

3. What is prayer?

Series: Job – suffering and prayer

Date: 29 January 2023

Location: St George's Battery Point

Preacher: Jackie Law

Texts: Job 10:1-22, 42:1-10

- Job's friends: encourage the 'practice of prayer' as an appeasement; never themselves pray
 - sacrifice compared with acknowledgement of the heart
 - prayers of lament
 - prayers of intercession
 - one effect of suffering is to increase our sensitivity to others who are suffering
 - comfort (2 Cor 1:3-11)
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Pray: fearful, humble

Intro: who's glad I'm not preaching all forty-two chapters? Heavy going.

picture us in Holy Saturday – 8.30 know what I'm talking about; 10/6 low-church types have not much idea (like Friday because of forgiveness, Easter because resurrection secures our salvation)

Holy Saturday a place of grief, where faith appears to be most fragile but is in fact at its strongest

what is prayer in the pit? What is prayer, ever?

1. identified sin in book of Job: '...did not speak rightly to me...'

God's judgement on Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar because they failed to love God, which resulted in them failing to love Job

2. prayers of lament:

how do you cry out for one you trust to love and care for you?

how do you speak to someone who has hurt you? Inherent risk in speaking up [Job 10:1-22]

'we don't like this, God'

allowing self to feel sorrow, express sorrow, takes more faith and trust than it does to push down what you're actually feeling

unedited/uncensored feelings; not trying to be theologically correct; tell it how you see it (not on trial for being human!)
freedom of faith in lament, freedom to worship the God who is free to act outside of earthly systems of justice

[Susie Colby, writing for *New Leaf Network* in Canada, reflected on Jesus praying in the garden through the night into Good Friday:

In spite of all the wonders he did, Jesus understood what he could not do. On the cross he would mysteriously take on our inability to save ourselves. No great deeds, no correct theology, nor powerful sermon, not even his

own prayers would help Jesus on Saturday. Resurrection Sunday would depend wholly on the action and intention of God his father. On Saturday Jesus would be powerless. On Friday it must have been terrifying to see Saturday coming, so Jesus prayed and prayed some more. I am convinced he threw himself on the character of God, trusting that whatever Saturday would bring, on Sunday God would rescue him.]

has purpose: petition – not for material restoration, or vindication/legal victory, but for relationship with God [dust and ashes, thought it was over]

Job is satisfied when God shows up, realises his understanding of the God he experienced was thankfully mistaken relationship is better, was never over; God breaks through hopelessness

Job realises that God loves him for nothing (gratuitously), and that he loves God for nothing [‘we love because he first loved us,’ 1 John 4:19]

- 3. agape love:** God’s desire is for heart connection/relationship; *hesed* = loving-kindness
- sacrificial (self-emptying) love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance
 - seeks the best for others
 - affection (volitional not compulsive)
 - no expectation of reciprocity (disinterested)
- 4. prayers of intercession:** agape love *for* God is not lengthy sessions of private singing! the first action required after Job repents of his ‘dust and ashes’ is to restore the friends through prayer [‘love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you’ Matt 5:43-46] one effect of suffering is to increase our sensitivity to others who are suffering; care, comfort, seek justice for the other prayer for those who are struggling to pray because God seems so silent and absent
- Job’s lament eventually leads him to think about the poor agape is selfless love that is passionately committed to the wellbeing of others; God repeatedly reminds us to attend to the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner not relativizing our own pain, but drawing on our own experience to step into another’s
- remember, God’s desire is for *all* to know his love

Pray: character of God: love; gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness
agape love, mysteries, gratuitousness (for no reason)
love and worship God by praying for the poor: the homeless, the starving, the ‘locked out’ ones

(God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer by Pete Greig)

Study

3. What is prayer?

From infancy, we have learnt to cry for the one we trust to love and care for us. Yet, in the moments I would instinctively call for my mum (who do you call for?), I don't know what to say to God. I suddenly become self-conscious, scrambling to put myself together enough to say some words I think God is likely to respond well to.

- Share your experience of how you pray in moments when you feel most desperate.
- What is that revealing to us about how we relate to God?
- Consider that, in most emergencies, we *do* need skilled human help as soon as possible, and not 'praying first' is hardly a spiritual crime. What's the principle in focus here? (what we believe about God's active involvement in the world and our own lives; what we believe about God's steadfast love and care for us).

Of all the earthly creatures in the book, Job is the only one to talk directly to God, i.e. pray.

1:4-5 7:1-21 10:1-22 13:20-14:22 17:3-5 30:20-23
40:3-5 42:1-6 42:7-10

- Can you identify the two types of prayer, **intercessory** and **lament**?
- What stands out to you about Job's prayers?

Lament can be understood as allowing oneself to feel sorrow, then expressing that sorrow; pouring out one's feelings to God before editing the words, before making them consistent with some sort of theology; it is *pre-reflective* prayer. How does this take more faith and trust in God than it does to 'push down' (deny or ignore) those same feelings?

Most Christians, and the communities to which they belong, under-utilise the prayer of lament.

- What do we lose in so doing?
- How can we be people who hope *and* lament?

A crucial translation key is needed to correctly interpret Job 42:7. Our Bibles generally say something like '...you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.' But a closer reading of the Hebrew renders this verse '...you have not spoken *to* me what is right...' That is, God's criticism of the friends is they did not pray! They had a lot to say about God but nothing to God.

- How does this fit with the suggestion that God's justice is *relational* rather than transactional?
- God always provides a way back into relationship. What is the way for Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar in this instance?
- How does this sharpen your understanding of intercessory prayer?
- Does reading James 5:13-20 offer any further insight? (Note James 5:10-11!)