

Suffering

by Ralph Shallis

The sermon explores the story of Job and the significance of his experience, highlighting the importance of faith and trust in God's goodness and sovereignty in the face of suffering.

Duration: 1:16:09

Scripture: Job 1:1, Job 38:4, Job 38:12, Job 38:17, Job 38:19, Job 38:22, Job 38:31, Job 39:1, Job 40:2, Job 42:5

Topics: "Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Job and the revelation of God's greatness in nature. He highlights various verses where God questions Job about his understanding of creation and the universe. The preacher also mentions Job's humble response, acknowledging his own insignificance compared to God. The sermon then transitions to the book of Psalms, specifically Psalm 82, where God addresses the gods and emphasizes their lack of knowledge and understanding. The preacher concludes by emphasizing the importance of recognizing God's sovereignty and justice in the world.

Transcript

O Father, we pray that you will turn men's thoughts and hearts away from me and fix them on you. O Father, the word of life can come from you alone. And we ask that you will sprinkle the heart of each one of us now with the blood of the Lord Jesus.

That there may be nothing that the enemy can use among us. That there may be nothing that the enemy can use among us. I pray that my heart, my mouth and my thoughts may be controlled by your Holy Spirit.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second oldest book in the Bible, Job. I can't prove that it is the second oldest, but I believe it goes right back to about the time of Abraham.

The only Bible that Job had was probably the first few chapters of Genesis. And apart from that, the stars, the dawn, the sunset. And apart from that, the stars, the dawn, the sunset.

The mountains of the desert, the flowers. The miracle of the birth of his little children. And the flowers that he cultivated around his house.

Job didn't have the advantage that we have of a whole Bible and of the words of Christ. And yet, God revealed to Job all the great doctrines. Let us just look at this book a minute.

We read in verse one that this man was blameless and upright, feared God and turned away from evil. We read in verse one that this man was blameless and upright, feared God and turned away from evil. And in verse three we read that he was the greatest of all the people of the east.

The desert east of what is now Israel. And Job was, if you like, a primitive Arab. He had probably heard of Abraham, but there is no mention in this book of Abraham or of Israel.

He was quite possibly descended from Abraham, just three or four generations removed. Well now, note that Job was upright and he was a man whom God esteemed. He was not a wicked man.

And yet upon Job fell an absolute torment of suffering such as hardly any people have known. Seven great catastrophes fell upon him, one after the other. Seven great catastrophes fell upon him, one after the other.

First of all he lost his cattle in four great disasters. And then all his children perished in a storm. And then the sixth thing that happened to him was that his wife turned against him.

And then the worst thing of all was when his three friends turned against him. And when his three enemies turned against him. And Job found himself utterly alone in a hostile universe.

Sitting on his rubbish heap. Covered with ulcers from head to foot. Covered with ulcers from head to foot.

I wonder how we would react if that had happened to us. Job's only remark was, God has given and God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

God has given and God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job did not realize that he was a battlefield.

We read in chapter 1 that Satan had had an argument with God about Job. In verse 8 of chapter 1, sorry verse 9, Satan says to the Lord, Lord, does Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not put a hedge about him, and his house, and all he has on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face.

And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power, only upon himself. Do not put forth your hand. In verse 9, Satan said to the Lord, Lord, does Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not put a hedge about him, and his house, and all he has on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power, only upon himself. Do not put forth your hand.

Does it seem astonishing to you that God should hand over one of his most upright men to Satan? Does it seem astonishing to you that God should hand over one of his most upright men to Satan? And yet the Bible tells us that this is exactly what God did. God wanted to prove something. Job was a man of faith.

Satan did not believe that a human being could truly love God for nothing. His argument was that man only loves God for what he can get out of him. This, of course, is exactly what the world believes.

And God decided to hand over this righteous man to Satan to prove that Satan was wrong. Don't you think that God took a terrific risk? Don't you think that God took a terrific risk? Look, this did not happen only in Job's soul, nor in his desert town. This proof came before the whole panoramic vision of the whole invisible world.

We read in verse 6 that there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before God, and Satan also came among them. We know that God convenes a parliament in heaven from time to time. We see this in Psalm 82.

We'll just read that psalm quickly. God has taken his place in the council of God. In the midst of the gods he holds judgment.

