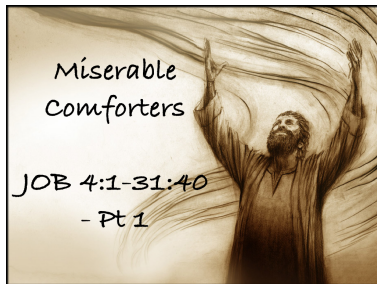


Miserable Comforters

(Job 4:1-31:40 – Pt 1 August 21, 2016)



I felt quite sorry for a number of the Olympic athletes who were expected to medal but didn't.

And then right after their event – when they are feeling crushed by the weight of disappointment – a reporter sticks a microphone in their face and says:

All of Australia wants to know – what happened? Did you choke, did you get your preparation wrong, did you just blow it?

They have to put on a brave face and say all the right things.

Whatever their pain – I can only think that this only made it worse.

Unfortunately – all too often we have done something similar – made the hurting feel worse.

At any time in our lives – there will be dozens of people we know – probably many more – who are really suffering.

And there will be other times when it will be us who are suffering.

Scripture is clear – one of our responsibilities is to support, encourage, minister to and comfort each other when we are suffering.

However, I suspect that there have been many times when the counsel and comfort we received or gave out was miserable and actually increased the suffering.

I can tell you – on reflection – too many times over the years my counsel was miserable and hard – not by intention – but it came out that way.

Last week we heard Dot's testimony and in it she said this:

I began to believe what people were saying about my sinful life, that I needed to repent of a big bad sin. So I started searching for that ... I was as low as I thought I could go.

Next week in his testimony Dave England will say this:

One of the interesting things that you experience when you are in a circumstance like mine is that people tend to give you what they think is good advice, but is often insensitive at best, and sometimes just plain dodgy.

I have heard this kind of unintentional, miserable counsel again and again.

This morning we begin a long section of the book of Job – which centres on a series of dialogues between Job and his three friends.

These chapters can be tedious, repetitive and often confusing.

But what is very clear – the friends of Job did not understand suffering and they were miserable comforters.

We can learn from them how not to comfort.

Basically – these chapters look like this:

Chapters 3-31

Job's Despair 3

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar

Cycle 1	4-14
Cycle 2	15-21
Cycle 3	22-26

Job's Defence 27-31

We began this section last week looking at chapter 3. We left Job at the end of chapter 3 despairing to the point that he longed for the release of death. That seemed to be the only way out of his pain.

It seems his speech prompted the three friends who had been silent until then to offer their advice.

As chapter 3 opened – Job and his three friends were pretty much on the same page.

After a week of silence Job spoke.

The three friends expected Job to say – Father forgive me I have sinned greatly and I deserve my punishment.

What he says is this – Father I am confused I have **not** sinned greatly, I do not deserve my punishment – so kill me.

They wanted Job to man up and realise why he was suffering and deal with the root issue.

Their advice to repent comes in three cycles of speeches. Each of the three friends speaks and Job responds after each one has spoken.

Each cycle becomes more direct and more pointed.

However, despite their increasingly fervent arguments – Job refuses to admit they are right and so by the third cycle the friends are exasperated and resort to insults. Bildad only gives a very short speech and Zophar does not give any speech at all.

Then in chapters 27-31 Job gives a prolonged, impassioned defence declaring he does not have any great hidden sin.

This is the read my lips – I have no great hidden sin in my life speech.

The Job we see here is frustrated, angry and confused. He makes it clear – their counsel did not help at all.

The question for us is why did the counsel of these men who clearly care – are clearly intelligent – who seem to have a high view of God – why did their counsel fail?

How can we avoid their mistakes?

I want to suggest that what is going on here is this – the friends have a very simplistic, commonly held view about God and how He deals with the world. Their view of God and His justice is known by a number of names:

Cause and effect justice

Proportional justice

Retributive justice

Basically – you reap what you sow.

If you are suffering – there **must** be a sin that caused it.

Their logic is simple – God is sovereign and God is just. His justice means He **must** punish sin. So punishment **must** mean there is a sin causing God to act.

It seems that before Job's life was decimated – he would have said – amen to this way of viewing the world.

But now that suffering has come to him – Job's perspective has shifted. In Job's responses we find two things.

First, Job is adamant that there is no sin in his life deserving of the suffering he is going through.

