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Does God Pervert Justice?

Job 8-10

1. God is Just (chapter 8).
2. God is Powerful (chapter 9).
3. God is Mysterious (chapter 10).

I want to begin this morning by telling you about Mark Talbot. He was a professor at Wheaton College for more than 30 years. He is a professor emeritus. He taught in the Philosophy department. He is especially interested in philosophical theology: how Christian thinkers think about philosophy and how those two things intermesh. He has an interest in the writings of David Hume, and also of St. Augustine and Jonathan Edwards.

Mark Talbot has written a lot about suffering, which will be helpful to us this morning as we continue digging into the book of Job. We will be looking this morning at Job, chapters 8 through 10. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to Job chapter 8. If you didn't bring a Bible, there's a black book in the chair in front of you; page 421 will get you there.

Mark Talbot has written several books about suffering. In 2020, he wrote "When the Stars Disappear: Help and Hope from the Stories of Suffering in Scripture."[1] Of this book, he writes:

> "This book tries to help you see that your suffering, no matter how awful it may be, is no worse than the suffering that some of God's people have already faced. Their stories, as they are found in Scripture, show us that we are not alone in our suffering. They show that even the most severe suffering can be survived and that we, like these people before us, can emerge from it with faith and hope in God intact."[2]

In 2022, he wrote "Give Me Understanding that I May Live: Situating Our Suffering within God's Redemptive Plan."[3] Of this book, he writes:

> "[My first book] examined the personal stories of Naomi, Job, Jeremiah, and some of the psalmists in order to help those of us who are suffering not lose hope that God is with us and working in and through our suffering for our good. [This book] steps back to look at the general Christian story that explains why there is any suffering, why there is so much of it, and what will finally, gloriously, be true for those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead (see Romans 10:9)."[4]

Catch the movement from his first book to his second. He began with individual stories of people in Scripture. Then, he looked at the grand story, the story of God' s redemption as revealed in the entire Bible. Those who are in the midst of suffering often become myopic looking at their own suffering. It is often helpful to step back and see suffering in light of God's big picture.

Talbot has plans to write two more books on suffering. Beyond these books, he has written articles about suffering and has granted a handful of interviews on the subject. You simply need to search on YouTube for "Mark Talbot Suffering" and you will discover some of his online resources.

Talbot is no stranger to suffering. He is in a wheelchair because of an accident he had as a young man. Listen to how he describes his accident:

> "When I was seventeen, I fell about 50 feet off a Tarzan-like rope swing, breaking my back and becoming partially paralyzed from the waist down. I spent six months in hospitals. Initially, I had no feeling or movement in my legs and no bowel or bladder control. I dropped from 200 to 145 pounds because I was so nauseated that I couldn't eat. Once my back had stabilized a little, I had regained some leg movement. When I left the hospital, I was able to walk awkwardly with a cane.
>
> "I am now in my sixties, and the consequences of my fall continue to multiply. I have to worry about things most people never even think about. In the last two decades, I sometimes have sleep-robbing leg spasms. And in the last few years my inability to do much walking has depleted the bone density in my hips to the point where, when I fell a couple of years ago, I broke my left hip and became wheelchair bound. Other complications have hindered my traveling, and some have sometimes put my life at risk.

> "I have thought about God's place in my suffering for over fifty years. I have had seasons of profoundly disorienting perplexity when, night after night, sleep fled from me because I was utterly unable to understand how God in his goodness could have been playing any part in what was happening to me. I have experienced hurts so deep and disruptive that they have dominated my consciousness, making me feel I could lose the Christian faith that has oriented me for almost my whole life. Like one suffering Psalmist, I have felt like a little owl alone in the wilderness, feeling that my days were disappearing like smoke and my heart was withering away like parched grass (see Psalm 102:3-11)."[5]

This is where we see Job. We see him in a season of profound perplexity. We see him hurting deeply and suffering greatly. He hasn't had 50 years to think about it. He has only had a few months (Job 7:3).

