

Job 3 'what happens when we reach breaking point?'

We all have our heroes of the faith, people we look up to, people we admire, people we esteem and whom we set on a pedestal, people whose hand we'd love to shake, people we'd love to sit down with for an hour or two - we'd enjoy a cup of coffee and a chat with them ... you know what I mean, don't you!

Some of our role models are alive and are with us in today's world; however, many of them are numbered among that 'great cloud of witnesses' that we read of in Hebrews 12, they line the streets of Glory - their names are etched on marble in Heaven's hall of fame ...

The reality is that such men and women who are giants of the faith, are still flesh and blood, just like you and just like me! Believe it or not, they too have their flaws, their faults, their failings, their foibles - and a lot more besides, sure they do ... it's just that we tend to skim over all the negatives.

These good folks whom we revere, and that's ok, they may have hearts of gold and an illustrious track record, but, at the same time, they have feet of clay. You see, if we were to prod and poke at them, you'd find there is an underside to every one of them - like you and me, they have known the best of times and the worst of times.

Yes, these wonderful examples of good men and women have all had their struggles, their trials, and their troubles - some of them like William

Cowper plummeted to the dark depths of deep depression - and others like Charles Haddon Spurgeon have openly talked about such times. In fact, on one occasion, the Baptist preacher recorded his feelings in his book, *Lectures to my Students*, when he 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.' So refreshingly honest ... I take my hat off to him.

My friends, the black dog is real - this is life in the raw; this is life lived on the sharp, ragged edge ... there's nothing make-believe about it; as the people of God, you and I are not immune from such cruel challenges.

If we're honest, and willing to admit to it, many of us go through times of despair, and distress, and desolation - it happened to me after our son Timothy was killed in his mid-teens - I've written about it in our book, *It's Still Hurting, Lord!* It's so important for us to remove the mask, to be open and honest and tell it like it is. For there will be times in your life and mine when our faith is reduced to ashes, when we feel as if it's going, going, almost gone!

And that's what we're unpacking here in Job 3 ... Job is transparent, he is razor sharp in his honesty and he doesn't attempt to hide his emotions in any way - he's candid, as he pours out his heart when sitting at the local garbage dump.

His wife is there, and his three so-called friends - Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar - are also there ... to all intents and purposes, he's not talking to them, he's talking to himself! Quite literally, he's the one who breaks the silence - because these guys have travelled miles and haven't yet said a single word!

I don't understand the attitude of these men - I mean, they have come a terribly long way and there are no words of affection for Job, not a hug or embrace of any kind - they just sit there and stare! Yeah, they shed some tears when they first saw him, but that was it. There's no attempt to sympathise with him and comfort him - for seven long days and seven longer nights, there's not a whimper of compassion from them. And even when the gaunt-looking Job does speak, these three guys will hear his words, but they'll not hear his heart.

In a sense, a melancholy Job is clearing his chest, he's getting a load off his mind in a lament ... ever done that? Have you ever experienced doleful despair like this and wondered how you could be a Christian and feel that way;

have you ever been hurt or wounded so badly that you wished you could go on to heaven; have you ever suffered so long with pain and are so tired that all you want to do is lie down and die; have you ever looked for an escape hatch in life, some kind of way out, an exit sign marked relief ... big questions ... well, you're not alone, for Job did just that ...!

Job hit rock bottom, as we sometimes say, only to discover that underneath him was sinking sand - he was on a shaky foundation and was in danger of being sucked under. Life was precarious. It was flimsy. He was tottering on the brink ... we read Job 3 and we feel so uncomfortable ...

Why do I say that? Because we don't expect our heroes of the faith to talk like that! We read the first two chapters and we marvel at the man who worshipped and said in 1:21, 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.'

He's the same man who said to his nagging wife in 2:10, 'Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' And remember that closing one-liner in 2:10, 'In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.' You see, that's the way our heroes speak in the face of incredible pain and trauma. And maybe that's why we would rather move on past chapter 3, where Job speaks from a place of dereliction at the bottom of the pit! It's here where the scabs are pulled from the sores as the pus of reality runs down Job's life. The last few words in 2:13 underline the grim reality of the situation, when it says: 'they saw how great his suffering was.'

