

Guest Preacher Mr. Donald Macaulay

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the chapters that we read in the book of Job, chapters 4 and 5.
Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves.

Therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. I'm sure that the majority of us, if not all, are quite familiar with the opening passages of the book of Job.

Again, I'm not going to go through all the detail that we have there. I'm assuming that you're familiar with it.

We will bring some of that detail in the course of looking at this particular speech. And we see at the beginning of chapter 4 then that this speech is by Eliphaz the Temanite.

Now, we know nothing else about him except what we can gather from his various speeches in the book.

[1 : 35] And we can see that if we go back to the end of chapter 2 on the opposite page, at least it's on the opposite page in this Bible, we can see at the end of chapter 2 in verse 11, Now, when Job's three friends heard of all the evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place.

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuite, and Sofer the Namathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort to him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him.

And they raised their voices and wept. And they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads towards heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights.

And no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. And it is not then until after seven days that we see in chapter 3 that Job first is the first to speak.

And basically what he does is curse the day that he was born. In other words, he wishes that he had never been born, so that he would not be suffering what he is going through at this particular time.

[2 : 57] Now again, you will remember, if you are familiar with chapters 1 and 2, that Job had lost all his material possessions.

And he had been a very, very rich man. And apart from that, he had lost all his children. Ten children.

Seven sons and three daughters, who had all died the same day on their birthday. Now that is a tremendous loss to any family.

Imagine ten children being taken away from you the same day. They must have been probably in their twenties.

We can't be absolutely sure of their ages. But we read that they have their own houses, and they've come together to celebrate their birthday. It's interesting, of course, that that's one of the reasons why certain groups do not celebrate birthdays.

[4 : 02] Because they maintain that Scripture, the only birthdays that we see in Scripture, all have evil consequences. There's Herod's birthday, of course, where John the Baptist is beheaded.

And you remember, of course, that there's also Pharaoh's birthday, and so on. And therefore, the Jehovah Witnesses refused to celebrate birthdays in any way, shape, or form.

Maybe they've got a point. I don't know. You can make up your own mind on that. It wasn't very common when I was young for birthdays to be celebrated here in our own island, certainly not among the adults.

It's become more of a fashion nowadays. And again, probably that is due to the commercialization of birthdays. But that's by the by. You can figure out your own ideas about that.

But then the one who we think should have supported him in whatever circumstances, his wife, what does she say to him?

[5 : 07] If you look back in chapter 2 at verse 9, his wife said to him, Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. But you notice the answer she gets.

But she said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil? And one has to have a bit of sympathy for the wife, mother of ten children that she's just lost.

And although as far as we can tell from the book of Job, she appears to have suffered in no way physically.

Undoubtedly, of course, the loss of all their material possessions, their sheep and camels and all the various other things, would have affected her materially, at least for a period of time.

But imagine the agony of the mother who has lost ten children on the same day. It's hard to understand that.

[6 : 16] No wonder she's better. We don't pay much attention to Job's wife, because the book doesn't focus on her. There's no further mention of her until we come again to the very last chapters.

And it's curious that the first two chapters and the last chapters are all written in prose, whereas all the speeches from chapter three onwards, all the way through, are all written in poetry.

Those who study Hebrew tell us that the poetry of the book of Job is among the most beautiful poetry that exists in Hebrew.

I can't testify to that, because I'm not a Hebrew scholar, but certainly there are phrases and things within the speeches that are extremely noteworthy and perhaps outstanding.

And so in chapter three, then Job gives his first answer. Let the day perish on which I was born. And so on.

[7 : 25] And Eliphaz hears this speech, and we think that he's the first to answer because he's the oldest, probably the oldest.

It's interesting, isn't it, that none of the four are Jews. They're all Gentiles. This takes place, as we're told in chapter one, in the land of Uz.

And although it's difficult to be exactly sure where the land of Uz was, it certainly was not among what was called the promised land.