Now, let me remind you quickly of the context. Job was the greatest man on earth. The LORD said of Job, "There is none like him on the earth" (Job 1:8). Satan objected to what God had said. Satan claimed that Job only blessed God because God had blessed him. So, God gave Satan permission to destroy his life, taking away all of his possessions, killing all ten of his children, and giving Job a painful disease. And through it all, Job didn't curse God. Instead, he held fast his integrity (Job 2:9) and worshiped the LORD, saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

Then, at the end of chapter 2, we see Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, coming to sympathize with him and to comfort him through his suffering. And the rest of the book of Job is spent with Job and his three friends wrestling with this problem of evil, trying to figure out why this happened to Job. This is often the question that comes in suffering: "Why?" "Why has this happened?" "Why has this happened to me?" "Why did God allow it?" "Why did God cause it?" Once children learn the word "why," parents, you are in trouble. Because it is the universal response to anything. Perhaps God is patient with us when we ask the very same question in our suffering.

As Mark Talbot says about the books he wrote: "Any Christian may suffer, from small children who have just begun putting their faith in Christ to the elderly who may have spent a lifetime following our Lord. And Christians can be puzzled by suffering. So it is important for some of us to address those puzzles by writing books that can be understood by nearly all Christians."[6]

This is what I am trying to do with these expositions on the book of Job. All of us, from the oldest to the youngest, may suffer. And all of us will encounter those who are suffering. It is helpful for us all to consider the philosophical, theological, and practical questions about suffering.

So far in the book of Job, we heard Job's lament in chapter 3. His lament came as a result of his great suffering; Job wished that he had never been born. Then in chapters 4 and 5, we heard the first of his friends, Eliphaz, telling Job how wrong he was with cheap and trite sayings that weren't really helpful to Job at all. Job responded in chapters 6-7 with a cry for comfort: for physical relief from his pain, for help from his friends, for comfort from God. But through it all, he found none.

And now, we come to chapter 8, where the second of Job's friends, Bildad, will jump into the fray. We see Bildad focusing our attention upon the justice of God. You can see it right there in the first three verses of chapter 8.

> Job 8:1-3
> Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:
> "How long will you say these things,
> and the words of your mouth be a great wind?
> Does God pervert justice?
> Or does the Almighty pervert the right?"

My message this morning comes straight from the phraseology in verse 3, "Does God Pervert Justice?" Justice will be the issue of chapters 8-10. Bildad, in his speech in chapter 8, will show his understanding of what the justice of God is.

And Bildad's point in chapter 8 is that

1. God is Just (chapter 8).

Now, Bildad doesn't say that exactly, but this is what he conveys with his rhetorical questions in verse 3: "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?" The answer is, "No." God doesn't pervert justice. God doesn't pervert the right. God indeed is just! And like so much of the book of Job, Bildad gets it exactly right. But Bildad gets it exactly wrong. We see that in verse 4.

> Job 8:4
> "If your children have sinned against him,
> he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression."

What a cruel thing to say to Job, who had lost all of his children to a great wind (Job 1:18-19). Bildad is saying that they died because of the justice of God: they sinned and therefore they died. And we know that this isn't true, because we know of the heavenly discussion that took place in chapters 1 and 2. Job's children died, not because they sinned against the LORD, but because Job was righteous and God gave Satan permission to destroy his family.

I hope that you see what's happening here with Bildad. He takes something true about God and then presses what he thinks it means into Job's suffering. And this is where Job's friends get it wrong. They take what is true about God and apply it wrongly to Job's situation. The caution comes for us as well: when speaking with those who are suffering, be careful in taking what you know to be true and pressing it into a situation where it may not apply. If the book of Job teaches us anything, it teaches us that God has plans for our lives of which we know nothing at all. Let us be slow in giving reasons why things have happened, because, quite frankly, many times we just don't know the mind of God.

Anyway, Bildad continues to tease out his implications of the justice of God in verses 5-7.

> <u>Job 8:5-7</u>
> "If you will seek God
> and plead with the Almighty for mercy,
> if you are pure and upright,
> surely then he will rouse himself for you
> and restore your rightful habitation.
> And though your beginning was small,
> your latter days will be very great."

Here we see Bildad's "Vending Machine Theology." You put coins in the slot and you can grab a bag of chips. You seek God, and you can expect a reward from God. And though things are small today (verse 7), you can expect them to be very great tomorrow, if you but seek God. The obvious problem with Bildad's words is not the counsel itself: it is always right to seek God (Job 5:8), and in Job's suffering it was right for him to seek God. The problem is that Job had been seeking God before this disaster came upon his life. It wasn't sin that caused Job to suffer. And it won't be righteousness that gets Job out of his suffering. And this is so applicable to us today, because it sounds exactly like the promises of the health, wealth, and prosperity "gospel": "If you follow God, you can expect great things from God in your life." Such a promise is simply flat out refuted in the life

of Job. Life doesn't always work that way.