And second – he now looks at the world with very sympathetic eyes and he sees that he is not alone – there are others who are innocent who suffer and there are wicked who prosper.

For example, Job 9:22–23:

It is all one; therefore I say, ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’
When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.

Now don’t mishear me.

Both Job and the friends have an inadequate view of God and his justice.

The friends declare that the only way to preserve God’s goodness and justice is to say Job has some great sin in his life. We know from chapters 1 and 2 that is **not** the case.

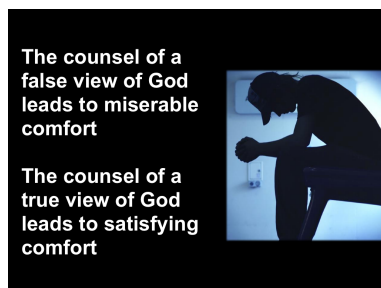
In their minds – if Job has no great sin – then God is unjust.

Job makes the mistake of justifying himself rather than God.

And in doing so we find that in Job 40:8 God says – Job you put me in the wrong in your attempt to be in the right.

Both views make God unjust.

Here is the point of this morning.



The counsel of a false view of God leads to miserable comfort.

A false view of God’s justice leads us to be:

Miserable comforters.

It is rare that someone sets out to be a miserable comforter.

But even those of us who understand grace can default to legalistic thinking and hurt those we seek to comfort.

Job’s three friends are usually viewed quite negatively. But their intentions were admirable.

These are men who cared deeply about their friend. They interrupted their lives and travelled a long way to be with Job to help him. Their motivation was right – they wanted Job’s pain and suffering to stop.

Their counsel was meant to help Job find a way to end his suffering – *not* to increase it.

However good their intentions – the result was terrible.

In Job 16:2 – Job says – you are miserable comforters.

In Job 19:2 he says – How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words?

Their words are hurting Job – but despite his protests they only intensify their diatribe.

Brothers and sisters – we are all placed into the lives of those around us.

Our spouse, our children, our friends. And when they are hurting – we feel the need to say something – to help them.

You don’t want their response to be – you are miserable at comforting me – you are breaking me into pieces.

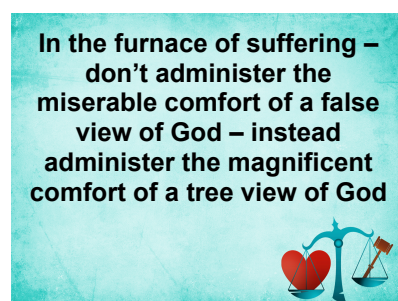
Nor do I want you to be miserable comforters to your own soul.

So what I want to do this morning is to learn from the mistakes of Job’s three friends.

These three friends are caring, they have a high view of God, they are very intelligent – so where did they go wrong?

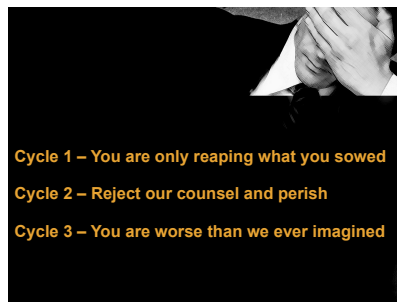
I believe that these three friends make a mistake many of us make – their counsel relies on the inadequate foundation of legalism rather than the sufficient foundation of grace.

So here is how I want to sum up the heart of this morning’s message:

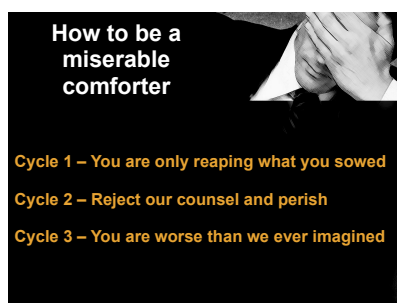


In the furnace of suffering – don’t administer the miserable comfort of a false view of God – instead administer the magnificent comfort of true view of God.

Since they view God as a proportional justice God, the three friend's counsel to Job in his suffering was:



Or putting it another way:



How to be a miserable comforter

Tell the suffering:

You are only reaping what you sowed

Reject our counsel and perish

You are worse than we ever imagined

Do you know what is really frightening to me?

I look at this list and although I understand grace – as I reflect on some of my efforts at counselling – while I hope I didn't use these words:

Said that ... said that ... and oh no ... said that.

