

Job: Meeting God In Dust And Ashes

We are in week four of Lent, studying the life of Job, subtitled “Meeting God in Dust and Ashes.” The series may be a bit different than others, where we look a little bit at the shadowed or dark side of life because that’s very real. It’s very much the experience we’ve had. We have seasons of Good Friday and seasons of Easter. The story of Jesus can contain all of those things. It can meet us in all of that. And that’s what this season of Lent is for. So, as we continue, we have some more to lean into from the life of Job.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are the first few words in the Declaration of Independence. They’re something of a creed almost for us as Americans. My guess is that if I were to have stopped at life and liberty, you would have been able to finish that sentence. It’s one we often, most of us, put to memory. It’s deep inside of us. It’s words that are transmitted to us from a young age, but even more, they’re imbibed into our consciousness. And over time, these are ingrained within our very being.

Of course, these words, originally penned by Thomas Jefferson and the editors of the Declaration of Independence, were about a bold and beautiful vision of what this country could be founded on. However, one of the things we see downstream from that is the assumption that these things are what are guaranteed to us. Yes, we’ll give you liberty. Yes, we won’t quite get your happiness, but we’ll let you pursue it. But notice the way that these things internalize into us and get at our very core. They indwell our consciousness in such a way that we assume all of these things are, in fact, how life should always be—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

My question is, what do we do when happiness is not realized? What do we do when we’ve pursued it and yet been left found wanting? This image of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is a beautiful vision. But if you’ve lived for any number of years, you recognize that happiness is not guaranteed. It is not assumed. And so, as we hear these words year after year, from a young age until the present, we begin to take on a vision of life that assumes happiness is a right for us.

The problem is that it is inconsistent with the very way of life. For many of you, you’re here, and you’re sitting in this environment, and life, liberty, and happiness feel like distant things. You feel the sting of death. You feel that happiness cannot necessarily be attained. You’re sitting here, and while you’re here, it doesn’t seem to mesh with your lived experience. This vision of life often indwells in us in such a way that it leaves us with no category for something like suffering.

This story of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that we hear from the beginning of our lives makes us, when we experience pain and suffering, maybe similar to Job’s, think that all of this could simply be a

waste of time. It’s a waste of a few years in which I could be pursuing happiness. It’s an intruder on what life should be. It’s an intrusion on the vision that I had of life, and so when happiness is not realized, the only category you have for suffering is that it’s a waste. It’s a waste of time, something to be endured. We feel like we have to get to the other side of the suffering because then we’ll get our life back on track to where it should be.

This morning, in a room this size, many of you sit here while we worship, pray, and hear the scriptures, and God seems absent. We’re used to the victorious Christian life, which is the hope that we hold. That’s what the Easter story is, but it isn’t always guaranteed in every season of life. We’re here in such a way that maybe your experience is more similar to that in Psalm 42. The psalmist wrote this beautiful poem that has been misunderstood primarily because of a beautiful song that came out in the late nineties. The chapter starts with: “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*” (Psalm 42:1-2).

The question we should ask is if the thirst the psalmist is writing about is a good thing. When I was originally taught this particular psalm, I thought it to be in that good category. I long to see God. I have this passion for God, which is a good, healthy thing, but I don’t think that’s what the psalmist is getting at. The image of the psalmist seems to be, “God, I’m coming to the stream, and I am thirsty for you because I’ve got nothing.” Look at verse 3. “*My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’*” (v.3).

This is a psalm of lament. It’s a psalm of searching for God and not finding him. It’s a song of seeking to do the things that we’ve always done to meet in the presence of God. Yet when we do those things, we’re left wanting. It’s when happiness isn’t realized. It’s when that intrusion of suffering enters into your story and you’re searching for how to go about this. Where is God?

**These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God under the
protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy
and praise among the festive throng. Why, my
soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within
me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. vv. 4-5**

The psalmist is wrestling with the lived experience of saying that he sought to find God, but God is not there. He is having to coax his own soul. “Why, my soul, are you downcast?” See, as many of you sit here this morning listening to me teach, or you hear these worship songs, you’re really, in your core, saying, “God, where are you? Life isn’t happy. Life didn’t go the direction I desired.” And because we don’t have a

category for suffering, we begin to question the very goodness of God, which is a good, natural, and healthy question. You begin to wonder, is this just me? Am I the only one with this experience? Is it something I've done? Is it something that's brought this on? Has God abandoned me? Is God cruel? Is God not a God of love but one who's led me into this season of wandering?

