



## Job sermon 1 - 1:1-2:10

We are starting a new 7-week sermon series on Job, and will discuss most of the sermons (except prayer meeting week for sermon 2 on Job 3)

These first two chapters are the introduction to the book - being narrative rather than poetic speeches makes them stand out. We see how Job is a wonderful godly behaviour and very prosperous. But the Satan challenges God to afflict Job, as supposedly he only loves God because of his prosperity. But does Job really love God for God's sake? And so the trials begin, and Job responds admirably, initially at least.

Note that there are probably lots of questions that people have, about God, Satan and suffering. That's OK by the way, and in a way we should accept that the Bible doesn't tell us everything.

### Questions

1. What do you know about the book of Job? What do you think it's about? How do you feel about studying it?

*Icebreaker, sharing initial thoughts*

2. How is Job described in v.1-5? How do you feel about him, knowing about his coming suffering?

*The start of the book is a beautiful picture of how life should be. On the one hand, Job is a blameless, godly man (v1), concerned about his children's possible sin and atoning for it (v5) and on the other he is prosperous, with a big family and great possessions (v2-3). It really shows how undeserved his suffering is, and how great by comparison. We should be in awe that someone could be as great as this, and feel pity for his suffering. (This question is more about understanding than application - that will come)*

3. We hear the two conversations in heaven, though Job doesn't know about them. What important things do they tell us? How does it frame the book's message?



*These conversations give us important background info we need to read the book. Among others:*

- *We get God's view of Job - God is his friend and honours him. The disasters are really not because God is against him or because Job has sinned - important background for chapters 4-27. Rather it is to show God's glory in Job's faith.*
- *God has reasons unknown to Job. So the book is less about suffering per se but more about when things happen that we don't understand (which will particularly be when we suffer).*
- *We get a better idea of the Satan. His lack of understanding and power, that he can only do what God allows and so on. Otherwise we might wonder how Satan could beat God and make Job suffer. At the same time, it shows there really is a malicious presence at work in the world.*

4. *Do you think Christians can suffer like Job? How would you respond, do you think? How is Job's response a challenge to us?*

*I think the answer is yes. Christians can suffer in terrible ways without explanation, that's a fact. James in James 5:11 gives Job as a relevant example to suffering believers. Like James' readers we might respond with anger, sin, bitterness etc.*

*But the amazing thing is that Job responds with worship. He keeps trusting and following God. It's deeply challenging for us. Though hopefully after we've wrestled through 42 chapters it will make it easier for us to worship too.*

5. *How do these chapters challenge your view of God? What questions do you have?*

*This is ultimately the point of the book: that we have a greater view of God that will help us keep living for him in worship through the times when we don't have the answers to our questions. So let it challenge you. His power and control, his commitment to Job, yet also the mystery of his will and his government of the world.*



*It may be challenging by the way. Job is not a comfortable book. Remember that this is only the introduction. Any doubts or concerns we have about God's character will hopefully be answered as we read on and reach the happy ending in ch.42.*

6. What difference does it make for us that we read Job after the coming of Jesus? How should it affect our response to God?

*Kevin mentioned two:*

- *Job didn't have the Bible, but we do. We understand much more about God and his plans, so we can make more sense of things than Job. Even the fact that we as readers know about the heavenly council makes a difference for us*
- *Job didn't know about Jesus, but we do. We know that at some point the one innocent man suffered intensely, even more than Job did, and that this was God's plan for a good purpose. So we can take a breath and trust God when we suffer, in light of the gospel.*

*NB: One thing we shouldn't say is that Job's experience is Old Testament and is not relevant to us. Sadly some churches teach a message of health & wealth, that God wants Christians to always be healthy and wealthy. A famous leader of one such church was once asked about Job, and the leader said that Job is Old Testament, but we live in the New Testament - i.e. Christians won't suffer. We will come back to this in a few weeks, though if it comes up, ask people to ponder this as we go on.*

7. What would you like to pray for yourself in response to these chapters?

*Closing sharing and transition*

### **Ideas for prayer**

- Give thanks for the book of Job and that God knows we have questions about life and his government of the world. Pray we would listen to him as he addresses us.
- Give thanks for the many blessings we have from God, but pray we would not love the gifts but the Giver, and keep loving him if the gifts are taken away.
- Pray God would enlarge our vision of him over the coming weeks, that it would lead us to have faith rather than doubts in the storms of life.