In an of itself – this advice is *miserable* comfort. It does **not** bring peace – it can't.

Let's look at how this fleshes out.

To set the scene for us – remember that these attempts at comfort come after God allowed Satan to decimate Job's life

While he initially stood up well – after months of torment Job finally snapped and lost it.

He longs for the release of death.

The friends did not like this so they responded.

Chapter 4 begins with the speech of Eliphaz the Temanite. He is probably the oldest of the three – and believe it or not – he seems to be the nicest of them.

While there are differences between the approach and tone of the three friends – in one way or another they all seem to give pretty much the same counsel.

We begin with this:

Tell the suffering:

You are only reaping what you sowed

This is the heart of their counsel – you are suffering because you sowed sin.

Have you said this?

Have you found yourself thinking this?

It is so common.

Eliphaz starts by saying – I know you are upset – but I just have to speak ... well no he didn't.

He tries to encourage Job to accept his counsel by saying:

Take your own medicine

In chapter 4 verses 1-6 he says – You have given counsel to many people who were afflicted by trials – you strengthened the weak – by telling them to find and confess their sin.

But now that it is you who suffer – you don't want to swallow your own medicine – you want an easy way out – you just want death.

Man up.

Then he says:

Identify your sin

If it is sin that causes suffering – work out what that sin is.

Look at verses 7-8:

Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

Who that was innocent ever perished? A key question.

We know while Job is not perfect – he did *nothing* to deserve this.

Eliphaz doesn't get this. He says – God works by the principle of law – if you plow iniquity you reap trouble.

The fact that you are in so much pain and suffering *must* mean that you plowed some profound iniquity – you must have some deep dark sin that is the cause of your problem.

I'm not being judgmental – just speaking the truth – in love brother.

Please listen – in the first sermon of this series we saw that there is a great deal of truth to the principle – you reap what you sow.

Much of the book of Proverbs reflects this principle.

If you are lazy – you will struggle to put food on the table.

If you mistreat your wife – you will have an unhappy marriage.

If you smoke 3 packs a day – don't be surprised if you get emphysema and lung cancer.

This is a fallen world but there are still echoes of this principle in the way the world works.

If you sin – there are generally consequences.

The problem is that Eliphaz assumes that instead of being the way things **often** happen – he assumes this is the way the world **always** works. God *always* responds proportionally. It is *always* cause and effect.

He has no category for innocent suffering – yet as we saw in chapters 1 and 2 – Job is suffering not because of any sin – in fact he is suffering because he was blameless – because God chose him as the best of men to put a target on him.

Brothers and sisters – we of all people should know that not all suffering is related to sin.

We know Jesus suffered and He **never** sinned.

Our worldview must have a category for innocent suffering.

But Proverbs rings in our ears – so when someone has bad stuff happen – all too often we wonder – what did they do to deserve this?

And if their suffering is great – sometimes we wonder – what are they hiding?

This is Eliphaz.

The third way this cycle is reinforced is by telling Job to:

Confess your sin

Eliphaz relates a vision he had that made his bones tremble.

A spirit came to him and declared this truth in verse 17:

Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?

This is one of **the** crucial verses in Job.

Can a mortal man stand justified, righteous – before God?

Over the next weeks we will see this question is asked again and again.

The one who brought the vision gives the answer – **it is impossible** – all his servants and messengers are charged with error.

Notice what is going on here. Eliphaz hears this vision and concludes it is a message for Job – Job, don't you dare say you are blameless and without some great hidden sin – because everyone is a sinner.

But – what Eliphaz seems to fail to realise is that this same truth says that ultimately – every man and woman – including him – is doomed.

It is not just Job – it is everyone.

When I preach a sermon – often someone says something like this:

Craig, thank you for that – Arthur really needed to hear that.

And I find myself thinking – yes – but so did you – and for that matter so did I.

Eliphaz heard this vision – and immediately thought of Job. Job is a sinner. Job needs to confess his sin.

But Eliphaz seems to have missed the real point of the vision – great sinner or minor sinner – can **anyone** be right before God? – no!

Consider the question:

If you were to die tonight and stood before God and He asked you – why should I let you into heaven – what would you say?