I had the opportunity this week to share the gospel with a man who thinks this very thing. He was telling me of what he was learning about religion and how he is trying to improve himself. I told him that you are not saved by your works, but by faith in Jesus and his sacrifice upon the cross; your good works flow from your faith in Jesus. He said, "Yeah, that's it. If you do good, good things will happen in your life." His view of God, him giving back to you what you give to him, is what most people think.

And this is where Bildad continues. He brings up the wisdom of the ages.

> Job 8:8-10
> "For inquire, please, of bygone ages,
> and consider what the fathers have searched out.
> For we are but of yesterday and know nothing,
> for our days on earth are a shadow.
> Will they not teach you and tell you
> and utter words out of their understanding?"

In other words, "Isn't this what everyone has always thought? If you follow God, you will be blessed?" Just because the majority of people think this doesn't make it right. Theology is not done by majority. Theology is done by the truth of God's word. Mark Talbot says this:

> "If we try to answer questions like 'why' without understanding what Scripture has to say about suffering, we will always end up going off the rails. So what you have to do is go to Scripture and see what Scripture says about suffering. Here's our natural inclination with regard to suffering: we believe in a perfectly good and all-powerful God, but some really awful sort of suffering comes upon us—maybe it's chronic suffering, maybe it's something that goes on year after year after year, which can also be profound; or it may be a calamity—whatever happens, it comes upon us and we find ourselves trying to cook up for ourselves the answer to that question why. We will virtually always get it wrong." [7]

That is quite a warning from a man who has studied suffering for more than fifty years. Search the Scripture. Embrace what it says about suffering. You are going to see the sovereignty of God in the midst of suffering far more than you are even

comfortable with. But it is there. So let us go to Scripture to understand our suffering, not the views of the majority in our culture.

Then Bildad appeals to the wisdom of nature. You always see cause and effect in nature.

Job 8:11-13
"Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.
Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish."

"Job, if there is no water, the plants will not grow. And if there is no righteousness, then the man will perish. Job, you aren't growing. Therefore, you must be sinning. And God, in his justice, is bringing about your destruction." And he continues with nature imagery.

Job 8:14-19
"His confidence is severed,
and his trust is a spider's web.
He leans against his house, but it does not stand;
he lays hold of it, but it does not endure.
He is a lush plant before the sun,
and his shoots spread over his garden.
His roots entwine the stone heap;
he looks upon a house of stones.
If he is destroyed from his place,
then it will deny him, saying, 'I have never seen you.'
Behold, this is the joy of his way,
and out of the soil others will spring."

This is Bildad's explanation of the suffering of Job: you get out what you put in. You have been destroyed! You must have put in sin. You have no place to trust. You are just going to die and someone will take your place. Then, in verse 20, he goes back to the core of his argument (see verses 5-7).

Job 8:20-22
"Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,

nor take the hand of evildoers.
He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouting.
Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

Again, don't forget what we know from chapters 1 and 2. God has "rejected" a blameless man. God himself said of Job, "There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8). Yet, God "rejected" him by destroying his life. Also, let us not forget that God ultimately rejected Jesus, the most blameless man who ever walked the earth. Upon the cross, Jesus said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God rejected his own Son so that we might be made right through his sacrifice upon the cross.

Bildad's promise of future prosperity falls flat, because he has mis-interpreted the justice of God.

And in chapter 9, Job responds with agreement. Look at verse 1.

Job 9:1-2
Then Job answered and said: "Truly I know that it is so:
but how can a man be in the right before God?"

Job's theology was the same as Bildad's: he believed in the justice of God. But Job knew deeper than Bildad. He asked the question: "How can a man be in the right before God?" This is really the question that all of us need to ask ourselves. If you really knew the justice of God and the depth of your sin, this is a very real question for us all. Your hope is not in yourself. You will never be in the right before God on your own strength or in the goodness of all of your good deeds. Your hope must be found somewhere else. And as you look at the whole story of the Bible, you realize that to be in the right before God, you need God's help. You need Jesus.

