

Job Unleashes the Frustration In His Soul

Job 3, Luke 22:39-46

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Some of us love it. Some of us hate it. Some don't understand it or don't have time to figure it out. But it shows up all around us in different forms. We might not recognize it when we listen to it or see it. But it has the great potential to make its way through our defenses to penetrate our hearts. Suddenly, we are joyful or touched or moved or stopped. What is it? Poetry. It's something that many of us are unfamiliar with and think we can't relate well to. Some of you love poetry and even write your own. But I think all of us appreciate some poetry. Maybe you've heard this one.

When I get older losing my hair,
Many years from now.
Will you still be sending me a Valentine
Birthday greetings bottle of wine?

If I'd been out till quarter to three
Would you lock the door.
Will you still need me, will you still feed me,
When I'm sixty-four.

When I'm 64 – a song by the Beatles

Or you may have heard these lines.

The snow glows white on the mountain tonight
Not a footprint to be seen
A kingdom of isolation
And it looks like I'm the queen

The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside
Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I've tried
Don't let them in, don't let them see
Be the good girl you always have to be
Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know
Well, now they know

Let it go – a song from movie Frozen last December.

Poems put to song stay with us. We've sung some poems this morning. But we may even appreciate written poems –

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

~ John McCrae – In Flanders Fields – from 1915.

Poetry can say something with force and persuasion like an ordinary narrative cannot. Today we are going to plunge into the poetic portion of the book of Job. I think it's appropriate that the book takes this turn because we're about to find out what Job thinks and feels about all that has happened.

But what do you think of Job at the end of Chapter 2? If the book stopped now, Job looks like a superhuman. The narrator identified him as someone who is blameless, upright, fears God and turns away from evil. Upon losing his flocks, servants and children, Job refuses to curse God. Instead he goes into mourning and worship. He does not sin or charge God with wrong. Last week we saw the satan afflict Job's body. Yet Job continues to trust the Lord despite his worsening circumstances and his wife's invitation to curse God. The narrator states that Job did not sin with his lips against God.

If the book ended here, we might be tempted to conclude that the basic lesson of the book goes like this. Job is amazing. He suffered. He trusted and so should we. Yet that Job seems very distant from us. Who would react to all that happened with a quiet and calm acceptance? In Job 3, we begin to what he felt and thought about all that had happened to him. Most people don't get too far beyond chapter 2. The narrative kind of stops there and the book moves into these poetic speeches. They go on for 40 chapters. We struggle to make sense of them. But we will discover that these speeches reveal some of the depths of Job's suffering and the struggles in his soul. We will discover as we go forward that this book is not ultimately about Job and imitating his example in suffering. It's more about reframing our understanding of God and the way the world works. Part of Job's struggles involve reorienting his understanding of how God works.

We discover his struggle internal struggle in Job 3. Today, we're going to see Job unleash the frustration that has built up in his soul. As we go through this, I invite you to see Job maybe as you have never seen him before. And pray that God will speak to your heart about what He wants to reveal to you through this. Then we'll see some things we can learn from this. We'll finish with how Jesus unleashed his soul's frustration and what that accomplished. At the end we will have opportunity to respond to the Lord and maybe unleash what's inside our hearts in a way that is appropriate.

Job 3:1-10

3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ² And Job said:

- ³“Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said,
‘A man is conceived.’
- ⁴Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.
- ⁵Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.
- ⁶That night—let thick darkness seize it!
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.
- ⁷Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry enter it.
- ⁸Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.
- ⁹Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none,
nor see the eyelids of the morning,
- ¹⁰because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
nor hide trouble from my eyes.

How does Job unleash the frustration of his soul?

He uselessly curses the day and night of his birth. (1-10)

Job shatters the silence that has lingered between him and his friends for 7 long days and nights. But he does not utter words of appreciation for their coming. He speaks a curse. But he does not curse God directly as the satan predicted. Nor does he engage in coarse language which we might associate with cursing. He curses in the sense of wishing evil on something - namely his own birthday. He formally expresses his desire that the day of his birth never happened.

