

Escaping the Dungeon of Giant Despair

The Hush of Heaven – Part IV

Job 6-7

Introduction

John Bunyan was a pastor who lived in the late 1600s in England. Because of his biblical convictions, he refused to align his church with the Church of England. It was in 1678, while Bunyan was in prison for holding unauthorized services, that he wrote a book entitled, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to that Which is to Come*; now, better known now as, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

In this book, John Bunyan portrayed the adventures of a young disciple, named Christian, who left his home village, called the City of Destruction, and traveled to the Celestial City – or heaven.

In one episode, Christian and his traveling companion, Hopeful, are captured by the Giant Despair. They are taken to the Doubting Castle, where they are thrown into a dungeon cell.

Christian and his companion are beaten mercilessly by the Giant Despair. One morning they are taken out of their cell and shown the bones of other pilgrims, out in the castle yard, who never escaped Doubting Castle.

Christian and Hopeful refuse to give up, however, and one night, Christian remembers a way to escape. He is able to unlock their cell door and the outer gate as well, and they run for their lives.

These pilgrims will escape the Doubting Castle and the Giant Despair, not by some show of force or some innate determination, but by a key called Promise.

When we arrive at Job chapter 6, we find Job languishing in a prison cell, controlled by the Giant Despair, deep within Doubting Castle. As he speaks,

we will discover that for the most part, he will ask questions – questions without answers. And the Giant Despair will nearly do him in.

If you remember our last discussion, a large part of the problem is that Job's tormentors are supposed to be his friends. Only in this scene, they are on the giant's payroll; they are working for him!

Eliphaz has just finished speaking in Job chapters 4 and 5. He has condemned Job for being a fool and accused him of being a great sinner, and thus this great calamity has come upon him. Eliphaz has even implied that Job is guilty of his children's deaths because of his hidden sins.

The heavy chains are now wrapped tightly around Job's body and spirit, and his response in chapter 6, is nothing less than the misery of an imprisoned believer held captive in Doubting Castle.

Job Speaks to His Friends

In Job chapter 6, Job addresses his friends.

1. **First, Job (actually) apologizes for his rash communication. (Job 6:1-3)**

Notice verse Job 6:1-3.

Then Job answered,

“Oh that my grief were actually weighed and laid in the balances together with my calamity!

“For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; therefore my words have been rash.”

In spite of his agony, Job offers his friends an apology.

What incredible character this displays! We see it peeking through every now and then, even though Job pours out his pain and frustration.

In other words, “Listen, men, I know I’m speaking rash words, but understand that if you put on the scales my grief and calamity, they would outweigh the sands of the seas.”

Do you know how heavy sand is? That is how heavy Job’s spirit is.

What amazes me is that Job has the objectivity and character to offer a veiled apology.

This gives us a good reminder, as we help people who are crushed in spirit, as one author said, “to cut them a little slack.” We are to distribute to them a measure of grace. Remember, do not just deal with their speech, but deal as well, with their wounded spirit, which issued forth in bitter speech.

2. Secondly, Job admits to his raw condition. (Job 6:4-13)

It is as if Job says:

- “There’s nowhere left to hide.”

Notice Job 6:4.

For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, their poison my spirit drinks; the terrors of God are arrayed against me.

In other words, Job says, “If God is firing His arrows at me, where am I going to hide? He never misses. He has perfect aim and has found my spirit. Furthermore, His arrows are dipped with poison and I am now filled with bitterness.”

“There’s nowhere left for me to hide.”

Job also says:

- “There’s nothing left for me to enjoy.”

Look at Job 6:5.

Does the wild donkey bray over his grass, or does the ox low over his fodder?

In other words, these wild animals do not complain when they are satisfied with food.

However, “As for me,” Job says in Job 6:6-7,

Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg?

My soul refuses to touch them; they are like loathsome food to me.

“There’s nothing in life I can enjoy – not even the simple pleasure of a boiled egg.”

Finally, Job says in his opening remarks:

- “There’s no one left to help.”

Look at Job 6:8-9.

Oh that my request might come to pass, and that God would grant my longing!

Would that God were willing to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off!

Continue to Job 6:10, “But men, you need to know that if He does,”

. . . it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

“I have not cursed God.”

How Satan must have hated to hear these words. He and his demons have been longing to hear Job blaspheme the character of God, yet Job will not do it.

