

Job's Three Friends, Conversation #2: Job 15-21
Ben Reaach, Three Rivers Grace Church
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We come this morning to the second round of speeches by Job and his friends. The format is the same as what we saw last week in chapters 4-14. Now in chapters 15-21 Eliphaz speaks for a second time, then Job responds. Bildad speaks, and Job responds. And finally Zophar speaks, and Job responds. And the arguments are much the same as well, although more heated. The friends insist that Job must be a wicked man to deserve these trials. Job insists that he is a man of integrity and does not know why God is inflicting him so severely. And I'm not going to rehearse the details of these points and counter-points through these chapters. But there are four points that I want to draw out of these conversations, and the first has to do with human depravity.

Human Depravity

We'll begin in chapter 15 with the words of Eliphaz, and we'll see some of the true things he has to say about human depravity. In his first speech he was somewhat gentle toward Job, even speaking some kind words to him at the outset. But now that he has heard Job defending himself repeatedly, Eliphaz is not so gentle. He begins with an insult that is meant to question Job's wisdom. He says in verse 2, "Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind?" In other words, he's saying to Job, "You're full of hot air. Your words are mere wind, with no substance or truth to them."

In the painful, ongoing trials of Job's life, he is faced with this additional trial of his three friends. As Job tries to wrestle with the meaning of his suffering, his friends rebuke him and ridicule him and turn out to be a major discouragement rather than providing any kind of encouragement to him.

As we noticed last week, though, there are many elements of truth in the theology of the three friends, even though their overall stance toward Job is misguided and unhelpful. One thing that we can glean from this speech by Eliphaz is his clear understanding of human depravity. This note is struck at other points in the book as well. In his first speech, Eliphaz said in 4:17-19, "Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth." And he states it again clearly here in 15:14-16, "What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? Behold, God puts no trust in his holy

ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!”

This is a sad truth, but an all-important truth if we want to understand the Good News of Jesus Christ. We must understand that we are not pure or righteous in and of ourselves. We are abominable and corrupt, and apart from God’s grace we drink injustice as water. Just as naturally as we would drink water, we commit sins and injustices and transgress the law of God. And we must embrace this low view of ourselves and our depraved condition before we can embrace the glorious news that Christ died for us. If there’s nothing wrong with us, then there’s no need for any help. If we’re not dead in our trespasses and sins, then there’s no need to be raised to life and forgiven (see Colossians 2:13). But when we see how wicked we are, when we can recognize that we are corrupt, then we can glory in the cross of Christ. Then we can behold the wonder of the Gospel, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

So even though there is much to disagree with in the way Job’s three friends interact with him, I want to point out this clear statement about human depravity that is so important to our understanding of the Gospel. The Gospel will not make sense apart from the truth of our utter sinfulness. And if you’re trying to recast the Gospel message in some way that ignores human sinfulness, then it’s no longer the true, biblical Gospel that you are clinging to. Christ did not come merely as an example, although He is that. Nor is He merely an inspiring teacher, although He is that as well. But He came to die for sinners. And that becomes Good News to us only when we see how sinful we are, and understand that our sin against a holy God deserves eternal punishment. Then we look to the cross, where the infinite wrath of God against sin was poured out on Jesus Christ, who died in the place of all those who will repent of their sin and rest in Him as their ultimate hope and treasure.

As I pray for revival in our midst—in our personal lives and in our church and city—I pray that God will convict us deeply of our own sin. I pray that we will be broken and humbled by our own depravity, and that we will then stand before the cross as forgiven sinners who are in awe of our great Savior. Let’s understand sin better so that we can appreciate the cross more. And let’s pray for conviction of sin, in our own lives and throughout this church, so that we might be a humble and joyous community of redeemed sinners.

Job's Suffering and Christ's Suffering

The second thing I want us to think about in these chapters is how Job's suffering prefigures Christ's suffering. In chapter 16 Job responds to Eliphaz. He calls his friends "miserable comforters" in verse 2. Then in the following verses Job complains to God for inflicting him in this way and pleads his own innocence. As I explained last week, Job does understand that he is a sinner, and he looks to God to forgive his sin. But in response to the friends Job doesn't know of any hidden sin in his life for which God would be punishing him like this. He knows he's a sinner, but he loves God and has sought to live a godly life. This is why God says of Job, he is blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil. So, in a qualified sense, Job is a righteous sufferer, an innocent sufferer. Jesus Christ, in an absolute sense, is the ultimate righteous sufferer—the sinless, perfect, innocent sufferer.

