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Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Pastor of

Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church
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THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Why Do the Righteous Suffer?

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Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we begin a series of messages on the book of Job by looking at Job chapter 1.

We do not know who wrote this book or when exactly it was written. It is considered to be the oldest written book in the Bible, and is believed to have occurred during the time of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land of Uz, where Job was from, was located to the East of Canaan.

The book of Job deals with the age-old question of human suffering, but does this from a believer's perspective. The question is not general, Why is there evil in this world? but rather, Why do the righteous suffer? Why do God's people suffer? Ultimately, this a question about God: Why does God bring suffering into the lives of His people?

In answer to this question, the book of Job presents an astounding doctrine of God as the absolute sovereign, who is just and good in all that He brings into the lives of His people. In this proper biblical view of God we find the answer to the suffering of God's people. The answer cannot be found without refer-

ence to God, and must not come from an emotional response to the pain of human experience.

In many ways, Job chapter one gives us the thesis or summary of the entire book. It introduces us to Job, a just man; it tells us of the intense suffering that came on Job; and it gives us the keys to understanding suffering so that we respond to it in a godly way.

In this chapter we see, first of all, the man Job.

Verse 1 describes Job's character by saying that he was "perfect and upright." This does not mean that Job was sinless, for the Bible tells us clearly that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It does mean, however, that Job was spiritually mature, and that he was a man of unparalleled piety. Here was a man of integrity who was meticulous in his walk with God.

The foundation for Job's piety is explained in the next words in verse one, "He feared God and eschewed (or hated) evil." To fear God is to respect who He is, to honor what He says, and to embrace what He

does. It is not the cringing fear of one who is terrified, but the loving reverence of a child before his father, a respect that leads to obedience. Fearing God, Job hated evil, because all that is evil is against God. Job realized that one cannot live a double life, and so he was constantly on the watch for sin, living a life of repentance, and putting away sin.

The godliness of Job comes out in this chapter in two ways.

First, Job was a man who took seriously his family responsibilities. How a man behaves in his private and family life is the real measure of his godliness. Publicly he may put on a good front, but how does he live at home, and how seriously does he take his covenant responsibilities?

Job is the father of ten grown children, seven sons and three daughters. Even though these children were grown and had families of their own, they were obviously a close-knit family, who loved each other's company, and so in turn they had a family gathering in each of their homes. This in itself speaks well of the way Job had raised them. Whenever his children had these gatherings, verse five tells us, Job would spend the day making sacrifices for each of his children, and praying for them, for, said Job, "It may be

that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Two things are notable in those words of Job. 1) Job knew that his children were sinners who were susceptible to temptation, and 2) he prayed for them even though they had not committed any open sin—his concern was that even in their hearts they may have sinned against God.

Secondly, Job proved his godliness in the way he handled his earthly possessions. Job was an extremely wealthy man. In those days, a man's wealth was measured by his property and possessions and the number of servants he employed. In verse three we learn that Job had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 1,000 oxen, 500 donkeys, and more servants than anyone else in the area. He was renowned for his wealth. Wealth always presents the temptation of being drawn away from God. Psalm 62:10 warns us, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them." But this did not happen with Job. He acknowledged that all he had was given to him by God (verse 21—the Lord gave) and he used it generously to care for the needy (Job 4:1-4 and 29:12-17). There was no sin in Job's being rich, and Job did not sin in the possession or use of his riches. How different from so many who are wealthy today. Because he feared God, and hated evil, he was very careful in the possession of his wealth.

good and looks so easy, when we really have no idea.

3. Pray that you may understand the grace and mercy of God yourself, that your view of God may be mature and balanced. You and I are sinners who have been redeemed and forgiven and are loved, and we do not deserve it. Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving, even as God in Christ has been kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward you. Good doctrine, which is experienced, will always lead to humility before God, gratitude for salvation, and mercy toward others. May God help us with this.

4. Do not equate grace with things or circumstances. Job's friends were not the only ones who did this; Job did it too. He asked, what have I done to deserve this? Why is God angry with me? We do that very quickly too. We should not. When difficult times come, it does not mean that God is judging you, or that you have done something wrong to deserve it. No, if you are a child of God, He is dealing with you in love, and so pray for grace to persevere and to experience his unflinching

love. He will never forsake His own.

Job was forsaken here, of his friends. They turned on him, they gaped on him. It reminds us of Jesus' suffering on the cross. He was forsaken of all, and compassed by enemies who taunted him. Even God came against him in wrath, till He cried out, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" And all of it, so that we may have the confidence, even in difficult circumstances, that God will never forsake us, or withdraw His grace from us. That is our confidence.

Let us pray,

Father, we pray for softened hearts that understand and experience grace and mercy, so that we may be those who are tenderhearted and merciful to others, and not just to those who are brothers and sisters in the Lord, but also that we may have a mercy and love that displays itself to those outside who are not saved. It is of grace, totally undeserved, that we are redeemed, and we are thankful. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Job's godliness also received the approval of God. When God from heaven looked down on man, and saw Job, He was pleased. In verse 8, speaking to Satan, God himself says, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" Is that what God would say of you?

Looking at all that is said of the man Job, we see his impeccable godliness. The Bible describes Job to us this way, not just as an example for us to follow, but to teach us that God's people, godly people, do and will suffer in this world, to teach us that suffering is a reality for every one of God's people. Becoming a Christian and believing in Jesus Christ do not give you an exemption from suffering. One of the popular heresies of our day, the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity gospel as it is known, is completely wrong here, and gives Christians a false hope. God's blessings to the saved do not come in the form of earthly prosperity. Salvation does not mean we are freed from the pains of human life. Job was an upright man, who feared God, and yet he experienced unparalleled suffering in his life.

The initial bout of suffering that came on Job was sudden and enormous. In one day, Job was stripped of his wealth and

bereaved of his ten children. In Job 1 we have a blow by blow account of Job's suffering, as one messenger after another comes to tell Job that he has lost everything.

This dramatic description is set against the backdrop of verse 13, which tells us that on this day Job's children were gathered in the home of their oldest brother eating and drinking wine. While they are eating together and having a good time, as we would expect, Job is on his knees in prayer for them. If we would look out Job's window, we would see his servants busily working with the oxen turning over the soil, we would see the donkeys grazing quietly in the fields, we would see the flocks of white sheep on the hillsides, and we would hear the servants bustling around the camels as they load another export to be carried across the mountains. Everything on Job's estate is running smoothly. It is a normal day.

