

Darling Downs Parish of the AELC

Parish Magazine for May-June 2018

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

During Holy Week I made it my aim to read through the New Testament. I'm pleased to say I did it! I am now happily reading through the Old Testament and recently finished the book of Job. I hope to finish the OT in the near future.

Quite often we will pick out bits and pieces of the Bible to read, but not often do we sit down and read it from start to finish. Anyhow, reading through Job makes one ask that very familiar question: Why does God allow suffering in our lives? What about the pain and suffering in the lives of Christians? Why does God allow Christians to suffer? Why doesn't He protect His own people from illness and needless pain? Why does He allow bad things to happen to good people? This question is the focus of the Book of Job.

Job was a good man who lost almost everything. Job was 'good' in a relative sense; he was 'good' compared to other sinful people. He lost his possessions. His children and heirs were all killed. His good health was replaced with boils and open sores that tormented him, and even his wife told him he should curse God and die. At this point in Job's story, three of his friends came to be with him during his suffering. These three friends were convinced Job was suffering because he had committed some heinous sin. They repeatedly urged him to come clean and repent of whatever it was he had done. But Job was adamant in insisting he had not committed any awful and particular sin that would warrant the suffering he was experiencing. Job was correct in saying this. God Himself had asked Satan, *"Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"* (Job 1:8).

An important lesson for us in Job, therefore, is that Job was not suffering because of some particular sin on his part. It is the same lesson Jesus taught

when He said, “*Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,*” (Luke 13:4-5). The lesson is the same for us: Our suffering is not necessarily a consequence of some particular sin on our part. Nor should we look at the misfortune of others and assume they are being punished for having done wrong. Rather, all of us need to repent and be forgiven of any and all sins we have committed.

So, if Job’s intense suffering was not the result of some particular sin, then why did God allow him to experience such extraordinary misfortune?

Job at one point answered that question by concluding that God must be unjust. Job went so far as to ask God to give him a hearing as in a court of law. Job said that if God would give him such a hearing, he would then prove himself righteous and prove God wrong regarding the way he was being treated. In doing so, Job became the precursor of all who believe that they understand matters like divine justice, goodness, and mercy better than God does. All those who say that the existence of evil, pain, and suffering disprove the existence of a loving God are actually placing themselves above God in making their judgment. They have a pride problem more than an existence of evil problem. People don’t reject God because of evil outside of themselves. They reject God because of their own evil, pride being paramount.

As we know from the Book of Job, God did give him a hearing. At that hearing, God’s first question to Job was this: “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*” (Job 38:4). At that point, the debate was over. Job immediately realised that for him to stand in judgment over the all-knowing Creator God was the height of foolishness and arrogance. Several chapters later in Job, God compared Job to the Behemoth and the Leviathan He had made. God did so to demonstrate to Job, and to us, that we are very small in comparison to God’s other creatures, and we are not in a position to pass judgment on the God who made them and us. It is also true that God led Job to repentance and forgiveness in part through his suffering.

Why did God allow Job to be afflicted the way he was?

We can answer that question only in part in that we can see that God refined Job with fire; God made Job into a better person than he was before his suffering, possessing far more knowledge, wisdom, and understanding than he had before. (A little humility didn't hurt Job either).

The same is true for the suffering God's people experience today. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*" That is God's promise to us, and when He says, "*all things,*" He means just that; He means that He will see to it that everything that happens to us, including the pain and suffering we endure, will work to our benefit. God may refine us with fire too, just as He did with Job, to better equip us to be His servants.

God's message to us is the same as His message to Job: "You need to trust Me. You may think you know better, but you don't. Just trust Me." And to all His people who suffer, through Paul, He said, "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,*" (Romans 8:37-39).

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Job understood this, and as the backdrop to all his suffering and questioning, Job stood on the following confession, as stated by him: "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!*" (Job 19:25-27).

Yes, God's people experience grief, pain, and suffering, but we do so trusting Him, trusting that all our suffering will be used for that which is good and knowing that we await the final chapter in human history, which John described as follows:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:3-5)

Some will ask, "Why doesn't God do something about suffering and evil?" We say, He has. He has sent His Son, Jesus, to live and die on the cross for us so that our sins could be forgiven, and we could live in fellowship with Him now and spend eternity with Him in heaven.

We Are the Creators Now

Martyn Iles from *The Australian Christian Lobby*

A few months ago, I read a most heart-breaking Australian legal case. It concerned a 15-year-old girl who was approved for a double mastectomy because she thinks she is a boy. By now her body will be mutilated forever.

Cari is a young woman from the USA who transitioned socially at that same age. She then started on hormones at 17. She underwent some surgeries. But at 22, she decided she didn't want to be a man.

In her YouTube video, Cari says:

"I wanted to make a video previously... so that folks can see that I'm a real live person, but didn't out of fear of showing my face. But I think it's important when we talk about these issues to really understand that women like us aren't just statistics, not just some dry data some gatekeeping doctor might throw at you, we're real people. This is a real outcome of transition. I'm a real live 22-year-old woman with a scarred chest and a broken voice and a 5 o'clock shadow because I couldn't face the idea of growing up to be a woman. That's my reality."

