

Hitting Rock Bottom

The Hush of Heaven – Part II

Job 3

Introduction

William Wilberforce was a champion. In fact, this year, with the release of a major motion picture about his life, many people will now know something about him.

This year marks the 200th year of the passage of a bill he pushed and pulled through Parliament which eventually led to the abolition of the slave trade throughout the West Indies and Great Britain. In 1807, William saw his bill passed in Parliament which abolished the slave trade. The movie details his efforts with this particular bill.

He did not stop with the passage of this bill. William spent another twenty-six years passionately defending the bill to abolish slavery entirely. That bill was finally passed in 1833, three days before he died.

He was also a committed believer, which I learned from his biography that I am currently in the middle of reading. His uncle and aunt were saved under the ministry of George Whitefield and in turn, had a great influence on William who eventually came to faith in Christ as a young man. He was later disciplined and inspired by John Newton, who was a pastor and the author of the hymn, “Amazing Grace”.

While many will only see the heroic side of his efforts in the name of Christ, they will never know that he suffered greatly. Early in his life, doctors prescribed daily opium pills to help him cope with the incredible pain of his ulcerative colitis. The medicine in his day was considered a “pure drug,” but the effects wore him down. He had colon problems, an inability to see without difficulty, lung

problems, painful episodes with ulcers, and suffered in his adult life with curvature of the spine that degenerated over time.

On author wrote of William that as a middle-aged man,

One of his shoulders began to slope; and his head fell forward a little more each year until it rested on his chest unless lifted by conscious movement; he would have looked grotesque were it not for the charm of his face and the smile about his mouth. For twenty years, he wore a brace beneath his clothing that most people knew nothing about – a steel brace around his waist, cased in leather, which supported his back and arms.ⁱ

The truth is that most of the time, we like our heroes to suffer some, but we are left somewhat saddened to discover that they suffered greatly.

However, we are troubled the most to discover that our heroes of the faith often struggled with despair and even depression.

When one great theologian in the nineteenth century, lost two of his sons in the space of a month, he was brought to a moment he had never experienced before. He hit rock bottom. He wrote, “When Jimmy died, the grief was painfully sharp, but the acting of faith, the embracing of consolation, and all the cheering truths which ministered comfort to me were just as vivid.”

This is a great place to stop, is it not? This is what we like to hear. A great man of God hit rock bottom, but came back up with smile.

However, he continues in the same letter, “But when the stroke was repeated, and thereby doubled, I seem to be paralyzed and stunned. I know that my loss is doubled, and I know also that the same cheering truths apply to the second as to the first, but I remain numb, downcast . . . without hope and interest.”ⁱⁱ

This is not the way we are supposed to talk, is it?

We are a little uncomfortable with the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great preacher of the nineteenth century, who once wrote, “I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Steven Lawson, who will be with our church this summer in our summer series, writes in his commentary on Job, “Every person has a breaking point; even genuine believers have a point at which they can become severely discouraged and even depressed. Such despair can cause a person to want to give up on life.”^{iv}

Ladies and gentlemen, if you have ever experienced despair like this and wondered how you could be a Christian and feel that way; if you have ever been hurt so badly that you wished you could go to heaven; if you have suffered so long with pain and are so tired that all you want to do is lie down and die; if you have ever looked for some escape hatch in life – some way out; some exit sign; some relief – you may have more in common with the heroes of the faith than you ever dreamed.

We see an example of this in David, the heroic singer/king, who wrote his 88th Psalm beginning and ending with despair. In Psalm 88:6a, he writes,

You [Lord] have put me in the lowest pit...

In other words, “I can’t get any lower than I am.”

The last words, in fact, never rise to the surface, as he laments in Psalm 88:18b (NIV),

. . . darkness is my closest friend.

“Not even one crumb of comfort.”^v

This is the last stanza at that moment in David’s life.

We also see this in John the Baptizer, the heroic prophet who stood against the world for the gospel of the Lamb of God, but became totally despondent and disillusioned.

