

It will be my birthday soon and because my son went back to the States 10 days ago he insisted I opened my presents from him before he went. Doing that reminded me of Christmas and the fact that at Christmas for a laugh knowing I like detective programmes like Morse and Lewis he had gone round various charity shops and bought videos, which he wrapped up as kind of extra presents. What he hadn't realised was that often with videos you needed two or three for a complete programme. So I have part two of Agatha Christie's 'body in the library' but no part one and one of PD James' I have part three but not the first two parts!

Well here this morning we are at part eight of Job so apologies if you have missed the first seven.

What's happened so far is that at the start Job was a happy and wealthy believer in God. Satan challenged God on that saying Job was only a believer for what he got out of it. So God allowed Satan firstly to remove Job's wealth and then to remove Job's health.

Since that we have spent five weeks seeing Job on the corporation rubbish heap covered in painful sores longing to meet with God so he could find out why he was going through this suffering which he felt he didn't deserve.

The three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who came to sit with him were sure he was suffering because he had done wrong. A further friend, Elihu, was sure it was because God wanted Job to change his ways. But through all this Job a. Defended himself as being innocent of sin and b. wanted to meet with God, who he saw as unjust, so that God might vindicate him. There seven sermons in 162 words!

Last Sunday I was up here before the 10.30 service getting ready when two of our youngsters, Joel and Jude, came running in very excited clutching a bag with sweets in. It was the prize that we'd won from the quiz on the Ukraine the day before. But what was even better they had the sheet with the answers on. We do like to know the answers to questions. You sit there watching who wants to be a millionaire sure you know the answer and then Chris Tarrant says, "we'll take a break". The big question throughout Job was why was Job suffering? Just last Sunday at our church picnic someone said to me, "so with Job next week do we get the answers?" I had to say no at least not in the way we would like.

We come to Chap 38 and finally God speaks and we wait for him to explain to Job why Job has been suffering. It is something we know in part because we saw in Chaps 1 and 2 that God was using the suffering to show that Job was a true believer and that even unexplained and undeserved suffering will not break his faith. However Job didn't know that and we might think at the end God might say to him Job all this was to prove your faith but God doesn't.

What we do get in these last five chapters is God showing that he alone is God, we see Job humbling himself before Almighty God and then God restoring Job

1. God is God

What we see in Chaps 38-41 is the meeting with God that Job wanted but it didn't go the way Job expected. You know how it is when you have a difficult meeting you plan out in your head what you might say, what the other person might say, and how you might respond...or is that just me? Well Job had rehearsed this over and over, "I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me." (10:2); "Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offence and my sin." (13:22-23); "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments." (23:3-4).

But Job had a sneaking feeling that if he did meet with God it wouldn't go as he planned, "Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast." (Job 9:3-4)

Job had the feeling that God would ask him loads of unanswerable questions because his wisdom is so great and his power so strong – and that was indeed what happened as we have seen in part from the slide show.

As we go through 38 & 39 God asked Job question after question to show the wisdom and power of God in creation and that Job could not begin to understand the complexity of creation. If he could not understand creation how can he understand the mysteries of suffering? God showed himself to Job as God the creator and sustainer of life and Job's response in 40:4 is to put his hand over his mouth recognising that he has spoken out of turn. But it wasn't just God's power over and in creation that God revealed, for as he goes on into Chaps 40 & 41 he reveals his power over evil.

We all know how children love animals. However unfortunately sometimes the pets are not controllable and disaster happens. In Chapter 41 God questioned Job about Leviathan, which seems to be a crocodile type creature and asking Job 41: 5 "can you put him on a leash for your girls?" But what God is saying is more than can you tame a crocodile, for Leviathan represents Satan (cf Job 3:8; Is 27:1) and while Job was at Satan's mercy and suffering at his hands it was God who had him on a leash and had set the limits on what he could or could not do.

Job wanted to meet with God and argue his case but instead God simply shows him that it is God who is God, so who is Job to tell him how to rule the world? What does Job know about it? Or come to that what do you and I know when we shout to God that's not fair or he or she didn't deserve that? It is God who is God and Job and we need to see that. We need to recognise that it is he who has the wisdom and power and not us. We need to recognise that we cannot bring God down to our level and our way of thinking any more than we can rise to his. We need to see that he and he alone is God and, as we were reminded in the first sermon we need to allow God to be God!

2. Job's response

Job's response to all God said was a wise response and we see it in 42:6, "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." He fell down before God in dust and ashes of which there were probably plenty on the corporation rubbish dump. Why did he repent if he was as he claimed innocent? He repented of his arrogant attitude towards God and how he had been demanding to meet with God. Now he bowed in reverent awe before God now he has 28/28 vision – "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." (Job 28:28) That was why his response was wise, because his action showed his fear, his awe of God.