Through verses 3-6, Job wants to reverse the order of creation on his birthday. When God created the world, he said “let there be light.” But Job wants to say “Let there be darkness.” A baby’s birth is usually considered the dawning of a new day and new beginning. But Job wants to shroud and hide it. “Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it or shine light on it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.” Verse 6 – That night – let thick darkness seize it.” Job

wishes that in some way, his birthday could have been hidden away or covered over so that nothing would have happened upon it. At the end of verse 6 Job wishes his birthday was deleted from the calendar.

But he not only depends on his own ability to curse the day. He wants help in cursing. Verse 8 - "Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan." It seems Job calls upon professional cursers. There were such people. It was their job to go around and curse someone on behalf of another. The Old Testament account of Balaam reveals this to us. He was hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites but he could only bless them. Well here Job calls upon the cursers to curse his day and rouse something called Leviathan.

Leviathan was a sea creature that caused great chaos. He was both a symbol of chaos and a bringer of chaos. We will learn much more about him in Job 41 when God talks a lot about Leviathan. But here Job seems to be saying "professional cursers – do whatever you can to rouse Leviathan. I don't know what he's going to do but hopefully he somehow shrouds or destroys the day of my birth."

Job concludes this first section of this speech by wishing the dawn, light and morning of his birthday never happened. Why? Because it did not shut the doors of his mother's womb, nor hide the trouble from his eyes." So Job completely curses the day of his birth. But what good does that do? You can't successfully curse something in the past. You can't bring about change or hope your prayer for evil will be answered when that day already happened many years ago. It seems he realizes this at the end of verse 10. So starting in verse 11, he changes his focus.

Job 3:11-19 (ESV)

- ¹¹ "Why did I not die at birth,
 come out from the womb and expire?
¹² Why did the knees receive me?
 Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?
¹³ For then I would have lain down and been quiet;
 I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,
¹⁴ with kings and counselors of the earth
 who rebuilt ruins for themselves,
¹⁵ or with princes who had gold,
 who filled their houses with silver.
¹⁶ Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child,
 as infants who never see the light?
¹⁷ There the wicked cease from troubling,
 and there the weary are at rest.
¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease together;
 they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.

¹⁹The small and the great are there,
and the slave is free from his master.

How does Job unleash the frustration of his soul?

He questions why he did not die at birth and immediately go into the underworld. (11-19)

Job's speech changes from cursing to questioning. He wishes he had not been conceived. Or if he was conceived, he wishes he died in the womb. Or if born, that he died at once. Or since he has grown to maturity, that he might die soon. Job reasons that if he had died, he would have been better off not because death would offer such compensation and joy. He sees death as something that ends life's miseries.

The people of the Old Testament had a very different understanding of the afterlife than we have today. They believed everyone went to the same place called Sheol, it was some sort of shadowy existence but it was a conscious life where you continued with your identity. It was not seen as a place of punishment or reward. It was simply viewed as a place where you existed and rested from the toils on earth. So the Old Testament believer was not motivated by the promise of resurrection and reward in heaven. His life with God was much more about the here and now. Job sees life in Sheol as relief from his suffering.

Job cannot see any benefit or blessing in his life. He is blinded by numbing pain in his heart and on his body. He moves from questioning why he's alive to lamenting the misery of his life.

Job 3:20-26 (ESV)

²⁰“Why is light given to him who is in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
²¹who long for death, but it comes not,
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
²²who rejoice exceedingly
and are glad when they find the grave?
²³Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
²⁴For my sighing comes instead of^[a] my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
²⁵For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.
²⁶I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, but trouble comes.”

How does Job unleash the frustration in his soul?

He laments the misery of his life. (20-26)

Job wonders why God allows those who suffer physical and mental hardships to survive. Job has never experienced anything like this before. But his losses and pain have overwhelmed him. He identifies with those who long for death verse 21. They look for death like a treasure hunter seeks treasure. They would rejoice exceedingly if they found the grave. But notice, they don't take their own lives. Nor does Job. Suicide as a means for attaining death is never contemplated by Job. He clings to the notion that even death is God's timing and God's gift. More on this in a moment.

In verse 23, Job sees God hedging him in. In chapter 1, the satan claimed Job only feared God because a hedge of protection had been put around him. But now Job sees the hedge as something to keep him trapped. He wants to escape the misery of his life. But he can see no way out. In verse 24, he describes the lot of a man who suffers greatly. A man who lives needs bread and water daily. But he utters deep sighs of sorrow as often as he needs bread. He groans with suffering perhaps over his skin as often as he needs water.