In fact, the promised land hadn't come into existence. Well, I should say that the promised land, the concept, had not yet been given to the children of Israel, because the book of Job is contemporary with Abraham.

Now, there are different views on this. But the majority view, we have no idea who wrote the book of Job. Some think that it was Job himself.

[8 : 32] Some think that it's Elihu, later on, a young man who appears towards the end of the book, who wrote down the speeches. But whoever wrote them, it's a piece of Hebrew poetry.

And as such, what it does is, it raises fundamental questions for us about the world in which we live, man's inhumanity to man, and also, of course, man's relationship with God.

We have the benefit of chapters one and two, in which we see into heaven. It's an amazing thing to think how that was given by divine inspiration to whoever wrote the book.

But the vision of heaven and Satan appearing, and you heard an excellent sermon last Sabbath evening on Satan. Again, I'm not going to go into that. But we come now to the point where Job has suffered, not because of anything that he has done, or anything that he has not done, but simply, because God permits Satan to attack him.

But you notice, and if you go back to chapters one and two, you'll see that clearly, Satan is not allowed to speak until God gives him permission.

[10 : 13] He's not allowed to act except within the limits that God sets upon him. And although he's allowed to bring death to the children of Job, he is not allowed to do so to Job himself.

And so we come up with this question, a question that Eliphaz phrases now in the beginning of chapter five, call now, is there anyone who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn?

And then he concludes in verse 17, Blessed is the one whom God reproves, therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

Now, behind that, in a very subtle way, what does Eliphaz actually say? If you're required to be disciplined by God, and that's what's behind, despise not the discipline of the Almighty, then discipline is only usually applied as a corrective procedure when something has been wrong.

Parents discipline their children, and although, as Scripture says, no discipline is perhaps pleasant at the time, nevertheless, the parents should discipline their children in love, because they are teaching them what things not to do, or how to correct inerrant behavior.

[11 : 50] And Eliphaz' argument is that that is exactly what God is doing with Job. Blessed is the one whom God reproves, or whom the Lord chasteneth, as it says in the A.V., despise not the discipline of the Almighty, for he wounds, but he binds up, he shatters, but his hands heal, and so on.

And so the argument that Eliphaz is putting forward, and it's going to be repeated by the other two later on, is that Job must have done something that requires correction.

There must have been some discipline required upon Job's behavior that he is perhaps unaware of, or maybe aware of, but he's not admitting.

And this, of course, was an idea that was prevalent in the ancient world, especially among the Jews, and so on. We see it even in the New Testament.

You remember, they asked Jesus in Mark, in John 9, about the man who was born blind. Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?

[13 : 11] And you remember the answer that Jesus gives. Neither this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the glory of God should be shown in him.

And therefore, it's the same procedure that we see in the book of John. We see the same theme in Psalm 73.

If you look at Asaph's writing in Psalm 73, you'll see exactly the same theme. Why is it that the wicked appear to prosper? That people who pay no attention to God or to his law seem to do very well, while those who follow the Lord and those who worship seem to suffer?

And this is Eliphaz's answer. God is disciplining you for sins perhaps that you're not aware of. And this is a very basic question, a question that we see so often nowadays, which is framed in this particular way.

Why do bad things happen to good people? people? Put that up on Facebook sometime, sorry, on Google sometime, and see what comes up, and you'll be absolutely amazed at the whole sort of range of variety of answers.

[14 : 37] Very few of them scripture at all. Why do bad things happen to good people? Well, let's think about that for a minute or two.

first of all, there are no good people. Jesus is very clear about that when he's asked.

And he says, why callest thou me good? Mark chapter 10 verse 18. Have a look at it later. Why callest thou me good?

There is none good but God. None good but God. There's no such thing as good people in the sight of God.

Especially when we compare ourselves to God's holiness. holiness. We haven't a leg to stand on. And therefore, whether we're conscious of it or not, we are all deserving of God's wrath and judgment.