The pursuit of happiness is not a bad thing. It's a good, healthy thing. It's a good idea that our country has been founded on. But I want to note the way it's formed us to see suffering as an intrusion. My question this morning is, what if suffering is actually used by God to do something to who we are? We have wrestled with that question. That's more complex than a simple yes or no. But we certainly have come out with the confidence that God uses those things. God is not a God of retribution but of redemption. He can redeem these particular seasons. So what if suffering is not an intrusion, but what if it is a season to endure because God is meeting you in dust and ashes? What if that was the reason?

So, what do we do with this intruder? How do we balance this life that feels like an intrusion where happiness is not realized? As we approach the Book of Job again, we find that now there's this fourth friend named Elihu who pops up in the picture. He comes out of seemingly nowhere, so much so that some scholars believe it was actually a later edit into the book, although that's wrong. But it seems like this voice comes into the picture out of nowhere, and he begins to ask questions different from what Job and Job's friends have asked.

As a quick reminder, Job has lost everything, and his three friends came to console him. They're wrestling with trying to understand God. They're asking deep questions. Where does suffering come from? How does God run the world? And as they've answered these questions or attempted to, we've been looking at what we call the triangle of tension. This is from a scholar named John Walton, who talks about how this is how you make sense of life.

In each of these categories, there are three different ways in which these interlocutors with Job are trying to understand how to make sense of this situation. In week one, when Job's friends popped up, they talked about this retribution principle, which is God must run the world off a harsh, strict understanding that the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper. We found that to be left wanting. That's not quite the way the world works for multiple reasons, and Job's is the one case in point.

In another angle of that triangle, he says that he is blameless. God calls Job blameless in chapter 1. Job says that he has done nothing to earn this. So, Job's story seems to be one that alludes to the fact that the retribution principle can't be true. Job says he has done nothing, and he begins to make accusations against God. He says that he wants a hearing with God. He wants to bring his case before God.

This character Elihu comes onto the scene and he presents a slightly nuanced view, but one that still is left wanting. He gets it, maybe you could say, a little bit more. There's more for us to learn from Elihu, but he doesn't get it perfectly. We're going to dig in and look a little bit at that. Let's pick up in Job 32.

So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. Job 32:1-2

These three friends have come to console Job. So Elihu's around, he's been listening in on the conversation, he's hearing Job's argument where he's saying, "I'm righteous," and this can't be the case. It's beginning to infuriate him as he's picking up on the fact that Job's way of thinking is accusing God of injustice.

As Dan preached last week, that's not a healthy argument either because God is just, even if we don't understand it. So Elihu is picking up on that and saying that can't be right. *"He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him"* (v. 3). He's looking at the three friends saying, you guys haven't figured it out either, and you're condemning this poor guy.

Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused. So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: "I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know." vv. 4-6

Now, you need to know one thing about Elihu. He is long-winded. When he begins here, he won't finish until chapter 37! I'm not going to preach all of Elihu. He goes on and on. I want to pluck out one section of Elihu's discourse because I believe that one section encapsulates the whole of his argument. Let's skip over to chapter 33, starting in verse 8. This is Elihu speaking. He's talking to Job.

"But you have said in my hearing—I heard the very words—I am pure, I have done no wrong; I am clean and free from sin. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths." Job 33:8-11

So Elihu has been listening in. He accuses Job of saying that he is pure and that he has done nothing wrong. This is where the argument gets a little sophisticated because Elihu is going to go on and essentially name the problem with Job as being self-righteousness. Job is taking a posture that assumes he knows better than God. So that is what is at the core of Job's problem.

I actually think that Elihu's right. That's actually accurate, as Job is, in fact, self-righteous here. But what you'll also find, just because it's complex, is that Elihu's position is also one of self-righteousness. He, too, is going to take the position and the posture to say, "I have an objective viewpoint, and so, therefore, let me demonstrate how I know what is happening here." Hold that in mind as we continue to work through the text. Let's pick back up in verse 12.

"But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than any mortal. Why do you complain to him that he responds to no one's words? For God

does speak—now one way, now another— though no one perceives it. vv. 12-14

God Speaks

Remember Job's accusation: "God, you're silent. You're not speaking up on your behalf. You're not saying anything here." Elihu is correcting that, saying, "No, God does speak." We just may not be able to hear God or, better yet, perceive God. He's going to give two ways that God speaks.