We see John sitting in a prison cell, hours away from being killed by Herod for having condemned his immorality, and he is wondering if all his efforts

and all his preaching have made any difference; in fact, wondering if he had even been following the wrong Messiah. It seemed that Christ was not fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament after all – prisoners were not being freed; the yoke of bondage was not being lifted.

So John sends a delegation of his disciples to Christ. They ask this question from their imprisoned leader,

. . . “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” (Matthew 11:3)

He had hit rock bottom. Now, even though he had baptized Jesus, heard the voice from heaven, watched the Spirit descend like a dove, heard the Savior preach, and seen Him perform miracles that only God could do – John the Baptizer had reached his breaking point in prison. He asked, “Lord, are You really the Messiah or should we pack our bags and look for someone else?”

This is not the way we expect heroes of the faith to talk.

Perhaps this is the reason Job chapter 3 makes us uncomfortable. Perhaps this is the reason most students study Job chapters 1 and 2 and marvel at the man who said,

. . . “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” (1:21b);

. . . “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” . . . (2:10b).

This is the way heroes speak in the face of incredible pain.

Then, let us move quickly past Job chapter 3, in which Job has reached the bottom of the pit.

Think about it – have you ever met anyone who has memorized any verse from Job chapter 3? Who wants to memorize Job 3:3a, where Job says,

“Let the day perish on which I was to be born....”

How is that for a “Happy Birthday” card?

Or Job 3:11a,

“Why did I not die at birth? . . .”

Or the last verse, Job 3:26,

“I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.”

Is this not encouraging? Can you see this framed and hanging in the church lobby, “I am not at ease, nor am I quiet”?

This might work in the nursery department – in fact, it might just be a theme verse! However, this verse will never make it on as many T-shirts and coffee mugs as Romans 8:28 or Jeremiah 29:11.

So let us just rush to the end of this book where Job is comforted by God and restored to health and given a new family.

Not so fast! What about Job chapter 3?

Job's Lament

Job's first speech is divided into three stanzas:

- The first section could have the heading, "Job curses the day he was born," and runs from Job chapter 3 verse 3 through verse 10.
- The second section could be headlined, "Job wishes he had died at birth," and runs from Job chapter 3 verse 11 through verse 19.
- The third and final section could be entitled, "Job longs for death to come now," and takes us from Job chapter 3 verse 20 through the end of the chapter.

1. First, Job curses the day he was born.

By taking a quick scan of the first section, we can see the repetition of the words "let" and "may". In Hebrew syntax, these words are known as jussives; that is, they are words that refer to "desire," as if they could issue commands. We could translate them by saying, "I wish".

- I wish the day had never come on which I was born (verse 3);
- I wish the night had never happened on which I was conceived (verse 3);
- I wish the day had been darkness when I was born (verse 4);
- I wish God had not cared about my birthday and that He had kept the light from ever dawning on that day (verse 4);
- I wish the blackness of night and gloom had blotted it out (verse 5);
- I wish no one to ever celebrate my birthday again because I wish it had never happened (verse 6).

This continues on and on.

Why would Job ever say such things? Because he is depressed; he has hit rock bottom and wants nothing to do with life.^{vi}

No wonder Robert Alden wrote, "The third chapter of Job must be one of the most depressing

chapters in the Bible; few sermons are made from this chapter; few verses are claimed as promises and few are remembered for their warmth . . . it [may very well be] the lowest point in the Book."^{vii}

The truth is that Job has arrived at the point at which:

- he cannot see any good reason or explanation for his trials;
- he does not have any idea what to do next;
- he does not see any end to his suffering;
- he assumes that God has abandoned him and for no good reason;
- he can see no escape or exit door out of his suffering and pain.

The prophet Jeremiah reached the bottom of this same pit and also said,

Cursed be the day I was born; let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!

Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A baby boy has been born to you!" . . .

Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow . . . (Jeremiah 20:14-15 & 18)

In this first section of Job's lamentation, we also notice the repeated use of words for "darkness":

- *darkness* (verse 4);
- *darkness and black gloom* (verse 5);
- *let darkness seize it* (verse 6);
- *let the stars of its twilight be darkened* (verse 9).

