

Why Do Good People Suffer?

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[0 : 0 0] heard the joke about the shortest guy in the Bible build that the shoe height that's bad maybe we should pray let's pray Heavenly Father we do thank you for your word we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it and so far we pray that you would help us to understand what you were saying in your word through the book of Job that we might live in light of it we pray this in Jesus name Amen well people suffer in all sorts of ways don't they for our children cleaning up their room is apparently a cause of great suffering in fact one day we told them that they couldn't watch TV until they had cleaned up their rooms to which one of them replied you're so unfair I'm going to get you needless to say they suffered more now we can understand deserved suffering can't we yeah what about suffering that seems so undeserved an article I was reading last year actually it says this it's got a picture of some people who face some suffering it says why do bad things happen to the good well as we return to Job tonight it's a question that Job and his three so-called friends wrestle with in their speeches though I need to warn you that we won't see the full answer until the end of the series but Job's friends do give an answer in their speeches which is what we're looking at tonight so what I want to do tonight is to help you get it get to know the book of Job a little bit and see what answer the friends give in their speeches to Job's suffering then we'll consider another reason why people suffer and more importantly we'll consider how we are to respond when we are suffering the other thing I need to say by way of introduction is that the friends speeches actually go on for a fair while some 23 chapters and they form three cycles so let me show you an overview of the cycles on the first slide there cycle one you've got Eliphaz speaks Job responds Bildad speaks Job responds Zophar speaks Job responds and then that pattern is repeated again in cycle two and then again in cycle three you see that pattern there I notice in the third cycle though Zophar's speech is left out and while there's disagreement as to why it is left out it looks to me as though it's replaced by chapter 28 which is a chapter on wisdom given by the narrator the editor but you can at least see the pattern up to chapter 27 now obviously we cannot cover all those chapters so what I want to do is show you an overview of just the first cycle there on the screen so you get an idea of what the friends are saying and an idea of how Job responds cycles two and three largely repeat what has already been said in the first cycle and so with that overview in mind you can always go and read the chapters later yourself but first let's pick it up where the story we left it last week with Job sitting in a pile of ashes so if you've got your Bibles there have a look at chapter 2 verse 11 chapter 2 verse 11 when Job's three friends Eliphaz the Temanite

Bildad the Shuite and Zophar the Namathite heard about all the troubles that had come upon him they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with Job and comfort him when they saw him from a distance they could hardly recognize him they began to weep aloud and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads which is a sign of mourning then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights no one said a word to him because they saw how great his suffering was we again reminded of what Job went through and so his friends set out to sympathize and comfort him and they start by mourning with Job sitting with him in dust and ashes without saying anything and this is actually the most comforting thing the friends do others of course try and comfort people they make the basic mistake of saying something too quickly especially us blokes we just want to fix situations so we just ram in there and try and fix the problem but often the best thing to do with someone who's suffering is just to be with them and to listen to them when they're ready to speak which Job finally does in chapter 3 after seven days and seven nights and when he does speak he grieves or laments over his situation and wishes he was never born so chapter 3 verse 1 after this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth he said may the day of my birth perish and the night that was said a boy is conceived may that day turn to darkness may God above not care about it may no light shine on it and on it goes in fact he goes on like that wishing he was never born until about verse 10 and then Job laments over the day he was born and wishes that he would die at birth verses 11 to 16 talk about that and then from about verses 20 to 26 he asks why he cannot die now so he starts off by saying wish I never was born

I wish I died at birth and I wish I could die now such is his suffering one of the most well known deaths of the last century was that of Princess Diana I actually remember where I was when I heard about it it's probably showing my age but her funeral pretty much stopped the world it was the most watched television event in history to that date about 2.5 billion people with millions of mourners both at Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace one report said that the palaces were covered with an estimated 54 million dollars worth of flowers and pinned to one bunch of flowers was a card with just one word that said why why and this is the underlying question to most suffering isn't it why it's the underlying question that Job's friends actually now try to answer why is Job suffering after all he is blameless which doesn't mean he is perfect but that he is godly so why is this godly man suffering like this well it's Eliphaz who speaks first so let's see what answer he gives which brings us to point one this is going to be our longest point as we kind of work through cycles as quickly as we can so have a look at chapter 4 verse 1 you have to do a bit of Bible flicking tonight so chapter 4 verse 1 then Eliphaz the Temanite replied if someone ventures a word with you will you be impatient but who can keep from speaking think how you instructed many how you have strengthened feeble hands your words have supported those who stumbled and have strengthened faltering knees but now trouble comes to you and you are discouraged it strikes you and you are dismayed should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope now Eliphaz's tone is not all that helpful here he asks rather insincerely if he can speak and then doesn't wait for an answer just speaks and he even has a go at Job he says haven't you Job instructed others have you not strengthened faltering knees but when trouble comes upon you you cannot even instruct yourself what's wrong with you Job he's not all that sympathetic is Eliphaz and in verse 6 he suggests that