Would the Italians just follow in their Bible? And God says to these gods the following words. Who are these gods then? We know from the book of Daniel that the nations are controlled by great mighty spirits. We know from the book of Daniel that the nations are controlled by great mighty spirits.

And from the book of Daniel it seems that the only spirit that was obedient to God was Michael who was protecting Israel. Now, Satan is the god of this world as Paul says. And Christ calls him the prince of this world.

John says the whole world is controlled by the evil one. Behind all the nations there are satanic, angelic powers that are controlling the affairs of this world. And these are the beings that God here calls gods.

They are false gods. And these are the beings that God here calls gods. They are false gods.

Certainly throughout the whole world, the ancient world and the whole world, these beings have been worshipped. The ancient gods, Jupiter, Venus, Isis, Ishtar, these were all real demonic powers. In the days of the Roman Empire, everybody had to worship the spirit of the empire incarnated in the emperor.

In the days of the Roman Empire, everybody had to worship the spirit of the empire incarnated in the emperor. Now, for some reason that God has not revealed to us, he allows these beings to control the world. Let us see how God deals with them, verse 2. God says to them, how long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless.

Maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy. Deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

In other words, God insists that there should be at least some rough justice in the laws of this world. But God says in verse 5, speaking of these gods, But God says in verse 5, speaking of these gods, For to you belong all the nations. As God created the Bible from century to century, a vision was opened on the invisible world.

But to Job this was all quite new. He was a battlefield between light and darkness. God and Satan were each trying to prove a theory out on him.

God was insisting that when the Spirit of God has put real faith in a man's heart, that man will never turn against God. God was insisting that when the Spirit of God has put real faith in a man's heart, that man will never turn against God. And Satan said it's quite impossible that anybody should continue to be faithful to God when God does evil to him.

Has it ever occurred to you that God often exerts great faith? God demands us to have great faith in him. God says that without faith you can't do anything at all in the spiritual world. But God himself has faith.

Do you realize that God has got faith in you? At least, he hasn't got faith in you, but he's got faith in the Spirit of God that is in you. He has faith in the Christ that's living in you. He has faith in your new nature.

And God trusts you. He trusts you to maintain the testimony of Christ unsullied. I find this is fantastic.

Io trovo che questo è una cosa meravigliosa. E poi questo ci porta ad avere fiducia l'uno nell'altro. Se io vedo il mio fratello Bill che fa qualcosa che mi sembra completamente sbagliato, anziché giudicarlo, io credo ancora che lo Spirito di Dio sta facendo qualcosa in lui.

E cerco di capire ciò che sta succedendo. Io capisco che forse Dio l'ha fatto intoppare. But instead of needing to be accused by me, he needs me to love him all the more.

And I still believe that the Spirit of Christ in him is going to bring him through this. And so I pray for him with real faith. My faith is really in God.

But because I know God is working in his heart, I also have faith in him. And so on a team, if you can have faith in your fellow team members, this is going to save an awful lot of trouble. But poor old Job didn't understand any of this.

Do you know the most terrible thing after his wife turned against him was the arguments that his friends brought? These three friends actually were very scared. Here was their best friend, the greatest man of the children of the East, the most righteous man, the man they all looked up to, and he's just sitting on a rubbish heap. Covered with filthy sores.

Utterly alone. If ever there was a case of God having punished a man, here it was. Now these men knew that Job was righteous, but they were afraid.

They thought, if that can happen to a righteous man like Job, it could happen to me. Now these three men had a certain religion, or let us say philosophy. The bigger the bank balance, the more certain it is that God approves of you.

The bigger your cadillac, the more certain you are of getting to heaven. But if you are reduced to a wheelbarrow, this means that you must be a very wicked man. In other words, material prosperity is the sign of God's blessing.

And material poverty and suffering must be the sign of God's punishment. Now this is a very comfortable sort of philosophy when you've got a nice fat tummy and you're in peace. But when you're going through an experience like Job, that kind of philosophy has nothing for you.

All these following chapters written in the most beautiful poetry are a dialogue between Job and these three friends. Sometimes interrupted when Job just cries to heaven, cries to God himself. Job begins by just crying out.