Suddenly, Job receives a knock on his door that will forever change his life. In rapid-fire succession, Job receives bad news. One messenger tells him of an attack on the servants working in the fields; the donkeys and oxen were all stolen, and all the servants killed. The next messenger tells of lightning from heaven that burned up the flocks of sheep and their shep-

herds. The third of an attack from the Chaldeans in which all the camels were stolen, and the servants murdered. And, as Job is trying to come to grips with all this, the fourth servant bursts in with news of the sudden and catastrophic death of all his children in a fierce tornado that exploded the house of his oldest son where they were feasting.

We have to pause here and picture the scene. Just imagine! No, you say, "I can't imagine." The Bible carefully gives us the details so that we may have a sense of the enormity and suddenness of these calamities. All his hard earned labor is gone in a flash and his heart is emptied in the loss of his entire family of children. All in one day. What a devastating blow! We picture Job reeling as he receives the news, sitting numbed in disbelief, sobbing with his face in his pillow. Job, like us, was a real person. A man of like passions to us. He was not superhuman. Verse 20 describes for us the overwhelming grief of Job; we read, "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground." Here is a shattered man. Here is a man pierced through with pain.

He arose—that implies that he had fallen down to the ground at the news. Now he peels himself off the ground.

He rent his mantle. The

mantle is the outer garment, the clean warm covering of the body, your presentation to others—your best suit. The tearing of the mantle is the action of a man in anguish, an announcement of utter grief and devastation.

He shaved his head. Hair in the Bible is always presented as a man's glory. Shaving the head, therefore, is a symbol of the loss of all personal glory.

And he fell down upon the ground again.

Maybe some of us know some of Job's pain, but I doubt that any have experienced such loss in one day. The Bible is teaching us here a very important lesson. God's people do suffer, and sometimes their suffering is intense and extreme. As Job says later, in Job 14:1-2: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Grief and pain are a part of our life in this world and in themselves are not wrong. Verse 22, "In all this Job sinned not." Troubles will come to us in life that will tear us apart and render us weak and helpless. This is the truth of God's Word here.

But why? If you have your Bibles open to Job 1, you will notice that I skipped over verses 6-12. I did that on purpose, because I wanted you to see Job's

God will always lead to humility, sympathy, and mercy. If you are lacking in mercy, it is usually because you have a lopsided view of God, and an inflated view of yourself. You do not show mercy because you do not understand your own sin and the great mercy of God towards you.

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Job, as I said, understood this. He says to his friends in chapter 16:4-5, "I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." He genuinely means that. Job understood and experienced grace, he understood the mercy of God toward him. He looked in faith on Jesus Christ to come, and out of that mercy he was a man of mercy.

That is the application for us. We should and do see ourselves in Job's friends. We are a lot like them, and we have a lot to learn about mercy and sympathy. We have a lot to learn about being comforters to others who are afflicted. So, let me close with these points.

1. Do be a comforter to others. Job's friends were right to come.

If you see a brother or sister in trouble, do not be standoffish, and think, well, I might mess it up, so I'm going to do nothing. No, sometimes we will get it wrong, but let us learn to be

more compassionate, encouraging, and comforting to others. A simple word of en-

couragement or thanks. A thoughtful text, e-mail, or card. There needs to be more Christian fellowship between believers, and more spiritual conversation. We are put together as believers in order to help one another and to bear one another's burdens.

2. Then, if someone is going through a hard time, do not jump to conclusions and come with solutions. That is our instinct, but it is sinful. We do not have the wisdom or the power to solve everyone else's problems. We should not assume that we can see things as God sees them. No, there is always a mystery to the suffering of God's people. Encouragement and comfort comes through pointing others to the unfailing love of God, the mercy and redemption that is ours in Jesus Christ, and the eternal hidden purposes of God. Too often we stand at a distance and pass judgments and have solutions, and it all sounds so

ferent. Over and over, they refer to God by the name El-Shaddai, God of Hosts, or in the English KJV, the Almighty. They viewed God only as austere, distant, and dreadful. Not once do they reference Him as Jehovah. Not once do they speak of sacrifice and satisfaction. These were men who had a lopsided view of God.

And because of this, they did not understand the grace of God, and how the grace of God works. They equated grace with material prosperity and health, and they equated the wrath of God with calamities and affliction. Their reasoning went like this. God sends calamities on wicked men. God has sent calamities on Job. Therefore Job must be a wicked man. They argued from their experience, from what they saw. We might say, they made their theology on the street corner, without reference to Divine revelation.

Many today do the same thing. They say that God sends good things, rain and sunshine, on both the just and the unjust, and that therefore God must be gracious towards all men. This is the teaching of common grace, which says that we determine who are the objects of God's grace based on what He gives to a man. It goes against the whole teaching of Scripture, and here particularly against the story of Job.

Yes, God was gracious to Job when He prospered him, but God did not remove His grace when He took all that away from him. Job's prosperity itself was not a sign of God's grace, and Job's calamity was not a sign of God's wrath. No, always God was gracious to Job, and especially God sustained Job by His grace when Satan came against him. The grace of God is not tied to material things, but is the saving attitude that God has towards His chosen people in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the wicked will prosper and God's people will be troubled. That does not mean God is being gracious to the wicked and is judging His people. No, the prosperity of the wicked is a part of God's judgment on them. As Psalm 73 says, He puts them on slippery places that lead to destruction. And, at the same time, all the afflictions He brings on His people are a part of His grace toward them and are sovereignly sent for their eternal profit.

So these friends had a wrong view of God and a wrong view of grace, and these things led to an inflated and self-righteous view of themselves and a lack of mercy towards Job. Implied in their theology was this, God is not judging us, so we must be the righteous ones. That showed in their lack of humility and sympathy. Proper theology of

suffering first from his earthly perspective. In those intervening verses, we get a glimpse into heaven and a conversation between God and Satan, but Job did not see that, and so from Job's perspective there is no answer to the question, why?

And that is the first and most important thing that we must understand when we go through the trials and sufferings of life. From our perspective, there is not always an answer. God does not always tell us the reason for our suffering. Yes, there are reasons, we are going to see what some of those are in a minute, but specific to our situation, and from our earthly perspective, we cannot and do not always know God's reasons and purposes. There is a part of it that is always hidden from us, shrouded in the mystery of the will of God.