I have read the stories of two people who suffered greatly and found it interesting that they both wanted to be left alone in the dark.

One was the story of Joni Erickson Tada, who, after becoming paralyzed from the neck down, lay in a hospital bed that was flipped over every three hours with her strapped into the bed to keep her from falling to the ground. She hung suspended, face down, looking directly at the tiles of her hospital room floor – three hours at a time. She finally demanded that everyone leave and the lights be turned off – she wanted to be left alone in the dark.

This is what we do when we hit rock bottom.

Job even suggests that someone conjure up "Leviathan" in Job 3:8 – the great sea monster that Isaiah called, "the dragon [of] the sea" (Isaiah 27:1).

Superstitions abounded regarding this great creature that is now extinct; such as the superstition that this monster could rise up and swallow the sun. Job says, “If it were really true, then conjure up Leviathan to swallow the day I was born from ever having taken place.”^{viii}

2. Secondly, Job wishes he had died at birth.

The second section of Job’s lament is no more hopeful than the first. Job, in effect, says, “Okay, since I can’t turn back the clock and not be born, I wish I had at least been stillborn.”

Look at Job 3:11-12a.

Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?

Why did the knees receive me . . . ?

This phrase does not refer to a mother welcoming her newborn, but to the father placing the child on his lap and blessing it before God.

Job says, “Why did I have to be conceived and birthed and blessed and fed?”

In other words, “Why couldn’t I just have died and been spared all this misery?”

One of the dominant themes of this second section is Job’s desire for rest. He is literally exhausted physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

Notice Job 3:13.

For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,

In death, according to Job 3:17-18,

. . . the wicked cease from raging, and there the weary are at rest.

[Even] the prisoners are at ease together; they do not hear the voice of their taskmaster.

“I am tired. I just want rest from this trouble. I need relief from my sorrow. I need rescuing by someone – anyone.”

3. Thirdly, Job longs for death to come now.

The third section which begins with verse 20 can be simply entitled, “I just want to die now!”

Notice Job 3:20-21.

Why is light given to him who suffers, and life to the bitter of soul,

who long for death, but there is none, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,

In other words, a casket would be better than a buried treasure chest.

Death is a treasure to Job. In his mind, it would be better than gold.

By the way, this is not a cry of defiance against God – it is a cry of despair to God.^{ix}

Job is not doubting the existence of God; in fact, he refers several times to God and assumes God is the one who has boxed him in with all this suffering.

Job is not talking about ending his life – he is wanting God to take his life. There is a vast difference in these two desires. Both desires want life to end, but one leaves it up to God and the other takes matters into its own hands.

Maybe you are listening to this sermon and thinking, “Wow, I thought I had it bad; I thought I was suffering and I was depressed, but not after Job chapter 3! I’m better off than I thought!”

Maybe you are listening to this and thinking, “I know exactly what Job is talking about; I think I know just how he feels. Heroes of the faith aren’t supposed to talk like this so I’ve kept quiet, but Job has spoken for me.”

The truth is that if someone with this character and integrity and faith can hit bottom, so can we – and we probably have at some point or another.

Is it any wonder that so many people through the ages have turned to the book of Job when they themselves hit rock bottom?

Joni Erickson Tada has written, “As I lay immobilized in the hospital, my mind swirled with questions. When I learned that my paralysis was going to be permanent, I was desperate for answers. One of the first places I turned after my diving accident was to the book of Job.”^x

Application

Let us make some applications from the speech of one of our heroes of the faith who went through the valley of despair.

Moments that even the strongest believer will experience

Even for the strongest believer, let me give several applications.

1. There will be seasons when you believe you are hopelessly bound to suffering.

In Job 3:23, Job says that God has “hedged [him] in”. The same word was used by Satan in Job 1:10, when he said that God had hedged Job about so that bad things would never happen to him. Now Job says that God has “hedged [him] in” so that he cannot get away from bad things.