There's nothing happy-clappy about Job in this chapter. No easy triumphalism. None! We sing of God in one song that '*in his presence our problems disappear*' ... in another that '*my love just keeps on growing.*' Well, my friend, neither was true for Job in chapter 3 - and, yet, he was a man of utmost integrity in his walk with the Lord.

Think about it - have you ever met anyone who has memorised any verse from Job 3? I mean, who wants to memorise verse 3 where Job says, 'May the day of my birth perish.' How's that for a Happy Birthday card? What about verse 11, 'Why did I not perish at birth?' Or the last verse where he said with more than a hint of audacity, 'I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.'

I've never yet seen that verse framed and hung on someone's lounge wall - you won't find it on cards, or tee shirts, or coffee mugs in the way you find the likes of Romans 8:28 or Jeremiah 29:11. Truth be told, you won't find it anywhere, except here! I wonder why? Well, it's because we don't expect our heroes to talk like that ...!

Before we get into the text, let me say this: at this point in the Hebrew Scriptures, poetry replaces prose. Chapters 1 and 2 are all prose - they are penned just as they appear in your Bible. It's the kind of writing style you would find in a novel or a newspaper article, or whatever.

However, when we move into chapter 3, that all changes for here we begin to read poetry. And so the style changes from narrative to metre - it remains like that all the way through to 42:6, then it's back to prose from verse 7 to the end of the book. This explains why the book of Job falls in the poetry category of the Bible.

There are three main points in our study today - the first is:

Job's downward spiral (3:1-10)

Did you notice when I read the first ten verses that one word appeared over and over again - in the NIV, it's the word 'may' ... some translations, like the KJV, prefer the word 'let' ... in Hebrew syntax, these are known as 'jussives' - they are 'wish' verbs - words that express a strong desire as well as a command! At its simplest, we could translate them, 'I wish ...' Let me show you what I mean:

I wish the day had never come on which I was born (3); I wish the night had never been on which I was conceived (3); I wish the day had been darkness when I was born (4); I wish God had kept the light from ever dawning on that day (4); I wish the blackness of night and gloom had blotted it out (5); I wish to never celebrate my birthday again because I wish it had never happened (6) ... and there's a few more ...

This is Job talking as he exposes his vulnerability and gives us an insight into his troubled mindset - I have to ask myself, Why on earth would Job ever say such things?

I can tell you why, it's because this authentic man is under the weather, he's severely depressed, that's why! Wrapped as he is in a blanket of darkness, all Job can do is look back and curse the past - his mind is full of regrets and is empty of hope for the future.

You see, the past is past, it's behind him - he cannot change it or cancel it. The truth is, his curse has no teeth and his wish is hopeless and pointless.

Job has reached breaking point - he has snapped. His emotions are threadbare - there's nothing left in the tank and he's running his life on empty. His energy is sapped, he's drained. As we sometimes say, he's had his fill and he can't take any more - he's had enough! There is no light at the end of his dark tunnel, there is no beauty of a new day dawning - hope has evaporated. Job is in the eye of the storm where the enemy is too big, and the task is too great, and the future is too bleak, and the answers are too few!

The won't go away truth is that Job has arrived at the point at which he cannot see any good reason or explanation for his trials - 2 and 2 don't add up and make 4 ... he has no idea what to do next for he's never been down this road before ... he doesn't see any end to his tidal wave of suffering ... he assumes that God has abandoned him and left him to get on with it on his own!

We have a glimpse of what's going through his mind when we see the repeated use of words for darkness - take a look at verses 4, 5, 6, and 9 ... for him, the lights have all gone out! Even at 12 noon - at midday - it feels like midnight. He feels a sense of aloneness in the dark ... that's where this downward spiral has taken him - to a nadir where he's overwhelmed with not nice thoughts. That leads us on to the next section, where we see and hear something of:

Job's dejected sobbing (3:11-19)

These words are just so poignant, heart breaking, we can feel the tears welling up in our eyes as we

read them - it's a soliloquy of crushing sorrow! He feels as if he's been put through a shredder and torn to pieces; he's like an animal squealing in pain.

Did you notice the word 'why' appears three times in the monologue ... verses 11, 12, and 16. Why, why, why ... *please tell my why!* Some of us have asked the same question, and sometimes we still do - and that's ok. Jesus himself asked it on the cross at Calvary when he cried out from a place of abject dereliction to his God, 'Why have you forsaken me?'