In the end, this is the main lesson in the book of Job. When Job's friends come to him and tell him that there must be some sin in his life that is the cause of his suffering, Job begins to probe more deeply into the reason for his suffering and puts the question to God, and God finally answers him with a rebuke. In Job chapters 38-41 God interrogates Job and helps him to understand his place as a mere man before God. God asks, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" and continues

with question after question in the same manner, hammering away at the inferiority of man, emphasizing to Job that there are so many things that man does not know and that man cannot do, that God does know and can do.

Finally, in chapter 40:2, God says to Job, "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?" And a humbled Job stops demanding answers from God for His misery, and says, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; Yea twice, but I will proceed no further." And then again, for two more chapters God continues to contrast His own almighty power with the impotence of Job, till finally Job confesses that God's ways are too wonderful for him to comprehend. He says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:4-5).

What is striking, in the entire book of Job, is that God nowhere directly answers Job's questions. He does not say, "Job, here is the reason that you have suffered." Rather, in Job's suffering, He answers Job with Himself. He gives Job a robust and exalted theology. And this is wisdom for the believer in

his suffering—not the answer to why I have to suffer in a particular way, but who is God?

And now, going back to chapter one, we see a second reason for our suffering: the sovereignty of God. Why did Job suffer? Because God sovereignly willed it. We see this, especially, in the conversation of Satan with God, in which God takes the initiative, asking Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? It was God, and not Satan, who initiated Job's suffering. And Satan himself acknowledges God's sovereignty when he says to God, "But put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath." Satan could not so much as lift a finger to touch Job, apart from the sovereign will of God. That is clear also in God's control of the specifics of Job's trials. First God says to Satan, "You may put forth your hand against all Job has, but you may not touch him," and then later, "Behold, he is in thy hand; but save his life." Satan was given permission to be the agent of Job's suffering, but God set the bounds on what he could and could not do to Job. And what this tells us is that God is intimately involved in the details of our suffering. It may be that someone you know devises evil against you, it may be that you fall sick with a disease, but both the people who hurt you and the sickness that racks your body with pain are limited by the sovereign control

of God. God does not suffer us to be tempted or tried above that we are able.

Another reason for our suffering is the testing of our faith. Satan certainly wants to test us. His accusation is that Job feared God only because of the good things that God had given him. Satan says to God, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." The substance of Satan's accusation is that faith is not real, that people believe and trust in and worship God only because God has given them good things. That the faith God has given us by the work of His Holy Spirit is not strong enough to endure the trials of life. But in the trials of His people God proves otherwise. He puts us through trials to increase our faith, to make it stronger through troubles. One of my favorite verses in the book of Job is found in chapter 23 verse 10, where Job says, "But he knoweth the way that I take, when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The trials are sent by God to strengthen us, to mature us, to refine us, to increase our faith in Him. Whenever a believer goes through a trial he will always find that God by His grace supplies the necessary strength. As God said to Paul,

that "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready" (Ps. 7:11-12). So, yes, God is a God of justice, and He will and does punish all sin.

But Job's friends incorrectly apply this truth to Job, and they do not see the whole picture of who God is and of the satisfaction of His justice in Jesus Christ. They do not understand the mercy of God for all who put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. They do not see that those whom God has chosen in eternity past, and on whom He has set His love, and who by a work of His grace have come to faith, are always the objects of God's love. That there is nothing that can separate them from the love of God.

Now maybe you say, how were they supposed to see this, so early on in history? This was around the time of Abraham, and how could they even know of the promise of Jesus Christ, and that Jesus would come as the lamb to bear the sins of His people? How could they know this?

Well, I don't know exactly how they could or would know this, but I do know that *Job* had a knowledge of these things. He understood the justice of God, but he also understood the mercy of God through the sacrifice of a Redeemer, and

because of this he knew God closely, as his friend, and not just as a distant, austere, angry Deity.

You see this throughout the book of Job. When his children feasted, Job made sacrifices for them, to atone for their sins. At the end of the book, Job makes similar sacrifices for the sins of his three friends, and God forgives them. In chapter 19:25, he speaks of his Redeemer. All of this demonstrates that Job believed that Jesus would come to pay the price for sin; satisfy the justice of God in the place of His people; and redeem them from the power and guilt of sin. Job's view of God was balanced and complete and mature.

And because of this, Job had a very close relationship with God. One of the most interesting things in this book is the use of names of God. Job refers to God by the name Jehovah, in the English KJV, LORD. In Job 1:21: "The LORD/Jehovah gave, and the LORD/Jehovah hath taken away." See the same in chapter 2 and in chapter 12. This is the personal and covenant name of God, the name that speaks of God's mercy and relationship to His people. Job knew God intimately, as his friend, and that was because Job came to Him through faith in the promised Messiah.

But the view that his three friends had of God was quite dif-

mourn with Job and to comfort him.” That is a good thing.

To comfort others is to come along side them when they are weak and down, and to ease their grief and give them strength and hope. It is to console them and to cheer them up. We do that by bringing the promises of God’s Word, and helping fellow believers to look beyond their troubles, to the sovereign love of God for them.

But Job’s friends didn’t bring him an ounce of comfort. Instead of directing Job beyond his troubles, they focused on his troubles. Instead of bringing him the promises of God’s love, they said God was judging him.

In order to bring comfort, you must first sympathize. To be sympathetic means, literally, to feel with another person what they are feeling; it is to enter into their situation and to look at their world and their experiences through their eyes. To try to understand what they are going through.

Job’s friends had no sympathy. Instead of seeking to understand Job’s experience, they jump to conclusions. They bring accusations, but no compassion. Instead of showing pity, Job’s friends were brutal.

But bigger than the problem of their behavior was their wrong theology. They thought they knew God, when in fact they did not understand Him at all. God is angry with them, not simply because they have mistreated Job, but, He says in chapter 42:7, “My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends, for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right.”

So what was wrong with their theology?

First, they had a very lopsided view of God. They understood the greatness, the exaltedness, and the transcendence of God; they affirmed very strongly the justice of God; but they did not see the love and tenderness of God.

Now, in some ways, what they say is a breath of fresh air. Today we hear the opposite, that God is a God of love and mercy, and the truth of God’s justice is overlooked. People believe that in love God simply overlooks sin, and that in the end there is no hell and eternal damnation. But, in fact, God is a God of justice, and even today the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). The Bible teaches

||| *Instead of directing Job
beyond his troubles,
they focused on his troubles.* |||

who asked to be delivered from his trial, “My grace is sufficient.” A believer will come out stronger on the other side. Satan will try to shake us and tempt us to forsake God, but God will not leave us, and through the trial will draw us closer to Himself.