Job should trust in his piety his godliness why well verse 7 he says consider now who being innocent has ever perished where were the upright ever destroyed as I have observed those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it and so he goes here Eliphaz says that you sow what you reap sorry you reap what you sow rather in other words the good prosper the bad suffer it's kind of like that kid's Santa Claus song do you know that one you better watch out you better not I'm not going to sing it you better watch out you better not cry Santa's going to find out who's not I don't even know it but but Santa's going to find out who's naughty or nice give the presents to the nice kids and the bad kids miss out that's the general gist and that's basically what Eliphaz is saying here the naughty suffer the nice don't and since Job has been pretty nice or blameless since he sowed a good life then he shouldn't have to suffer for too long so Eliphaz says just trust in your blameless life he says and know that you won't suffer too long but Eliphaz is implying at the same time that because Job is suffering then he must have deserved it in some way he must have sinned in some way in fact

[9 : 29] Eliphaz says only a fool says that he has not sinned because everyone sins and so have a look at what he says in chapter 4 verse 17 chapter 4 verse 17 he says can a mortal be righteous more righteous than God can even a strong man be more pure than his maker if God places no trust in his servants if he charges even his angels with error then how much more those who live in houses of clay that's humans whose foundations are in the dust who are crushed more readily than a moth you see if God even charges his servants and angels with error with sin then how much more so humans who are weak says Eliphaz and there is truth in this isn't there there is no one who is perfect like God and so Eliphaz says to Job that he should just suck it up and treat his suffering as discipline from God for some sort of sin he's committed and after he's endured it well God will restore his fortunes then so come across to chapter 5 verse 17 towards the bottom right hand corner of your pages there

Eliphaz continues he says blessed is the one whom God corrects so do not despise the discipline of the almighty Job for he wounds but he also binds up he injures but his hands also heal he says the problem of course with Eliphaz's theory is that it doesn't explain why Job who is reasonably good is suffering so much if Job is basically good then why is he suffering so bad well after that rather unhelpful speech by Eliphaz Job responds in chapter 6 by saying that his suffering is actually pretty severe guys even though Eliphaz has made light of it and then Job has a go of his so-called friends so pick it up at chapter 6 verse 14 chapter 6 verse 14 he says anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the almighty but my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams as a stream that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow but that stop flowing in the dry season and in the heat vanish from their channels see what Job is saying when times are good they are supportive of Job but when times are bad their support dries up and for

Job to take Eliphaz's advice of enduring God's discipline for his sin means that Job must admit that he has sinned that he does deserve this suffering now Job knows he's not perfect he'll say as much later on but he also knows he's not sinned in a way to deserve this severe suffering and so now he defends himself in verse 24 so have a look at chapter 6 verse 24 top of page 505 he says to his friends teach me and I'll be quiet show me where I have been wrong how painful are honest words but what do your arguments prove do you mean to correct what I say and treat my desperate words as wind you would even cast lots for the fatherless like Job and barter away your friend but now be so kind as to look at me would I lie to your face relent do not be unjust reconsider for my integrity is at stake is there any wickedness on my lips can my mouth not discern malice he says he not only defends himself to his friends but he also then defends himself to

God so come across to chapter 7 verse 19 bottom right hand corner of the page there verse 19 he says to God will you never look away from me or let me alone even for an instant if I have sinned what have I done to you you who see everything we do why have you made me your target have I become a burden to you why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins for I will soon lie down in the dust you will search for me but I will be no more Job says to God show me what sin I've done to deserve such suffering and even if I have sinned in some small way why have you not forgiven me either way I certainly don't deserve this severe suffering and at this point Bildad can't hold it in any longer and so he blurts out in chapter 3 his little speech so have a look at chapter 8 over the page chapter 8 Bildad says how long will you say such things