Like Job, he felt a sense of abandonment - he felt jettisoned on a turbulent and stormy sea when tempestuous billows of deep sorrow swept over him ... hence the stark question, Why?

Right here, Job is saying something like, 'Okay, since I can't turn back the clock and not be born, I wish I had at least been stillborn?' (11-12) In other words, 'Why couldn't I just have died and been spared all this misery?' He wished he had never seen the light of day.

It seems to me that one of the dominant themes of this second section is Job's desire for rest. You see, he's exhausted physically, and emotionally, and intellectually, and spiritually (13) ... he says: 'I am so tired. I want rest from this trouble. I can't take any more. I need relief from the pains and pangs of my sorrow and grief. I'm at the end of my tether. I need to be rescued by someone ... anyone!' For Job, there is no lifeline, and there is no lifebelt. He is, quite literally, all at sea.

The final stanza in this lament more or less says that Job wants to die, and he wants to do it now!

So our third main point is:

Job's deepest sorrow (3:20-26)

This is quite incredible, for Job thinks a casket would be better than a treasure chest. Death is a treasure to Job, it would be better than gold. It's worth noting that this is not a cry of defiance against God ... it's more a cry of despair to God. And it's perfectly understandable bearing in mind all that Job has experienced in recent days.

Job is not doubting the existence of God for he refers to him numerous times in this section, nor is he casting any aspersions on the character of God.

He's not talking about ending his life - suicide is not in his plans; rather, he wants God to take his life - and there's a vast difference between the two options. Both desires are for his life to end, but one leaves it up to God, and the other takes matters into its own hands.

And you're sitting there thinking - 'Wow, I didn't realise things had gotten as bad as that for Job. His emotions are all over the place and he's in a dark corner ... I thought I was suffering and I am, I'm getting it from many angles, but things ain't as bad as that. Poor Job! When I see how Job has sunk so low, I'm better off than I thought I was!'

Or right now, you can maybe identify to a degree with Job's situation - the bottom has fallen out of your tiny world and life doesn't seem worth living any longer. OK, you haven't lost everything, it just

feels like that ... but, hey, you've maintained a stiff upper lip, you've bitten your tongue and said very little about it, but Job has spoken for you, he has voiced your feelings.

My dear friend, the truth is that if someone with Job's character and integrity and faith can hit rock bottom, so can you and so can I. The chances are, some of us have probably reached breaking point at one time or another ...

but we don't stay there, our friend Job eventually resurfaced with a breath of fresh hope in his heart - it didn't happen in a flash, sure it didn't; there was no overnight transformation - it took time, it took a lot of time, but it was all in God's time ... and that's what the rest of the book is all about! Suffering people rarely bounce back in 24 hours ...

One chapter closes with the end of chapter 3, then another opens ... that's the way the Lord works. Yes, even when we've reached breaking point, Father still knows best.

You see, when we meet up with folks who are suffering, it is essential that we weep with those who weep. We don't always have to open our mouth and say something, there are times when tears speak volumes.

Let me leave you with three down-to-earth statements which I hope and pray will help us as we face the struggles of getting through another day.

First, some days are far too dark for the suffering saint to see any light.

That's where Job is as we end this epic chapter. Unfortunately, his so-called friends will not bring him any relief. Like Job, you may not have seen light for a long time either. It was Mr Spurgeon who said that 'our God may drench us with grief, but he will not drown us with wrath; nay, he will refresh us with mercy. May flowers are brought to us through the April clouds and showers.'

Second, there are experiences too extreme for the hurting heart to have hope.

When a person drops so low due to inner pain and heartache, it's as if all hope is lost. That's why Job lets off steam and admits his lack of ease, his absence of peace, and his deep unrest.

Third, there are valleys too deep for the anguished person to find relief.

It seems, at that point, there is no reason to go on, little or no incentive to put your best foot forward one more time. We run out of places to look to find relief. It's then that our minds play tricks on us, making us think that not even God cares. Wrong!

Shortly before his death, David Watson wrote: 'When you crush lavender, you find it is full of fragrance; when you squeeze an orange, you extract its sweet juice. In the same way, it is often through pains and hurts that we develop the fragrance and sweetness of Jesus in our lives.'

Do you recall a line from Corrie ten Boom, a line that has travelled all around the world? She said: 'There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.' That's what Job longed to discover -

to find the nearness of God in a cloudy and dark day ... and my prayer is that you and I will find it too.