He says, Why was I ever born? What's all this happened to me for? And then these three men start bringing their philosophy to him. They say, Well, Job, you'd better confess. You must be really a very, very wicked man.

Job says, Well, what have I done? And they say, Ah, you must be a hypocrite. Outwardly you've been a very good man, but inwardly you must have been doing very wicked things. And poor old Job, sometimes crying to God, sometimes crying out to his friends saying, Why has all this happened to me, God? Why have you turned against me? And then to his friends he says, But what you're saying is absolutely false.

It isn't true. And finally these three men become vicious in their language. And they say to him, You've committed adultery, you've stolen, you've lied.

They have a whole list of all the things they accuse Job of. And then finally in a long chapter Job defends himself. In chapter 31 he says, I haven't done any of these things.

He says, I am righteous. And then a young man called Elihu jumps up. And he says, I waited for all you old people to teach me wisdom.

But he says, I see you're just a lot of ignoramuses. He turns to these three men. He's very angry with them because they haven't been able to convince Job of his sins.

And then he turns to Job and he's very angry with Job. And he says, How dare you argue with God? Don't you realize that God is so great that you can't argue with him? And if God does something like this to you, well you've just got to shut your mouth. But none of these men had any idea of what really was happening to Job.

None of them realized that God was sort of waiting with bated breath to see whether his experiment would come off. Job imagined that it was God who was doing all this to him. He didn't realize that all this came from the devil.

And finally there was silence. I lived for many years in the Middle East. I remember especially when I lived in the mountains of Kurdistan and Lodistan.

And I remember particularly the years when I lived in the mountains to the east of Iraq. In the heat of the summer there were sometimes terrible vortexes of wind that formed in a few minutes, and suddenly a whirlwind came down from the mountains and struck Job and he was caught in this terrifying temperature. It's a terrifying experience to be caught in a whirlwind.

It's also a horrible experience because all the dust of the desert comes off and it just fills your ears and your eyes and your nose and your mouth. And in this whirlwind Job heard a voice. We don't know whether he heard it with his ears or whether it was in his mind.

But Job has written it all down for us in this beautiful verse. He has summed up the revelation that he had from God in those terrible few minutes. And in the end all that Job could say was, by the way, God said to him chapter 38 and verse 2 Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? And then God reveals his immense greatness in nature.

He says in verse 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? And in verse 12 he says Have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place? And in verse 17 he says Have the gates of death been revealed to you? And in verse 19 Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And in verse 18 Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? And in verse 31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? And in verse 39 Do you know when the mountain goats bring forth?

And then in chapter 40 verse 1 The Lord said to Job Shall a fault finder contend with the Almighty? And then in chapter 40 In verse 2 God said to Job The censor of all power Still wants to contend with the Almighty And in verses 3 and 4 and 5 Job answers Behold I am of small account What shall I answer thee?

I lay my hand on my mouth I have spoken once but I will not answer Twice but I will proceed no further And in this terrifying and marvelous vision of God Job in chapter 42 says I know that you can do everything And then verse 5 He says I had heard of you By the hearing of the ear But now my eye sees you And therefore I despise myself And repent in dust and ashes So that righteous man Job Found that Before the all righteous God All he could do was just Sit on his rubbish heap And shut his mouth But a miracle had taken place Job had seen God Before this his knowledge of God Was through his ear It was intellectual, it was academic It was all quite correct So much so that Job had a real faith in God But until now Job's experience of God Had been that of blessing But now his experience was

that of the blesser God took away all Job's blessing So that He could reveal to him The hand that gave him the blessing Now Satan is completely confounded It is true that Job has rebelled He has cried out in agony It's true He has thought that God Put all this evil upon him But Job hadn't turned against God He couldn't understand But at least he still respected and loved God His great mistake was that he justified himself And God wanted to strip away from Job That last obstacle to revelation It wasn't until Job saw himself As a miserable sinner Sitting on a muck heap That he was ready to have God's revelation So not only had God Confounded Satan With his own argument So that all the angels of God And all the angels of Satan Could see that God was right So that all the angels of God And

