

## Job 23:1-17

Then Job answered:  
‘Today also my complaint is bitter;  
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.  
O that I knew where I might find him,  
that I might come even to his dwelling!  
I would lay my case before him,  
and fill my mouth with arguments.  
I would learn what he would answer me,  
and understand what he would say to me.  
Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?  
No; but he would give heed to me.  
There an upright person could reason with him,  
and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge.  
‘If I go forward, he is not there;  
or backward, I cannot perceive him;  
on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;  
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.  
But he knows the way that I take;  
when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold.  
My foot has held fast to his steps;  
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.  
I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;  
I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth.  
But he stands alone and who can dissuade him?  
What he desires, that he does.  
For he will complete what he appoints for me;  
and many such things are in his mind.  
Therefore I am terrified at his presence;  
when I consider, I am in dread of him.  
God has made my heart faint;  
the Almighty has terrified me;  
If only I could vanish in darkness,  
and thick darkness would cover my face!

## Deserted

When have you felt utterly deserted? If you look at the word ‘desert’ it has no good meaning. It was in the Mojave Desert where I did some of the most grueling training in the army. We can all imagine those images of deserts that we see in movies, a sunburned guy staggering along through the dry, hot sand, finally collapsing from exhaustion. When you trace the history of the word ‘desert’ you find that it means “a waterless, treeless expanse.” It’s this that Job is experiencing with almost his entire being. I love this book of Job because most of it is a poem of great passion as this man agonizes over suffering, and suffering is a part of every human life.

But what is amazing about Job is that the one person he cries out to in his agony is not his wife or his friends; that person is God. Job is a book about great faith, great hope in a God that Job refuses to give up on despite feeling utterly abandoned by that God.

In this Mystery worship series we are challenged to really get into the mind of Job, and quite a challenge it is. We don't want to go to the place that Job is. Most of us know how that story begins, how Job loses everything, and how God restores him in the end. But we don't dwell on the middle part of the story, the 38 chapters of poetry that explore human suffering and man's failed attempt to explain it away. The writer wants us to feel Job's despair, to agonize with him as others accuse him of some horrible crime that would cause God to punish him so, and as his own wife tells him he should just give up the ghost.

A couple of simple points I'd like to make today; first is that our suffering is what prompts us to seek God all the more. Second is that our persistence in seeking God, even when we feel utterly deserted, shows that hope is alive in us. Hope is one of those gifts from God that we don't appreciate as much as we should. Hope enables us to look at the worst of circumstances and still see that there is liberation from our suffering. And when our hope is in God, we are able to endure anything. Hope is the one thing that kept Job alive through his ordeal.

To the first point: suffering causes us to seek God more. It should be no surprise to anyone that in the most affluent countries of the world – the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and eastern Asia – the church is in decline, while in the poorest nations of the world the church is on the incline. If we feel that life is good and continues to go well for us, we perceive that things are going fine between us and God, and so there's no real need to contact God. It's like when I was in college; when I had money in my checking account there was no need for me to call my dad. It was only when I was running low that I would call and ask him for more money. We are told that Job was a righteous man, which meant that he obeyed God's laws, but we're not told whether Job had any relationship with God, whether he ever talked to God or asked God questions. Life was good for Job, and he could content himself with obeying God and telling himself that God must be pretty pleased with him because he was so blessed with property and family and health. The same can happen to us. We can be Christian, profess faith in Jesus Christ, and be basically very good people – even go to church. But do we seek God? If everything is hunky dory, doesn't that mean that God is okay with us we're okay with him? One of the great dangers of the Prosperity Gospel that is still so prevalent in America is this idea that is put forward that if you are prospering, God has shown favor upon you, and if he shows favor upon you, there's nothing else you need. And so those who buy into the Prosperity Gospel will do what it takes to prosper and content themselves that they are in good standing with God. Job may have been a man of such a mindset. But while we may think that we are in good standing with God, that God is showing us favor, we never nurture an authentic relationship with the true God, and so we become spiritually bankrupt. How many well-to-do people in our society have found no need for church because their prosperity affords them better options on a Sunday morning? How many well-to-do people have

desecrated the sacred bonds of matrimony because they have the means to buy sex outside of marriage? And how many of our youth are turning to heroin and other dangerous drugs because they have observed a culture that seems to be all about self-gratification and they have reached a point where the only thing that gratifies them anymore is being high? There is no need to seek God when he have all this prosperity! We can find our joy in other things. There is no greater tragedy in my mind than seeing a person of means die of an overdose of drugs, because life had become all about getting a thrill, and there was no other purpose for which to live.

And this is where Job demonstrates that he is truly blessed, because Job's greatest desire is not a drug or a life of luxury; ***Job longs for God.*** Job waxes poetic for 38 chapters to show how much he longs for God. Yes, he's kind of upset with God because he's been doing everything he's supposed to be doing and the torment hardly seems fair to him, but Job never stops longing for God. He could have just died I suppose, and he could have just cursed God, but Job chose to ask questions and demand answers.

That is the essence of hope. That's the essence of hope in God. We want to at least hear him. Preferably see him, and even better be with him. The good news is that God does answer Job, and of course he restores Job's life. But those stories of God's answer and Job's restoration are for the next couple of weeks.

Just remember, in troubled times, seek God. If things get worse, seek him longer and harder. Don't give up hope. God will answer. God will not forsake you.