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- Give thanks for Jesus and his undeserved suffering, and how he saved us. Give thanks that through the cross we can always be sure of God's love (Romans 5:8)



## **Job ch. 4-27 - Job & his friends**

This is the third sermon and second study of this series. Officially we are covering 24 chapters, but the sermon summarised most of it, as it is rather long.

The chapters are basically a debate between Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. One friend speaks, Job responds, the next friend speaks, Job responds etc, for 3 rounds, though in the last round Bildad only says a few verses and Zophar has nothing to say. It shows the debate has ground to a halt.

The big issue is whether suffering here is God's punishment for sin. That's the straightforward system that everyone believes, but the book of Job shows us that that's not true in this case (and through it, casts doubt on most cases). Job is innocent and suffers for different reasons. And so things are not as simplistic as we often think.

*NB if it's a short passage you can still have a good discussion if people haven't read it. That will be very hard with 24 chapters. So encourage people to listen to the sermon beforehand. If you want to read a representative chapter, read ch.22 perhaps.*

*At the same time, there is a lot in these chapters that we can't cover. In terms of the sermon we won't look much at the second point, "justice delayed", in this study. Also Job's continuing trust in God and seeking a relationship with him, is very admirable.*

### **Questions**

1. These chapters are a discussion of the "retribution principle" - that suffering is God's punishment for wrongdoing. Where do we see this in the world? Religions?

*Very common - parents disciplining children, rewards for homework, fines for parking, karma etc. Even the Old Testament Law.*

2. Do you identify with this feeling - if things go wrong in my life, it's my fault? Have you encountered such teaching in your past?



*Just sharing. The idea that suffering is God's punishment for what I've done is basic to most religions, and even some forms of Christianity. Good for anyone to be able to share if they feel they had this experience.*

3. Can you summarise the basic arguments and logic of Job's friends on the one hand and Job himself on the other? Where do they go wrong?

*Both Job and his friends believe in the retribution principle, so that is how they interpret Job's suffering. The friends think that means Job must have sinned, while Job believes he is innocent and so concludes God must be unjust. Hence the disagreement.*

*The problem is in their assumption of retribution. Job's suffering has nothing to do with punishment. So God is still just and Job is still innocent. This is what Job realises.*

4. What consequences will you see if we think of our suffering/blessings as a result of our behaviour? How could it affect our relationship with God?

*Lots of options, like we see in Job*

- If things go well we become proud and judgmental (like the friends)*
- If things go badly we will feel unnecessarily guilty and despairing*
- We can become bitter with God because we feel we don't deserve this*
- God becomes just a mechanism for getting blessings/ avoiding suffering, rather than an actual person.*
- If we earn blessings/avoid suffering by our effort, pretty soon we will also think we earn salvation by our efforts, which is the opposite of the gospel.*

*A lot of this is gospel-centred life stuff - we relate to God by law, we close the gap between his holiness and our sin and think we can surmount it ourselves.*



5. What are things we can learn from these chapters about the right/wrong way to encourage others? Especially, how can we avoid being like Job's friends?

*Encouraging and comforting each other is really important. And yet we can go wrong. Most of all, we shouldn't just say it's because of their sin. But more generally, the friends don't listen at all to Job, they are stuck in their system. They make assumptions without talking. They offer simplistic solutions. We can likewise say "hey, God loves you, look at the cross" or Romans 8:28. Instead, being a loving and caring presence, with an emphasis on listening and gentleness, is much better.*

6. What difference would it make to Job if he knew God's verdict of innocence? What does that show about the difference the gospel makes?

*Just imagine the anguish it would have saved Job to know God's verdict. If he knew that God said he was innocent, that God wasn't against him, he might still have some questions, but his greatest fear would be allayed. That happened through the cross. We have been justified - received God's verdict of righteousness, so that we know we will be saved and not condemned. Because Jesus paid for all our sins. It is remarkable.*

7. Read Romans 8:31-39. Do you feel you know God's love like this? What can we learn here about the way to get through suffering?

