

HOPE HAS COME

Series: When It Hurts
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Job 1
Suffering, Hope
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One day walking around a street and I just felt the need to look at people's faces. In a busy city like Nairobi where I was then and depending on which part of the city you are in, there is pressure to look like you are alright. People dress really well, wear a smile and for most people, you cannot be able to tell if they are okay or not.

And it is not every day we have a bad day, but then how many of those people had just lost someone they loved? How many people were struggling with addictions? How many of them were stuck in abusive relationships? How many of them had just lost significant investments? How many were coming from families that had fallen apart or were in the process of falling apart? How many of them had not had a meal in days or were about to be evicted from their places of residence or business?

You see sometimes walking around our city it is easy to just see a sea of faces. But all those faces are not just names. They are people with names and lives. People with a past and a future. People facing very different seasons of life. Certainly, some facing a lot of pain and suffering. And all of us have known difficult times in our lives. We have had some very painful seasons. Some longer than others, some more painful than others. Some longer than others.

We all know how that feels like. Times of suffering. And quite frankly it's like its never just one thing. One thing goes down and everything else follows. You know, when it rains it pours. Those are dark times that make us wonder if God actually cares at all. For some people, it is just seasonal. For others, it seems to be a long season with no end.

Why do we suffer? Where is God when we suffer? Broken hopes and dreams, pain in our bodies loss of loved ones or relationships we held dear. We all know the sting of pain and suffering. Some are sitting here today and may be going through a hard season or know someone who is or remember when we last did.

As a community faith let's explore suffering in our new series. When it hurts. Will God meet us in our pain? Is God mad at us when we suffer? Does our pain count? Is there something to be done in times of pain?

Let's pray

The Bible has a very interesting story of a man for whom it didn't just rain, It poured and poured heavily. And it is a difficult story. Such intense suffering for a man who had everything and lost it all overnight. The man was called Job.

Now people have argued whether the story is one of someone who actually lived or just a parable. And it is hard to know. Whichever side of that argument we chose, we can only speculate. It is possible that job actually lived and all these happened as written. It is possible that he lived but because the story is set so many years even before the formation of the Nation of Israel, it is possible that some details of his life became allegorical. It is possible that his story is entirely a parable.

But none of this takes away the truths of in this story. Much like we have no problem with Jesus teaching using parables and we know that the truths of the Kingdom are not lost just because they are stories.

Job's story is interestingly the story of humanity's struggle with the question of suffering. So he has everything in life, he is an upright man, a righteous man, committed to God. Then he faces very hard times of suffering. So overnight he loses his family, his wealth, his status in society, and even his health.

He has dialogues with his friends which I want us to look at which I want us to look at. Because these dialogues portray some of the attitudes that were held in that time about suffering. Surprisingly, we still hold those attitudes to this day. I mean for an advanced society we do not seem to learn because we still think like people did thousands of years ago.

Let's see what happens in the story of you would read with me

Job 1

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, 3 and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yokes of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Okay, so this is a very wealthy person. In those days wealth was measured by how much livestock you had, and how big your family was. So he had so much livestock. 500 oxen 500 donkeys, 3000 camels, 7000 sheep, and many servants. Servants were most probably counted as wealth. Clearly a very rich man.

Job had a perfect family. 7 sons and 3 daughters. For Jews, for whom this story is written in the Old Testament, 7 was an important number as it was the number of perfection. So to have 7 sons were to have a perfect family.

Notice the numbers. If you said to a Kenyan, Oh I am from the 254 a Kenyan knows exactly what you are saying. If you told an American that you were at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave they immediately know what you are saying.

Job was the ideal man of his time. Respected in his society, wealthy, with a perfect family and a man who had reverence for God. He was very intentional about his and his family relationship with God and so he kept offering sacrifices in a very unassuming manner. He did not wait to be sure that his sons had done something wrong to make offerings for them, he went ahead and did anyway, he just had to be right with God.

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."

Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

So here is an interesting scene set in heaven. What I want us to pick from that is that the person telling us the story of Job wants us to see that even God found Job an upright person.

So it was not just a show he put up for men and women to see but he was actually an upright person and God found him so too. He was making a point that if there would have been a person God would have said to people of that time, “you need to follow his example”, it would have been Job.

But things take a very interesting turn

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. 10 “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

So Job lost all his wealth overnight. All at once

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:

Naked I came from my mother's womb,

and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;

may the name of the Lord be praised.”

Then because when it rains it pours, as he stood there thinking about how much he has lost, he is informed that he has lost his entire family and all he could do is stand there helpless.

Remember the description of this man that we have been given at the beginning. Wealthy, perfect family and righteous. And all in one sweep, everything was lost.