In verse 25, Job admits that the thing he has dreaded most has actually happened to him. He could be referring to what he perceives as the absence of God or the punishment of God – the very thing he tried so hard to avoid with his sacrifices on behalf of his children in 1:5. Finally, he concludes his speech with four sharp and penetrating statements about his reality – “I am not at ease; nor am I quiet; I have no rest but trouble comes.” Job is definitely not okay. His friends cannot take comfort in the fact that Job seems to be doing well. He is not. This is one of the hardest chapters in the entire book. Yet it can teach us so much if we will ponder it.

What do we learn from Job's speech?

1) A real believer can go through blank despair and utter desperation.

Christopher Ash writes “Job 3 teaches us “that a blameless believer who has not fallen into sin may go through utter despair and yet at the end be seen as a real believer. We ourselves, if we walk closely with Christ may still go through very deep darkness. And if we are willing to accept this truth, we might begin to learn to weep with those who weep rather than explaining their suffering to them or encouraging them to confess something they've done wrong.

Do you hear that church? Or are you convinced that this cannot be and there's got to be something wrong with the person or something they did wrong. John Walton writes “We begin to see the depth of Job's psychological despair as his speeches become less composed and dignified, which realistically reflects the scope of his loss. The author has

portrayed Job as extraordinary in his piety and righteousness, but it would not do to leave the audience thinking of him as superhumanly untouched by grief. The audience is able to sympathize with Job because in his place we would do the same; now Job is one of us.”

Christopher Ash also writes “this chapter is a sobering one for some segments of contemporary Christianity. There is a version that is shallow, trite and superficial. Happy clappy – Easy triumphalism – in His presence, our problems disappear – but this was not true of Job. This was real life.

2) **Job is not the poster boy for the stiff upper lip denial of emotion during difficulty.**

That’s how you come with difficulty. You don’t cry. You keep going. You don’t lose your composure. There is something to be said for keeping on. Job is no Stoic, striving to be pure mind with no feeling. The Bible knows nothing of such dehumanizing philosophy. But some of us come from a long tradition that has confused the Christian way with the noble but heathen ethic of the Stoa. Its prescription for the afflicted you resign yourself to the unquestionable will of God; you strictly curb all feelings, or at least on the outward expression of them, you disapprove of the weakling majority who cannot walk calmly in the furnace of suffering.

Such stoic expectation has been played out and called for in many a tragic situation. Some survivors on the Titanic claimed to hear those left on the deck encouraging one another to be calm and brave in the midst of this unfolding tragedy. This tradition has not taken Job as it’s patron saint. He is bereaved, humiliated and in pain. His skin is festering and his nerves are on fire. Job 3 wows the Stoic, calm, composed of Job out of the water.

3) Job is disturbed by the apparent chaos of his once well-ordered world. Ash – “The deep reason for Job’s unrest is that he cannot understand his sufferings. He cannot understand why a believer, a man of godliness and piety, suffers with such mind numbing intensity. This unexplainable trouble shakes the foundations of his moral and ordered universe”.

John Walton notes “Most people believe that the world works with justice as the foundation principle. But Job teaches us that the foundation of the world is God’s wisdom. So we need to focus on God’s wisdom more than on God’s justice. God is certainly just. But his wisdom is deeper than our understanding of justice can sometimes explain. “Could it be” Walton proposes “that this book forces us to look at righteousness or rightness before God from a totally different angle. Instead of thinking that if we do enough right things God will accept us, Job challenges us to examine our

righteousness when we go through suffering. How do we continue to walk righteously before God for all the right reasons? Not – God I will stay true to you if you bless me. Or God I will stay true to you if you get me out of this trouble. But God, I will stay true to you because you are God.

Job seems to have bought into the retribution principle. If I do good, than God will be good to me. If I do bad, then I deserve God’s punishment. But he has not done bad. And bad things happen. Now he begins the journey of reorienting his understanding of God away from the simple, flat retribution principle.

4) Though Job wants to die, he does not choose suicide.

Yet he must work through this desire that to die would be better than to keep living. To help us with this let’s go back to Kelly Lemon’s story:

JHW: DID YOU WISH for death, Kelly?