[15 : 49] And you might say then following on from the question, but it seems so unfair because God's wrath and judgment seems to happen to godly people, perhaps even more than we're aware of.

it happening to others. Well, in your protected cocoon here on the Isle of Lewis, perhaps you're not aware of the suffering that goes on in other parts of the world.

Not only among God's people, but among all people. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Well, if we start to analyze it from a human point of view, from a psychological point of view, everything that we do has a consequence.

Everything that we say has a consequence. And sometimes these consequences can be negative or positive depending on what was said, what was done, or how it was said.

[17 : 02] Look back over your own life and see how many times you got it wrong and you upset someone or caused a reaction or something. But also look and see, it's not all negative.

See perhaps how many times you got it right. Perhaps like Eliphaz, you were attempting to comfort, comfort. But your comfort worked from the wrong premise.

You see, Eliphaz and his friends have assumed that Job has sinned grievously. And that this is why God is now punishing him.

God is disciplining him. certainly, we can see in so much human behavior that the consequences of not following God's commandments and the principles of God's law can lead to intense suffering by many, many people.

in our modern world nowadays perhaps we're beginning to rein it in a little bit, but the effect of social media on younger generations is something that seems to be having enormous negative effects.

[18 : 24] The years that I spent in education I've never heard of or seen so many people, so many children having anxiety disorders etc., ADHD and so on, and it seems that these things have grown and come to the fore in our more modern society.

And perhaps the question is why? I'm not going to attempt to give a detailed educational answer to that, as so many others who do it, but there's no doubt that in our societies when we've turned our back on the principles of God's word, there are consequences that follow from that.

And that, I'm afraid, is what we are living through at this particular time. But that wasn't the case with Job. He is quite unaware of having sinned.

In fact, he will protest later on in the next speech that he cannot understand what is happening. And perhaps that's the way it is for you and I at times as well.

We cannot understand why God is dealing with us in a particular way. We can't understand what God's purpose is.

[19 : 54] But let us be very clear. Scripture shows us so clearly time and time again that there is a purpose in everything that God does.

A purpose in what he, in his, I was going to put it in a different way or put it like this, there is a purpose in his decretive will and there is a purpose in his permissive will.

God decrees certain things to happen. He makes them happen. You see that clearly for example in the plagues in Egypt and so on. But there are other things that he allows to happen.

And very often we are asking why? Why? Why do these things happen? Very interesting, some of the threads that there have been on social media in the last week or two about the Holocaust, the Holocaust Memorial Day.

Why did God allow such a suffering among the Jews? I don't know the answer to that.

[21 : 06] I don't think anyone does. But one of the more likely answers is that without that suffering, there probably would never have been the state of Israel as it exists now.

now you may argue about that one side or the other, et cetera, well that was an awful way to do it, et cetera, and so on. But that's not the point.

The point is that it's only when we look back at things that we can see what the outcomes have been later on. And perhaps you and I in our lives are the same.

you've had to deal with difficult circumstances. And perhaps sometimes those circumstances may not necessarily mean the loss of family members, although it can do, of course, and we should be very clear that there will come a time when all of us will lose family members.

But very often our difficulties are other. It may be in dealing with our children, it may be in our marriage, it may be in financial situations, in employment, whatever.

[22 : 35] And you wonder why are you going through this trial. Well, there are various answers that we could give to that.

Think of the world of athletics and sport. There used to be a famous slogan, I think it was back in the 60s and so on, with Nike training shoes and so on.

And it showed this guy pounding along the road, et cetera, and so on, with these new shoes on. And then underneath it said, no pain, no gain.

If you didn't put in the hard miles to train and suffer when you were training, and usually the suffering meant muscular pain, et cetera, and so on, then you weren't building the stamina and the muscle power and the toughness required for whatever race you were competing in.

And so it is with the Christian life. You will face difficulties. Jesus himself makes that very, very clear.

[23 : 47] He says, in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world. John 16, the final two verses, just before he launches into the high priestly prayer, where he himself would undergo suffering like no one has ever undergone.

God's suffering in context with Christ's suffering, there's no comparison.

