

Job 4-5 – “If Anyone Thinks He Is Wise... (Eliphaz 1)”
Psalm 1
1 Corinthians 3

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So what do we do with Eliphaz?

At the end of the book of Job, God will say that Job’s three friends
have *not* spoken rightly about God.
And Job (whom God says *does* speak rightly of him) contradicts them.
So perhaps we need to be a little suspicious of Job’s friends!

And yet, it is notoriously difficult to pin down where Eliphaz goes wrong.
Job’s friends represent the best of the wisdom tradition –
rooted in Deuteronomy and Proverbs.

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 1, provides an excellent example of this wisdom tradition.

Psalm 1 speaks of the two ways –
the way of sinners (v1)
and the way of the righteous (v6).
The blessed man walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

And you can see the descending steps in verse 1,
because the danger is that if you first walk in the counsel of the wicked,
then you stop to “stand in the way of sinners,”
and finally “sit in the seat of scoffers.”

If you walk in the wrong path,
and stand around listening to the wrong voices,
then, invariably, you will become one of the wrong voices
that entices others to walk in the wrong path!

But blessed is the man who does not walk in counsel of the wicked!
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Job’s friends know Job has been such a man.

But Psalm 1 goes on to say,

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does he prospers.
The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away.”

Job’s circumstances would suggest that he is *not* a blessed man!

Then again, there was a day when our Lord Jesus did not exactly look like a blessed man!

Hanging on the cross – crying out like a derelict,
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Any attempt to deal with “the problem of evil” that does not take the cross into account will fall short!

It is only when the blessed man of Psalm 1 is hung on a cross that we can begin to make sense of suffering.

Sing Psalm 1
Read 1 Corinthians 3

What is Paul doing here?

Paul quotes Eliphaz:

“he catches the wise in their craftiness.” (3:19 – Job 5:13)

Paul says that “the wisdom of this world is folly with God,” and then he quotes Eliphaz, a pre-eminent example of ‘orthodox wisdom’ in the Old Testament.

Eliphaz had said that God “catches the wise in their craftiness” – but at the end of the book of Job, God catches Eliphaz and his friends in their craftiness – Eliphaz was caught in his own net.

I don’t know how intentional this was for Paul.

Perhaps he wasn’t thinking about Eliphaz.

Maybe he just remembered this great quote from the book of Job.

Perhaps if you told Paul, “That’s brilliant irony!”

he might reply, “Huh, I hadn’t thought of that connection...”

But the Holy Spirit was!

Because Paul’s whole point at the beginning of 1 Corinthians is to show that the wisdom of the world – whether Jew or Gentile – is foolishness to God.

And the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom.

And the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

All the wisdom of the Greeks could not imagine what God was really doing in the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Even so, Eliphaz, in all his wisdom, could not imagine what God was really doing with Job.

As we go through the speeches of Job’s friends,

I want us to think about what “wise counsel” sounds like.

You can say all the right things,

but if you say them to the wrong person – you won’t really help much.

You may know fifty things that are true and good –

but the question is what is the true and good thing that *this person* needs to hear!

¹ *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:*

But who is Eliphaz?

Eliphaz is a Temanite.

Teman was the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau (Gen 36);

and the Edomite city of Teman is named

by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Habbakuk.

Indeed, Jeremiah 49 says that Teman was famed for its wisdom!

1. Two Words of Comfort (4:2-11)

a. Your Integrity Is Your Hope (4:2-6)

² *“If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?*

Yet who can keep from speaking?

³ *Behold, you have instructed many,
and you have strengthened the weak hands.*

⁴ *Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees.*

⁵ *But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
it touches you, and you are dismayed.*

⁶ *Is not your fear of God^[a] your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?*

We need to see that Eliphaz starts by bringing genuine comfort.

Eliphaz starts by saying, “Yes, Job, you *are* innocent!”

You have comforted others – you have instructed many –
now remember your own counsel!

Is not your fear of God your confidence?

In 3:25, Job had spoken of his “terror” – his ‘fright’ –
but he did not use the word “fear” used here.