*Romans 8 is probably the high point of the Bible, and interestingly it is a lot about dealing with suffering. In the midst of it we can be assured of God's love because of the cross. We know God is on our side, first because he gave up his Son for us (v32), second because through the cross we are now justified (righteous) in his sight (v33-34). So the cross is the key to knowing God's love, and if we don't feel God's love that is what we need to meditate on, to get us through suffering.*

### **Ideas for prayer**

- Give thanks for God's grace and that he does not treat us as our sins deserve, but blesses us undeservedly.
- Pray we would be good friends who encourage others, and that God would use us to bring comfort and hope to those suffering.



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- Pray for those in our church suffering at the moment, that they would not feel guilty but trust God's wisdom when it is easy to despair.
- Pray that in times of suffering we would turn to God and that the cross would assure us of his love in the dark times.





## Job ch. 28 - Where is Wisdom?

This is the fourth sermon and third study of this series. Ch. 28 is the main focus, an interlude about wisdom after the debate between Job & his friends, though the sermon also covered the next section of Job's final appeal.

The main point is that we can't find out the answer to many questions. This is 'Wisdom' - how God governs the world. God knows, but we don't, and we can't find it out. What we have on the other hand is 'wisdom' - knowing how to live. And that is to love and trust God and follow his way.

### Questions

1. Are you someone who always wants to know the answers to questions, or reasons why things happen? Why is this important to you?

*Opening sharing, getting the topic on the table.*

2. What is the difference between 'Wisdom' (v12, 20) and wisdom' (v28)? How are the two related?

*'Wisdom' (Hebrew: 'the' wisdom) is how God made and governs the world, while 'wisdom' is the right way to live now. When we think of wisdom literature we usually think of the latter. But the two are related - the right way to live is according to how God made the world - like the Maker's instructions.*

3. What points does the poem in ch.28 make about Wisdom (e.g. 28:1-14, 15-19)? How is this challenging, especially in Job's situation? How do you feel about this?

*The big point is that Wisdom is inaccessible. Humans work hard to find precious things that are difficult to reach, mining for metals and diamonds (1-11). Yet no matter how hard we try, we can't find wisdom (12-14). A secondary point is that Wisdom is the most precious thing there is, more precious than jewels or anything (15-19) - which makes its inaccessibility all the more sad. Only God knows it. (23-27).*

*We often want to know the answer to things. Things happen in our life, and we want to know why, and can't really move on until we do. But this passage says there*



*are things we won't know or understand. We can argue and debate for ages like Job and his friends, but we get nowhere. Don't know how people feel - bitter, scared, paralyzed?*

4. Is there a recent situation or one you are in now where you would really like God to explain why this is happening? How are you responding in this situation?

*Applying it - particularly good to consider how we respond. Are we paralyzed not knowing what to do? Do we feel justified to respond badly? Are we withdrawing from church? Are we getting bitter towards God?*

5. What does it mean to "fear the Lord and turn away from evil"? What does this look like? How is Job himself a good example?

*Ultimately this is about relating to God rightly. 'Fear' is often used, but it doesn't mean being afraid or terrified. Job is someone who exemplified this (1:1) yet he had all kinds of questions to ask God, he certainly wasn't afraid of God. Instead, it is to make him first, to relate rightly to him, to treat him as he deserves, to love and trust him. And that is then seen in a life following God's way, as we relate to others, as Job exemplifies in ch.31.*

6. What would it look like for you to 'fear the Lord and turn away from evil' in your situation? What do you find hard about this? How does this passage help?

*Going back to question 3. What would the right response be? And maybe, share what you find hard about this, which will set up the next question.*

7. We can only respond like this if we trust God. What reasons do we have to trust him? Especially as Christians living after the coming of Jesus?

*Last point of the sermon. God tells us to trust him - can we do that? The gospel shows how much we can trust God. Jesus was God's Wisdom come down to us, revealing his heart, and what all his plans are about, especially as he died on the cross. The one who died for us is now the one who rules the universe, so we can trust that he loves us and is committed to us. Job didn't know all this.*



## Ideas for prayer

- Give thanks that the world is not out of control but that God governs the world according to his plan.
- Pray that when difficult events happen in our life we would humbly accept that we can't find out why, and not grow bitter or paralyzed.
- Pray we would 'fear the Lord and turn away from evil' like Job - by loving and trusting the one who governs everything and continuing to walk his way.
- Give thanks that Jesus came down to us and what he revealed about the heart of God and his plans. Pray we would trust him all the more as a result.