all the angels of Satan Could see that God was right And they had to admit the miracle Of a man who existed on earth Who could love God Without a second thought A man who had real faith And who had the whole experience To bring Job into a face-to-face revelation With himself Now here we have the real secret Of the problem of suffering Suffering does not come from God God, rather, is the one Who receives the suffering God has shown us how From Bethlehem's cradle Right to the cross With his crown of thorns God suffers and suffers And suffers and suffers But from the beginning To the end of the Bible God tells us That he will not spare us Suffering Christ said we could not Be his disciples Unless we took up the cross We could not be His disciples Unless we took up The cross Let us look at

the end Of this book of Job In verses 7 and 8 God addresses His three friends And says to one of them My wrath is against you And against your two friends Because you have not spoken Of me according to the truth As my servant Job did Now this astonishes us If we do not know God Apparently Job had Said some pretty hard things about God He said but you are afflicting me unjustly You are doing it inexplicably It is illogical, it is irrational Whereas the three friends were saying God is righteous and he always Punishes the wicked and you are the proof of it And yet God says that the three friends Had not spoken the truth about him But Job had It is utterly false That material prosperity Is necessarily the sign Of God's approval Jesus Christ was pitifully poor The apostle Paul was poor The

prophets were poor Moses was poor Nearly all the great men of God have been poor Multitudes of them have been persecuted unjustly Countless numbers have been tortured And imprisoned and put to death What matters is your reflex It does not matter Whether all the ship Logos Thinks you are in the wrong over this matter So long as your heart is right with God And I said I know it is And I said I am sure it is But I said what matters Is the way you react If you are going to stand for your rights They are your rights I said this ship will sink But if like Jesus Christ You are prepared to turn the other cheek Allow people to reckon you

are wrong Insist on doing your job But it does not matter If they besmear your character I said what matters supremely In this test you are going through Is

whether you come out like Jesus Christ Or if you come out with bitterness in your heart I said if you leave this ship tonight You know that for the rest of your life You will have bitterness in your heart Against these people I said it is supremely important That the spirit of God Should bring out the character of Jesus Christ In you now I said that is all that matters I said that is all God is looking for The next morning I heard that he had unpacked his bag And he went with the loggers for two or three years I just bow my head in worship to God For a spiritual victory like that For Jesus Christ Remember I told you not to talk about that OM has a habit of using what we call In the Arab world The Arab telephone It could even reach him right round the other side of the world I don't want

him to hear Well I must close Just one or two verses first I want to conclude with one or two verses In 1 Peter 1 Peter 11 Where the spirit of Christ Predicted the sufferings of Christ And the subsequent glory You see The subsequent glory comes After the suffering It comes from the suffering You know how in the epistle to the Hebrews It says We don't see everything Submitted to Jesus yet But we see Jesus crowned And I think that the people Who first heard that epistle read Thought that the next words Were going to be crowned with thorns This is the only crown The early church had ever seen On Jesus' head But the writer of this epistle Said crowned with glory And it's in the crucified face of the Son of God that we see the glory of God.

You can't see the glory of God anywhere else. Brother, sister, it is only in your crucified face that the world will see the glory of God.

When Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me. When Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me. He explained one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian world.

Now just look at a few verses in Peter. Chapter 2. Chapter 2. Verse 9. Verse 19. Verse 19.

One is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. This is acceptable, that if someone, for reasons of conscience before God, endures afflictions In verse 20, for what credit is it if when you do wrong and are beaten for it, you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it, you take it patiently, you have God's approval. In verse 21, it is to this that you have been called.

This is what we have been called for. Brother, sister, do you want to be called of God? Are you prepared for this? You can't be a servant of God without going through this. Do you think God is going to let one of his real servants go through this life without suffering? Oh, I know so many gifted preachers who have all the audiences and all they say is so wonderful.

Oh, I know so many gifted preachers who have all the audiences and all they say is so wonderful. And they do such damage. They destroy souls.

Because they've never suffered. They've taken the easy way. It's only the man who's suffered who can understand the suffering of others.

And if you have the love of God in your heart, you cannot help suffering. The two greatest mysteries in this world are suffering and love, and you cannot separate them. And this is what we see in Jesus Christ himself.

In the cross of Jesus, in his crucified body and tortured soul, we see all the love of God with all the suffering that it's possible to conceive. In the cross of Jesus, in his crucified body and tortured soul, we see all the love of God with all the suffering that it's possible to conceive. The more you love, the more you suffer.