I think Eliphaz would say something this:

Lord God, I am not perfect – and for my sins I received my punishments in my lifetime. Of course because my punishments were minor – unlike Job – it shows I was a very obedient servant. My righteousness – while not perfect – should get me into heaven. I once thought Job was better than me – now I know I am much better than him.

One truth Job's predicament is designed to bring out is this truth – law won't save anyone. There is no one who can be right and pure before the perfection of God.

Job knows he is not sinless. Job 13:23:

How many are my iniquities and my sins?

But he knows there is no huge sin so he asks:

Make me know my transgression and my sin.

What have I done to deserve this?

But Eliphaz assumes Job *has* to know what he has done and wants Job to confess his sin. Look down to chapter 5 verse 7:

Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Men are wicked – it is who we are – just admit it.

Verse 8:

As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause.

If I were you – if I were suffering like you – I would confess my sin and take my punishment.

It is the way God has set the world up.

In a moment we will look at the counsel of Bildad and Zophar – but I want us to think for a moment – about whether this is the kind of counsel you have given – and why it is so miserable and lacking.

Think back to the times when you have been hurting – really hurting.

Your world is falling apart – you are asking God why – nothing makes sense – it all seems wrong.

You ask to speak to me – you sit across from your pastor – you pour your heart out – and I say – well you do know don't you that you are just reaping what you sowed?

What would that say to you?

It says – find the sin causing your problem.

Now – don't get me wrong – sometimes there is an element of truth – that we did contribute to the problem.

You weren't the best spouse or parent before the family troubles.

You did eat three Big Mac's a day before your heart attack.

If there is a sin or a cause – deal with it.

But you know what – most of the time those who come to me already know if there is sin contributing to the trouble – but someone they trust saying you are reaping what you sowed – can say to us that **all** of our trials stem from our sin. It is **all** my fault.

That is rarely the case.

Most problems that arise are rarely simple cause and effect.

And you know what – even if it is – it is miserable comfort to lead off with – well we all saw this coming didn't we?

It is miserable because all of us sin – and in and of ourselves – we can't deal with our sin.

We will see in the sermons to follow that the answer is to point them to the boundless comfort of Christ who does deal with our sin.

Yes – there will come a time when you deal with contributory issues – deal with sin – but choose the time, the place and the words carefully.

But, and this is important – I also want to point out that like Job – much of the time the suffering in our lives has **nothing** to do with our sin – Adam's sin yes – our personal sin – no.

The victims of the Tsunami, the wife with brain cancer, the child hit by a drunk driver – they are **not** reaping what they sowed. Job is going to point this out especially in chapters 9 and 24. Bad things **do** happen to those who don't deserve it.

So what happens when something bad happens to you and someone says – well you are only reaping what you sowed?

What do you do – you begin to tear your life apart looking for some sin – and guess what? – you **will** find sin – because we are all sinners.

Although there is no connection between the sin and the trial – we assume there is.

I was a bit rude to my mum.

I slacked off at work recently.

I told a few white lies.

I only read my Bible for half an hour last week.

Oh no – it **is** true – I am reaping what I am sowing?

You heard Dave and Sharon say in their testimony this morning – we wondered if we had contributed to Owen being born with Down's Syndrome.

Guilt and pain makes us go there.

But what if we confess our sin and fight it and practice the spiritual disciplines and the pain stays there?

We conclude – it must be some other sin – or my confession is not genuine enough – or I don't have enough faith – and we tear ourselves to bits – and the guilt grows and the pain becomes worse.

Brothers and sisters – this is **miserable comfort**.

And here is what it does – we begin to blame God.

I have tried to deal with every sin – and I'm still in pain – then we can get angry at God. We can even speak wrongly of God.

And yet – this is the only tune Eliphaz, Blidad and Zophar know.

Look at Bildad in chapter 8.

Job if you are saying you have no great sin – you are saying God is unjust.

But we know that God does not pervert justice.

Then look where this legalistic view of God takes him. Chapter 8 verse 4. Clearly all ten of your children were such great sinners that God had to take their lives.

That is so harsh. Your kids just got what they deserved. That is miserable comfort.

But Bildad thinks this is kindness – verses 5-7 – just confess your sin – if you become pure and upright – God will restore you and your future will be greater than your past.

In verses 20-22 he says repent and your life will be filled again with laughter and joy.

This is so cruel.

Tell a parent whose child is dying – they are only reaping what they sowed – and see if this brings joy!

Zophar is no better.