In other words, the sign on the doorway of life says, “No Escape . . . No Way Out.”

2. There will be times when solitude is preferred to fellowship.

Now, I am neither defending nor suggesting this as a course of action. In fact, by doing so, your depression and despair may take even longer to hurdle. But this will be the path you may very well travel as you struggle with the fact that the will of God hurts.

3. There will be episodes when anger replaces praise.

4. There will be periods when resentment overshadows trust.

5. There will be moments when despair replaces hope.

One author wrote, “The true believer does not always rise from his knees full of encouragement and fresh hope. There are times when you may remain down in the dumps and yet still have prayed well.”^{xi}

Solutions for those in the darkness of despair

Are there any solutions? Is there a way to surface after hitting rock bottom?

Let me provide several, in order to help you think along biblical lines.

1. Accept only the thoughts about God that are clearly supported by scripture.

. . . destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and . . . take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ . . .

Paul wrote in II Corinthians 10:5a.

Take every thought into captivity – run every thought through the scanner – to make sure the baggage is not carrying into the mind dangerous things. Your mind is where the battle is fought, so guard it well.

When C. S. Lewis was losing his wife to cancer, he wrote, “I am not in danger of ceasing to believe in

God. The real danger is to believe terrible things about God. The conclusion I dread is not, ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but, ‘So this is what God is really like?’”^{xii}

2. Refuse the counsel of others, including your own personal feelings that doubt the sovereign plan of God.

This was the downfall of Eve, who believed that God was keeping from her what was best, and of the Israelites, who were convinced that God was not worth following in the wilderness.

Suffering makes us forget the joys of the past and convinces us of the hopelessness of the future.^{xiii}

Any feelings that drive you deeper into that pit; any counsel that raises doubt about your past, present, and future not being under the sway of the sovereign is false counsel and wayward emotion.

3. Cultivate a deeper love and taste for sacred substance.

- It might be the assembly – when you hit rock bottom, you will be tempted to avoid it;
- It might be the scriptures – when you hit rock bottom, you will be tempted to neglect it;
- It might be the friendship of another believer – when you hit rock bottom, you will be tempted to refuse it.

You will be open to developing a habit for the unhealthy things of life that only add to your misery.

Some of you are watching shows that will only add to your misery.

If you are struggling with financial problems – do not sit down and watch the National Poker Championships – as if there was a time when you should.

If you are wrestling with issues in your marriage – do not go to eHarmony’s website and read the testimonials of people who found the perfect person and are all saying, “I found someone just like me.” Since when was that a good thing? If you find someone just like you, you have only doubled your problems.

Here is a radical thought – if you are struggling with the troubles of life, stop listening to secular music – listen to Christian music. I made a decision while in college, to not listen to or purchase secular music outside of classical music. That is one decision I have never regretted.

The tunes I like that dance around in my mind – well, the tunes I like do not necessarily dance – the

tunes that move slowly through my head have spiritual lyrics. These tunes offer sound advice and sing of Christ and hope.

Cultivate a deeper love and taste for sacred substance even before you hit rock bottom, so that when you are down, you will have some resources to draw upon.

4. Remember you are not the first believer to suffer such grief that you want to be left alone.

Take heart – you are not the only one to walk through such deep sorrow that you want the lights turned off – and to be left alone.

One author made a great connection to Christ – who was portrayed for us in the gospels as one “...made like his brothers in every way” (Hebrews 2:17 NIV); of whom was written that He was “deeply distressed and troubled...overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” (Mark 14:33-34 NIV). As B. B. Warfield comments on this passage: “In these moments our Lord [experienced] the ultimate depths of human anguish, and vindicated by the intensity of His mental sufferings the right to [be called] The Man of Sorrows.”^{xiv}

5. Give what little energy you have to something that brings help and hope to others.

I have referred already to Joni Erickson Tada. Some of her story is recorded in a book edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor, entitled, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*.