However, let us not make too much of a hero of Job. He says, in Job 6:12 paraphrased,

What do you think I’m made of – granite? I’ve got tough skin, but do you think it’s made out of bronze? It isn’t!

Continue to Job 6:13, “Indeed,”

. . . my help is not within me, and . . . deliverance is driven from me . . .

I agree with the translators that make this verse a statement of fact, rather than a question.

Job says,

- There’s nowhere left to hide.
- There’s nothing left to enjoy.
- There’s no one left to help.

I am periodically reading the sermons of Joseph Caryl, a Puritan pastor who preached through the book of Job. It took him more than twenty-three years to finish (and you thought six years in Romans was bad!).

On this text in Job, Caryl observed that “although the spirit hath no weight at all; only flesh and material substances are weighty; but a wounded spirit is heavier than wounded flesh.” Then, he made this interesting insight, “The spirit is strong enough to bear the burden of wounded flesh; but the flesh is not strong enough to bear the burden of a wounded spirit.”¹

This is the reason that when we are discouraged, we are also tired. Our flesh cannot support a weary, despairing soul. When we find rest for our souls, we will find strength for our flesh.

Job says, “This is more than I can take. I am not made of stone or brass. I am a human; I am a weak, frail, faltering human being.”ⁱⁱ

Job admits to his friends that his condition; his emotions are raw. He cannot take much more of a beating from the Giant Despair.

However, in spite of his weary state in this prison cell, Job apologizes for his rash words, as well as admits to his raw condition. He then continues.

3. Thirdly, Job appeals for real compassion. (Job 6:14-23)

Notice Job’s pitiful appeal in Job 6:14.

For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear [reverence] of the Almighty.

Can you see this scene? What pity this should have stirred in the friends of Job.

I can say that nothing has moved me to empty my pockets more than the children in India who scrambled after our luggage and taxis and followed everywhere we walked, begging for some small change.

I remember in New Delhi, riding in a car with my window down and coming to a curb at a busy intersection where a young mother was standing with her baby in her arms. Her face was blotched with leprosy and she was holding her thin arm out with her bony fingers outstretched toward me with a look of sadness and sheer terror in her eyes. Even after several years, I cannot forget her look.

Can you imagine this scene with Job? He is covered in boils, racked with pain, bereaved of his children, sitting on the ash heap at the town dump, appealing, not for money (Job 6:22), not for physical help or deliverance (Job 6:23) – he is not asking for food or clothing or protection, but only for some kindness.

Job’s friends, however, are afraid (Job 6:21). They are afraid that if they associate too closely with Job, God will send the same judgment to them that He sent to Job. So, these friends are not going to identify too closely with Job or give him sympathy since it might anger God.

Job says to these friends, “You are all like a desert stream.” In Job 6:15, he says,

[You are] . . . like a wadi . . .

A “wadi” is a dessert streambed that rushes with water during the rainy season, but dries up in the heat of the summer.

Traveling caravans from Tema and Sheba (Job 6:19) were known to travel across the dessert. They would often be desperate for water, so they would travel along a wadi in hopes of finding it. Sometimes these caravans would look in vain and die of thirst.

Job says, “I’m following after you, hoping for refreshing water, but at the end of the day, you have nothing to offer me.”

In other words, “You cannot even offer me one little cup of compassion.”

4. Fourthly, not only have Job’s friends failed to offer him real compassion, but Job says his friends have failed to provide him with true correction. (Job 6:24-30)

In Job 6:24, Job says,

Teach me, and I will be silent; and show me how I have erred.

The Hebrew word for “erred” refers to unintentional sins. Job never denies sinning, he just does not know where he has sinned and refused to repent so that God would now judge him.ⁱⁱⁱ

Job says to his friends, “Listen, I don’t need accusation – I need illumination. Show me my fault; show me my sin and I’ll readily confess!”^{iv}

Of course, these friends do not do this because they cannot. So instead, they offer trite advice; condescending counsel.

Do you not feel weary when someone tries to give you advice, but you know they do not care and their advice is self-exalting and condescending or trivial and insufficient?

Charlie Brown, that great theologian, provides a wonderful response on one occasion. In one comic strip, Charlie Brown is complaining because his team always loses their baseball games, “We always lose; we are always defeated.”

Lucy comes along and in her know-it-all way, offers some advice, as she says, “Remember, Charlie Brown, you learn more from your defeats than you do from your victories.”