Dreams

In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride, to preserve them from the pit, their lives from perishing by the sword. vv. 15-18

The first way he's saying God speaks is through these dreams. You may get these visions, these nightmares that are a way in which God is speaking to you, which was common in the ancient world. That's how they believed God would speak. I actually affirmed that there are times in which God can speak to us through dreams and visions. Now, not always, this is complex. This is where we need the help and the support of a community in scripture to help guide the way God speaks to us because God certainly would not speak in a way that is inconsistent with the rest of the scriptures. So it isn't that every dream you hear is God speaking, but rather God does, in fact, speak to us through those ways.

Elihu is saying that this is how God can speak at times. Notice in verses 17 and 18. This is the purpose of why God is speaking according to Elihu—"to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride, to preserve them from the pit and their lives from perishing by the sword." Here's the crux of Elihu's argument. He is saying that God sends suffering, in this case through dreams, through terrifying warnings, all these sorts of things so that it wakes us up. So it will preserve us from future pit experiences, to keep us from pride, to keep us from perishing by the sword. This is simply a refigured retribution principle. Do you see it? God will send suffering.

Pain and Circumstances

The next way that God speaks, by the way, is through pain and circumstances. All of them, though, are not where Job's friends saw the retribution principle as paying for past sins. Elihu says that it protects you from future sins, that it cultivates a character in you in which you will avoid pride, and that you will be saved from the pit. It's actually brilliant. He's asking the question, what does suffering do to us? How does it shape us?

"Or someone may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in their bones, so that their body finds food repulsive and their soul loathes the choicest meal. Their flesh wastes away to nothing, and their bones, once hidden, now stick out. They draw near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death. vv. 19-22

The second way that Elihu says God speaks is through this pain, through this experience, which clearly now he seems to be speaking directly into Job's circumstances. It's God trying to get your attention in such a way that your bones would be healed, that your flesh would be restored. He says that sometimes God speaks that way, and it's for your good. It's for you to avoid that future wasting away that could happen.

Then, notice in verse 22 where *"They draw near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death."* There is a way in which you walk through suffering that leads to more death or more life. Didn't he just talk about earlier how one of the ways God speaks is to help you avoid the pit? But he says here, there are others, though when they walk through these seasons, it brings them face to face with the messengers of death. This is an important point, and Elihu understands it right here. He's saying that suffering can cause greater life or greater death and says this is the impact of what these circumstances can do.

It's a harsh reality because again, and particularly in the case of Job, you're thinking this came out of nowhere, and Job now has to wrestle with this. But Job is not alone. Often, the seasons in my life where suffering has come to me have given me the option of moving closer to God or moving away from God to greater life or greater death. And this isn't a circumstance in which I want to rally you up and say, how dare you go towards death. That's not the way. Elihu is naming the reality of circumstances and saying that this is the potency that was within living in these circumstances. It offers you a great opportunity for death, or it offers you a great opportunity to turn from God.

It's difficult. It's challenging. You see that in Job, by the way. If you read the full character arc of Job, you'll watch the way he matures and grows. By the end, he's going to say that he had heard of God, but yet now he sees God. There's a greater experience that he wrestles with. God accuses. God says to make your case. This seems all off, and it gave Job the chance to have a greater life or greater death. That choice is before us as well. Let's keep reading in verse 23.

We Are Not Left Alone

Yet if there is an angel at their side, a messenger, one out of a thousand, sent to tell them how to be upright, and he is gracious to that person and says to God, 'Spare them from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for them—let their flesh be renewed like a child's; let them be restored as in the days of their youth'—then that person can pray to God and find favor with him, they will see God's face and shout for joy; he will restore them to full well-being. And they will go to others and say, 'I have sinned, I have perverted what is right, but I did not get what I deserved. God has delivered me from going down to the pit, and I shall live to enjoy the light of life.' vv. 23-28

Elihu also says that we're not left to walk alone in this choice before us. He asks what if there was a messenger? What if there was an angel? Which by the way, that's what that word angel means; it means messenger. What if someone came to you, Job, in your moment of suffering and was able to encourage you? What if someone came and said, "Hey,

this isn't necessarily all bad. God is with you. You are not alone. He's using this in order for you to avert disaster." He asks what if this angel was sent to encourage, to tell you to be upright? It says this messenger advocates on behalf of this person. It says they go to God and ask for him to be spared and not go down to the pit.