Joni provided chapter 9 of this book and wrote:

Trapped facedown, staring at the floor hour after hour, my thoughts grew dark and hopeless. All I could think was, God, I prayed for a closer walk with You; if this is Your idea of an answer to prayer, I am never going to trust You with another prayer again. I can't believe that I have to lie facedown and do nothing but count the tiles on the floor of this torture rack. I hate my existence. I asked the hospital staff to turn off the lights, close the blinds and close the door.

She writes that a friend came and listened to her rant and rave and cry. Then, she put a Bible on a little stool in front of her and turned to Psalm 18, which read in verse 6a,

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help . . .

Now, years later, Joni is determined to provide an estimated 18 million wheelchairs to the disabled

around the world, along with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Recently, she received an email from a woman named Beverly, who wrote:

Dear Joni,

I'm out of hope. But I am wondering if you might be able to help my husband, Ron, who was in an accident last year that left him a quadriplegic. He's a pastor, and he continued to [work] for a time, but now, he has resigned. He no longer wants to get out of bed. He doesn't talk. He doesn't want the lights on in his room and no TV. He doesn't want to live and he doesn't care about our family anymore. We all seem to be falling through the cracks. My husband feels useless and hopeless. We need help.

Joni wrote,

“I responded by calling information and tracking down Ron and Beverly and gave them a call. Beverly answered and [after sharing and praying with her] I asked if I could talk to Ron.

She knocked on his door and he let her tuck the phone under his ear. Although he would not respond, I talked a little bit of shop about quadriplegia.

I wanted to move beyond these topics, however, and bridge the conversation to spiritual things. So I started to share favorite scriptures that have sustained me through the toughest of times, like Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Silence on the other end. I even sang to him. Nothing.

Finally, I did the only thing I could think of that I had not already tried. I asked Ron if he had ever seen a movie called *The Shawshank Redemption*.”

“Why, yes, I have,” he said.

I couldn't believe it – Ron had responded.

“Well, Ron, do you remember when Red found Andy's letter? Do you remember what it said?”

“I think so . . . um, ‘Hope is a good thing . . . and no good thing ever dies.’”

“Ron, there are ten thousand other quadriplegics like you and me across America . . . and all of them were lying in bed this morning wondering whether or not they should get busy living or get busy dying. Ron, I'm going to make a choice to get busy living. Do you want to join me today?”

He said, “Yes, ma’am, yes, I do.”

The last Joni heard was that Ron and Beverly were active in sharing their testimony to everyone, preaching far and near.^{xv}

He had hit rock bottom, but surfaced with hope. Ron had decided to get busy with living – and help others surface from their own episode when they hit rock bottom too.

- Accept only those thoughts about God that are clearly supported by scripture;
- Refuse the counsel of others, including your own personal feelings that doubt the sovereign plan of God;
- Cultivate a deeper love and taste for sacred substance;

- Remember you are not the first believer to suffer such grief that you want to be left alone;
- Give what little energy you have to something that brings help and hope to others.

Remember, Job thought he was forgotten. He had no idea that he was not only in the full view of God, but that he would actually be remembered by millions of believers throughout the course of human history.

In remembering Job, discover a true hero of the faith – and redefine heroism. Through his struggles, and in His living Lord, find hope.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/4/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John Piper, The Roots of Endurance (Crossway Books, 2002), p. 117.

ⁱⁱ John Piper and Justin Taylor, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God (Crossway Books, 2006), p. 179.

ⁱⁱⁱ Steven Lawson, Holman Old Testament Commentary: Job (Holman Publishers, 2004), p. 33.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 34.

^v Mike Mason, The Gospel According to Job (Crossway Books, 1994), p. 56.

^{vi} Charles Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (W Publishing Group, 2004), p. 63.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 61.

^{viii} Derek Thomas, The Storm Breaks (Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 62.

^{ix} Roy Zuck, Job (Moody Press, 1978), p. 27.

^x Thomas, p. 64.

^{xi} Mason, p. 56.

^{xii} Thomas, p. 67.

^{xiii} Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Patient (Victor Books, 1991), p. 22

^{xiv} Derek Thomas, <http://www.monergism.com>.

^{xv} Piper and Taylor, p. 192.