Mark Talbot says it this way:

"This is the heart of the gospel: if we put our faith in Christ's work, then we are justified—that is, we are declared righteous by God in spite of our sin. Our status before God changes because Jesus's death on the cross has propitiated God's wrath—in other words, it has placated God's anger

against our sin. God the Father sent his Son to take our place, to bear our sins, and thus to die the death we deserve. By not sparing his own Son (see Isaiah 53:4-6; John 3:16; Romans 8:32), God demonstrates his righteousness by publicly displaying his holy hatred of sin. In forgiving us, God has acted righteously by directing 'against His very own Self in the person of His Son the full weight of that righteous wrath' we deserve. As [John] Stott puts it, 'God himself gave himself to save us from himself'—and for himself (see Titus 2:14)."[8]

And Job sensed this great need of God's help for him to be right before God. That's the question he asked in verse 2: "How can a man be in the right before God?" Job didn't know of Jesus, but he knew of the power of God. And Job knew that before God, he stood no chance of being in the right before him. This is my second point:

2. God is Powerful (chapter 9).

Bildad said, God is Just (chapter 8). Job believed this, but added, God is Powerful (chapter 9).

Job 9:3
"If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand times."

Job senses and understands that God is so great that we have no hope but for his mercy towards us. Not once in a thousand times, not once in a million. We can't stand before God and argue with him in any way. Who has shaken his fist at God and won the day? Not Herod, who was eaten by worms (Acts 12:24). Not Nebuchadnezzar, who was crushed despite saying, "Look at the great palace I have made by my power and my might" (Daniel 4:30). There is no one who can stand before God. It doesn't matter how mighty they are on the earth.

Job 9:4-10
"He is wise in heart and mighty in strength —
who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded? —
he who removes mountains, and they know it not,
when he overturns them in his anger,
who shakes the earth out of its place,
and its pillars tremble;
who commands the sun, and it does not rise;

who seals up the stars;
who alone stretched out the heavens
and trampled the waves of the sea;
who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;
who does great things beyond searching out,
and marvelous things beyond number."

None of us are strong enough to resist God. He can move mountains. He can shake the earth. He can melt glaciers. He can stop the sun. He placed the stars in their place. No one can stand against the LORD. This is absolutely true! The psalmist says:

Psalm 130:3-4
If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

But there is forgiveness in Jesus, that we might stand before God, reconciled through his blood.

At this point, Job feels abandoned by God.

Job 9:11
"Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him."

Job had walked with God faithfully for years, but God is nowhere to be seen. This is Job's struggle. He knows that he has been faithful to the LORD. But now his life has turned to ruins without explanation. And again in verse 12, Job knows his place.

Job 9:12-15
"Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back?
Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'
God will not turn back his anger;
beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab.
How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?

Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser."

The reference to "Rahab" refers to some chaotic sea monster or to the power of the tossing sea. The point is the same: the sea itself bows to God. God's mercy is our only hope before an all-powerful God! Job knew this. As Mark Talbot said: "Job lacked God's power, as well as his majesty, dignity, glory, and splendor. Consequently, he couldn't force God to vindicate him. If justice was to be done and Job was to be vindicated, then God would have to do it."[9] And God would have to do it by his mercy. It is only by his mercy that we are saved: "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Job speaks of his own experience before this all-powerful God in verse 16.

Job 9:16
"If I summoned him and he answered me,
I would not believe that he was listening to my voice."

Job doubts whether God would even listen to a mere human. But Jesus gave his promise to us, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus calls us to come to him.

Job 9:17-19
"For he crushes me with a tempest
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?"

Job here is getting it exactly right. This is how the book of Job will end. We will find God challenging Job in a contest.

Job 38:3
"Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me."

Then, God puts forth four chapters of the greatness of God, and it changed Job. As Mark Talbot said: "By shifting Job's focus, God enabled Job to gain some

perspective on his suffering. What had seemed to Job in his suffering to be life's full story was not in fact the full story. Job came to see that the full story involved much more than his suffering."[10]

The full story of Job's suffering is that there is a giant and sovereign God over all of it. The big picture of the power of God is the solution to our suffering questions. It may not answer every specific question, but it is the answer that was given to Job And it is the answer that should be sufficient for us all.

He continues in verse 20 to focus upon himself in thinking about the power of God.

> Job 9:20-22
> "Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me;
> though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.
> I am blameless; I regard not myself;
> I loathe my life.
> It is all one; therefore I say,
> 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.'"

You see how helpless Job feels before the power of God. He even feels mocked.

> Job 9:23
> "When disaster brings sudden death,
> he mocks at the calamity of the innocent."

Job is "the calamity of the innocent," and Job feels that God is mocking his suffering. Suffering is bad enough, but when God comes along and mocks you on top of it, that is what Job felt like. I don't think that is what God did, but that is what Job felt. In verse 24, Job speaks of how he can't find justice in this world.

