

Pillar Passage – Job 3
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Welcome to another Pillar Passage. Today we are looking at Job chapter 3.

Job is now in the second stage of his suffering. The devil, the evil one—literally in Hebrew here, the adversary—has gone before God in the heavenly places and has challenged God to His face saying, that after God has put Job before the devil, has said that Job’s faith is only mercenary. He only trusts and loves You because of what You give him. He is challenging God—the devil is—to God’s face. Job is the proxy for this battle.

God allows the devil to take away Job’s wealth and to take away Job’s children. This he does, and Job does not do what the devil said that he would and curse God to His face.

Now the devil has challenged God again, and again God has allowed the devil to harm Job. Now Job is suffering ill health. He has boils all over his body. It says in chapter 2 that he took a piece of broken pottery and scrapped himself while he sat in the ashes.

Job’s three friends came and they sat for a week with him in silence; grieving his lamentable state with him in silence.

Now Job speaks.

Just a note here before we get into that. The rest of the book of Job—for the most part—is structured in the form of Hebrew poetry. That’s why, in your Bible, it is typeset differently. You’ll notice here how it’s structured differently than even the sentence above. That’s because the English translator are trying to point out to you, now the structure of the text has changed. There is a poetic element to this. There are many reasons for this, but it is good to at least observe it at the outset.

When Job speaks, he essentially says he laments his birth. *Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived.’ Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.*

So Job speaks, and he laments the day of his birth. He calls for it not to be celebrated but to be mourned—to be mourned because of all of his suffering; because of all the pain that he is experiencing.

Before we move on to Job’s friends in the next chapters, it is good for us to consider just a few facts about Job and about his suffering. Facts that we may observe with our friends in their suffering.

The first thing to observe here, is Job is human. Job is human with plenty of suffering. There is simply no threading the needle, no perfect way of doing it. Suffering is *hard*. Suffering is, well—suffering. Suffering is hard, and Job is human.

Number 2, he is clearly—we should note—clearly complaining.

Number 1, suffering is hard; and number 2, Job complains. He is complaining, and the implication here is, about what God has done or what God has allowed in his life. It is oblique but it is true, that is what Job is complaining about.

The central complaint here is, why God would allow him to continue receive light—the light of life—when he wishes to be in darkness; when the pain of his life is so great. We see this in verse 20-22. This is really the central complaint. *“Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul? Why has life been continued to be given to the one who longs for death?”*

But it comes not.

Why would God give life to one who wants death—not in a dark way but to simply rest from the pain. Once that rest from pain, more than any hidden treasure, who seeks for it and long for death. Again, not in a dark macabre way, but as a relief from his pain. Who would be glad when he found the grave. Why does God do this? That’s really his complaint.

We need to think about this. This brings us to a point that really combines the first two points, and that is this, that Job is in pain.

Job is in pain. I know this is dead obvious, but it is really worth understanding that Job is in pain, physically, emotionally. If the human being—as I understand it—is a combination of the physical and the spiritual—body and soul. Then at the intersection of body and soul just about all that Job feels—perhaps ALL that Job feels—is pain.

It is pain.

Job feels pain.

This pain has only been enhanced by what we saw in chapter 2. His wife becoming emotionally cold and being of no help. *“Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.”*

Job replies, *“You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”*

But still, to suffer in body and soul is one thing, but then to suffer that almost complete pain alone, well that’s something else entirely. Job’s wife actually enhances his pain with this.

So with Job, and all like him, it must be remembered that something hurts. These two words we would do so well to remember; something hurts. Dead obvious, but profound, and too often we “forget this. That’s why doctors, undoubtedly, in the hypocritical oath take the first affirmation, First, do no harm. Do not add to the suffering.

Lastly, we must note, God is not against all complaint. If He were, much of the psalms would not be in the Bible. Job complains here because he believes God exists. God still exists. This is why Job complains. He still believes God exists and God is good that’s why he has questions about how grievous his suffering and about how deep his pain is. It’s not that he stopped believing in God. If he had, he would just sit in silence. This whole thing would just become a nihilistic moment and there would be nothing to say, just sit in the darkness in silence. But there is no command in scripture for God’s people to suffer in silence. There is only for us to continue to reach for God though the skies rain down suffering and this is what Job is doing in his complaint. He complains *because* he still believes in God.

Now, one more observation here. That is the difference between empathy and sympathy. Empathy means entering into a person’s pain—entering into it and understanding it. Sympathy has embedded into it the sense of coming alongside one in their pain though you may not understand it. Sympathy does not require full understanding of the pain. The prefix at the beginning of the word in Greek actually means to come alongside—to have pathos alongside, is what sympathy means. But empathy means to have pathos within—inside the other person’s pain.

But Job’s pain is so great! If we consider what he’s gone through; to lose all of his possessions, all of his children, and basically all of his health. His pain is great; so great that it is difficult for anyone to comprehend it. In fact, I would go so far as to say here, that empathy in this situation is impossible. It is pride and a fool’s errand for anyone to think they could enter into and fully understand Job’s pain. It *cannot* be entered into fully. Therefore to do so or to think, foolishly, that one has done so would then set up one to sympathize and help Job in foolish ways.

But if we come alongside other people’s pain realizing the empathy is actually impossible—that it is impossible to fully gain empathy—while we might still feel their feelings, but full empathy is impossible—this is actually crucial to good help; to being wise in helping other people. Because it would then force us to watch our step around the suffering; that we don’t know all that we are feeling. We would want to enter in and help, but we would do so *cautiously*. Cautiously as though we’ve wandered onto God’s ground where God is doing deep things; things that are too deep for us to understand in full. And then, ironically, that would help to be even more wise—unlike what Job’s friends’ help would be as we will see in the coming chapters.