And that points us to another reason for our suffering—the goodness of God. In His sovereignty, God is always good and merciful to His people. Jesus teaches us that not a hair can fall from our head without the will of our heavenly Father. The trials we experience come from our father. Sometimes they are sent to chasten us, other times they are sent to strengthen us, but always they are sent from the loving hand of God. We must never suppose that God intends evil against us, and whenever we do, that is a sinful reaction to the trials God sends. In Psalm 77 the psalmist questions the goodness of God, asking, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth *his* promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (Ps. 77:7-9). And then he says, No, those questions arose from my infirmity, from my sinful human nature. God’s promise is that “All things work together for good to them that love him”

(Rom. 8:28). These are things we must believe, by faith, and they will come only when we have a proper view of the sovereignty of God.

So, what are the reasons that the righteous suffer? Well, we do not always know the exact reasons, but we do know that God is Sovereign, that God is good and loving, and that He will use them for our spiritual profit and growth in grace.

And knowing and believing these things, we will learn to respond as Job did at the end of this chapter, in verse 21. Job says, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

In these words Job acknowledges the sovereignty, the justice, and the goodness of God. His response is a response of worship, in which he falls down before God, fixes his eyes on eternity, and acknowledges that everything he once had was a gift to him, not something he deserved. He came into this world naked and empty, and he will leave it the same way, and in between the Lord gives and takes, according to His sovereign goodness. And because of this, Job worships!

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*February 9, 2014
No. 3710*

*When Things Go from Bad to Worse
Rev. Rodney Kley*

Dear Radio Friends,

How do you respond to death and disease when it comes into your life, personally? When you lose a loved one, maybe your spouse, a close friend or sibling, or even one of your children, then what do you say about God? When you get so sick that you cannot sleep and you become depressed, how can and do you respond in a biblical and Christian way?

When we are struck by pain and grief, often one of our first responses is anger. How can God do this to me? How can this be fair and loving? We rage against God. And even though in sympathy we might say that such a response is understandable, we have to see and say also that such a response is sinful, that it arises out of a lack of trust in God, and a weak view of God.

This was the response of Job's wife when they had lost everything, including their ten children. She said to Job, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die." But Job, instead, made a wonderful confession concerning the sovereignty of God. He said, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive

evil?" And the Holy Spirit notes that "in all this did not Job sin with his lips."

These words of Job and his wife are recorded for us in the book of Job, chapter 2 and in today's message we are going to be looking at the first ten verses of this chapter. For Job, things have gone from bad to worse, from very bad to extremely worse. Back in chapter 1 Job, in one day, lost all his assets, all his servants but a few, and all ten of his children. Standing among ten freshly dug graves, Job made this beautiful confession, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away: blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

Behind Job's suffering was Satan, attempting to get Job to curse God. Satan's contention had been that Job feared God only because of how good he had it in life. Satan was saying that Job's faith, and God's sustaining grace, were not sufficient to preserve Job in his trust in God. But Job's confession proved otherwise, and, in round one of Job's suffering, Satan is defeated.

that Job has sinned and therefore must repent, and that when he does, things will improve in his life. Zophar says, "Oh that God would speak and open his lips against thee. Know that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (Job 11:5-6). He then calls Job to put away his iniquity, and tells him that this is the only way he can possibly have peace.

So these are Job's friends. What miserable comforters. What they say is not fair and is not true. We already know from the earlier chapters that God Himself viewed Job as an upright man, and that He had not brought any of this suffering on Job as punishment for particular sins. These friends are totally wrong.

But it raises an important question. Why, when Job is already going through such severe trials, seemingly without cause, why does God, instead of sending friends to comfort him, send friends who taunt him? In chapter 16, Job will say that they tear and gnash at him with their words. He will confess, "God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked" (Job 16:9-10).

Why does God do this?

We remember the conversation between Satan and God. Satan is behind these friends,

to persecute Job now with cruel words, and to press home even closer the temptation to curse God. If Job will believe what his friends say about God, he will become exasperated with God.

But God Himself is again sovereign here. Sometimes He will send people into our lives who are constant critics, who become a thorn in the flesh, whose words are never encouraging, to teach us some important lessons in patience, to keep us on our toes, and to help us see that we should not depend on the praise of men.

But now let us evaluate the words of Job's three friends. We must do that, because God Himself passes judgment on them. At the end of their lengthy interaction with Job, God tells Job to pray for them and make sacrifices for them, because they need forgiveness. What they did and said was sinful.

So what is wrong with their comfort and advice? We can answer that question on two levels, first by addressing their behavior, and then second, looking at the underlying issues.

In one word, their behavior was cruel.

Apparently they had good intentions. Chapter 2:11 tells us that when they heard of Job's situation, they "made an appointment together to come to

tive on life is priceless. But friendships also bring familiarity, and the possibility of hurt, and here Job's friends fail. The modern saying, "Who needs enemies when I've got you for friends?" could well have been used by Job to refer to his friends.

In Job 16:2 Job declares, "Miserable comforters are ye all." He tells them, there's nothing new in your words, I could get this advice anywhere, and he asks them, When are your long-winded speeches going to end?

What did they say to make Job evaluate their friendship and their advice this way?

Let us go over a sampling of their words.

Eliphaz speaks first. He is probably the oldest of Job's friends, and he appeals to his experience as an older man. Over and over he says, "I have seen." In chapter 4:8 he says, "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed."

In my experience, he is saying, "God always brings

judgment on wicked men." At first these words are an abstract observation, but later they become a specific accusation without any grounds, when he says to Job in chapter 22:6-9, "thou hast stripped the naked of their clothing,

thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, thou hast withholden bread from the hungry, thou hast sent widows away empty."

Bildad, Job's second friend, joins the chorus. He again argues from human experience, not his own, but he makes an appeal to history and to the wisdom of forefathers. His assertion is that God is just, "Doth the Almighty pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice.... Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers" (Job 8:3, 20). His accusation is that Job, and especially Job's children, had sinned. He says, "thy children have sinned against him, and he hath cast them away for their transgressions" (Job 8:4).

Zophar is the harshest of Job's friends. He does not bother to argue from experience or history, but simply makes assumptions. His main assumption is

*Having Christian friends
who can counsel us
from God's Word
and help us to maintain
a proper perspective on life
is priceless.*

Chapter 2 begins with Satan appearing again with the other angels in God's presence in heaven, a scene very similar to that in chapter 1, verses 6 through 12. In these two scenes we get a glimpse into heaven, and the invisible war that is constantly going on between Satan and God.