Job your words are a blustering wind does God pervert justice does the almighty pervert what is right when your children sinned against him he gave them over to the penalty of their sin he says you see Bildad makes the same point doesn't he the only slight difference is that instead of using the idea of discipline that Eliphaz uses Bildad uses the idea of God's justice did you see verse 3 Bildad says does God pervert justice the answer is of course not and so Job must deserve his suffering so for example in verse 4 Bildad says your children sinned now they're dead they got what they deserved I'm not sure Bildad has understood the idea of comfort at this point but he's saying the same thing as Eliphaz isn't he we reap what we sow and so Job what should you do well verse 5 but if you Job will seek God earnestly and plead with the

[15 : 23] Almighty if you are pure and upright even now self on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state your beginnings will even seem humble so prosperous will your future be you see what he's saying Job just repent of your sin that you've obviously committed and seek God and then he will restore your fortunes after all God is a God of justice now again there is truth in this isn't there God is a God of justice and Job knows this the problem is though it does not fit with Job's present experience because he knows he has done nothing to deserve this suffering so how can he establish his innocence before God that's what he wants to know now that's the other problem of course he knows he can do that so there's two problems at this point he knows he hasn't sinned to deserve it and secondly how can he show that to

God how can he defend himself to God and so in chapter 9 Job responds have a look at chapter 9 verse 1 2 he says indeed I know this to be true that God is a God of justice but how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God though they wish to dispute with him they could not answer him one time out of a thousand his wisdom is profound his power vast who has resisted him and come out unscathed see what Job saying Job knows God is just but doesn't know how he can how can anyone stand before him in fact Job is not even sure he would get a decent hearing have a look at what he says in verse number 14 of chapter 9 so page 507 verse 14 how can I dispute with God how can I find words to argue with him though I were innocent I could not answer him I could only plead with my judge for mercy even if

I summoned him and he responded I do not believe he would give me a hearing he would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason you see based on Job's recent experience he's not sure that God would even give him a hearing because God has already multiplied his wounds for no reason well no reason that Job knows of at least and so Job says he needs a mediator to stand before him and make his case so come across to verse 32 of chapter 9 right hand side of the page he says God is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him that we might confront each other in court if only there was someone to mediate between us someone to bring us together someone to remove God's rod from me so that his terror would then I would speak up without fear of him but as it now stands with me

I cannot and so he continues in chapter 10 by saying I loathe my very life therefore I will give free reign to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul I say to God do not declare me guilty but tell me what charges you have against me does it please you to oppress me to spurn the work of your hands while you smile on the plans of the wicked see Job wants to defend himself against God to ask God what sin he has committed and why he suffers while the wicked prosper but he knows God would be too overwhelming he knows he needs a mediator to stand for him to remove the fear so that he can speak directly with God but he will no one rebuke you when you mock you say to

God my beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight oh how I wish that God would speak that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom for true wisdom has two sides know this Job God has even forgotten some of your sins now again instead of comforting Job Zophar actually goes on the attack doesn't he he rebukes Job for maintaining his innocence in fact in verse 6 Zophar implies that Job has actually gotten off lightly you know that God has even forgotten some of his sins so count yourself lucky Job lucky if I was Job I'd jump up and bop you on the nose at this point and then from verses 7 to 9 Zophar goes on to say that God is all wise and knowing and so God is wise enough to know who deserves to suffer and who doesn't let's have a look at verse 10 and 11 top of the next page 509 verse 10 if he comes along and confines you in prison and

[20 : 51] God convenes a court who can oppose him surely he recognizes deceivers and when he sees evil does he not take note you see Zophar is saying that God is wise enough to know who's naughty and nice and so Job must have been naughty therefore repent and then God will bless you so have a look at verse 13 yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him if you Job put away the sin that is definitely in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent then free of fault you will lift up your face you will stand firm and without fear you will surely forget your trouble recalling it only as waters gone by you see in the end Zophar though they say it with their own theme Eliphaz uses the theme of discipline and says that God is disciplining

Job for some sin Bildad uses the theme of justice and says that God is justly punishing Job for some sin and Zophar uses the theme of wisdom and says God is wise enough to know who's naughty and nice and so you Job you must have been naughty you deserve it I once knew a family where the mother told their children this all the time actually if they got a cold or got sick or hurt themselves she said well you must have done something wrong to deserve that it's not a parenting technique I'd recommend but that's what the friends are saying here you reap what you sow now again there is truth in this you know if you speed down Doncaster road and get caught then you will suffer a fine if my kids are rude they suffer the consequences we do sometimes suffer as a direct result of our sin in fact there are examples of this in the Bible it's just that we also suffer when we don't sin and that's what the friends theory doesn't take into account of and so