## Job ch. 32-37 - Elihu

This is the fifth sermon, looking at Elihu. He shows up for a few chapters and is never heard of again, and we know nothing about him except that he is younger than Job's three friends and his genealogy (32:2). He is like a prophet, speaking to Job about God before God himself will speak to Job in 38-41.

In terms of the flow of the book, Elihu is preparing Job for the encounter with God. He challenges Job's attitude so that Job is in a more humble state of mind before God speaks. So it will be helpful to humble us as well.

Elihu rebukes the friends in ch.32 and then gives 4 speeches.

- **33** - God is not silent, he speaks in many ways - will we listen?
- **34** - God is God - we should not doubt his justice
- **35** - God doesn't need us, and won't listen if we have the wrong attitude
- **36-37** - God is great and merciful - let us be humble before him

### Questions

1. Suffering will come into our life no matter what. The question is how we will respond. What are right and wrong ways people can respond to suffering?

*Opening question flagging the topic. Right way is to keep trusting God, to "fear the Lord and turn away from evil". Wrong ways would be e.g. to grow bitter or angry, to stop listening to God, to seek refuge in idols for comfort or security,*

2. Job thinks God isn't listening. How does Elihu challenge Job in 33:12-28? What is the problem Elihu is pointing out?

*Elihu speaks in more ways than Job thinks. Job wants God to show up. But God speaks in other ways too. Through conscience (12-18), and through pain (19-28), perhaps in order to keep someone from sin. Suffering might be preventative. The problem is not that God isn't speaking, but maybe Job isn't listening, closing his ears to what God might be doing.*



*Note: Elihu is not trying to give a solution. He is not saying that this is what God is doing. The human characters don't know God's purpose. Rather, Elihu is giving it as theoretical possibilities that should make us stop and think rather than assume.*

3. What is it about God's nature that we can trust his justice, according to 34:12-19 and 21-25 (perhaps split in pairs/two groups)? How are these encouraging?

*Job has questioned God's justice and Elihu corrects him. He mentions a few things why we can know God is just, but significantly two things*

- *God is impartial in 12-19, and the reason is that he doesn't need anything. He made the world and its people, he wasn't put in charge by someone else unwillingly. So he doesn't have any needs that make him partial to those who can meet those needs, or that makes him open to bribes, or anything like that. He cares about the world because he made it, so he will administer justice rightly. This sets him apart from human rulers who don't care and are open to those who can give them what they want or need.*
- *God knows everything, nothing is hidden from him, in 21-25. So God is not just willing to do justice, but able to do so, because he can see everything. Again, very different from human rulers who are maybe willing to do the right thing but don't know enough to do justice, they can be deceived.*

4. Why do we so often think we are right in our thinking? How does our culture add to that? How does this affect our view of God's actions?

*We usually think we are right in what we think. We trust ourselves, we want to justify ourselves, we are blind to our own faults. And the culture tends to add to that. It tells us each person has their own truth, and that our feelings are usually right. E.g. If we feel hurt, we are hurt, and someone else has wronged us, even if they didn't intend anything.*

*This means that there is little place for humility. If we don't understand what God is doing, or don't feel happy about it, then God must be in the wrong. Actually, maybe we have misunderstood something, or there is something we don't know.*



5. Elihu wants us to see God's greatness. Listen to 36-37 being read slowly (using an audio bible, or go round in paragraphs). What strikes you about God?

*As Job is such a long book we often abridge the readings. Yet then we can miss the majesty of this book. Listening to two chapters about God's greatness will be good, and hopefully gives us a new vision of God's greatness.*

6. Think of a current or recent difficulty in your life. How do these chapters speak to you? How do they help you respond well to your trial?

*Applying - these chapters are meant to help us respond rightly to trials, so that is where we finish.*

7. In what ways do you feel you most need to grow in your vision and knowledge of God? And how do you see that most clearly in Jesus?