Charlie Brown replies, “Well then, that makes me the smartest man in the whole world!”

True compassion opens the door to wise counsel – even when it is challenging and reproofing.

Identifying with the sufferer is the first part of giving insight to the sufferer.

One of our young people – a middle schooler – was recently diagnosed with Crohn’s disease. What a trooper he was in the hospital. I had the opportunity

to visit him, along with two of our student pastors. In fact, we all went down to the game room and played a couple of games of pool. It was proven that none of us are wasting time in some pool hall – we all stink, which is probably a good thing, right?

I am not sure how the connection was made, but one of the most encouraging things to this young man, as he battled this diagnosis, was receiving an email from David Garrard, the quarterback for the Jacksonville Jaguars. I received permission from both the family and Garrard to mention his email to you.

Notice the true compassion before reading any challenge. I have edited this email to these few lines:

Dear David,

My name is David Garrard and I'm a professional football player . . . three years ago I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, just like you. I am here to tell you that I know first hand the circumstances that you are going through . . . I will be praying for you and for a speedy recovery. Remember that God puts things in our lives to teach us to trust Him. Keep your eyes on Him and trust Him with all your heart. I know that some days can be worse than others . . . but keep your head up. Feel free to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

David Garrard #9

Isn't that great? What encouragement and wise counsel. It almost makes me want to root for the Jaguars . . . almost.

There was identification and then insight. What a great example for us today.

Job Speaks to God

Now Job turns from speaking to his friends to speaking to his God, in Job chapter 7.

1. First, Job mourns the misery of his suffering. (Job 7:1-5)

In Job 7:2-3, Job effectively says,

"Listen, Lord, even a slave who works in the hot sun eventually gets a chance to rest in the shade, and a hired hand who works hard at least has his paycheck to look forward to, but I don't have any relief – there is no shade tree under which my sorrow can find rest."

Job is saying, "My misery has no end."

In Job 7:5, we are informed that Job's physical condition is worsening. He says,

My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt, my skin hardens and runs.

Literally, Job's skin is now cracked and oozing with puss.

It is not just that it is not letting up, but, "God, it's getting worse!"

In other words, "The beatings of the Giant Despair are only growing harder for me to endure."

Job mourns the misery of his suffering.

2. Secondly, Job bemoans the brevity of his life. (Job 7:6-16)

Job says, in Job 7,

- Verse 6a – ***My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, . . .***
- Verse 7a – ***Remember that my life is but breath; . . .***
- Verse 16 – ***I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.***

In other words, "Since my life is short anyway, why let it linger on – why not end it Lord? The grave would be better than my painful life."

Notice Job's words in Job 7:15.

. . . my soul would choose suffocation, death rather than my pains.

It is this verse that John Bunyan put into the mouth of Christian as he languished in the dungeon cell, deep in the dungeon of the Doubting Castle.

Christian says to his companion, "Shall we be ruled by this giant? . . . I know not whether it is best to live like this or to die . . . the grave is more easy for me than this dungeon!"

At this place, in the original text of *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, himself languishing in a prison cell, pencils into his manuscript the reference, Job 7:15.

The natural cry of the believer under great suffering is, "How long, O Lord? If it is for the rest of my life, take me on to heaven."

Perhaps the greatest injury to Job is not his misery in suffering, or his brevity in life, but in that which he says in the third and last portion of his prayer.

3. Thirdly, Job laments the loss of communion with God. (Job 7:17-21)

Notice Job 7:20-21.

Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself?

Why then do You not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust; and You will seek me, but I will not be.

Make no mistake – Job is bound, deep in the cavernous depths of Doubting Castle, his spirit ruled by the Giant Despair. All we can do is observe him there – and learn.

I do not want to be too hard on Job, however. It is remarkable to me that he is even praying at all.

We can learn from the writing of John Bunyan, who found a way for Christian and Hopeful to escape the castle, and it is the same way of escape for us all.

Earlier in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian had been given a small key and told that whenever he needed to open a door, he should use this gift. This special key had a name – its name was Promise.

One night Christian remembers he has the key in his pocket. He pulls it out and indeed, he is able to unlock the cell door and the outer gate as well. He and his companion escape Doubting Castle and the Giant Despair, not by some show of force or some innate determination, but by a key called Promise.

Keys of promise to defeat the Giant Despair

Should you find yourself locked in a similar dungeon, remember the gifts of promise given to those of us who follow Christ and use these keys to defeat the Giant Despair.

