father.

Matthew last week pointed us to Acts 14:22 where Paul and Barnabas told the disciples in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." - suffering part of the normal Christian life.

Then in 1 Peter 4:12&13 Peter taught the readers, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

Now all this grates with us and with a lot of what we hear and think in our Christian lives. In so many ways we present the normal Christian life as being joyful and problem free. Yet reality speaks against that. As I have been talking one to one with people over the last six months I know that many of you carry deep pains and sorrows and have struggled with suffering. If that is so are you abnormal or unchristian?

Have you seen those weather houses where the woman comes out of the house when the weather is good and the man when it's raining? I think for many of us we think if we are Christians we should always enjoy the sunshine, the good things. I think Job tells us not and indeed I think Jesus tells us not.

I say this not to depress us, though it will, but so as to bring to us reality and so that we are not disappointed.

You go on holiday in Spain and it rains you are disappointed because you expect wall to wall sunshine. However you go on holiday in England in May and you get some days of good weather and you are delighted because you know you could just as easily get rain.

If we think the normal Christian life is all sunshine we will be disappointed and we will struggle. However if we recognise as Paul taught that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" then while we will still struggle with suffering we will at least recognise that we are not abnormal and some how bad Christians because we are suffering.

Job is a tough book with hard things to teach us but there is a measure of reassurance in that God is in control even in our suffering and that he is a good God.