*General sharing and food for prayer. Last bit is to get people thinking about the gospel. God spoke most clearly to us in Jesus (John 1:14-18), he showed his justice most clearly in Jesus (Rom 3:25-26) and showed his glory most clearly in Jesus' cross and resurrection (John 17:1-5).*

### **Ideas for prayer**

- Give thanks that God knows what is good for us and is willing to tell us the truth, even if we don't want to hear it.
- Pray we would know that God is God and we are not, so that we can be humble before his justice, wisdom and mercy.
- Pray we would seek to grow in our vision of God and his glory revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
- Pray we would stand firm in our trials and respond in a godly way in light of who God is for us.



## **Job ch. 38-41 - The LORD**

This is the 6th sermon, looking at God's speeches to Job. There is one more sermon - on Job's response and restoration in ch. 42 - but it's in prayer meeting week, so this will be the last study on Job.

In a way these two speeches (38-39 and 40-41) are the climax of the book (with Job's response in 42:1-6), but they are often misunderstood. God continues the theme that Elihu started in 36-37 that God is so much greater than us, but we need to see that God actually addresses the problem of suffering.

- We can see from the sea and from wild, dangerous animals that God's control of the world includes suffering, which seems wild and uncontrollable to us.
- God's description of two mythical monsters, Behemoth and Leviathan, shows there is a source of chaos and evil behind what we see in this world, but again this is under control.
- But these monsters are creatures under God's control, and one day God will defeat them. There is hope of an end to suffering.

It is a complicated passage, as the points mainly come through poetry and imagery from a culture of 4000 years ago - if you have any questions, please ask me!

Judging from conversations after the sermon, most people have never heard before that chapter 41, about Leviathan, is about Satan. Just to explain that more clearly.

- Leviathan in Ancient Near-Eastern myths is a great monster living in the sea, like a serpent or dragon. The word comes from a verb for 'twisting', like a snake curling around its prey. It is a symbol for chaos and evil, like a source for it. It is linked to the sea being a place of chaos and evil (e.g. Genesis 1:2 - before God starts forming the world it is just sea - or Jonah, or the Exodus when God makes a way through the sea). Job uses this same symbol, in ch.41 and e.g. in 3:8: when Job curses the day of his birth, he is asking for people to wake up Leviathan - i.e. may the monster come and destroy it. The Bible uses this symbolism in other poetry, e.g. Isaiah 27:1 (God will destroy Leviathan, the serpent, on the day of the LORD), Psalm 74:13-14 (when God opened the sea in the Exodus, it was like crushing Leviathan, a victory over evil).
- The Bible links Satan and Leviathan in certain ways. In the Garden of Eden there was the serpent who was Satan, who brought evil into the world. This is easy to link with the myth of a huge serpent in the evil sea who is the source of evil.



When the Old Testament was translated into Greek it translated Leviathan with 'dragon' and this probably lies behind the dragon imagery in Revelation for Satan, the serpent. So the writer of Job is probably making the same link, talking about Leviathan in a book where Satan is causing trouble, even though Satan is a spiritual being (as in chs. 1-2).

- Does this mean Leviathan really exists as a physical monster? I don't think so (though he was probably inspired by dinosaurs). Rather, God is speaking to Job and his friends in a way that would have made sense to them, using an image from their culture and worldview to explain that there is a great evil that is linked to Job's suffering and will one day be defeated. Job is a poetic drama rather than a textbook of theology. The long physical description of 34 verses is not meant as signifying a real multi-headed fire-breathing dragon in the sea. Rather it communicates that a) evil is far more terrifying than Job knows and b) God is in control of it (because knowledge signifies control - Leviathan is not a mystery to God, he understand him inside out, and therefore he has Leviathan under control)

But you may have other questions, and coming to terms with God's sovereignty over evil is important but challenging. So please ask.

## Questions

1. Anything that struck you from Sunday's sermon or you have questions about?

*As it's a difficult passage that most people have read but never thought about or heard a sermon on, there's a good chance there are lots of questions. Maybe good to gather some first responses and park any questions beforehand.*

2. Read ch. 38:1-38. Why does God ask Job all these questions? How should Job - and we - feel hearing/reading everything God says?