You see, thousands of years later we still have not learned that we cannot put our hope in how much money we have in the bank. Thousands of years later, we have not yet learned that how many pieces of land you own cannot be where you put your hope. Because in the face of real crisis

Thousands of years later, we still have not learned that our ideas of perfect families offer us no real hope. That at one moment you can be standing in one place and in the next moment on the same place you stand you can be in a totally different place altogether.

I grew up in what I thought was a perfect family. Yes, I was available to people who came from broken families but I did not realize that I really did not understand what that meant. So one night I went to bed a young man raised by 2 great parents and in the middle of the night my mom called and said she was leaving home because things had gotten terrible with my dad. I was still in the same bed that I had slept in a few hours before that call but in that moment my whole life had changed. It affects your present and even what you thought

you knew about your past. Did I really come from a perfect family? Do I even know how families should work? In one moment your reality can just be different.

And that in the face of crisis, even those who love us most might be unable to do anything about it.

I guess one of the things the person telling the story of Job wants us to know is that even the best of us suffer. If you think that those with more money than you do not suffer like you do, well they do. If you think those with better families do not suffer like you do, well they do. If you think the person most passionate about God does not suffer, well they do.

And I think this is where the brand of the Gospel that lies to people fails. When people preach that if only someone had enough faith they would not fall sick, when someone teaches that if only you gave more money to the church you would be wealthy, well they lie. Job is an example that even the best of us go through very hard times.

The reality of our life in this age is that suffering is part of life. We will overcome some because God our King has come in Jesus. So we are not doomed. We have seen God come through for us and people around us in times of suffering. We have seen people get healed and situations change at the mention of the name of Jesus or through acts of compassion and justice. Some change immediately some over time. But there will be things that will have bear with through our journey because again, we are waiting for the return of the Jesus our King, to finally set everything right. So until then, we wait. We live in the tension.

Back to the story of Job. So after losing everything Job was still unbroken. Then his body was attacked and he fell so ill but not dying. Lost his wealth, lost his family and now lost his health. Because we all have hard seasons but some are longer and some are harder than others.

So then we encounter Job's wife and 3 friends who say very interesting things about Job's suffering. Bringing out the questions we all struggle with when we suffer.

(Job 2:9) His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"

His wife represents a very common view of many people who have rejected God. Isn't it common to hear people say that there must be no God because if there was one, he would not have let there be that much suffering in the world?

But you see those who argue God doesn't exist because he would not let there be such suffering often are arguing that they care for people more than God actually does.

Often, it is not those suffering that give up on God because of suffering but those who are not in that place at the moment. They point to other countries and places with so much suffering. They talk of hunger in part of Africa and war in parts of the Middle East. Just like Job's story. Job is keeping his faith in God but the wife who is not sick is losing faith.

So then they decide that life is random and things just happen because of evolution and how society will naturally set itself up. But if this is the case, why then even bother with justice?

Every human being is born with an innate sense of good and bad, right and wrong. Where do you think that comes from in every human being? Picture this, if you see something crooked, you will call it crooked because you know what straight looks like. You have certain standards of good and bad even if you do not believe in God. Whether you keep them is a different question. If everything is random then they should not call anything unjust or painful or suffering it just is what it is. But even those who reject God because of suffering and therefore say things are random still cannot dispense with the idea of a sense of good and bad settled deep within us, from God.

Or in the view of Job's wife at a time where it was not popular to be an atheist. It is better to believe that God might be out there but he is too busy for us, uninvolved with his creation.

And some of us here are like that. You grew up in a Christian family so you were taught about God and you find it hard to jump over to atheism but then you hold the idea that he is uninvolved in the world to at least in your life.

One of the common thing I have heard people say is, "Please pray for me because I do not think God hears me anymore"

But these same people would not want God who interferes with everything in our lives including human choices. Because that becomes God who you cannot trust. How would he be inviting us to a relationship if he makes all choices and controls everything? God is in control, but he is not a controlling God. And he does intervene and interact with his children. So hold on, God has not abandoned you.

One of his friends says to Job ch 4:7-9

“Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?

Where were the upright ever destroyed?

As I have observed, those who plow evil

and those who sow trouble reap it.

At the breath of God they perish;

at the blast of his anger, they are no more.

In other words, Job’s misfortunes must certainly be Job’s fault. You must have done something to deserve what you are getting. This is the idea of karma. That you reap what you sow. And because they knew that he, Job, was blameless he tells him that surely no man is more blameless than God so there had to be something he found against you worth punishing you for.