Job has had enough of his so-called friends and look at chapter 12 the last response of his we'll look at he says doubtless you are the only people who matter and wisdom will die with you but I have a mind as well you know I am not inferior to you who does not know all these things but I have become a laughing stock to my friends though I called on God and he answered a mere laughing stock though righteous and blameless those who are at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping the tents of the marauders are undisturbed and those who provoke God are secure those God has in his hand I love the sarcasm of verse two there Job says doubtless you are the people the wise ones and when you die all wisdom will die with you but of heard and understood it what you know

I also know I am not inferior to you but I desire to speak to the almighty and to argue my case with God you however smear me with lies you are worthless physicians all of you if only you would be altogether silent for that for you that would be wisdom he says Job again says he knows what they know that the wicked are the ones who ought to suffer but he is instead you see their wisdom says everyone reaps what they sow they get what they deserve but their wisdom doesn't account for Job's situation he says your wisdom does not work for me because I haven't done anything to deserve this and so Job says to his friends in verse five if you really want to be wise friends then shut up because for you that is true wisdom such is their so called comfort and in verse three Job continues to say he wants to argue his case before God he wants to ask God why he a good an upright person is suffering like this but he doesn't hold out much hope chapter 14 verse 7 he says at least there is hope for a tree if it is cut down it will sprout again and its new shoots will not fail its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant but a man dies and is laid low he breathes his last and there is no more see job says here that he has less hope than a tree for at least a tree has some sort of resurrection it will sprout again but not for him though he wishes for it and wonders if there might be so verse 13 he says if only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me until your anger has passed if only you would set me all the days of my hard service

I will wait for my renewal to come you will call and I will answer you you will long for the creature your hands have made surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin my fences will be sealed up in a bag you will cover over my sin but as a mountain erodes and crumbles and as a rock is see what Job is doing here he's kind of toing and froing waxing and waning he thinks maybe there might be hope after the grave to face God and argue my case but I don't think so it's an uncertain hope at best well as we'll see next week Job does get an answer of some sort from God but for now we need to reconsider the question we started with why do reasonably good people suffer and the answer all the friends gave was people are not good and they all suffer because they deserve it now as

[27 : 41] I said there is some truth in this there is no imperfect and sometimes we do suffer because we deserve it and so it is worth examining ourselves when we are suffering and seeing if there is some sin that we are persisting in and need to repent of because maybe just maybe our suffering is a direct result of our sin but the problem is often our suffering is not the direct result of sin sometimes as in Job's case it is undeserved so why do some people suffer when they don't deserve it and the basic answer is the one I think you already know it's because our world is stained by sin and under judgment we know this from places like Genesis 3 where God shuts Adam and Eve out of his presence and curses the ground because of Adam's sin and so their bodies decay and get sick work is hard disasters happen and we know it from places like Romans 1 where people want to live a life without God and so God goes sure I'll give you what you want a life without me but suffer because we live in a sinful world under

God's judgment on the 25th of July 1993 a church in Cape Town South Africa had its Sunday evening service disrupted by a number of armed men who fired indiscriminately upon the congregation you may have heard the story they also threw hand grenades attached to tins of nails so when the grenades exploded the nails went everywhere as a result 11 people died and 55 were injured some were horribly maimed for life now the attackers had no issue with the church or anyone else in it it was simply a random act of violence designed to increase the level of unrest in the country at the time why did those people in that church suffer like that because they like us are living in a fallen world of sinful people whom God has given over to their sinful desires and if we realise this then rather being amazed at the fact that suffering like this happens we should be amazed that suffering like this doesn't happen more often you see when we understand that this world is so messed up by sin then it shouldn't surprise us that people suffer we should mourn it should make us grieve but it shouldn't surprise us that people suffer even when they don't deserve it of course we often underestimate the seriousness of sin and are surprised when suffering comes our way but because we live in a fallen world under

God's judgment then people including us will suffer even when we don't deserve it of course the next question is that why do I suffer when that person over there doesn't why did God choose that church in South Africa to be attacked and not another one why did the tornado well we need to wait to see what God says in the next couple of weeks but for now it's worth considering how we might live in the face of undeserved suffering which brings us to the final point for those who are not Christians then suffering ought to warn you that God's judgment is real it ought to remind you that things in life are not as they meant to be but so you won't face his final judgment so for example on the next slide Luke chapter 11 Jesus says this there were some present at the time who told him about Galileans whose blood mingled with their sacrifices and