Kelly: As I look back years ago, it is sad to say there was a time in my life that I prayed for the Lord to take my life. I remember it vividly because it was immediately after my thirteen-hour nerve transplant in September of 2000. I woke up in more excruciating pain than I had ever experienced at the young age of twelve. My legs were burning, since they removed the long nerve that runs underneath your knee to your ankle, in both legs. So each leg was bandaged up past my knees and would burn if I straightened my leg. Then my neck was in so much pain, since they took out the nerve from the spinal cord, causing my left arm to go numb for four months, and the nerve graft was threaded through my chest and into my armpit.

At the time it was the most pain I had ever experienced, and on top of that I had horrible phantom pains due to the trauma and stress of the surgery. So when I came out of the surgery, I remember lying down in the hospital bed, crying in pain, and praying, “Lord, why did you save my life in the car accident so that you would allow me to suffer to such a great degree? Lord, please take me home to be with you. Please allow me to fall asleep and wake up in your presence.” There were days that I screamed out loud in pain, pleading that the Lord would make it stop and bring me home.

JHW: How did you resist those wishes and eventually conquer them?

Kelly: Over time some of the pain subsided. The Lord gave me peace in my heart and assurance that he had plans for me. I felt the Lord saying, “I didn’t miraculously save you from that accident, only to take you home a couple of

months later. I want to use this trial, and I want to use you ... but you need to trust me.” So I began trying to think of life on a day-to-day basis, trying to seek him for the strength to endure.

JHW: Was there consolation in the belief in heaven—an eternity with God?

Kelly: Definitely. My belief in Christ, God, heaven, and spending eternity with him dramatically impacted the growing process after the accident. I did not just simply want to end my life; rather, at the time I wanted God to take me to heaven—sooner rather than later. The pain and suffering I experienced seemed like too much to bear, so I yearned to be in heaven, in eternity with him.

JHW: Did such a hope help you feel any better about life and God?

Kelly: My hope in spending eternity with God did help knowing that there will be a day when I will not live in extremely excruciating pain; yet at times I was impatient and wanted that time to come now. Over time that hope did affect my thought process and did help me change my perspective on life.

JHW: Do you have any perspective to offer people who are suffering and desire death? What would you say to them?

Kelly: I would first and foremost listen, to hope that I understood what they were trying to communicate before offering my opinion. Then I would try to encourage them to shift their perspective on how they view their trial—that instead of focusing on the “why” questions, they should seek the question, “Lord, what are you doing here and what do you want me to learn?” The Lord has a plan for their lives and isn’t done yet, and he wants to carry them through the suffering. I would gently encourage them in how the Lord can use trials, such as: trials cause us to draw near to him, they test our faith, they can be used to move us to the place the Lord wants us to be, they can slow us down to focus on him, and trials can be used to show God’s power, which he allows us to experience. We should take it day by day, and when we are called to be in his presence, it will be the right time; but until then, we are to seek him and offer our sufferings and our desire for death to him. For when do the stars shine the brightest? When the sky is the darkest and there is no other light in sight. When we are in dark times and can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel, those are the times we seek Christ and experience him in a real way. Heaven will come in its time, but for now we are to take it one day at a time.

5) **Don't simply complain. Take your complaints to God.** One commentator points out "this is not a lament in a traditional Psalmist form. Biblical laments express complaints about life, others, oneself and God. But they almost always end with a note of confidence or even praise of God. Job's words are more like the grumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness. While God invites the laments of the Psalmists, he despises the complaints of the wilderness generations. God welcomes our cries but disdains complaints. Job does not explicitly address anyone – not his friends; not God. He just gives vent to his intensely felt inner feelings and thoughts.

So take your complaints to God. Instead look at what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane hours before his arrest. He prayed. Take this cup from me. Not my will but yours be done. If it is your will that I drink this cup, then be my Strength to drink it.

Jesus drank the cup – so that we might have life and reconciliation with God. He drank the cup and obeyed His Father's will. Those who receive Jesus are brought into new life and relationship with the God who can overcome evil for good and work for the good of those who love him. At the cross, God was most present and overcoming evil at the moment when He seemed to be most absent and defeated. If you walk in a time like that today, please bring your frustrations to the Lord. Ask someone to pray with you. Or if you know someone who is in need this way, listen to them and then pray with them.