*All these rhetorical questions have basically the same answer "God, not Job/us". God made the world. We don't. God understands the world. We don't. God knows everything. We don't. God governs creation. We don't. We should feel humbled and in awe of our great God the Creator and Sustainer of everything.*





3. The list of animals in 38:39-39:30 has a certain theme. What should Job realize from it about the world and his life in it? And about God's role?

*All these animals are wild/untamable (mountain goats, wild donkey, wild ox), strange (ostrich) or dangerous (lion, war horse, birds of prey). They are not domesticated, like farm animals or pets. God is saying that the beautiful world he made and controls includes wild, unpredictable, dangerous things. God permits this in his wisdom that we can't know. We need to come to terms with God's sovereign control over evil and suffering, and that we can't control or understand it.*

*Note that God is talking here about a fallen world. He is not saying that God made the world this way originally (i.e. this is what it was like before the Fall in Genesis 3), just that the world as Job sees it now has these features.*

4. How important is having control to you (give examples)? How does it impact the way you respond when life is unpredictable and difficulties come your way?

*Control is a common idol, we want everything to be under control, which gives us security. But the Bible says we live in a world that is partly wild and uncontrollable for us, though not for God. So we will probably respond badly when that happens for us. Sharing about our idol and learning to recognize it, so that we can leave it with God and his sovereign and good control.*

5. God's description of Leviathan, a sea monster that is a metaphor for Satan, teaches us two things about him: 1) Satan is involved in our suffering and 2) God is in control. Split in two or four groups and discuss one of the statements. Why is this important? What are the consequences for our faith if we don't believe this?

*These two statements are both important, to believe and hold together.*

- *Satan is involved: This is important, because it means there is an evil source behind what is happening. If Satan is not involved, it's either you or God who is to blame for suffering - the debate between Job and his friends. And if we think we don't deserve what is happening, it casts a slur on God. But if Satan is involved there is more going on. Also, that hope is there of an end to suffering if God causes it and God doesn't change? So seeing there is actual evil, and there is another party involved, helps a lot.*



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- *God is in control: it is important that God is in control and Satan can only do what God allows him to, as we clearly see in chapters 1-2. But if God is not in control, then is Satan stronger? If God didn't want Job to suffer but Satan could do all this, it seems like it. God is weak or slow. And of course, if Satan is stronger, there is no hope God will win and there will be a perfect new world.*

*This doesn't make it easy - why does God allow Satan to do this? But it is much more comforting for us to believe there is a good God who allows evil for mysterious reasons, than to believe in a good God who is nice but powerless to stop evil. Not that this makes it easy - it is mysterious that God allows evil, and challenging if you're going through it - but ultimately it's the only way to have confident hope.*

6. Satan was in principle defeated at the cross. What is unexpected about this defeat compared to 40:9-14, 41:26-29? How does this make you love Jesus more?

*God is envisioning a battle here, where he symbolically suits up and goes out in judgement (or at least after letting Job have a try, which he is not able to). He will deal with all the proud, including the king of pride (41:34), all those opposed to him.*

*But though Satan will one day be defeated like this (Revelation 20:10), the principal victory over him was at the cross (e.g. Col 2:13-15, Heb 2:14). And the cross is a far cry from the battle here. God the Son became a weak human being. God the Son let himself be attacked by Satan, his creature. God the Son experienced the full force of Satan's wrath. God the Son seemed defeated by Satan. So strange. But by taking our place he rescued us in that, out of love. The fact that God was willing to do that is amazing.*

7. What are you facing in life at the moment that God's defeat of evil really speaks to? How does it encourage you?

*Applying it to our difficulties and uncertainties.*



## Ideas for prayer

- Praise God for making this good and ordered world and how he runs it, knowing that we are mere humans who could never do this.
- Pray we would trust our great God and not blame him when things go wrong, knowing that things are more complicated than we think in ways we cannot understand.
- Give thanks that Jesus has crushed the serpent and slain the dragon, and pray we would love him more knowing how much it cost him.
- Give thanks that the end of suffering is guaranteed and so we can have hope. Pray we would share it with others.