

Sunday April 10th, 2022

Palm Sunday

Job 30:1-15

“Oh, the Indignity of it All!”

Darrell Loomis was a truck driver. Each week he hauled goods from Cincinnati to Atlanta. Joe's Diner was his favourite eating spot on that route, and Darrell always stopped for his meals at Joe's. One summer afternoon, Darrell parked his truck and walked into the diner. Sitting down in his favourite seat-the third counter stool-he ordered his usual-hot meat loaf sandwich, mashed potatoes, and iced tea.

In the distance came a roar and a cloud of dust, followed by the arrival into the parking lot of twelve members of a motorcycle gang, riding Harley-Davidsons with extended forks. These were mighty fine bikes, quite a sight to see. The gang parked their bikes right next to Darrell's rig and set down their kickstands. As the gang stomped into the diner the leader of the gang immediately spotted Darrell eating his meal at the counter.

“Well, who is this little sissy at the counter?” the leader sneered. Darrell merely remained silent and continued eating his lunch. Forming a semicircle around Darrell, the gang members started snapping their fingers in rhythmic cadence. Unperturbed, Darrell just sat and ate his lunch. One of the gang members picked up Darrell's ice tea and poured it over his head. The others watch, and kept snapping their fingers.

With his napkin, Darrell quietly dried his face, but said nothing. Another gang member picked up Darrell's mashed potatoes, and stuck a handful in his ear, then wiping his hand on Darrell's shirt. Darrell remained calm, and didn't respond, and continued to eat his lunch. Although the gang continued to taunt Darrell, he didn't respond to any of it. Darrell finished his lunch, paid his bill, and left the diner without saying a word.

The leader of the gang laughed and said to Joe, “What a wimp! That guy sure ain't much of a man!” Joe looking out the window of the diner said, “No, and he ain't much of a driver either. He just ran over twelve Harleys. (Hot Illustrations for youth Talks p.155) One of the behaviours of humans that has never made any sense to me is how much bullying and mocking there is in our society. “Never kick a man when he down”, seems like good advice, but it still happens.

Last week we saw how Job longed for the past. Mostly he longed for a return to the status he had in being able to serve others and to walk closely with God. In chapter 30, we come racing back to the present, and confront head on one of the most troubling aspects of suffering. As we enter this Holy Week, Job points us to the fact that our hope for the future, and the only way we can endure this present suffering, is to know that in Christ our suffering has meaning.

There is, however, one more painful aspect of Job's suffering, that we must explore, and it is one many of us are well acquainted with. In the midst of Job's hellish existence, there emerges a group of people that have taken notice of him, and not for the better. Sitting in ashes, scaping his boils with a pottery shard, and in sight of everyone coming and going from the city, he becomes a focus of ridicule. Unlike when Job looked at people, and smiled on them with generosity, and good will, he is now looked on with cruel enjoyment of mockers.

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Job's description of those who mock him is as far from flattering as you can imagine. He first words indicate that they are younger than Job is. In a society in which you were expected to show respect and deference to your elders, Job says they used to withdraw from him with a bow. Now these "young men" ignore him and laugh at him. Probably making jokes at his expense. Job, out of his anguish and anger, now describes these young men and it ain't pretty.

Job first describes their families as dogs. More accurately "dogs of the flock". Meaning shepherding dogs. In Job's time, these dogs were not valued much. They were symbols of filth and baseness. Remember when Goliath faces David he says, "Am I a dog...?" Job says, that men who produce sons like this, would never have worked for him. These tormentors are less than human and of no import.

Then Job talks about their usefulness, which in a nut shell is none. They are undernourished, weak, and not up to doing the lowest, most menial job, on Job's estate. If they were on his payroll, these men would be on permanent sick leave. But it is not only their uselessness that Job despises, it is their reputation. They are the kind of people you do not want near your property or your family. They are dangerous, and this has led them to live in the worst of places.

They are men excluded from civilized society. We might describe them as riff-raff. Now you might agree with some commentators who find this description by Job of these men as out of Job's character. It does not mesh with his own description of him caring for the outcasts. Job sounds like a nineteenth century mill owner who saw his workers as only valuable for what they produced. Job actually seems to be saying these men are poor because they deserve to be.

But we must remember verse 8, in which he calls them nameless. Job is not talking about the virtuous poor, but rather men who have become poor because of their wickedness. Its not that they have no name, but rather that they have no reputation of note. These are men who are destitute, not because they are victims of a cruel society but because they never showed honesty or reliability. That is why they are on the bottom of the heap.

How terrible it is that Job should be laughed at by these young men. To be laughed at by thieves and robbers. These verses just once more describe how far Job has fallen. It makes me mindful of Jesus' experience on the cross, where one thief, condemned to die, mocked Jesus. Of all the people to mock Jesus. Job describes in detail how he too is mocked, and his dignity is assaulted. In a nutshell Job is now a laughing stock of his community.

The worse of the worse of Job's society, now kick Job when he is down. How did this happen. Job says God "loosed his cord". It may refer to a tent being disassembled, or maybe a bow string being unstrung. God has, in Job's opinion, taken his strength. The mockery of the "rabble" is one more stripping away of whatever dignity Job had left. Job calls these degradations, "terrors". Bildad had said that the wicked face such terrors, and Job does not disagree.

This is the way Job thought the "terrors" worked, but now, the whole of the created order seems out of wack. Death has invaded the land of the living, stealing hope. Job sees that what is happening to him is of a supernatural origin. That this is God's judgment. But for us, Job's suffering begins to make sense when we see it through the lens of Christ's suffering on the cross.