God has measured his love at the cross. This is the measure of his love, and it's also the measure of his suffering. I'm going to tell you another little secret.

If God didn't make you suffer deeply, you would never be able to understand the heart of God. If God lets you suffer, it's because he wants you to understand what's going on in his own heart. I used to be troubled about something when I was a young man.

I never found any description of Christ's spiritual sufferings in the New Testament. People always told me that his spiritual sufferings were greater than his physical ones, but I didn't find it in the New Testament. In the sufferings of Job and in the sufferings of all the men of God, there was a sort of telescopic view of the sufferings of Christ.

I just want to read a few verses in the book of Job. Job 30, I just want to take a few verses from Job. Instead of thinking of Job, think of Jesus.

Here you've got a real photograph of Christ's sufferings. Verse 9. Now, please. Just one moment.

Would you read through to verse 15. Jesus stumbling along the little narrow street of Jerusalem out to the Damascus gate with his cross on him and all the rabble around him, people kicking his feet so that he'd stumble and the cross would fall down on him. See his garment just twisted around his body with all the blood and the sweat.

Would you read on in verses to verse 15. Verse 16. And now verses 16 to 18, he comes to Mount Calvary.

Verse 19. And now verse 19, they fling the cross down on the ground. They fling him down onto it and start to nail him onto the cross.

And I cry to you and you don't answer me. And now they stand the cross up. And his body falls hanging on the nails.

Down to verse 23. Verse 24. And then on the cross, down to verse 31.

Verse 33. Verse 34. I could spend the next hour or two taking you through the Old Testament, Job and the Psalms and the Prophets.

Passages like these where the prophets suffered in advance what Christ was going to suffer. What a supremely great privilege it is for you and for me if we have suffered so much unjustly as really to be able to enter into the heart of Christ's own suffering. I've just a little more to quote in 1 Peter.

In chapter 2 still and verse 21, where we read to this you have been called, Peter goes on, Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you should follow in his steps. Would you read down to verse 24? You'll learn in chapter 3 and verse 17. And then in chapter 4 in verse 1 and 2. And then in verse 12.

And then he goes to verse 14. And then one last verse in verse 17. Peter wrote this epistle so far as we know somewhere between the year 60 and the year 63 of our era.

One year later, that is in the year 64, Nero had already begun to burn Christians alive in Rome. A year or two later, Peter wrote his second epistle, written in his rough style and his Not like the first epistle which his friend Silas had corrected for him. In the second one, Peter was in prison in Rome and a little time later he was crucified upside down because of Christ.

This second epistle of Peter is his last testament. All the things that Peter was writing about in the first epistle, he put into practice. And notice that Peter says in that verse we read just now, whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

We can just begin to see dimly why God makes us suffer. And I have one last passage to look at with you in 2 Corinthians. Paul speaks of two sufferings.

He says that there is a suffering, the suffering of this world which brings forth death and there is a suffering according to God which brings us to repentance. You see, suffering produces one of two effects in us. Either it is sweet in us or it is bitter in us.

Either it produces the character of Christ, develops our faith, brings us closer to God, opens heaven to us, prepares us for the total vision of God's face, or else it makes us bitter. If you allow a root of bitterness to grow in your heart, it will poison your whole being. I know some people who suffer atrociously and the Spirit of God just flows out of them revealing Christ to everyone they come in contact with.

And I know others who also suffer but who are bitter and you would think they were porcupines, you can't get near them without being hurt. I know some old spinsters who are marvellous women and just radiate the love and glory of God. I know some old spinsters who are marvellous women and just radiate the love and glory of God.

They've accepted the fact that God didn't give them a husband. And they find a ministry and a family on every hand. They haven't any children of their own but they've got dozens of children everywhere.

They haven't any children of their own but they've got dozens of children everywhere. And I know other old spinsters who are as bitter as a bad artichoke. Because they have never forgiven God because they haven't got married.

Because they have never forgiven God because they haven't got married. But it's in many cases because the artichoke appeared even before they had a hope of being married. And the boys shied off.

Anyway, let us just ask God to reveal himself to us. Anyway, let us just ask God to reveal himself to us. And don't be surprised if you really go through it.

And don't be surprised if you really go through it.

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