But why are these recorded in Scripture? That is an important question. The reason is not simply so that we know about the reality of Satan and his demons and their attacks on God's people, but especially to show to us that God is absolutely sovereign over the works of the Devil. Satan cannot move or lift a finger apart from God's will.

We see that in Job 2. Already in verse 1, Satan presents himself before the Lord. Does not that tell us who is the superior here? This is not a contest of equals, but with all the other angels who are servants and messengers of God, Satan also comes.

And then in the following verses we see that God issues a challenge to Satan. Often we think of Satan as the one who is challenging God and challenging Job, but if we read the passage closely, we see that in actuality it's the other way around. God challenges Satan. Verse 2, "The Lord said unto Satan, whence comest thou?" You see, God takes the initiative

here. Satan has already been challenged once and has been defeated. He is hardly ready to bring this up to God. But it is God's will that things get worse for Job, and God is going to use Satan as the instrument to bring that on Job. He initiates the conversation with Satan by asking "From whence comest thou?" God is not afraid of Satan or of what Satan has been doing.

And then you have Satan's very evasive answer. "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it."

You ask your children who are not making any noise, "What are you doing?" and the answer is, "Oh, nothing," and you know that means they have been up to something.

Satan's answer is like that. "Oh, I've just been wandering around, checking things out," when in fact he has been going around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour, and his latest attack has been on Job.

In chapter 1, it was Satan, yes, by God's permission, but it was Satan who had brought all Job's misery on him in an attempt to get him to curse God. He is the accuser of the brethren. His name, Satan, means adversary. And now, defeated after round 1, he says, "I've just been wandering around in the earth." He does not dare to bring up the name of Job.

But God does, and continuing His challenge, He says to Satan in verse 3, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

What we should see here is the confidence of God in His challenge to Satan. God is saying to Satan, “See, My grace is sufficient to sustain and to give strength to My people in the troubles of life. See, Satan, My love is stronger than any trouble that comes. See, Satan, My people have a confidence and a hope and faith that supersedes all the troubles of life. See Job, Satan, you said he would curse Me, but he has not. He still fears Me, he still hates what is evil, and he has retained his faith through immense trial.”

Is this not a beautiful truth, the truth of God’s preserving grace? In the New Testament, in Romans 8:35-39, it is stated in a very positive way, when Paul says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep

for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is what God has demonstrated in Job’s life.

Now, you would expect Satan to stop right here and to admit defeat, but no, he will never admit he is wrong or weak or defeated. In defiance of God, he says, “Skin for skin, yea all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.”

Sometimes, after we lose our possessions maybe in a house fire or car accident, we will say, “Well, at least no one was hurt, and we still have each other.” Or, maybe we lose everything, and then we say, at least I still have my health. Satan’s contention is that this is how Job is thinking—he still has his health, so of course he is still faithful, but take away his health, and he will curse thee.

And confidently again God says, “Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.”

With this, Satan has un-

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 23, 2014
No. 3712

Job’s Miserable Comforters
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

We return today to our study of the life of Job. In the first two chapters of this book we learned of the great calamities that came upon Job, and we heard him responding with beautiful confessions concerning the sovereign control of God. At the end of chapter 2, Job’s three friends come to visit him, and they sit down with him in silence for seven days. In chapter three, at the end of the seven days, Job speaks, cursing the day he was born, wishing he had died as a child, and asking why God wants him to continue living, when his life is so empty and miserable. He says that he is bitter in soul, that his way is hid, and that God has hedged him in. He’s in a dark pit of depression, and he sees no way out of it.

In response to Job’s words, his three friends, whose names are Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, begin a lengthy discussion with Job that goes on for 29 chapters. In these chapters there is a cycle of speeches. Each of the friends speaks in turn, and after each of their speeches Job responds. This happens three times over,

except that in the last cycle, Zophar no longer speaks, but is replaced by another man, Elihu. Today we are going to look at the content of what these friends said to Job, but because it is impossible in one message to consider everything they say, I want to do this: first, summarize their words; second, evaluate their words; and then third, make some applications for ourselves.

All of us can think of friends that we have who, like Job, are hurting. One has physical/health problems, another has psychological problems and is depressed, another does not have steady employment, another has marriage problems, another has wayward children. How are we going to help these hurting friends? Or even this, how can we avoid hurting them more?

There’s a lot for us to learn from the friends of Job. Friendship is a wonderful thing. Having friends in time of trouble is very important. Having Christian friends who can counsel us from God’s Word and help us to maintain a proper perspec-

He is working through our pain to bring us to greater maturity, and to keep us dependent on Him. He is a loving Father, who does not afflict needlessly, but who with restraint inflicts pain, for our profit. A parent who loves his children will do the same.

And, so, the positive encouragement here for you, if you find yourself in the dark throes of depression, is to look away from yourself and your troubles to God, and to trust in Him and His unfailing faithfulness and love displayed in Jesus Christ.

This is how Jesus handled His suffering. We have a great example of it in Psalm 22, which is a Messianic Psalm, a prophetic Psalm concerning the suffering Savior. As Jesus endures the suffering of the cross, and as God turns His back on His Son, the Son moves His attention away from Himself and His suffering and He looks to God and His faithfulness.

I will just read the first few verses, but it is pattern in this Psalm. Psalm 22:1, 2. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

Then, turning from His suffering, He says (vv. 3-5), "But thou art holy, O thou that

inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

And in verses 9 and 10, "But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother's belly."

And so He encourages us, in verses 23, 24, "Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard."

Let us pray,

Father, we do not always know the reason for our suffering, and sometimes it seems that we are all alone, and that even Thy hand is withdrawn. But, Father, we know that Thy love in Christ is unfailing, and so we ask Lord that Thou wilt encourage us by this truth, never to give up on Thee, but to continue in trust and hope, till the day of Christ. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

restrained power to harm Job himself, only he must not bring anything on him that will threaten his life. And so Satan goes out from God's presence to assail Job. He wants to prove to God that Job will indeed curse him, and so he comes with a two-pronged attack. All that Job has left is his health, his wife, and his life. Satan cannot touch his life, but he will use his health and his wife now against him.

Job 2:7-8, Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself."