Now Eliphaz reminds him – when we talk about the fear of God,
it should not be “terror” – but a genuine fear, *reverence* for God!

You have maintained your integrity – your innocence – in this matter.

Good, Eliphaz says, is not your integrity your hope?

You hear echoes of Eliphaz in the mocking of Jesus at the cross:

“He saved others – but he cannot save himself.”

Of course, Eliphaz is not mocking.

He sincerely believes that if Job is patient – if he waits upon the LORD,
he will be vindicated.

After all:

b. The Innocent and Upright Will Not Perish (4:7-11)

⁷ *“Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?”*

God has identified Job as “upright” – one who fears God and turns away from evil.
There is a consistent emphasis from Job’s friends,
“If you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore your rightful habitation...” (8:6)

Now, that’s what happens, right?
In the end, Job *is* restored!

Eliphaz is not simplistic:
He does not say that the righteous never suffer –
rather, his view is that the righteous are not *cut off*.
The innocent never perish.
You are still alive, so there is still hope!

⁸ *As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.*
⁹ *By the breath of God they perish,
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.*

And Eliphaz is absolutely right.
The apostle Paul says in Galatians 6:7-8,
“Whatever you sow, that you will reap.
The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction;
the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

So, as a principle of spiritual “cause and effect” it is true.
If you plow iniquity and sow trouble, then you will reap the same!

But does that mean that if you reap trouble, then *you* must have sown it?

No, because the breath of God blasts all of creation:

¹⁰ *The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,
the teeth of the young lions are broken.*
¹¹ *The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.*

This sets up Eliphaz’s central point.

2. Eliphaz’s Vision: You Cannot Be More Right than God (4:12-20)

The central focus of Eliphaz’s speech is his vision in verses 12-20.
You can hear how Eliphaz sets Job up with his lengthy introduction:

¹² *“Now a word was brought to me stealthily;
my ear received the whisper of it.
¹³ Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men,
¹⁴ dread came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.
¹⁵ A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh stood up.
¹⁶ It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.
A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:*

By this point you *really* want to hear what this voice says!

¹⁷ *‘Can mortal man be in the right before^[b] God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?’*

Probably verse 17 is the message of the voice,
and verses 18-21 are Eliphaz’s commentary on it.

The language in verse 17 suggests a comparison –
“take the man – compared with God – who is righteous?”
“a man – compared with his maker – who is pure?”

This is *the point* that Eliphaz wants Job to hear.
Listen to yourself, Job.
You are cursing the day of your birth,
and wishing that you were dead.
You may not have cursed God,
but by cursing the events that God has ordained for you,
are you not questioning God’s wisdom and justice in your case?

Do you really think that you are more right than God?

Gregory the Great, in his “Morals on the Book of Job,” (5.67) agreed with Eliphaz:
*For whoso murmurs at the stroke, what does he, but charge the justice of the striker?
Thus a man accounts himself more pure than his Maker,
if he stirs complaint against the scourge,
and without doubt he makes God give place to himself,
whose judgment he blames in the case of his own affliction.*

We should humble ourselves before God,
and recognize that he is right and pure – and compared to him,
even at our best, we are nothing!

After all,

¹⁸ *Even in his servants he puts no trust,
and his angels he charges with error;*

Remember that in chapter 1, we talked about the “sons of God” –
the heavenly beings – the “gods” – the principalities and powers in heavenly places –
Eliphaz says that if the heavenly beings are capable of error –

¹⁹ *how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed like the moth.*

²⁰ *Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces;
they perish forever without anyone regarding it.*

²¹ *Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them,
do they not die, and that without wisdom?’*

Some people have said that Job’s friends have a strict “retribution theology” –
that they believe that if you are suffering, then it must be because of your sin.
Eliphaz makes it clear that he has a more nuanced view than that!

In verses 19-21 Eliphaz says that all humanity suffers under “common wrath.”
Perhaps you are familiar with the phrase, “common grace” –
it refers to how the sun shines on the righteous and the wicked;
how the rain falls on the wicked as well as the righteous!
There is a general benevolence that God shows to all his creation.

In the same way there is a “common wrath.”
Natural disasters do not destroy the wicked only!
Many churches were flattened by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.
Cancer strikes the righteous as well as the wicked.