Friends we need that same 28/28 vision so we don't try and take God's place and tell him how he should run the world he has made or how he should run the life he has given me. Instead we need to learn each day to humbly bow before God, acknowledging he is God and allowing him to be God in every part of our lives. We need daily to say "your Kingdom come your will be done".

Job's response was not to say, "but you haven't answered my questions" but to humble himself before Almighty God.

In that action Job was vindicated that is he was shown as a true believer. His faith was true as God had said. At the end, despite all he had been through, he was still trusting God. In all this he foreshadowed Jesus. In Jesus we see the perfect innocent sufferer who through all his pain trusted in

his heavenly father, “when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus is the paradigm for all who would follow him for as he suffered so do we. We suffer in many general ways as do so many people in our world. However we can also suffer simply because we are followers of Jesus. Some of you because of your faith have been separated from family, denied promotion at work or even lost your jobs, and as we travel further afield we see the cost of following Jesus for some is very high. Just this week in Pakistan suspected Islamic extremists shot dead two Christians accused of “blaspheming” Muhammad. The gunmen shot the Rev. Rashid Emmanuel, 32, and his 30-year-old brother Sajid Emmanuel, days after handwriting experts notified police that signatures on papers denigrating Muhammad did not match those of the accused. Expected to be exonerated soon, the two leaders of United Ministries Pakistan were being led in handcuffs back to jail under police custody when they were shot. We suffer as we follow Jesus.

3. God’s vindication of Job

Job’s wish was to meet God and find justice. Well he met with God and in the end there was justice. God vindicated Job, he showed that Job was right. God vindicate Job, the stand he had made and what he had said. In 42:7&8 three times God referred to Job as “my servant” – God saw Job as a true believer. Then he said Job had spoken the truth. God said to the three friends, “you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” However, then we see the grace of God at work. Firstly it was shown towards the three friends who despite having got it wrong find God’s forgiveness through sacrifice. It is a reminder of how we too so often do things wrong. So often we act as if God doesn’t matter and yet through sacrifice no of bulls and rams as here but through the sacrifice of the life of Jesus we can be forgiven. I hope we are all aware of that. I hope today there is none of us that doesn’t know that God is gracious and forgiving and that if we come to him trusting in the death of Jesus on the cross as sufficient to take away the punishment we deserve for our wrong attitude to God and our wrong actions then God will forgive us. God’s grace was secondly also shown towards Job but in a very different way as we see in v12, “The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first”. Job’s wealth, family and presumably health were restored. It wasn’t a reward because he had worshipped God but a sign that God is just, faithful and gracious and that he honours those who honour him.

As we draw these chapters to a close one encouragement and two riders.

The encouragement is that ultimately as Job discovered to follow God is rewarding. God greatly blessed Job and the phrase at the end “he died, old and full of years” (42:17) is not an equivalent of they all lived happily ever after but a bible epitaph reserved for those who have been great in God’s eyes and who God has greatly blessed such as Abraham and David.

The first rider is that we don’t follow God for what we get out of it anymore than Job did. The second rider is that, while Job was blessed in this life as a sign to those around him that God was faithful, for us while this life may well be and often is rewarding as we follow Jesus, it is in eternity that we find the greatest blessings as we will share fully in the life of God.

4. Summary

As we draw stumps on Job what have we seen?

1. God is God and he is in control. The sovereignty of God has been seen right through the book from the start when he allowed Satan to test Job’s commitment to God right through to the end when God out of his grace blessed Job. God is God and as we have seen we have to allow him to be God in our lives.
2. God is good. One of Job’s questions and a question often reflected by those who suffer or watch others suffer is “is God good”. The book affirms it but it affirms it alongside the previous statement that God is God and so very often we cannot see the goodness of God in what is going on around us. Suffering for some makes them question the goodness of God but the suffering of God in Jesus affirms to me that God is good and while he may allow me to suffer in many ways in this life it is because he doesn’t want me to suffer eternally that he sent his son to die in my place. God is good and his greatest concern is our relationship with him and for that Jesus died.
3. The third thing is that the innocent do suffer and the innocent believer in God may suffer. We learn through this book that those who follow Jesus are in a battle and that while God’s greatest concern is to build our relationship with him the aim of the devil is to destroy that relationship. That was what he tried with Job. The question at the start was would Job’s faith stand the attacks of Satan and the answer at the end for those who like answers is yes it did but along the way it was bumpy. If we are followers of Jesus then we are in a battle and each day we need to hear the words of the writer to the Hebrews, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Yes in this life we who follow Christ will suffer but it is through those tribulations we enter the kingdom of God.