There is no comparison. Whatever material loss Job suffered, and then in his physical health, whatever he suffered, he lost no spiritual blessing whatsoever.

Perhaps he was unaware of that for a period of time, but he lost no spiritual blessing. And so many commentators see parallels, and I must admit I see them myself as well, between the sufferings of Job and the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No one ever suffered like the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one ever will. And it wasn't just the physical suffering.

[25 : 17] while the physical suffering was perhaps beyond anything that we can understand, and certainly beyond what Job suffered, the spiritual suffering was much, much greater, beyond our comprehension.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The cry from the cross. we can't delve into the hours where Christ was separated from his Father, the hours where he underwent the pains of hell.

But aren't you thankful that he did? Because there, the victory is won over the grave, over death, but more importantly, over sin.

in the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, to his intercession on the right hand of the Father. All that is done so that you and I are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Christ. In some way, Job was aware of that. It's interesting, isn't it, that this is before the priesthood, this is before the law is given, although Job continues, or Job at the beginning of the book, we see him sacrificing for his sons, for his children, carrying out the process of sacrifice.

[27 : 00] And again, remember that this is taking place before any law is given. If it's contemporary with Abraham, then probably the land of us, we think of it now as being where modern day Jordan is, probably around there, then it would seem that here were a group of people who worshipped God in a similar way to Abraham and who are called from Abraham.

And yet, they have no books of the Old Testament, they have no law, they have no commandments, they have no priests, but each one of them carries out these roles as they worship God and that they are committed worshippers of God is very, very clear as you read through the book of Job.

Job says in chapter 19, in spite of every accusation that his friends level at him, I know that my Redeemer lives.

He could see Christ, he could see somehow, again, we don't understand how he saw, but he could see not only the Redeemer, but the resurrection.

And you can look at his words at the end of chapter 19 yourself when you go home, as time is running past again. It's a difficult subject to deal with, human suffering.

[28 : 44] We are all aware that illness and death will come to all of us at one time or another throughout our life.

And if you think of it this way, as God's people, how would the rest of the world react, the people around you, if you did not endure suffering at some time?

Whatever that suffering would be, there is no doubt that it is the discipline of the Almighty and the retasticment of God that affects the Christian more than anything else in his spiritual walk.

So often his question is, why me? Why is this happening to me? And I remember asking that question to my father in 1985 when I was undergoing treatment for cancer.

And that was my question, why me? And the answer I got knocked me right back. He said, why not you?

[30 : 07] What's special about you? It left me thinking, I wasn't a believer then, that was a number of years before I came to faith after that. But it left, it rocked me on my heels.

Why not me? If the believer does not undergo trials and tribulation, and Christ has promised us that in this world we shall have tribulation, we see it throughout Scripture.

What example are we setting to others as we go through these trials? If the Christian had no trouble, if he had an easy life where everything works fine, etc., and he has no problems, and his kids are well behaved and don't cause any problems for him, etc., and so on, then it's so easy to say, well, you know, God is protecting him.

In fact, that's the argument that Satan raises to God for attacking Job in the first place. How many people would then become an inverted commas Christian simply to avoid the trials of life?

God but that's not the way that God works. God deals with each one of us in order to be a witness and a testimony to others, not only when things are going well, but especially when they're not going well, and especially when we face perhaps tragedy or difficult situations in our life.

[31 : 56] But the word of God reassures us time and time again that whatever you're going through, he is there with you.

He is upholding you. He is strengthening you. And perhaps as many of these things, he is teaching you to depend upon him.

He is perhaps teaching you humility to come closer to God is a hard lesson to learn humility for each and every one of us, to be humble before God.

But nevertheless, it's only when you look back that you can see how the Lord has upheld you, has guided you, has perhaps even used you as a witness to others in these situations.

you see so many examples of that in Scripture. Think of the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution that took place in the early church in the book of Acts.

[33 : 06] What happens? The Christians are dispersed from Jerusalem and into other places because of such persecution.