What exactly this disease was we do not know, but its symptoms were terrible. The boils themselves covered Job's entire body and produced a hot, searing, and penetrating pain. They broke out into sores that scabbed over and became incredibly itchy, and Job, having no ointment or medicine to ease the pain, scraped at his body with a broken piece of a pot. That was his only relief. With this disease came insomnia, worms, nightmares, bad breath, weight loss, chills, diarrhea, and blackened skin (Job 7:4-5, 13-14; 19:17, 20; 21:6; 30:27). So severely was Job smitten by this disease that he was forced, as an unclean man, to sit outside the city in a pile of ashes, and when his friends came to see him, they were so shocked at his appearance that

they did not recognize him (Job 2:12). Already reeling in grief and loss, Satan attacked him with this incurable disease with its insufferable pain.

And now, understand, that Satan's attack on Job is not only physical. No, whenever we are sick or in pain, we are usually pretty cranky too. And, not just cranky with people, but also with the sickness itself, and we start to feel sorry for ourselves. Why me? Why is God doing this to me? There is a spiritual assault, an assault on our souls, a challenge to our faith, that comes with physical illness. And Satan is bringing those things to Job too. In these moments when he is physically weak, his faith is being challenged. Satan wants Job to curse God to His face. That is Job's temptation here. Those are the thoughts that Satan is putting into his mind.

We know that from what Job's wife says to him. Here is the second prong of Satan's attack. Now, understand, that Mrs. Job had experienced the same loss as Job. Her wealth and status were gone in a day. Her mother's heart was torn by grief in the loss of her children. And understand, too, that she is not an evil woman, but rather the beloved wife of the godly Job, who with him had raised ten godly children, and who would be the mother of the children

God would again later give to Job. But now under her grief, she is broken, and she becomes an ally of Satan, to tempt Job to give up and to curse God. We can feel the intensity of the moment, and can understand her anger and grief. But we do not justify it. It was sinful and wrong.

There is a double caution here for us. On the one hand, just because someone is a sincere Christian who cares about us does not mean we should always follow his advice when we are in trouble. Good people, who love us, can give very bad advice. Our counsel, ultimately, must be from the Word of God. And then, on the other hand, we must be very careful not to tempt others by what we say, or by how we respond to a situation. That is why the best response to a severe trial is to be silent, as Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." Otherwise we respond out of pain and emotion, out of what we are feeling and experiencing, as did Job's wife.

How does Job respond? Or we could say, What kind of response does God's unfailing grace produce in His dear child, Job?

We point to four things here in Job 2.

First, Job acknowledges that he is a sinner who deserves nothing more than what God is

giving to him here. At the end of verse 8 we read that Job sat down among the ashes. To sit in ashes, and to smear the ashes on one's face and body, was a sign, not only of grief, but also of personal humility. It was to say, I am black in my sin before God. Later, in chapter 42:6, Job will say, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." In sitting in ashes, Job shows that his heart is still ruled by the confession he had made in chapter 1, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." He did not deserve anything more from God.

Second, in answer to his wife, Job is amazingly tender. When we are sick and tired we become impatient especially with those who are closest to us. Here is Job, racked with pain, and the one who should have been his support and help turns against him. What does Job do? He rebukes her, yes, but he does not berate her or call her a fool, rather he says to her, "That's not how a child of God speaks. What you've said is what a fool, who denies God, would say." It shows us that Job himself is thinking of how he as a child of God should respond to what has happened in his life.

Third, Job does not blame others for what has happened to him, but instead receives it from the Lord. He could have. He does not know of Satan's

times, that God is absolutely sovereign, that there is nothing that can or will happen outside of His sovereign control. That has already been Job's confession. He knows that God has given and taken away, he receives the evil in his life from the hand of God, and he knows that God has brought him to this point, into this deep pit. And as he holds on to that truth, he will begin to receive light and hope in his darkness.

Number two, God is just, that is, there is no creature who has ever received what he truly deserves from God. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. We see in our suffering the enormity of sin, not only in general, but our own sin. We realize that there would not be death or disease if sin had not entered this world. Our suffering is a testimony of God's hatred for sin and a reminder of the torment of hell. So any suffering that we must endure in this life is minimal, is nothing, compared to what we deserve for sin. Too often we get the idea that God owes us better, when in fact we have much more than we deserve.

Number three, we see through our suffering the love of

God for us in Jesus Christ. There is no better place for us to see and understand the cross than from the midst of our suffering. God brought suffering on His son, so that we would be spared what we truly and actually deserve. And all our suffering in the present is wrapped in love, the eternal love of God for us in Jesus Christ.

	...all our suffering	
	in the present is	
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	in Jesus Christ.	

What Job experienced and expressed, and what we must sometimes endure when God seems far off and silent re-

minds us of the suffering of Christ on the cross when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And we rest in those words of Christ. Because He was forsaken, we will never be forsaken. He carried the curse of our sin for us, to turn away the wrath of God, so that nothing could ever separate us from God's love. And though Job does not see and experience God's love for him, that does not mean that God has forsaken. No, God's love, because it is eternal, is also unfailing. Jesus tells us that none of those whom the Father has given Him will ever perish.

Then, number four, God always has a sanctifying purpose for our suffering. He decrees pain and suffering for our good. Though we do not always see it,

have to deal with as we counsel for and recover from depression. We also acknowledge that there can be cases of depression that are brought by a person's sinful lifestyle. A man who is an adulterer, and who is weighed down because of his sin, may well become depressed, and his sin must be addressed if he is to recover from his depression.

But the remedy, when a person is in the throes of depression, is not to come with guns blazing and fingers pointing. This is exactly the problem with Job's three friends, as we will see in our next message. All they heard were Job's words, and they had no understanding or sympathy for the depths of suffering in his soul, and so they concluded, "Job, you must have sinned, and God is correcting you." And for more than 20 chapters they go on and on in this way, trying to help Job, but it is no help at all, except to demonstrate that Job's faith is more mature than theirs.

You see, Job's depression couldn't be answered with man's wisdom. It was only when God finally spoke in chapter 38 that Job's life was changed. The sum of what God said was this: "Job, I am God alone, I made you, I

know everything about you, in fact I know you better than you know yourself, and you're not going to find the answer to your situation and your depression by asking WHY, but rather by asking WHO, that is, Who sent them?" "Job," God says, "look to me." It is because Job has taken his eyes off God that he becomes self-absorbed and obsessed with his problems. At the root of his depression, from a spiritual point of view, is selfishness, and

...the remedy, when a person is in the throes of depression, is not to come with guns blazing and fingers pointing.

Job needs to redirect his focus from himself and to God. He has lost his perspective, because he has taken his eye off God.

