

24 October 20261

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 34:4-8, 19-22](#)

I sought the Lord, and he answered me;

he delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant;

their faces are never covered with shame.

This poor soul called, and was heard by the Lord;

and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him,

and delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good;

blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

The righteous person may have many troubles,

but the Lord rescues them from them all;

he protects all their bones,

not one of them will be broken.

Evil brings death to the wicked;

the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

The Lord will rescue his servants;

no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

[Job 42:1-7, 10-17](#)

Then Job replied to the Lord:

‘I know that you can do all things;

no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

You asked, “Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?”

Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,

things too wonderful for me to know.

‘You said, “Listen now, and I will speak;

I will question you,

and you shall answer me.”

My ears had heard of you

but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself

and repent in dust and ashes.’

After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. ... After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job’s daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

[Mark 10:46-52](#)

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of

Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him. The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.' 'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

MESSAGE Insights from the book of Job

I wonder whether you have ever cried out to God in extremis?

Perhaps at the death of a loved one, or a personal experience of pain and suffering. Why me God? Why now? Why don't you do something to fix up this mess?

At such times, our world can shrink and become very small, closing in upon us and our very real experience of pain.



In these situations, few of us are as articulate as Job and are able to lay out our actions, our innocence and our right to be heard as Job does. Yet God remains silent and hidden to Job, and worse, is the apparent cause of his suffering. As Job sinks further and further into despair – and as he cries out to God for justice – we readers know that God already knows Job by name and already takes pleasure in Job's character and faith.

So it shouldn't come as a great surprise that God eventually breaks the silence and speaks to Job. But



what a speech! God appears in the midst of a mighty whirlwind and questions Job about his knowledge of the world and about the breadth and beauty of creation, and about the chaos monsters Behemoth and Leviathan that only God can tame.

Job is overwhelmed and admits that he spoke from ignorance and repents. But note that while God enlarges Job's vision, God never addresses the suffering of Job or its causes. Job never receives a direct answer to his many questions.

So what do we learn about Job, about suffering and about God from these exchanges?

- We learn about **Job** that his life has been *transformed* by his suffering and by his encounter with God.
He has heard reports *about* God but now has *seen* God, his Redeemer.
Job is not forgotten or invisible but rather is *known* and *named* by God.
He is given a *new purpose* – to pray for his friends – and invited to re-engage with life, which takes both *courage* and *resilience*.
He learns something important about the value of *daughters*, who are his only children named and who are to receive an inheritance along with their brothers.
- In terms of **suffering**, we are reminded of its *overwhelming nature* and how it can bring misery and despair to the strongest of people.
We are given no clear or reliable explanation into the *causes* of suffering. It can afflict *anyone* – including good and righteous people.
Ultimately, suffering remains a *mystery* given the love, power and wisdom of God.
- This book of Job reinforces several aspects of **God's character**:

... God is **powerful** as the Creator and as the one who establishes the conditions and context for all life on earth.

... God is also **wise** and **just**, caring for the whole of creation including both the righteous and the wicked. Unlike some other parts of Scripture that paint a fairly black and white almost mechanistic portrait of God who always blesses the righteous and condemns the wicked, the book of Job is more nuanced.

Innocent people like Job sometimes suffer.

The wicked sometimes thrive.

In the midst of this messy reality, blessed be the name of the Lord.

... God is also **loving** and **caring**, watching over the world, listening to people's cries and answering them.

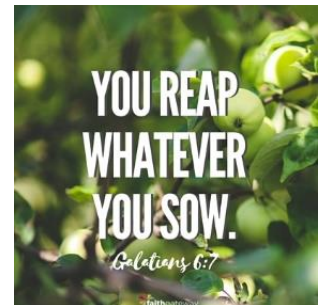
We are not alone or forgotten.

God is with us.

... which means that God remains a **mystery**. The choice that the book of Job challenges us with is whether to reject God or worship God in the face of this mystery.

The book of Job sends ripples that reverberate through the rest of the Scriptures and into our own lives.

While the broad tradition of Scripture suggests that we reap what we sow and that right living leads to blessing and flouting the ways of God leads to suffering, other strands of Scripture suggest that **this ain't always so!**



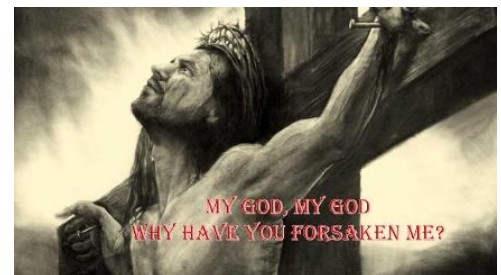
Israel's experience of exile points in this direction. Israel may have forgotten God at times, but her suffering at the hands of a violent heathen nation does not feel like justice. Where is the powerful, wise and loving God in this midst of this devastating experience? Isaiah chapters 40-55 explore this question ...

Many psalms such as Psalm 34 that we read earlier reflect the traditional view that God will rescue the righteous and bring death to the wicked. Yet several other psalms question why righteous and innocent people – like David – suffer so much. How can this be?

The same question is asked by the followers of Jesus following his crucifixion.

How can such a compassionate, good, just and upright person be killed by the wicked?

Hence the story of Jesus' passion is interwoven with quotations and allusions to the psalms of the innocent sufferer (e.g. Jesus' cry from the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' from Psalm 22).



Later reflection points to the **redemptive nature of Jesus' death** ... that he suffered so that we may be freed from the grip and guilt of sin and may have restored and intimate relationship with God the Father.

So in this case – in the story that lies at the heart of our Christian faith – there is great suffering endured by someone who is upright and righteous like Job.

In this particular case there is ultimately a point and a reason for the suffering – although this is not apparent at the time.

In other cases the purpose of our suffering is hidden from us and remains a mystery.

But if Jesus embodies the very character of God, then there is **hope** in the midst of suffering ... for Jesus is especially drawn to those who suffer and usually restores them to fullness of life, as in the case of blind **Bartimaeus**.

He cries out for help, is met by Jesus at his point of need, is healed and then follows Jesus on the way towards Jerusalem.

In many ways Bartimaeus is a model disciple who sees clearly who Jesus is and who is prepared to follow Jesus whatever the cost.



*A key take away from the book of Job, then, is that God **does** hear, **does** care and **does** want to have relationship with us.*

God is mighty.

God is just.

God is loving and compassionate.

But God remains mysterious.

*... **and** God invites us all to know him and worship him in this odd mix of power, justice, love and mystery.*

Our Western (Protestant and Catholic) approach to knowing God is sometimes summarised as **faith seeking understanding**. We want to know the whys and wherefores of our faith and we struggle with mystery.



The Eastern (Orthodox) approach to knowing God is very different and can be summarised as **love adoring mystery**.

We are called to love and worship God in the midst of mystery.

The song we are going to sing now is a favourite of many.

It brings together some of these themes ...

... God is powerful, and creation reminds us of the beauty and majesty of God ...

... but God also allows Jesus to suffer and die which is a deep mystery ...

... both of which lead to joy and worship and the cry: **How great thou art!**

SONG TiS 155 How great thou art

Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand has made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,

How great thou art, how great thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,

How great thou art, how great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,

and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Refrain

But when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die – I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, our burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away our sin:

Refrain

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim: My God, how great thou art!

Refrain

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