Now, there are all sorts of illusions and mysteries about who exactly this messenger is. Some scholars believe that Elihu views himself as this messenger coming to Job in his moment. There could be some validity to that. Others think it's the angelic host. Maybe there is some divine or supernatural being that's coming to you in your suffering to encourage you. That could be. Others would argue it's an allusion to Jesus in the New Testament as is accurate. That is a valid option as well. I don't really know exactly who this is.

But the principle that we take out of this is that in your suffering, you are not walking through this season alone. Whether it's someone you know and see and you could tangibly sit down and have a coffee with them or whether it's someone who you don't quite know. God is sending someone to intersect and encourage you and to advocate on your behalf. And certainly, the theme we've hit is that, yes, Jesus not only walks with you and is in your suffering, but he's intimate with your suffering. He has felt the sting of that. He walks with you in that season.

Verse 29 is the summary statement for all of Elihu's arguments. *"God does all these things to a person—twice, even three times—to turn them back from the pit, that the light of life may shine on them"* (vv. 29-30). He says this can happen in a life more than once, more than twice, maybe even three times or more. God does this as a way of drawing us from the pit to the light of life that he may shine on us. It's a hard teaching because it opens the possibility of what if God intentionally did bring that suffering. It's the same thing that Job's friends have talked about. Where Elihu goes wrong is this simplistic view of the world. But at some point, we do have to wrestle with the question of what if God did bring us into this season? What if God did allow that suffering to happen? What is God doing in the midst of this?

There's a scholar, John Walton, whom we've referenced a few times. He answers these two questions: what does Elihu get right, and what does he get wrong? It's important before we move on to sit in that. Walton said,

Elihu is right about God when he insists that God is not accountable to us and that his justice, along with all other aspects of his character, is unassailable. We cannot question God. We cannot do his job better. We dare not impugn his governance. God is not contingent, and we should not think that his actions are subject to our evaluation or correction. Walton

What Elihu gets spot on is Job was taking this posture to say, I know what is right for me and what is wrong for me, and Elihu calls that out. He says that is not how this works with God. You can't take that posture. Yes, you can cry out to God. You can express all of your honesty, but at the end of the day, God is not accountable to us. That's a hard lesson to

take. It's a hard thing to come to that realization. But Elihu gets it right. God is not contingent on how we respond.

What we'll see next week when God speaks up is that I believe that God is running the world on infinite wisdom, wisdom that's beyond human attainment, wisdom that's beyond our understanding. And ultimately, the message of Job is that we would come through all of that pain, bring all of it before God, knowing we're not alone, and trust in the character and the wisdom of God. It is hard. It is not what you say to someone suffering the first time you sit with them. It is not what you say maybe even a month in, but it is the message. Can we trust in the wisdom of God, wrestling with the deepest parts of what it means to be human, recognizing the complexity and the nuance of life being much more difficult and painful than we're comfortable with?

On the flip side, what does Elihu get wrong? Again, John Walton says, "Elihu is wrong about the nature of God's policies." Remember, that's really the question at hand for all of them. What is the policy in which God runs the world? Elihu is wrong about the nature of God's policies. He continues to have an inadequate theodicy. Theodicy is the \$10 word for the problem of evil. How do you reconcile a good God with evil? So Elihu is asserting a theodicy. He continues to have an inadequate theodicy and does not seem to realize that in attempting a theodicy, he's falling prey to the same fault of which he accuses Job. He overestimates his ability to bring coherence on the basis of justice.

God will present his policies very differently in his own speeches. And we will find that any human attempt at theodicy is inevitably presumptuous. He's saying, inevitably, if you're trying to make sense of God and put it in a nice theological category and write books about it and preach sermons about it, if you try to do all of that, it's inherently presumptuous to assume that you could define the things of God.

Elihu gets that wrong in the same way that Job assumed the world was simplistic and formulaic and that this is how God must operate. Elihu takes that same posture and says, it's simple. This is what's happening. God is sending suffering so that you avoid sin in the future. Which, again, is that true? Yes and no. We have to sit in that complexity of not necessarily knowing the origins of sin.