Eliphaz says, compare yourself to God – who are you compared to him?
Job, your suffering fits into the normal course of the universe.
It’s just an example of common wrath!

Then in chapter 5, he applies this to Job in three ways.

3. Application to Job’s Situation (5:1-27)

a. Affliction Comes upon the Fool (5:1-7)

First, he says, think about the fool.

¹ *“Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?*

² *Surely vexation kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the simple.*

Verses 3-7 are potentially devastating personally for Job.
Eliphaz describes Job's situation!

³ *I have seen the fool taking root,
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling.*
⁴ *His children are far from safety;
they are crushed in the gate,
and there is no one to deliver them.*
⁵ *The hungry eat his harvest,
and he takes it even out of thorns,^[c]
and the thirsty pant^[d] after his^[e] wealth.*
⁶ *For affliction does not come from the dust,
nor does trouble sprout from the ground,*
⁷ *but man is born to trouble
as the sparks fly upward.*

After all, Job's children were crushed in the gate –
Job's harvest was stolen by bandits –
and now Job is afflicted by sores and boils.

But I don't think Eliphaz is referring of Job here!
He describes what happens to the fool –
and even though that is exactly what has happened to Job,
he seems to want to distance Job from the fool.

After all,
we haven't heard the end of the story!

There is still hope –
so, my friend Job,
here is what I would do!

b. So Commit Your Cause to God Who Saves the Needy (5:8-16)

⁸ *“As for me, I would seek God,
and to God would I commit my cause,
⁹ who does great things and unsearchable,
marvelous things without number:
¹⁰ he gives rain on the earth
and sends waters on the fields;
¹¹ he sets on high those who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.*

There is some irony here –
because this is exactly what Job will do!

Eventually Job will say that he wants to stand before God and plead his cause.
And in the end, God will say to Job almost exactly what Eliphaz says here!

After all, Eliphaz is reciting sound, orthodox wisdom theology!
The reason why it sounds good is because it *is* good!

And then comes the passage quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:

- ¹² *He frustrates the devices of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.*
¹³ *He catches the wise in their own craftiness,
and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.*
¹⁴ *They meet with darkness in the daytime
and grope at noonday as in the night.*
¹⁵ *But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth
and from the hand of the mighty.*
¹⁶ *So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts her mouth.*

Eliphaz is right.

God saves the needy from the hand of the mighty.

So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth!

Thanks be to God!

Now Eliphaz is on a roll:

**c. Despise Not the Discipline of the Almighty and He Will Heal and Prosper
You (5:17-27)**

- ¹⁷ *“Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves;
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.*
¹⁸ *For he wounds, but he binds up;
he shatters, but his hands heal.*

Verse 17 is a paraphrase of Proverbs 3:11-12 –

“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof,
for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.”

And this is quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6.

Verse 18 paraphrases the second Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:39)

“There is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

A point also made in Hosea 6:1,

“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.”

Eliphaz seeks to comfort Job with the promise that God's discipline is for our good.
Again, Eliphaz brings words of profound wisdom.

And we should take it to heart!

Yes, it would be better if you never sinned –
but since you *do* sin, despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

God often brings suffering into your life in order to chastise you –
in order to correct you when you have strayed.

Gregory the Great wisely points out, (6.42)

that God sometimes afflicts us bodily in order to “consume our hardness of heart.”
He restores us to saving health, “by dealing wounds,
when He afflicts His own Elect outwardly,
that they be quickened with inward life.”

Other times, he “inflicts wounds within,
in that He strikes the hardness of the heart with the desire of Himself;
yet in wounding He heals, in that when we are pierced with the dart of His dread,
He recalls us to a right sense.”

Sometimes God uses outward suffering –
other times he uses inward suffering –

but one of his purposes in sending afflictions
is to draw us to himself – to “recall us to a right sense” of him.

God loves you –
and he will go to whatever lengths necessary
to recall you to a right sense of him!

So what's it going to take to get through to you?

In conclusion, Eliphaz assures Job
that God will restore and deliver him.