- First, in seasons when you conclude God is not present – He is.

God's promise key is Hebrews 13:5b (NKJV),
I will never leave you nor forsake you.

There is no loophole in this promise. God means it.

A young Dutch Christian woman named Corrie ten Boom, who helped the Jewish people during World War II, survived the horror of her imprisonment in the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. She later said, "There is no pit so deep but that God is not deeper still."

No matter how deep your dungeon, God is deeper still.

- Secondly, in times when you feel life is hopeless – it is not.

A key of promise that came to mind is Jeremiah 29:11,

"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

- Thirdly, in afflictions when you believe God does not care – He does.

I Peter 5:7 promises,

casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Cast your cares upon Him because He continually cares – the tense declares – He constantly, without stopping cares and is concerned for you.

This is the key. It is His gift to you.

- Fourthly, in situations when you are certain you know better than God – you do not.

Psalm 18:30 tells us,

As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the Lord is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.

- Fifthly, in despair when you believe God has not heard your cry – He has.

David provided another promise key, in Psalm 69:32b-33,

. . . You who seek God, let your heart revive. For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise His who are prisoners.

One translation renders this,

. . . [God] despises not His . . . wounded ones. (Amplified)

The Message paraphrases it,

. . . [God] doesn't walk out on [those in] wretched [conditions].

With God, even when nothing is happening, something is happening – even for those in wretched conditions.

- One more key, sixthly, in circumstances in which you do not feel loved – you are.

This is the promise key in Romans 8:38-39,

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May I challenge you to contemplate the connection you have in your suffering to others who have suffered – past and present?

If you are struggling, read the biographies of Christians who have gone before you. Read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* when you feel your circumstances are beyond the love of Christ.

See your connection to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He was humbled as He voluntarily came to this land of sorrow. He took the form of a servant, Paul wrote in Philippians 2, and died the death of a despised, unwanted, unloved criminal.

See your connection to the body of Christ – His church. We all share in the sufferings of believers around the world, I Peter 5 says, and we desperately need wisdom in the way to handle our own temptation to despair, as we read in James 1.

You are not alone and you are deeply loved – whether you sense it, conclude it, feel it, or even believe it.

Ask Job. The God he thought had abandoned him was actually, at this moment, in this chapter of his life, empowering him to survive the beatings of the Giant Despair.

Conclusion

We all appreciate the great testimony of a sufferer named Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer whose hymns have brought strength to so many.

There is another hymn writer who also suffered from blindness, though not as well known. I thought I would end our study today by introducing you to him.

When he was only a teenager, he learned that his poor eyesight was going to deteriorate until he could no longer see. The diagnosis was discouraging, but not defeating. George Matheson continued with his studies at Glasgow University in his native Scotland.

He graduated from college when he was nineteen, but when he pressed on in his graduate studies, the prognosis became reality. At the age of

twenty, in 1862, George Matheson became totally blind.

His sisters joined ranks with him, learning Greek and Hebrew so they could assist him in his studies. He pressed on, in spite of the crushing news when his fiancée returned her engagement ring, stating that she was unwilling to marry a blind man.

George never married – the pain of that rejection never totally left him. However, he entered the ministry and served in the pastorate for thirty-one years.

He became rather famous – this blind preacher. Queen Victoria often invited George to preach to the royal court. In fact, she paid to have his sermons on Job published.

After his youngest sister married, leaving him entirely alone, George became overwhelmed with sorrow. Instead of languishing, however, he sat down and wrote the words to a poem that since has become a famous hymn of the church.

Even more, the words to this poem reflect the keys of promise that kept George Matheson from self-pity and defeat.

*O love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*

*O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.*

*O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms
red,
Life that shall endless be.^v*

This is the way we escape Doubting Castle; this is the way we flee from a giant named Despair.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/22/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Joseph Caryl, Practical Observations on Job: Vol. 2 (Reformation Heritage, 2001), p. 421.

ⁱⁱ J. Allen Blair, Living Patiently (Loizeaux Brothers, 1966), p. 53.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Hartley, NICOT: Job (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 140.

^{iv} Warren W. Wiersbe, Job: Be Patient (Victor Books, 1991), p. 32.

^v Robert J. Morgan, Then Sings My Soul (Thomas Nelson, 2003), p. 207 and <http://en.wikipedia.org>.