We may sometimes be tempted to laugh at the craziness of the transgender movement. Maybe the notion that a man can join the women's weightlifting team and win by a mile makes us chuckle ... Or Qantas suggesting its staff refrain from saying "ladies and gentlemen." But it's not just funny or foolish. We are talking about lives; the lives of children. It is our young people who stand to lose the most from this ideology. It is being served up at schools around the country and peddled by the counsellors and medical professionals our children interact with. Teaching tools like the "Genderbread Person" and the "Gender Unicorn" confuse children about their sex, gender and sexual orientation. Confused children who begin to question their identity can then be socially transitioned and put on puberty blockers before more radical decisions around hormone therapy and surgery are made.

Much of this can be done without their parents ever knowing. Some Education Department guidelines leave open the option for school authorities to cut parents out if they discern that they would not be "gender affirming."

Precisely how a pre-teen knows what it feels like to be a woman trapped in a man's body, or a two-spirit genderqueer trapped in a woman's body, or a non-binary is anybody's guess. But it is obvious how they might be confused by all this.

Unsurprisingly, there is an unprecedented explosion in the number of children reporting symptoms of gender dysphoria. Studies show that between 80 and 95 per cent of children reporting such feelings grow out of it when left alone. And yet school counsellors, family courts, medical professionals, hospitals and clinics are increasingly putting these children on an escalator to irreversible, permanent damage. They are playing with lives.

Rather than solve the underlying causes of their mental discomfort and anguish, treatment is directed at destroying their bodies. It's like giving an anorexic child liposuction. We don't do that. Instead, we direct treatment at their mental health.

The spectacular confusion around this issue ought to be something of an “I told you so” moment for Christians. It was always going to happen if people messed with gender. I say that simply because, ever since the moment described by those words, “*In the beginning God created*”, God has revealed His purposes for His creation.

Then God said, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”*”

God impressed certain laws and principles on His creation from which it can never depart. No matter how much we mutilate our bodies or fill ourselves with hormones, it is ultimately impossible to change our sex.

But more than that, God has called His noblest creation – human beings – to bear His image.

I don’t fully understand it, but it seems that maleness and femaleness is intrinsic to that image, according to this scripture.

But it should not surprise us that people do not submit to the reality of creation or the will of the Creator. In Romans 1 when the Apostle Paul diagnoses the way societies go astray without God, he nails the nub of the issue with these words: *They exchanged the truth about God for the lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the creator.*

This is the timeless and original sin of the human race. Our first parents fell because of the desire – “to be like God.”

What is “the truth” in the context? It is the fact of God as Creator. What is “the lie”? It is the dethroning of God as Creator, putting the creature in His place. In short: we are the creators now.

This is the timeless and original sin of the human race. Our first parents fell because of the desire – and I quote – “*to be like God.*”

A 6’6” man with hairy hands can declare that he is a woman in a moment’s decision and everybody must conform to the new reality because he has made it so.

A marriage can be the union of two people of the same-sex because the stroke of a legislator's pen has said that it is true. We can change our gender on our birth certificate, or substitute birth parents because even the reality of history can be rewritten because we wish it was true. We are the creators now.

Except that it doesn't work.

More than 40 per cent of transgender people who have undergone transition attempt death by suicide, compared with roughly 4 per cent of the general population.

No man will ever compete fairly on a woman's sporting team. No amount of mutilation will ever mask the truth that a body is male or female. Normally developed chromosomes will always be XX or XY.

The solution is as God intended it. We are called to live in the bodies we have been given, and to fulfil God's purposes as boy, man, husband and father or girl, woman, wife and mother.

The compassionate and truthful thing to do is to enable children to be comfortable and mature in the sex that God gave them.

The Apostle John tells us that God who made the world is not only the one by whom all things were made in their proper order, but in Him is light and life itself. Our ultimate blessing and fulfilment is found in conformity to Him and His ways.

Words of Encouragement

Dust and drought. The rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer. Wars and rumours of wars. Corrupt or clueless politicians. Increasing apathy of Christians. Rising anger shown toward God's children. Surely the end can't be too far away! The Apostle Paul says, *"²² For we know that all the creation has been groaning together with them, and labouring with birth-pangs together with them until now. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as His children, for the redemption of our bodies,"* (Rom. 8:22-23). All of creation has been groaning in eager anticipation for things to be set right

on judgment day, and we too groan as we await God's great day. Yet we must confess that *the LORD is good. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble. He cares for those who take refuge in Him*, (Nahum 1:7).

A little while ago, when I was out and about making my regular shut-in visits, one of our members who has since gone to be with the Lord, quipped when I asked how she was. "Pastor," she said, "I am not so good today. I think I need some words of encouragement."

We all need a good word of encouragement when we are lonely, sad, in pain, and when we have had losses in our lives. Nahum reminds us that God is our fortress and strength. He gives good and positive words that help to strengthen our faith and give us hope when everything seems hopeless.

Here are some other wonderful and good words to help us today. They come from the Prophet Isaiah, "*For I, the LORD, your God, am grasping your right hand. It is I who am telling you, 'Do not be afraid! I shall help you,'*" (41:13).

Affection for His people fills the heart of our Lord. He takes us by the hand and promises to help us. That is the foundation of all the comfort God proclaims in His Word. He has the power to help. He stands behind the words of comfort with power, righteousness, and faithful love, and never forget – Jesus has died and risen from death to save body and soul from hell. The gift of faith in Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection assures us of eternal life now and in heaven forever. After all, "*If God is for us who can be against us?*" (Rom. 8:31).

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