Look at chapter 11 verse 6:

Know then that God exacts of you **less** than your guilt deserves.

This man has lost almost everything. He wealth, his position, ten children and his health.

And Zophar feels confident enough to say – I think you are such a great sinner – you deserve worse!

Legalism makes us judge and jury. There is no place for grace.

Job is blameless – but his peers crank up the pressure – actually you are worse than we first thought and you deserve even worse.

And again in verses 13-20 he pleads with Job to confess and repent.

Do this and God will make your life brighter than noonday. You will be secure and have hope.

You are reaping what you sowed

This principle never brings comfort or freedom.

Most religions and philosophies in the world are based on a variation of this.

It has never worked. It cannot explain the world. It certainly can't explain Job.

But if the one you talk to rejects this counsel – what do you do next?

You proclaim very loudly:

Reject our counsel and perish

Of course you do it in love.

Chapter 15 begins this second cycle.

Eliphaz is adamant – a wise man would not answer with such windy knowledge.

He will not argue with such unprofitable talk.

You are rejecting the fear of God.

You are not Adam – born sinless.

Listen to Job 15:8–13:

Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father. Are the comforts of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring such words out of your mouth?

Job – we are very wise men. How could you possibly think you know something we don't?

No one knows any other way the world functions.

So, you reject our counsel at your peril.

Because if you do:

Verse 15 – you will writhe in pain every day.

Verse 22 – You will be marked for the sword.

Verse 24 – Distress and anguish will terrify you.

Bildad picks up on the same theme in chapter 18.

Do you think we are cattle and stupid – rejecting our counsel?

He then tells Job what awaits him if he fails to repent.

He will be cast down, seized and ensnared. His skin and limbs will be consumed. He will live with terror. His name will perish from the earth. He will dwell with the unrighteous.

Zophar continues in chapter 20.

Verse 6 – You will perish forever like your own dung.

Verse 20 – You will know no contentment in your belly.

If someone refuses to heed your counsel – paint the blackest possible picture of their future – on earth and for eternity.

Tell them to reject your words will bring all these calamities.

Frighten them into admitting their sin.

And then of course when all else fails:

Tell the sufferer:

You are worse than we ever imagined.

If they refuse to heed your advice and find their sin – it clearly shows they are even more sinful than we thought – so crank up the vitriol.

Have a look at Job 22:5–10 where Eliphaz says:

Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities.

Remember – this is blameless Job.

God says he has no great sin – but Eliphaz says – it is abundant – clear for all to see – it just oozes out everywhere.

For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. ... You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.

Is this accusation true? No it is not. God told us Job is blameless.

But if someone won't admit their sin – throw enough mud – some of it will stick.

How easy it is to impute sin and blame to someone.

Job 22:21:

Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.

This is your last chance Job.

Bildad gives the final speech. It is short so I will read it all.

Job 25:

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said: "Dominion and fear are with God; he makes peace in his high heaven. Is there any number to his armies? Upon whom does his light not arise? How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!"

When all else fails – call them a maggot and a worm – because they are clearly worse than we imagined. Don't say you are right before God.

Is it any wonder this counsel from wise friends brought no peace, no joy, no rest?

I imagine most of us have been on the end of some legalistic comfort – from friends – counsel that made us worse – led to no peace and gave us no hope.

Brothers and sisters – I trust that no one here holds such false views of God such as seeing Him as a God of:

Cause and effect justice

Proportional justice

Retributive justice

If you do – you will have no answer to suffering – you will be a miserable comforter to others and to yourself.

In Job 26 – Job says to his friends – your counsel has not helped me, you have not counselled me wisely – it is just that breath came out of you.

I think he went easy on them.

Legalism causes us to futilely hunt down sin to try and meet God's standard.

Legalism – and any other false view of God – is never the answer.

Often when people suffer – we don't know what to say – and often what we say is inadequate and miserable.

What should these three men have said to Job?

They should have pointed him to the glory and majesty of an all good, all sovereign God and urged him to trust this God.

In the forward to his book – *The supremacy of God in preaching* – John Piper wrote this:

Years ago during the January prayer week at our church, I decided to preach on the holiness of God from Isaiah 6. I resolved on the first Sunday of the year to unfold the vision of God's holiness found in the first four verses of that chapter. ...