This goes back to the first week of this series. Yes, at times, suffering is the result of our own actions. It's sin that we cause. It's brokenness that we bring upon ourselves. Other times, it's from the sin around us, those in the world who are fallen, and those who bring pain and suffering onto us. Other times, it seems God would lead that. You see that through the Old Testament. But other times, it's just the product of sin, a fallen world. It's simply the fallen world in which sin and brokenness run rampant. Sometimes, that's just suffering. Elihu takes a simple, formulaic way of thinking through this.

I want to ask the question that Elihu seems to be getting at: Does suffering have the potential to do something to us, particularly do something to our character? And if God is not a god of retribution but of redemption, then I want to entertain the thought that God is redeeming your circumstances. Whether or not he's the one who initiated it doesn't

really make a difference. Life just is, and it's broken, and here we are in pain and suffering.

So could there be a way, a category for suffering that isn't just a waste? That isn't just an intrusion on a life in the pursuit of happiness. What if God is redeeming these broken seasons in us to bring about something better in our lives? It's not necessarily causing these things; it's important to catch that distinction. It's more complicated than that, but certainly, God could use these things. It's the assumption I'm going to make, which might be presumptuous, what we just learned with Elihu. So, I do so with humility. I do these a little bit less of chapter and verse and a little more of conjecture of here's maybe some ways God, in your particular circumstances, might be doing something within you.

I go from this posture that with God, our suffering holds the potential for greater intimacy and depth. See, when we encounter a dark night of the soul, God is using the brokenness that we experienced. And I believe it opens us. It brings us beyond the veneer, beyond the facades that we tend to put up, and it allows us to see both ourselves and God more clearly, which seems odd because often that lostness feels like a fog. But what's happening is God is clearing away all of the ways in which we push our true selves and our true understanding of God away. He's maneuvering that aside so we can see ourselves more clearly.

So, what do we do with this pain and hurt? It offers that unique opportunity for depth, even if it's painful. Maybe the easiest example of this—which I always come back to, so I apologize for the lack of diversity in images—is marriage or relationships. When you enter into a relationship or marriage covenant, what vows do you say? For richer, for poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.

What's so beautiful about those vows is not what's said on the wedding day, but it's 10, 15, 20, 30 years down the road when a marriage has endured some of those things in which it's been richer and poorer. It's been sickness and health. It's been seemingly until death do us part. What happens in those moments in a marriage is it gives you the opportunity for greater depth, for greater life or for greater death, and for later life, where it doesn't seem to work out.

See, what's happening in there is you're testing the bounds of your understanding of the other person. And again, I'll hold all of this in view of your relationship with God. As you walk through those seasons, what you find is that you are losing the illusion of control that, if you do this, your spouse will do this. If I do this with God, God will give me this. Part of the issue with marriage and our relationship with God is that we tend to be more in love with the feelings we get from God than we are with God himself.

What if he's luring us away from the addiction to the mountaintop experiences with him, which are good, healthy things but yet cannot be sustained? A marriage cannot be sustained by the honeymoon phase, no matter how much Hollywood wants to present that image. And it's not always about what you feel. It just isn't. That's not life. But it doesn't mean your love is diminished. It's actually much richer. It's much deeper.

What if God, in suffering, is doing that work within us? What if he is removing the addiction to the mountaintop feelings of God to say, "Do you love me for me?" Remember, that was the question at the beginning. Of course Job loves you. Look at the life you're giving him. You're giving him everything. It's easy for someone to love you, God if this is the case.

Weirdly, the accuser, the Satan, actually asks a pretty good question. And what we find at the end of Job is that Job comes to the place in which he says it's no longer about those things. He had heard about God, but now he saw God. His relationship is much deeper with God because he walked through these things. This is when you sit with a couple who's been married for 30, 40, 50 years, and they talk about the way that the marriage vows have been stretched and pulled and brought to the brink, and when they've held on, there's a richness to that.

So richness, this is possibly what God is doing. He's drying our hearts to connect with him a little bit more. There's a sense that when we move from being in love with the feelings we get from God and move to being in love with God, we begin to endure many things. It's not easy. It's not comfortable. Most of us don't really like it. A lot of times, we actually churn from those seasons because it's a little too scary. And I get it. There have been seasons where I have stepped into that suffering, and it's brought me greater life. But there were plenty when I said, "God, I'm not ready to go there." I turned back, and I assume it probably diminished the depth I could have had. But God is still there, loving us, walking with us, inviting us into more.