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The suffering we feel, are like aftershocks from what Christ experienced. Job has also come to the realization that his suffering has to complete its purpose in him. So, in verse 16 Job turns from reflecting on his mockers, and once again focusing on God's hand in his suffering. It is in this passage that we catch a sliver of the timing of this experience. We do not know how long Job suffered, but Job indicates that this ordeal seems like an eternity.

His nights are spent in pain and agonizing thoughts. Night time is the absolute worse for people suffering. When I was in hospital, I hated the night. My hallucinations haunted me, the noises of the hospital disturbed me, and I was alone with my thoughts. I longed for the dawn, as a reprieve. I actually slept better during the daylight hours than at night. Job is really alone in his wrestling with God.

Job is praying as he never prayed before, and yet God remains silent. Job is so stressed that he sees God as cruel. Job concludes that God's silence means that God intends to kill him, which is what Job has longed for. Job is again foreshadowing Jesus, in that before his cries for deliverance could be answered, his suffering had to run its course. Job's, and also our suffering, ends when its purpose is complete. It is never that God does not hear us, or care, but there is a bigger plan at work.

This is our experience when someone we love seems to linger long after we think they should die and go to God. Why, we wonder? What is the purpose of this drawn-out experience? Paul said that "all things work for good, for those called according to God's purpose". But we often find it hard to see that good outcome, even though we long for one.

Job accuses God of treating him more poorly than Job treated other people. When someone was in deep distress, Job took pity on them, and even offered whatever help he could. One would assume that is the godly thing to do, and yet when Job is in this terrible distress, where is his comfort and relief? God doesn't seem to weep for him. In fact, God seems intent to heap trial upon trial on Job's head.

It now seems like a broken record to us the litany of Job recounting his suffering. How he is darkened by grief and day by day racked with pain and facing the mockery of others. Job starts to see how he has become a "one trick pony". He describes himself as a jackal or ostrich, (could also be the owl) crying out of loneliness. Inwardly he is fevered and outwardly he is decaying. He is, as I said before, experiencing a "living death".

However, even if Job does not know the reasons behind his suffering, we do. Job suffers because there are some other greater factors in play. Was the Satan, right? Would Job curse God, after suffering as much as he has? This is the justification for a "blameless" man suffering through unanswered prayer. This is clearly a foreshadow another man, who was sinless, who suffered unfairly.

Beaten unmercifully, mocked relentlessly, excluded from society and abandoned by his closest friends, and finally executed on a cursed cross, like the guilty criminals on each side of him. All for a greater purpose. The greatest purpose of all. Can we who believe we are suffering unjustly, live with a faith strong enough to take assurance that greater plans are at work.

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What did the Apostle Paul say about meaning in suffering? From perhaps one of my favourite passages in Romans 8, we find these words.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 8:35-39)

Job points to the experience of Jesus by reminding us that there is a divine necessity in suffering. There is something deeply necessary to justify the suffering and unanswered prayer of a righteous person. Centuries later these same realities will emerge in the experience of the most unjust action in history. A time when a man without sin was falsely accused, unfairly condemned, unjustly stripped of his dignity, excluded from society, and submitted to a disgraceful accursed death on a cross.

Hebrews 5:7 tells us that Jesus’ passion experience, his “loud cries and tears” which go unanswered was to complete its course for the greatest good for all of us. And some day, not yet, but some day we will see the fulfillment of his suffering and how it wrought good for us and the whole world. This is a very hard concept for us to grasp, because we wish it wasn’t so.

Stephen Hawking is an astrophysicist at Cambridge University and perhaps the most intelligent man on earth. He has advanced the general theory of relativity farther than any person since Albert Einstein. Unfortunately, Hawking is afflicted with ALS Syndrome (Lou Gehrig's disease). It will eventually take his life. He has been confined to a wheelchair for years, where he can do little more than sit and think.

Hawking has lost the ability even to speak, and now he communicates by means of a computer that is operated from the tiniest movement of his fingertips. Quoting from an Omni magazine article: "He is too weak to write, feed himself, comb his hair, fix his clothes--all this must be done for him. Yet this most dependent of all men has escaped invalid status. His personality shines through the messy details of his existence."

Hawking said that before he became ill, he had very little interest in life. He called it a "pointless existence" resulting from sheer boredom. He drank too much and did very little work. Then he learned he had ALS Syndrome and was not expected to live more than two years. The ultimate effect of that diagnosis, beyond its initial shock, was extremely positive. He claimed to have been happier after he was afflicted than before. How can that be understood? Hawking provided the answer.

"When one's expectations are reduced to zero," he said, "one really appreciates everything that one does have." Stated another way: contentment in life is determined in part by what a person anticipates from it. To a man like Hawking who thought he would soon die quickly, everything takes on meaning--a sunrise or a walk in a park or the laughter of children. Suddenly, each small pleasure becomes precious.

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By contrast, those who believe life owes them a free ride are often discontent with its finest gifts. James Dobson, [New Man](#), October, 1994, p. 36.

The great temptation of suffering is to let your pain become the whole world and to start believing that all that ever was, is and will be, is your private hell. God's frontal assault on Job's egotism really liberates him from the notion that his suffering is the whole world. It tells him that there is a great big world out there, a world that is infinitely greater than his suffering. Taken from [Waiting: Finding Hope When God Seems Silent](#) by Ben Patterson Copyright (c) 1989 by Ben Patterson. Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com

John Wesley's covenant prayer demonstrates a level of sacrifice and devotion to Jesus that has been rarely matched. How many of us have asked for suffering, in order to experience the humility and the poverty of spirit that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount? This prayer forces us to ask how committed we are to God's will in our lives. Are we willing to suffer for Christ? Are we willing to submit other desires, goals, achievements to the larger purpose of Christ transforming us?

I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.