



Sermon Notes

Term – Summer 2019

Series – Worship

Gathering & Date – the 10, 19 May

Title – Worship in suffering

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – Job 1:1-12 & 19:25-27

Main message of this talk in one sentence – Job is not about suffering, except in as much as suffering is the dramatic vehicle for an examination of the book's true heart: faith. The question at the heart of Job is - How can we keep faith with a God who seems to have broken faith with us ...?

Main points –

See attached notes for a more detailed overview of the structure of Job – and some thoughts on a biblical approach to suffering.

We learn from Job that

- Suffering is universal – we see that in scripture (David, Jesus, Paul); and also in life: we observe suffering, we experience suffering, we cause suffering
- Our Enemy the devil is real, and we are the battleground – our lives, bodies and souls matter
- Our ultimate wholeness lies beyond the grave – this isn't to belittle this life and its trials, simply to state an overarching truth (the wonder of 19:25-27 is the revelation to Job that our destiny is an embodied physical state ...)
- Sometimes there are no answers to why things happen
- God's presence is the ultimate answer
- We can be real with God – we can shout, we can scream, we can blame, we can hit out: Adam does this, as does Abraham, Moses, Martha ... and even Jesus ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') Eugene Peterson used to say that 'the enemy of real prayer is nice prayer'

We learn from Job's (so-called) comforters that we mustn't leave people to suffer alone for fear of not having the expertise or the right words to fix their situation. We learn not to be religiously legalistic (more concerned with our truth than with the needs of the other person), and we learn the value of presence – simply being with someone in pain, even if our words are few ...

So what is the key to keeping faith with God when it seems he hasn't kept faith with us?

There must be many answers, but as I've observed people in pain sticking to their faith, I see that one part of the answer is simply 'choice'.

At this point we watched a video testimony you should also be able to download from the website, about worship through tears. It's well worth a watch ...

I spoke of the loss experienced by the couple who then went on to write the song 'Blessed be your name'; and told the story of Horatio Gates Spafford, whose 4 daughters drowned as they crossed the Atlantic, and how he began to write the hymn 'It is well with my soul' at the very spot the earlier ship had gone down ...

When you show kindness to the person who is hurting you ... when you ask not 'Why me?' but 'Why not me? ... when you call out the Lord's name through tears when heaven seems silent ... when you come to church, when it's the last thing you feel like doing, and manage to sing just one line of one song, through gritted teeth, because it's all you can summon from within you ... that is worship – and it is precious to God.

We read Psalm 73 and saw that the key comes in v. 5 ... 'yet' ... 'yet I will praise him'

We considered the significance of being, not 'yes' men and women, but 'yet' men and women.

The Job of chapter 42:1-6 is a very different character from the one we meet in chapter 1:1-5. Hard to believe as it may be, he is healthier in his soul at the end of the book than at the beginning. I've witnessed so many people over the years who have suffered for significant parts of their lives – including my own father – who claim they've learnt more about God, his goodness, his love and his sustaining power in the time of illness than they knew before. It baffles me, and yet it is clearly real.

I closed by reading the testimony of a young teenager, Jonathan Bryan, who can only communicate by moving his eye and who has written an extraordinary book called 'Eye Can Write' – which I recommend to everyone.

For further thought –

- Someone complains bitterly about a tragedy, especially incensed that it is the 'innocent' who suffer. How would you respond with truth and yet with compassion?
- Do you believe the Devil really exists? Look up the scripture references on the attached paper on suffering. What does it mean to resist the Devil? Can anyone in the group come up with some scriptural examples and then some from your own experience?
- Read Job 5:7 & Matthew 24:9. Why are we shocked when suffering comes upon us?
- Read Ephesians 6:10-18. How seriously do we take the Bible's teaching that our lives are the arena in which God and the Enemy wage war? What difference does this perspective make to the way we live?
- Read Job 19:25-27. Do we expect God to set all our ills to rights in this life? What is left of our future hope? Read Romans 8:18-25 & Revelation 21:1-6.
- Read Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10; 13:10; 14:12; 21:7. How can we ensure we are still going at the end?
- Have we learnt to be real with God ... and one another? Are our prayers too 'nice' to be 'real'? Can we tell God exactly how we feel and know that he is big enough to take it?
- Can you recall and share a time when you consciously chose to worship through pain or suffering? What helped you do that? What were the challenges?
- In what ways have our understanding of 'worship' broadened as a result of this talk?
- Can you recall and share a time when your understanding of and relationship with God was deepened through a time of suffering? How do you look back on that time now?

For Prayer –

- that God will graciously make known His presence in our midst as we gather for worship week by week, and as we seek to live for him day by day
- If we know someone who is suffering at the moment, pray for them ... but also ask God to show you how you can be part of the answer to your own prayers – perhaps through your own ministry of 'presence'; sitting with someone without the need for many words