And as Job describes himself in chapter 16, there are several aspects of his suffering that resemble the suffering that Christ endured. Verses 10-11, "Men have gaped at me with their mouth; they have struck me insolently on the cheek; they mass themselves together against me. God gives me up to the ungodly and casts me into the hands of the wicked." And in verse 17 he states his innocence, "although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure." Job here is wrestling with the fear that God may be his enemy. But we know that is not the case from what we read at the beginning and end of this book. Job, however, in the middle of his trials, was unsure of how he should understand what was happening to him.

What I want to draw our attention to is the striking parallels between Job's suffering and Christ's suffering. Like Job, Jesus was given up to the ungodly and cast into the hands of the wicked, even though there was no violence in His hands, and His prayer was pure. Jesus was absolutely pure and sinless. And God gave Him up to be scorned and tortured and crucified by wicked people. Isaiah 53:9-10 prophecies of these things: "And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief." Just as in Job's suffering, God was also completely sovereign over Christ's suffering. It was the will of the Lord to crush Him. It was not Satan who prevailed, or the will of sinful men and women. It was ultimately God's sovereign plan that led Jesus Christ to the cross, to suffer innocently.

Also in Job 17:6 he complains, "He has made me a byword of the peoples, and I am one before whom men spit." This brings to mind the awful abuse that Jesus endured leading up to His

crucifixion. Matthew 26:67, “Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, ‘Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?’” And Matthew 27:30, “they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.” Like Job, Jesus became a byword. He was despised and rejected, ridiculed and spit on.

Then in Job 19:19 Job laments the fact that close friends have deserted him: “All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me.” This, too, makes us think of how Jesus was betrayed by Judas and deserted by the other disciples. Even those closest to Him left Him.

So in various ways Job’s suffering foreshadows Christ’s suffering. Jesus is the ultimate righteous sufferer. He is the sinless One, the innocent One, who died a criminal’s death.

Christ’s Suffering and Our Suffering

The third point I want to make, which is closely related to the second, is the connection between Christ’s suffering and our suffering. We’ve seen some similar aspects of Job’s suffering and Christ’s suffering. And now let’s apply this to ourselves and recognize that this suffering is also for us. One of the fundamental truths of Christianity is that we are, by faith, united to Christ. And part of being united to Christ is partaking in His suffering. The Apostle Paul assures us that this will happen. He writes in 2 Timothy 3:12-13, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” And Paul does not see this as a bad thing. It is not something to dread, but something to embrace as a necessary and good means by which God brings us to glory. He says in Philippians 3:10-11, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Peter also testifies to the blessing of partaking in Christ’s suffering. 1 Peter 4:12-14, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Just as Job was cast into the hands of the wicked even though there was no violence in his hands, and he was made a byword of the peoples, and even his close friends turned against him, so also Christ suffered and was persecuted, and in similar ways we, too, will suffer. There will be times when we will think, What did I do to deserve this? Why are people treating me this way? I have been kind to these people, and yet they seem to be

going out of their way to make my life miserable. I'm trying to work hard at my job, but my boss seems to hate me. I make attempts at sharing the Good News, but people push me away and make fun of me. Why are these things happening, we ask.

The proper response of the Christian is not to get even or to become bitter, but, as Paul and Peter have shown us, to rejoice that we have the opportunity to share in Christ's sufferings. This is reason for rejoicing because it assures us that we, indeed, belong to Christ. We are united to Him, and therefore we will be ridiculed and persecuted like Christ was. And the assurance that we are His gives us great hope for the future, because we know that suffering will not be the final story. Rather, the suffering is preparing us for an eternity with Him, where there will be no mourning nor crying nor pain (Revelation 21:4). In this way today's pain and persecution will lead us to paradise. Our present suffering will lead us to the sinless bliss of heaven. This is the paradoxical nature of Christianity. We die to live. We take up the cross in order to discover true life.

This is the Christian life. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer, himself, died at the hands of the Nazis in 1945. Listen to what he says about taking up one's cross. "The cross is there, right from the beginning, [the Christian] has only got to pick it up: there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹

If these words are discouraging to us, I believe it's because we love this world too much. We don't want to die to ourselves or to the pleasures of this world. But this is how God is so good to us in allowing us to suffer, because the trials and the persecution and the suffering work in our lives to make us yearn for Christ and long for heaven. We presently have the privilege of identifying with Christ in suffering, and we will one day have the everlasting pleasure of being with Him in heaven.

Job's suffering points forward to Christ's suffering, and Christ's suffering is experienced also by those who are united to

¹ *The Cost of Discipleship* (SCM Press, 1959), pp. 98-99.

Him by faith. Therefore don't despair as you carry your cross in this life. It shows that you are His, and it is preparing you to enjoy heaven.