> Job 9:24
> "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
> he covers the faces of its judges —
> if it is not he, who then is it?"

The wicked are prospering, and even the judges who are supposed to be the faces of justice aren't just. Everything is falling apart for Job. Then, in verse 25, we see Job in utter despair against this all-powerful God.

Job 9:25-35

"My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee away; they see no good.
They go by like skiffs of reed,
like an eagle swooping on the prey.
If I say, 'I will forget my complaint,
I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,'
I become afraid of all my suffering,
for I know you will not hold me innocent.
I shall be condemned;
why then do I labor in vain?
If I wash myself with snow
and cleanse my hands with lye,
yet you will plunge me into a pit,
and my own clothes will abhor me.
For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to trial together.
There is no arbiter between us,
who might lay his hand on us both.
Let him take his rod away from me,
and let not dread of him terrify me.
Then I would speak without fear of him,
for I am not so in myself."

Job says, "I'm done! Before the LORD, I am crushed. I am condemned. There's nobody who can help. I don't even have an arbiter." Job is standing alone before the LORD and finds no hope. Further in verse 33, he says that he doesn't have an arbiter, that is, one who will go before the LORD on his behalf. Long before Jesus, Job recognized the need for a mediator: one who will stand between us and God.

And what Job longed for, we have. We have a mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our advocate. He is the one who pleads for us before the throne. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

This is the reality of the gospel. And we have a hymn that captures it.

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea:
A great High Priest whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.[11]

Job lacked an arbiter. But Jesus is ours, if we but believe in him and call upon him!

Let's finish chapter 10 quickly. In chapter 8, Bildad said, God is Just: you are being punished for your sin. Job agreed that God is just, but disagreed that he had sinned. Job said, God is Powerful, and he felt helpless before his power. And now, in chapter 10, we see Job saying, "I don't understand." Here's my third point:

3. God is Mysterious (chapter 10).

When it comes to the question of suffering, it will often be mysterious to us. Mark Talbot writes:

> "[In our suffering] We may assume that we will not suffer much. We may even feel that because we are Christians, God owes us lives without much suffering. We may even suffer profoundly. And that may perplex us, prompting us to ask, Why? Why am I suffering? And why am I suffering this way? Sometimes the answers to these questions are clear. Adam and Eve knew why she was going to find labor painful and he would find providing food for his family laborious. Cain knew why God had condemned him to be a vagabond who would no longer know God's presence (see Genesis 4:12-14). Likewise, the Israelites of Psalm 90 knew that their suffering was caused by their sin, even if some of the particular ways in which they were suffering may have startled and dismayed them. But often we don't know. We can't say why we suffer as we do."[12]

Job gives his desperate prayer to the LORD.

> Job 10:1
> "I loathe my life;
> I will give free utterance to my complaint;
> I will speak in the bitterness of my soul."

This prayer is about as raw and honest as you can get. That is not a bad thing. I would encourage you to be brutally honest before God. He knows what you are

thinking. Speak your feelings to him clearly. But speak them in faith. End, as most laments of the Psalms do, with a plea, “God, be my help. I will still trust in you.” Utter your complaint to the LORD and then express your trust and dependence upon him.

Job 10:2
“I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
let me know why you contend against me.”

This is the core of Job’s prayer. He wants to know why. But Job didn’t know what happened in chapters 1 and 2. He doesn’t know why. Then, Job questions God.

Job 10:3-7
“Does it seem good to you to oppress,
to despise the work of your hands
and favor the designs of the wicked?
Have you eyes of flesh?
Do you see as man sees?
Are your days as the days of man,
or your years as a man’s years,
that you seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,
although you know that I am not guilty,
and there is none to deliver out of your hand?”

This is the confusion of Job. He knows that he isn’t guilty. But he knows that God has sought him out. He is questioning the goodness of God: “God, are you enjoying this?”

Job 10:8-13
“Your hands fashioned and made me,
and now you have destroyed me altogether.
Remember that you have made me like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?
Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.
You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.

Yet these things you hid in your heart;
I know that this was your purpose."

Job is heading in the right direction here as he speaks of God's sovereignty in creating him. Job feels like a sculpture that the one who made it then smashed with a wrecking ball. He sees the sovereignty of God. He sees that God's hands fashioned him. God has sovereignty over him. But why, if I am this painting, did you rip me up? Why did you smash and crush me? To him, it made no sense.