So the remedy is to look to God in faith, and as I say that I do not mean to sound overly simplistic. No, the road out of depression is long and hard, but the believer who goes through it needs, as an essential part of his recovery, to be directed towards God and His promises, and to trust in Him. All our hope and happiness, in the end, can be found only in the Lord.

Let me conclude by reminding you of several great truths concerning God that are an important part of the message of the book of Job.

Number one, we must remember, in the bleakest of

conversation with God, but he does know how Satan works, and he could have said, good things come from God and this evil must come from Satan. He could have said, it was the Sabeans and the Chaldeans that took all my stuff. But he does not do this. Instead he rests in the truth of God's sovereignty, even when the evils come at the hands of others. He realizes that God is in control.

And so, fourth, he makes another beautiful confession concerning the sovereignty of God. "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" In his loss, and now in his sickness, he says, "This is all from God. And I accept it as such." That is one of the strongest statements of faith ever uttered about God and suffering.

Stronger even than his confession at the end of chapter

one. There, he said, "God gave and God has taken away." Now he says that evil in his life, and by evil he means the bad things that happen in this life, evil is from the hand of God.

Many today will not say this. Instead they have a dualistic view, which says that all evil comes from Satan, and they would say that we blaspheme God to say that He sends evil.

But here, the Holy Spirit tells us that Job did not sin with his lips by saying that evil is from the hand of God.

We ask, how can evil come from God? The answer is that He is sovereign over even the devil, and He uses Satan to accomplish His purpose in our lives. Satan does not see it that way. He thinks that he can tempt and hurt and destroy God's people. But the truth is that whenever he brings evil and temptation into our lives, he is simply being used by God to test us and to build up our faith. We see here the victory of God's grace in us over the assaults of Satan.

And so Job rests here in the truth of the sovereignty and goodness of his God. Yes, as we go on in the book we will see that

Job teaches us where to look in our pain and grief.

he is going to wrestle with his suffering, but never does he deny or curse God.

Job teaches us where to look in our pain and grief.

But now, if all we had in the Bible was the story of Job, we would easily become discouraged, because, well, we just do not measure up to Job. In the troubles that come in our lives, which are not nearly as severe as Job's were, we are not always patient and God-honoring in our responses.

Then we must learn to look away from Job, to perhaps the only one who ever suffered more than Job, that is to Jesus Christ. He was blameless, there was never one like him in all the earth. He feared God, He hated evil, He was sinless, and yet He subjected Himself to a level of temptation and suffering much greater than Job ever knew. His adversary, like Job's, was Satan. His suffering, like Job's, came with an increasing intensity throughout His life. All through His life the shadow of the cross hung over Him. And as He suffered, physically, mentally, spiritually He was being prepared for the final hour of His suffering, on the cross. In the crucifixion He suffered intense physical pain, He suffered the reproach and rejection of men, and, on top of it all, in a way we can never understand, He suffered the agonies and torments of hell in our place.

And because He has done this, we who believe on Him, we His people, are able to endure whatever evils God sends to us in this life.

By His death, Jesus lifted God's curse and God's heavy hand of wrath from our lives, so that all things under God's sovereign guidance work for our eternal good.

And in His resurrection life, Jesus comes by His Holy Spirit

to dwell in us, and to give us the strength we need for every trial. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And today, Jesus lives at God's right hand as our ready helper—the one who has endured every trial, who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who is able to help us in time of need.

Let us go to Him. Yes, here you have Job. You see in him a wonderful example of a child of God enduring suffering. But looking to Jesus we see how that is possible.

Let us pray,

Father, we know and confess that Thou art sovereign, absolutely sovereign, over all our sufferings. Even Satan is used to carry out Thy eternal purposes. Father, we rest in Thy sovereign power and control. Teach us, Lord, to accept everything that comes into our lives, the evil as well as the good, from Thy hand. Give us grace to be like Thy servant Job, who, though he did not understand what was happening, trusted in and confessed thy goodness. Lord, dwell in us by the power of Jesus Christ, who has overcome all evil, for our sakes. In His name do we pray. Amen.

experiences from his wife. In verse 26 he says that he has no rest and no quietness. In verse 24 he compares his roaring to a continual fountain.

He suffered mentally, that is, in his mind he is confused, his mind is flooded with unanswered questions.

From these things we see that sometimes some of the causes for depression are outside of ourselves, and outside of our control. We should not think that depression is always caused by a particular sin that a person has committed. There are circumstances and trials of life that bring us very low, and make us weak and susceptible to periods of doubt. And then sometimes we need help, professional help, to deal with these things, especially when we get as low as Job did, and think that death itself would be better than life.

But we also see here that there is a spiritual dimension to depression that can be answered only from God's Word. Depression gets down into the soul of a child of God, and causes doubt about one's standing before God. Satan comes attempting to draw us away from God, wanting to make us doubt that we are truly saved. That is what we see Satan doing here. His whole aim in Job's trials is to get Job to curse God, and to achieve that end he seeks to undermine Job's trust

in God. Job's faith here is very faint and weak. And though he does not curse God here, he does sin with his lips, in his desires, and with his questions.

It is wrong for the believer to want to die simply for release from the troubles of life, especially when it is clear to him, as it was to Job, that God's will was for him to live. It is wrong to question the purposes of God in the way Job does. Later in this book, God will reprimand Job for this, and Job will repent of it and admit that he needs to be silent before God in his suffering. So, we see, there is a spiritual dimension to Job's depression. Though he did not sin to bring this suffering on himself, still, because he is a sinner, his response is not as it should be before God.

Well, what is the remedy to Job's depression?

The first thing to note from the book of Job, and this is very important for us from a practical point of view, the first thing we should say is that one does not remedy severe depression by coming at the one who is suffering with specific accusations of sin.

Yes, we acknowledge that as we live in this sin-cursed world, and as we all wrestle with sin, there are sinful inclinations and thoughts that we have to deal with as believers and that these are going to be a part of what we

his possessions and family and earthly relationships, but the loss of communion with God. When he goes to God with his questions, God is a wall. He feels that he is trapped in a deep dark pit with no way out—God, he says, has hedged me in, I'm trapped. He could take the loss of his children and the loss of his health, but now when he turns to his God, there is an awful blackness and a silence. God has removed His gracious presence, and Job has fallen into a deep and dark spiritual well.

When a believer goes through severe depression, that is exactly his experience. There is no joy in life, one feels trapped by his circumstances, and God seems to be ignoring him.