Proclamations of Hope

Finally, let's look at two striking proclamations of hope that Job voices in these speeches. Overall Job's words are full of despair, but it is amazing that in the midst of his grief he includes some very hopeful statements. First, in 16:19-21, "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high. My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God, that he would argue the case of a man with God, as a son of man does with his neighbor." Back in chapter 9 Job was wishing for an arbiter, a mediator, between him and God. Now, in chapter 16, he seems to have confidence that such a Person exists. He has a witness in heaven. He has Someone who will testify for him, who will argue his case.

Then, in an even bolder proclamation of hope, Job says in 19:25-27, "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!" Remember that Job is in the pit of despair, and he is trying desperately to defend himself against the accusations of the three friends. In verses 21-22 he cries out to them, "Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?" He feels that everyone is against him, and he pleads for mercy. And then in verses 23-24 he wishes for some way to preserve his words. "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!" His concern is that he might not be vindicated before his death, and so he wants to somehow preserve this defense he is making of his own integrity. According to his perspective of things at the moment, it is unlikely that his friends are going to understand him, and it also seems unlikely to him that God is going to vindicate him any time soon. So he wishes that his defense could be forever engraved in a rock, hoping that someday, even after his death, it might be seen that he was right and his friends were wrong. Interestingly, on this request, God far exceeded what Job desired, for his words are recorded here in God's timeless Word.

But Job was merely grasping for any glimmer of hope he could conceive of. He hopes that his words can endure past his death, and this desire is rooted in some firm expectations he has concerning death and resurrection and judgment. In verse 25 he

says, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.” I believe what we are seeing in Job at this point is an example of how suffering can clarify and solidify our convictions and our hope in God. Job may not have thought much about the after-life before he encountered these trials. But the wrestling that he has been forced to do in the wake of devastation and the tense dialogues with the three friends has caused him to think long and hard about death, and what is beyond death. And God has revealed some precious things to Job here, even very early in the progress of revelation—things that we understand much more clearly, having the full revelation of God’s Word. But even here Job is able to look to the future and hope in a Redeemer—the One who will be the mediator he has hoped for (9:33), the One who is his witness in heaven (16:19). He is confident that he has a Redeemer.

This word for Redeemer is a very meaningful word in the Old Testament. It’s the same word that was used in the book of Ruth of the kinsmen-redeemer—Boaz, who fulfilled family obligations to marry this widow and provide an heir for the deceased husband. It’s also used of the person who can assist a brother who has lost his property due to poverty. The redeemer buys back the property for his brother (Leviticus 19). Or the redeemer pays to redeem his brother from slavery (also Leviticus 19). Then later in the Old Testament the word is used in a more theological sense to refer to Yahweh as Israel’s Redeemer. For instance, Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” Or Jeremiah 50:34, “Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon.”

Job is putting his hope in Someone who will plead his case, who will graciously redeem him back from the slavery that he feels his friends have put him in. He is hoping in One who will ultimately vindicate him. And it seems that Job in a sense identifies this figure with God (He’s in heaven; 16:19), but distinguishes him from God as well. For this Person will also need to vindicate him before God. We don’t know how much Job could foresee as he proclaimed this great hope in his Redeemer. But where we now stand in the history of redemption we know that this Person is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of the Father, who is God and yet is also a distinct Person from the Father. Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. He is the One interceding for us (see Hebrews 7:25). Romans 8:34 says, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

This is our great hope. Whatever accusations others may bring against us. And most importantly, whatever accusations God brings against us because of our sin, Jesus Christ is at His right hand interceding for us, pleading our case based on His own shed blood for us.

And Job's words point to the last day when the Redeemer will stand upon the earth in final judgment over all mankind. It is Job's hope that on that day he will be vindicated by His Redeemer. And he even expresses a knowledge of bodily resurrection. In verse 26-27, "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 soul faints within me!" This is astounding in light of previous comments that Job has made that sound so despairing. But here he is filled with hope that even though he will die, he will live on in a new body and will see God. Derek Thomas writes, "What we have in Job's words are the beginnings of what progressive revelation would reveal as the doctrines of the coming of Christ at the end of times, the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment."² In these truths Job proclaimed great hope, even in the midst of his dark trials.

In closing I want to bring together the various themes that we've considered this morning. We've talked about sin and suffering and hope. And the only reason we can put those three words in the same sentence is because of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. He is the One who forgives our sin, allows us to identify with Him in suffering, and in these ways gives us great hope for the future. So let's be a people who understand sin, so that we are continually in awe of the cross. And let's be a people who embrace suffering as God's gracious gift to us. And if these things are true of us, we will most certainly be a people of great hope.

² *The Storm Breaks: Job Simply Explained* (Evangelical Press, 1995), pg. 165.