Job 10:14-17
"If I sin, you watch me
and do not acquit me of my iniquity.
If I am guilty, woe to me!
If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head,
for I am filled with disgrace
and look on my affliction.
And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion
and again work wonders against me.
You renew your witnesses against me
and increase your vexation toward me;
you bring fresh troops against me."

Job feels like a hunted man. He says, "If I'm guilty, you'll lift up my head. If you lift up my head, you're going to lop it off. I can't win anyway." And then Job laments as he did in chapter 3, wishing he had never been born.

Job 10:18-22
"Why did you bring me out from the womb?
Would that I had died before any eye had seen me
and were as though I had not been,
carried from the womb to the grave.
Are not my days few?
Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer
before I go — and I shall not return —
to the land of darkness and deep shadow,
the land of gloom like thick darkness,
like deep shadow without any order,
where light is as thick darkness."

This shows what often happens to those who are suffering: they hash over the same things over and over again. They get on this same loop and they can't get off it. I find this often with those who are suffering. Last night I met up with some old friends. We have a mutual couple who is separated and heading toward divorce (not at this church). And our friends are just absolutely crushed by this. They told me how heavy it is on their heart and how often they talk about it and how often they pray about it and how they have reached out to this couple as much as they can. This man was the other man's best man in his wedding. He has even contacted his friend and confessed his lack, "I'm sorry that we've drifted like this and this is where you are." Their hearts are just filled with sorrow. They told me that it seems like it's all they can talk about. When you know genuine suffering, you know how it is. You talk about it over and over. You spin it in your mind, trying to figure it out. I think that is what is happening with Job. He comes back to the same theme as he had in chapter 3, "I wish I had never been born."

I want to conclude with a final quote from Mark Talbot about his own experience in his suffering. May it give us all hope.

> "From the first moment of the accident that has left me this way, I have always sensed God's love for me both in my accident's occurrence and in the disabilities that have followed on it. Before I was hurt, I was doubting God's existence, but the suffering arising from my accident has conveyed to me a steady sense of God's gracious presence. Even now whenever my physical condition spawns new worries, I find that those worries, rather than threatening my faith in God's goodness and tempting me to leave the path of obedience, inevitably reassure me that God is good and that I must obey him. And so I find myself confessing with the psalmist:
>
> > *You have dealt well with your servant,*
> > *O LORD…*
> > *Before I was afflicted I went astray,*
> > *but now I keep your word.*
> > *You are good and do good…*
> > *It is good for me that I was afflicted,*
> > *that I might learn your statutes.*
> > *The law of your mouth is better to me*
> > *than thousands of gold and silver pieces…*
> > *I know, O LORD,…*

that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.
(Psalm 119:65, 67-68a, 71-72, 75)

> "Of course, my experience with my paralysis is not every sufferer's experience, just as it has not always been my experience with other kinds of suffering. Yet I think that it is eventually the experience of most Christian sufferers (as corroborated by many Christian testimonies) that, although they (quite correctly) would never have deliberately chosen to suffer in the ways that they have, they also would not choose now not to have so suffered."[13]

So may the Lord give us a similar perspective in our suffering.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 6, 2026 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

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[1] Mark R. Talbot, *When the Stars Disappear: Help and Hope from the Stories of Suffering in Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

[2] Talbot, *When the Stars Disappear*, preface, Hoopla.

[3] Mark R. Talbot, *Give Me Understanding that I May Live: Situating Our Suffering within God's Redemptive Plan* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

[4] Talbot, *Give Me Understanding*, preface, Hoopla.

[5] Talbot, *When the Stars Disappear*, chap. 1, Hoopla.

[6] Talbot, *When the Stars Disappear*, preface, Hoopla.

[7] Mark Talbot, interview, "Podcast: Asking God 'Why' in the Midst of Suffering," *Crossway*, https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-asking-god-why-in-the-midst-of-suffering-mark-talbot/.

[8] Talbot, *Give Me Understanding*, chap. 4, Hoopla.

[9] Talbot, *When the Stars Disappear*, chap. 4, Hoopla.

[10] Talbot, *Give Me Understanding*, preface, Hoopla.

[11] Charitie Lees Bancroft, “Before the Throne of God Above” (1863). Public domain.

[12] Talbot, *Give Me Understanding*, chap. 4, Hoopla.

[13] Mark Talbot, “When All Hope Has Died: Meditations on Profound Christian Suffering,” in *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 82-83.