And what's the result? The church grows. the church is fed by those who are persecuted.

I can't remember now who it was that said, I think it was Augustine who said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. all you have to do is look back at so many who suffered martyrdom.

I was thinking this afternoon a little bit of the covenanters in our own country. How many of them were put to death for their faith, but yet their witness in their sufferings, remember particularly the two Marguerits who were drowned at the stake in the Saul Wayford, their witness to others was so important.

Those who were burnt at the stake, Latimer and Ridley and various others, the list is enormous. And there's a very interesting verse that helps us to think about this in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 57, at the beginning, the very first verse.

[34 : 33] The righteous man perishes and no one lays it to heart. Devout men are taken away while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from calamity.

He enters into peace. How much suffering sometimes is avoided by God taking his people home.

Perhaps at times when we don't expect them to be taken home, but they enter into peace. Isn't that what Paul said? To be with Christ is far better, far better.

And although perhaps the instinct to hang on to our human lives is the strongest instinct that we possess, nevertheless, you have to put it into perspective.

At here, you have no continuing city. And there will come a day where we all have to stand before God and appear later on at the judgment seat of God.

[35 : 46] There are so many passages in Scripture, particularly in the New Testament, that lay that doubt clearly for us. There's a lovely book which I've got, and if anyone wants to borrow it, I'd be very happy to lend to you, by an American author called James Dobson.

You may not have heard of him. He died a few years ago. He was the founder of a ministry called Focus on the Family. He was a medical doctor, but he particularly specialized in psychological problems in children and so on.

And he deals with the relationships that take place between families and among families in order to strengthen them according to biblical principles.

But this particular book is called When God Doesn't Make Sense. And in it, he lists various scenarios where young Christians apparently destined for service as medical missionaries and others are suddenly taken from the face of the earth because of accidents or illness or whatever.

And his question is why? How can we explain what God is doing? It's not easy by any means.

[37 : 15] And it's not easy for anyone who is going through these circumstances. But you're told in Scripture so often, and with this I'll close the time has passed.

In Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 5, Solomon says, trust in the Lord at all times and lean not on your own understanding.

And that's the problem that you and I have. We lean too much on our own understanding and we fail to see the bigger picture of what God is actually doing.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we come to you this evening confessing that there are so many things that we don't understand.

But we understand that you are good. And we understand that you are the only one who is good. And we understand that you have a purpose in all things.

[38 : 24] That all things work together for good for your people, especially the ones who have been called. God. And we thank you that your restraining grace guides us in so many situations.

And you uphold your people and comfort and strengthen them in whatever circumstances they are in. We pray, oh Lord, that you would help us to understand that, to experience that in our own lives.

But especially to be a witness to others as we go through the various trials and tribulations of this life, that we can do so with grace and wisdom from on high.

Be with us now, part us with your blessing, take us safely to our homes, and pardon sin for Christ's sake. Amen. Let us conclude by singing verses in Psalm 119, on page 405, at verse 59.

I thought upon my former ways, and did my life well try, and to thy testimonies pure, my feet then turned I. I did not stay nor linger long as those that slothful are, but hastily thy laws to keep, myself I did prepare.

[39 : 51] Bands of ill men me robbed, yet I thy precepts did not slight. I'll rise at midnight thee to praise, even for thy judgments right. I am companion to all those who fear and thee obey.

O Lord, thy mercy fills the earth, teach me thy laws, I pray. Let us conclude then with these verses, Psalm 119, at verse 59, I thought upon my former ways.

I thought upon my former ways, and did my life well try, and to thy testimony fall, and is
pure, my feet, and turned and I, I did not skin or liquor long as those that strong full heart,
but history thy laws to keep myself

I dare prepare! and so fell man me wrong yet I thy present!

did not slide I rise! I am to all those I all fear I am to all those all who fear I am to fear and
thee obey O Lord thy mercy fed as the earth teach me thy laws I pray

[42 : 54] Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with
you all now and forever Amen