So how then do we do this? If this is the potential that's there, I want to offer three things that are my own conjecture of how we can walk through these seasons to allow God to do that deep work on the other side of suffering.

Enter The Desert

The first is we need to enter the desert. Now, the desert is one of the helpful metaphors that followers of Jesus have used for many centuries to talk about these dry seasons. The reason that we need to enter it is that often, when we're pressed into these moments of suffering, we retreat away. But what if God's inviting us in? Now, what's interesting about this metaphor of the desert is not many people choose the desert as their ecosystem of choice; it's rough. It's harsh. It's dry. But what I've also learned is that the desert is actually quite beautiful.

What would it look like for you, whatever it is, the circumstances you're experiencing, to enter into that brokenness and pain? What if you pushed in just a little bit further, entered the desert, and rather than trying to avoid it or go around it or drive as fast as you can through it, what if you pulled over and said, "God, help me not to avoid this but help me get through it?" It's a different prayer. It's that old saying that says the only way out is through. That's true of our seasons of suffering, our desert seasons. The only way out is not to avoid and to run away but to go through them, to walk through them with God.

Walk In Community

But as Elihu pointed out, you don't do this alone. This is the second thing I would encourage you to do: walk with community. When you enter the desert, you don't do this alone. Even Jesus was in the desert, in the wilderness. Do you remember who led him there? The Holy Spirit. Even Jesus was not alone. It's one of the beautiful things of our faith that you, regardless of if there are other humans around, are never alone. The Spirit of God is with you, is within you, walking with you.

Secondly, we need community because we need people around us to help remind us of what's going on. One of the tragedies in church life is often when you're in the season of suffering, and you don't feel like worshipping; the church has created an environment in which we can't hold those stories, so people feel like they can't come to church in the moments of those suffering. As a pastor, that breaks my heart. It's one of the reasons we entertain the season of Lent, to communicate there is room for those seasons here in this room. It's okay to be broken and life does not make sense. We may at times still sing victorious songs, but maybe you come in and can't bring yourself to sing them, but you can hear others in a different season sing them.

We walk with community because we need others, not always to point out the barriers of here's how this season may go, but we also need, at times, people to pray over us, to allow us to say the words that we can't bring ourselves to say, to profess the faith that we may or may not hold at that moment. We need that community.

The Mystery Of God

And then, lastly, we must embrace the mystery of God. I wrestled with that phrase because it sounds really churchy. Sounds really good, doesn't it? But mystery is disorienting. Mystery is uncomfortable. It's in those moments when you've had a formulaic understanding of God that says, if I do this, God does this; this is how the relationship works. It's simple. It's what Job's friends have suggested. It's what Elihu suggested. It's what Job suggested. They didn't want the mystery of how God organizes the world, so they settled for simplistic things.

But what if we pushed in and just realized if God is who he says he is, then we probably are not ever going to fully understand him. It's one of the things that God is going to suggest next week when he begins to speak. He's going to say, "I have a different vantage point than you. You don't recognize all that's happening. I am an infinite creature, and you are finite, therefore, we are in different places." So, in this season of suffering, what if you embraced the mystery? And I mean that in the disorienting sense. You embrace that it is difficult and hard, and you don't understand the way things should operate, and you have all sorts of questions. But you're walking with community; you're in the desert, you're slowing it down, you're trying to figure out how to get through this season, and instead of resisting and fighting that, what if you just

came to the place where you can say, "God, I don't understand, but I trust in you."

See, the beauty of the lament psalms, even that one that we read in Psalm 42, is it ultimately gets to the place where it says, "but I put my hope and trust in you." And you may have to say that in an academic way more than a felt way, but you profess that and say, "God, I trust, and I walk with you."

My friends, in the kingdom of God nothing is wasted. No experience, no suffering, no pain, no scar, no loss, nothing is wasted because God is in the work of redeeming all things for the good. He's working in all of the pain and the chaos, and he's bringing them together, saying we're building something beautiful out of broken things. So wherever you find yourself today, may you trust that nothing is wasted. The hurt, the pain you're experiencing, it is not a waste. It is an intrusion into God's good world, but it is not a waste. God is cultivating something deeper.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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