Jesus answered them do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way no I tell you but unless you repent you will you see Jesus' point here he speaks about two different types of suffering one caused by human sin in this case pilots and the other caused by a natural disaster a tower falling on them and in both cases those who suffer didn't deserve it any more than the next person but the point Jesus makes from their suffering is make sure you repent otherwise you too will perish you see suffering in the world is meant to turn us back to God I know a lady called Florence she used to be a nurse in a hospital and occasionally she'd have conversation with patients where they would say if there was a

God then why does he let me suffer like this to which Florence would reply rather cheekily maybe he's trying to get your attention it's not a bad answer really to give a non-Christian who asks why there is suffering in the world it's to remind us that the world is fallen and under judgment and to point us back to God and if you're not a Christian here tonight then when you see suffering remember that it's a result of living in a fallen world that is under God's judgment and that it's meant to turn you back to God to find hope for the future otherwise says Jesus you too will perish of course for us who are Christians who have turned to Jesus then we need to do what Job did he didn't walk away from God did he but he sought to speak to God to wrestle with God even cry out to God but we had to do so with two important differences to Job first we had to do so remembering that we have a more certain hope than Job had for the next life remember Job waxed and waned in this hope he said that he has less hope than because of

[33 : 45] Jesus and the forgiveness his death brings then we have a certain hope of heaven don't we where we will see God face to face and there will be no more pain no more suffering no more tears in fact our suffering ought to make us groan and long for that heavenly hope as Paul points out in Romans 8 we'll consider more of that in a couple weeks time but in the meantime we're to secondly come to God remembering that unlike Job we not only have a certain hope but we also have a mediator who helps us through our suffering do you remember Job he wanted a mediator who could approach God for him so that he could speak to God without fear well in Jesus we have one such that we can approach God without fear and even find help in our time of need and it's here I want us to turn to our second reading or first reading Hebrews chapter 4 and we'll finish here so turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 4 verse 14 if you're there quickly can you yell out a page number for us 1207 just everyone turn there and make sure

Marty's right that was a joke the writer of the Hebrews is going at great lengths to show that Jesus is our high priest our mediator and he says in verse 14 therefore since we have a great high priest who has ascended into the heavens Jesus the son of God let us hold firmly to the faith we profess for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet did not sin let us therefore approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need now although this suffering is talking about temptation in particular it's true of all suffering isn't it Jesus experienced more suffering than we ever will and so he can empathise he understands he can sympathise with us with what it's like you see we do have a mediator who gets it and that ought to encourage us to come to

God in prayer and to wrestle with God as Joe wanted to do and more importantly to find help to keep going you see if you're going through a tough time how much nicer is talking to someone who gets it when our first child Tim was born he used to cry quite a bit because he suffered from reflux which is when the food comes back up and burns your throat and we had some other friends who had a girl Emily at the same time now the father didn't hear his daughter Emily cry for the first three months of her life didn't hear a cry true story and so he suggested to us when we were explaining how much Tim was crying that maybe there's either something wrong with Tim or something wrong with our parenting we stopped visiting them for a while after that you see coming to people who get it who can sympathize with you makes a difference doesn't it Job had no mediator and his friends were unsympathetic and useless but we have

Jesus who not only gives us a more certain hope of the future but also understands and bids us come approach God with confidence and find grace to help in our time of need well let me wrap up this newspaper article said why do bad things happen to good people interestingly the article offers no answer to that question at all it simply just told us what happened and atheists say there is no answer it's just the way it is but we actually have better answers than that don't we for we know that suffering came into the world because of sin we know that it meant it's meant to point people back to God and we also know that we have a God who knows suffering himself and offers us a real hope where there will be no more suffering now that's a better answer than the atheist who says there is no hope now what's more we have a real mediator and friend one who can really sympathise with us and encourages us to come to the throne of grace and to find help in our time of need so why don't we do that now let's pray heavenly father we do thank you for this book of joe we thank you that it addresses real issues and doesn't shrink from them and father we do pray for those amongst us who are suffering father we know that it is a result of living in a fallen world and while we can understand that at one level it is still extremely hard and so father we thank you so much for Jesus who offers us a more certain hope where there will be no more suffering and who is our sympathetic mediator and through whom we can come to you now and pray for help in our times of need father help us we pray that we may continue through our times of suffering and so persevere as Christians to the very end we ask it in Jesus name amen we're going to sing our next song oh great we're going to see now have us see now as as as as aside