¹⁹ *He will deliver you from six troubles;
in seven no evil^[f] shall touch you.*

²⁰ *In famine he will redeem you from death,
and in war from the power of the sword.*

²¹ *You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue,
and shall not fear destruction when it comes.*

²² *At destruction and famine you shall laugh,
and shall not fear the beasts of the earth.*

²³ *For you shall be in league with the stones of the field,
and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.*

- ²⁴ *You shall know that your tent is at peace,
and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing.*
- ²⁵ *You shall know also that your offspring shall be many,
and your descendants as the grass of the earth.*
- ²⁶ *You shall come to your grave in ripe old age,
like a sheaf gathered up in its season.*

Everything will be restored:
family, flocks, health –
God will make everything right!

- ²⁷ *Behold, this we have searched out; it is true.
Hear, and know it for your good.”^[g]*

Eliphaz is a wise and faithful friend.

He brings comfort that is designed to show how Job’s suffering
fits into the pattern that God has established.
He brings together the best of the wisdom tradition of the ancient world,
clearly rooted in the wisdom that we see in the book of Proverbs,
as well as Deuteronomy and the prophets.

It’s good stuff.
I daresay it’s the word of God!

You can find anywhere from three to a dozen other passages of scripture
that will confirm every single verse in chapters 4-5!

There’s only one problem.

He’s got the wrong target!
If you are a skillful basketball player,
and you can sink a three pointer every time,
could you please make sure that you are on the right side of the basketball court?
Eliphaz is draining three-pointers right and left –
on the other team’s side of the court!

At the rate that Eliphaz is going, the Accuser is going to win the game!

Now in future weeks, we will always include Job’s reply with the friend’s exhortation.
Eliphaz’s first speech is too long for that
(it is also too good to pass over lightly!).
You need to see that the three comforters are not heretics or fools.
They bring the best of the ancient world’s wisdom tradition –
the best of God’s own wisdom tradition (Proverbs and Deuteronomy)!

But Proverbs and Deuteronomy cannot explain what has happened to Job.
Common wrath cannot explain what has happened to Job.

Job understands (as we'll see next week)
that God "has it in" for him!

In a single day, God took his children and all his possessions.

It took four separate actions:

The Sabeans raided his crops and donkeys and killed his servants;
the fire of God fell upon the sheep and killed his servants;
the Chaldeans raided the camels and killed his servants;
and then the east wind huffed and puffed and blew his oldest son's house down,
killing all his children.

That cannot be explained by common wrath!
There is nothing ordinary about that!

I want you to think about this:

sometimes we suffer because of our own sin –
my high school health teacher said that if you are foolish enough to sleep around,
you have a really good chance of coming down with a S.T.D.;
other times we suffer because of someone else's sin –
the cheating husband gets an STD – but so does his wife!

Other times we suffer – not because anyone's particular sin,
but because of common wrath,
because of God's general displeasure with humanity
(because of "original sin" you might say).

But there is one other reason why we may suffer.

This is the one that Job's friends never get.
Sometimes we suffer because we are righteous!

This is the one that is upside down and backwards.
In the NT it will be called "sharing in the sufferings of Christ"
or "suffering for righteousness' sake."

Sometimes you are suffering because God wants to show you off!

He wants to show the whole world what he has done in Jesus Christ –
and the way that he does that is through *you*.

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1,

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'
(Sounds a lot like Eliphaz again!)

Where is the one who is wise?
Where is the scribe?
Where is the debater of this age?
 Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom,
 it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.
For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified,
 a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,
 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
 Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
For the foolishness of God is wiser than men,
 and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Job becomes for us a picture of Christ –
 his wounds pointing to the passion of our Redeemer,
 “surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Is 53:4);
 the Tempter robbed him of everything,
 so that Job would be abandoned by his friends and family.
Gregory the Great points out that
 “The body of blessed Job is mangled with wounding,
 for our Redeemer does not disdain to be pierced with nails
 upon the stock of the cross.”
Job is wounded – not only by his foes, but also by his friends,
 to whom he must in the end say, “Get behind me, Satan!”

Of course, we have something better than Job.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7)