So I preached on the holiness of God and did my best to display the majesty and glory of such a great and holy God. I gave not one word of application to the lives of our people. Application is essential in the normal course of preaching, but I felt led that day to make a test: Would the passionate portrayal of the greatness of God in and of itself meet the needs of people?

I didn't realize that not long before this Sunday one of the young families of our church discovered that their child was being sexually abused by a close relative. It was incredibly traumatic. They were there that Sunday morning and sat under that message. I wonder how many advisers to us pastors today would have said, "Pastor Piper, can't you see your people are hurting? Can't you come down out of the heavens and get practical? Don't you realize what kind of people sit in front of you on Sunday?" Some weeks later I learned the story.

The husband took me aside one Sunday after a service. “John, these have been the hardest months of our lives. Do you know what has gotten me through? The vision of the greatness of God’s holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on.”¹

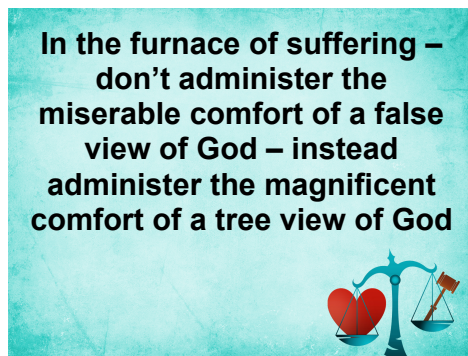
That is one of the great lessons of Job.

It took an encounter with the majesty of God for Job to get this.

Remember that the great truth of the book of Job:

The great question is *not* why am I suffering but who can end the suffering?

There is no other place we can find peace.



In the weeks to come, we will see that that if you want to be a magnificent comforter – you don't counsel the sufferer to deal with sin themselves – but point them to trust in God – even if you can't understand what He is doing – trust the One who can and will deal with sin forever.

Grace – through the Arbiter, the Redeemer – the One who does what we cannot.

We weep with those who weep, we confess we are all unworthy sinners, we lament this fallen world, and we thank God that He cares and has acted to end sin and suffering forever.

This is the great lesson Job learned through much pain and many tears.

Without it there can never be peace.

Without it – we are miserable counsellors – to others and to ourselves.

William Cowper – understood many truths – he was one of the great hymn writers – but he struggled with grace.

¹ Piper, J. (2004). *The supremacy of God in preaching* (Rev. ed., pp. 13–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Unfortunately, like Job's friends he seemed to think his problems were due to some sin in his life and what he needed to do was find that sin. It gave him no rest – no peace. Here is one of his poems where he talks about his suffering and his efforts to find peace:

Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

Return, O Holy Dove, return
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.

He thought – if only I can find my idol – the cause of my troubles – and tear it away – **then** I will find my blessedness and walk closely with the Lord.

Unfortunately, this turned into a fruitless search that tore this man apart. He spent most of his life in an insane asylum wondering why he had no peace.

Where is peace? – In the majesty of God. The One who sent Jesus.

Jesus paid it all – Jesus did what we could not – Jesus brings us peace.

This is the basis of all true counsel.

This is the basis of all true peace.

This is our Gospel.

This is our joy.

Miserable Comforters **(Job 4:1-31:40 – Pt 1 August 21, 2016)**

Main Point: In the furnace of suffering – don't administer the miserable comfort of legalism – instead administer the magnificent comfort of grace.

- Have you ever received miserable comfort? What made it miserable?
- Have you ever given miserable comfort? What made it miserable?
- Consider Job 42:7:

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

In what way did Job speak right of God?

In what way did the three friends *not* speak right of God?

- How can a wrong view of God lead us to be miserable counsellors?
- If we don't understand what God is doing in our lives – how should we respond? How should we **not** respond?
- Do you agree that Job's friends had right motives in counselling Job? Why?
- What was the view of the three friends in terms of God and the way he deals with sin?
- Why did Job come to question this view?
- You reap what you sow.

In what ways does this still apply in a fallen world?
In what ways does it not apply?

- When should we look for sin and deal with it?
- Do you bring sin up in counselling? If so – how and when?
- Why is it important to have a category for 'innocent suffering'?
- How do we counsel those whose sin contributes to their suffering?
- How do we counsel those whose sin is not related to their suffering?
- Why does trying to relate all suffering to a sin lead to frustration and anger?

- How does Jesus and the cross change the way we counsel those who suffer?