Even though, as we will see, these things are not true, this is exactly how a depressed person sees it.

We should realize and understand that many believers will and do experience this in life. We understand that Job is a believer here.

This is the same man of whom God said, "there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" This is the man who confessed after he had lost everything, "the LORD gave, the LORD hath taken away, Blessed be the name of the LORD." This

is the man who said to his wife, who told him to curse God and die, "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?"

Even here in this chapter we see evidences of the faith of Job. Though he curses the day of his birth, he does not curse God. Though he longs for death, he never takes that into his own hands. And, even though he speaks unadvisedly, he still directs his thoughts and questions toward God. That in itself is a kind of prayer and an expression of his faith.

As a believer, he goes through this dark valley of depression.

What are the reasons for it? We need to answer that question so that we ourselves can find answers in depression. Looking at Job, we see that the reasons are multiple. Job suffers on every level here all at once.

He suffered physically, so traumatized by his pain that he could not eat or sleep. His pain was so severe that he found no satisfaction in even the simple pleasures of life. In verse 24 he says, "my sighing cometh before I eat," that is, instead of food, there is just wailing from pain.

Along with this, Job suffered emotionally, dealing with grief in the loss of his children, and loneliness in the opposition he

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 16, 2014 *Mournful Words from a Miserable Man*
No. 3711 *Rev. Rodney Kleyn*

Dear radio friends,

In our study of the book of Job we come today to chapter 3.

In the first two chapters we were introduced to Job, a very wealthy man, and at the same time an upright man who feared God and hated evil. We also learned of Satan, who said that Job feared only God because of all his wealth. We also saw Job's intense suffering, first in the loss of all his wealth, then his ten children, then his health, and finally he lost the support of his wife. Then we also learned of the wonderful truth of God's sovereignty, both from God's conversation with Satan, and also from the beautiful confessions that Job made in response to his suffering.

Chapter 3 continues the story of Job with his next words. For seven days Job sat silent in his grief with his three friends looking on. Now, he opens his mouth and speaks, not just to his friends, but primarily to God.

This is a very difficult chapter to treat. Job's words are very dark and negative. I think we can understand quite easily what Job is saying, but we

do not always know what to do with it, and we are tempted to pass it over and get to Job's other confessions of faith later in the book. But this is God's inspired Word, and so it is profitable for us to study.

The main thing we learn from this chapter is that even the strongest believers do become discouraged and depressed, that there is no such thing as a super-Christian. That is right on the surface here in this chapter—it is very obvious.

We see this first in what Job says. What does Job say?

Job begins his words by cursing the day he was born. He says, in summary,

"Let that day perish. Let it be covered in darkness so that even God doesn't regard it. Let it be cursed. Let it be obliterated from the annals of history. I wish it had never dawned. It was a failure, for rather than preventing my birth, it gave me life."

Then Job goes on to say that it would have been better had

he died as a child. Again, in summary, these are his words,

“Why died I not from the womb? Why was I received alive on my mother’s lap, why did she nurse me as a child? Why wasn’t I miscarried before anyone knew about my existence, or buried as a stillborn baby who never lived to see the light of day?”

Then Job tells us why he says these things. Death, he says, has more appeal than life. He idealizes death, viewing it as a place of rest, the great equalizer, and deliverance. Job says,

“Now I should have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept. Then I had been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth. The small and great are there together. There the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together and hear not any more the voice of the oppressor. There the servant is free from his master.”

These words of Job reveal his depression. These words of Job are not randomly and thoughtlessly expressed. They are not the words of someone who is simply feeling down for a day or so. But Job has been sitting in misery and pain and thinking through his situation now for a week, and in this chapter he carefully puts his thoughts together in a lengthy poetic speech, and this is what

he comes up with. Who says, “I wish I were never born,” or, “death right now would be better than life,” but a depressed person? There is something wrong with Job. This is not the way a believer generally speaks.

We see Job’s depression also in what he desires. Job has an intense desire to die. This he expresses in verses 21 and 22. It is the longing of a hungry man for food or of a thirsty man for water. He says that he longs for death, but it does not come. That he searches for it like a man who is digging for hidden treasure. He would rejoice to find the grave, it would make him glad, but he cannot find it.

Again, this desire of Job reveals the depths of his depression. He finds no joy in life and sees death as an escape. When God created us, He created us with a natural desire to live, to protect our own life. We have an aversion to death. Ephesians 5:29 says, “No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.” That is describing how a person normally views life and cares for himself. But Job, now, is so depressed that he longs to die.

Is it always wrong to want to die? No, there are in the Bible at least two appropriate reasons to want deliverance from this life.

One reason is to be deliv-

ered from, not the pains and afflictions of this life, but the spiritual struggles with sin. In Romans 7, after Paul has described his own daily struggle with sin, he says, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.” He desires to die in order to be delivered from the ongoing and exhausting struggle with sin.

The other reason that a believer might want to die is that he desires richer and closer communion with Christ. This is what Paul is talking about in Philippians 1 when he says that he has a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, and when he describes death as gain for the child of God. The gain of death is this, to be with the Lord, to see him face to face, and to know Him as He is.

But behind Job’s desire for death here we do not see either of these reasons. He is simply sick of life, because of its troubles, and he does not speak of the gain of death here in terms of eternal life. He is actually mistaken and wrong about death. It is not rest for all. It is not the great equalizer. It is not deliverance from bondage for all. And later in the book of Job, his perspective changes, but here, he has this very dark and wrong desire for death. And what it shows is his severe depression.

Then also we see Job’s depression in what he asks, in his

questioning, which is directed not to his friends, but primarily to God. You see his questions in verses 20 and 23. Job asks in verse 20, “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter of soul?” And then in verse 23, “Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?” Job is asking, “If God could simply end it all for me now, then why doesn’t He? Why does He drag it out? Why must I go on in my misery? If God is sovereign, why does He allow this pain?”

In asking these questions Job expresses the chief part of his torment and suffering. What Job says and desires and asks are simply an expression of a deeper experience, the experience of overwhelming sadness and pain in soul. In verse 20 he tells us that he is “bitter of soul” (v. 20). The soul of man is the spiritual aspect of his being, the part of us that makes us different from animals, the part that makes it possible for us to live in a relationship to God. When Job says his soul is bitter, he means that he has no experience of God’s love to him. This he describes in verse 23 when he says that his way is hid and that God has hedged him in. This is what makes his suffering so severe. In verse 25 he says, “The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me.” That fear was not just the loss of all