And certainly, there is some truth to the idea that we reap what we sow. You do not plant mangoes and harvest anything else. Trust me, if you did punch a wall you will hurt. If you fail to invest in your relationship with your spouse and kids, you will lose them. If you fail to file your tax returns on time you will be in trouble with the government, ask me about it, It's not fun.

But is this everything? What did the children in war zones of the world do to deserve what they are going through? What did a little child fighting cancer do to deserve that? Surely is God in the business of finding fault in us to make us pay for them?

In our news cycles, there is the story of a girl who was probably having an affair with a high profile person in one of the counties. So she certainly made a few wrong choices. But did it deserve the brutal murder she was met with? Does her family deserve the agony they are undergoing? What did the child that was soon to be born have to do with any of it?

See that is not the Kind of God Jesus reveals. In Jesus, I see God who pursues humanity in love. Because he so loved the world. So this is not a sufficient reason for suffering in our lives.

And if people are to get what they deserve then we are all in trouble for we have all sinned and fallen short of God's Glory in us. For those who walk around putting this argument on people heads in self-righteousness, my question to be you would be, would you want God to meet you with what you deserve, really?

Jesus shows us Grace, where everything we have is more than we really deserve.

The other philosophy is that in the world there are 2 opposite and equal forces at war. The forces of evil and the forces of God. And human beings are just caught up in the middle if not pawns. It is the idea of dualism or what is represented by the Chinese yin and yang.

And yes, there is a grand war. The enemy of our souls is the enemy of God. He is opposed to God. It is a mistaken idea that God and our enemy are equal in power. God is fully in control and settled in his throne. God is sovereign over all.

Look at the picture the story gives, Satan presents himself before God and asks for permission to do anything. That even the enemy has no power. He cannot just freely roam. He is on a leash.

The problem with believing this wrong philosophy is that it is one of the things that creates defeatism and a sense of resignation. Where you believe that there is nothing good that can come out of anything and the word is simply doomed. So you stop praying for your country and you stop praying for the sick you stop expecting God to actually change anything or to intervene because if it was meant to be it will be.

But no, God is fully in charge. He is unmatched and unrivaled. God is in charge even in your time of pain.

You see we could go on and on giving reasons for why people suffer but the truth is we will find them all insufficient and not very helpful for when we suffer. The question of suffering and why we suffer is universal and age-old. And even I would be lying if I stood here and said I had we had great answers that cover everything.

As the story of Job comes to a conclusion something beautiful actually happens. God moves in and gives Job and audience. He listens, he corrects and then he sets things right. He brings justice to Job and restore his health and his family. And this is our hope. That just

like in that story, God is not too far and he does move in. That there is surely light at the end of the tunnel. That certainly there is a better day.

And this what happens when Jesus moves in to our reality. Its God responding to all the injustices of the world. To your pain and my pain. For the wrongs we have done and those done to us. For suffering caused on us by the fallen nature of the world, the fallen nature of evil forces and the fallen nature of wicked men.

And simply by God moving in he starts to set things right. Jesus moves in and begins to bring healing to the sick. Sight to the blind. He is moving in power.

The power of the end of the story job in Jesus comes at the very beginning of our story. In Jesus, the Hope at the end of the story of humanity comes mid story. And it is accessible even today.

You can get healed, you can be set free, your marriage can be set right. In Jesus, the end of the story, has invaded the middle of the story. Jesus starts talking about how the poor are treated and hundred of years later believers lead the fight against slave trade and today believers are feeding the hungry and walking with the mourning. This is the Kingdom of God come Now. So that means that in our suffering we can be full of expectation for things to change.

But still, we have to get to the end of the story. So the power of the Kingdom of God is living side by side with the fallen powers of the world and so suffering still continues.

But we are not alone. By Jesus coming in the middle of the Human story to bring the Hope that is at the end, he chose to be part of the human reality, journeying with us to that end.

He not only cares but understands our pain. He feels our pain with us. He has felt the very same pain we do. He is familiar with human suffering.

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,[c] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

That in Jesus, God deliberately chose to be part of our human experience including our suffering. Some from the natural world like hunger, some from the spiritual like being oppressed by the enemy through demonic forces and some from the wickedness of men who have not yielded their hearts to Jesus. Whatever the pain is, Jesus goes through it with us. And promises to see us to the end, to be with us to the end.

Our hope is alive. Hope has a name and its Jesus. Our Hope is Jesus going through it all with us. Our Hope is Jesus coming back.

So if our healing comes now, we celebrate. If our healing is delayed we celebrate.

If our marriages are healed now, we celebrate. If healing for our marriages is delayed we

Wars in different countries can end tomorrows so we pray, wars in different countries will continue so we still pray.

When the war is won and there is no more pain, we praise. And even when it hurt, we still praise. Closing Prayer