

Starting in Job 15, we come to the second cycle of the wisdom debate.

In the first cycle, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each addressed Job,
offering comfort – offering explanations of what had happened to Job –
trying to help him understand how his afflictions fit into the order of the universe.
And in reply to his three friends,
Job maintained his innocence,
and set forth his appeal before the court of heaven.

In the second cycle of speeches, each of the friends will start by addressing Job,
and then conclude with a description of the fate of the wicked.

For Eliphaz, it is a picture of what Job is not;
for Bildad, it is a picture of what Job may become;
for Zophar, it is a picture of what Job must avoid. (Clines, 344)

Each of the three friends has a slightly different take on what is happening.
Each provides a slightly different solution for what Job must do.

Introduction: Eliphaz’s Second Speech – “Are You Adam?” (chapter 15)

A. Job’s Words Would Overturn Orthodox Wisdom (15:1-16)

a. Windy Words vs. the Fear of God (v2-6)

15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

*² “Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,
and fill his belly with the east wind?”*

*³ Should he argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which he can do no good?*

*⁴ But you are doing away with the fear of God^[a]
and hindering meditation before God.*

*⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.*

*⁶ Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.*

When you compare the three friends,
Eliphaz consistently is the kindest of the three.
He speaks firmly with his friend,
but he never descends into name-calling or presumption.

He starts by identifying Job as a wise man:

“should a wise man answer with windy knowledge?”

Job, you are known through all the east as a wise man.
Your speeches, though, are full of crazy talk!

Job has just said that man is like a mountain –
doomed to erode and wear away into nothingness (14:18-20).
Job has argued that the wicked and the righteous all perish together,
and that God brings destruction on all humanity (12:13-25).
Job has said that his only hope would be if there was something beyond death –
if there was some sort of resurrection beyond the grave.

Eliphaz thinks this is nuts.

Eliphaz is so ancient in his thinking that he is truly modern!
He thinks that Job's appeal to a future resurrection is an escape from reality.
If you put your hope in some future resurrection, Eliphaz says,
then you will cut off moral effort in this life.

You fill your belly with the east wind!
The east wind blows off the desert.
It is a hot, violent wind that brings destruction and death.
It was the east wind that killed Job's children.
And now Eliphaz says that Job has filled his belly with the east wind.

You speak too much from your feelings, Job.
In the OT the "belly" is the seat of one's feelings or impulses,
whereas the "heart" is the seat of reason.

Eliphaz thinks that Job's complaint against God is foolish.
You are following your impulses – your passions –
you are not thinking straight.

And so in verses 7-16 he asks: (read verse 7)

b. Job vs. the Council of God (v7-16)

- ⁷ *"Are you the first man who was born?
Or were you brought forth before the hills?*
- ⁸ *Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?*
- ⁹ *What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?*
- ¹⁰ *Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
older than your father.*
- ¹¹ *Are the comforts of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?*
- ¹² *Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,*
- ¹³ *that you turn your spirit against God
and bring such words out of your mouth?*
- ¹⁴ *What is man, that he can be pure?
Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?*

¹⁵ Behold, God^[b] puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not pure in his sight;
¹⁶ how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a man who drinks injustice like water!

Eliphaz asks, “Are you Adam?”

Eliphaz is not mocking Job.

He is speaking “man to man” – and asking, “are you the first man?”

“Were you brought forth before the hills?”

In Proverbs 8:25, this is said of Wisdom.

Do you really claim to be the original man?

Eliphaz thinks that his answer in chapters 4-5 was on track:

Back in chapter 4, Eliphaz had provided this comfort:

“Can mortal man be in the right before God?

Can a man be pure before his Maker?” (4:17)

Job has suffered under God’s common wrath –

he is being disciplined by God and needs to humble himself and accept that.

Now, in verses 11-16, he reminds Job of what he said in his first speech.

No one is perfect.

“What is man, that he can be pure?

Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?” (15:14)

If you would simply accept God chastening, you would no doubt soon be delivered!

All have sinned –

therefore how can you claim to be innocent?

B. Remember the Fate of the Wicked – Those Who Defy God (v17-35)

a. The Wicked Man Will Not Depart from Darkness (v20-30)

¹⁷ “I will show you; hear me,
and what I have seen I will declare
¹⁸ (what wise men have told,
without hiding it from their fathers,
¹⁹ to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them).

In verses 17-19, then, Eliphaz sets up his exhortation.

I will remind you, Job, of the wisdom of the fathers.

And in verses 20-30 he speaks of the wicked in a way that makes it clear

that he is not accusing Job – but reminding him of what happens to *others*.

²⁰ The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.

²¹ Dreadful sounds are in his ears;

in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.
²² *He does not believe that he will return out of darkness,
and he is marked for the sword.*
²³ *He wanders abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?'*
He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand;
²⁴ *distress and anguish terrify him;*
they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle.
²⁵ *Because he has stretched out his hand against God
and defies the Almighty,*
²⁶ *running stubbornly against him
with a thickly bossed shield;*
²⁷ *because he has covered his face with his fat
and gathered fat upon his waist*
²⁸ *and has lived in desolate cities,
in houses that none should inhabit,
which were ready to become heaps of ruins;*
²⁹ *he will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure,
nor will his possessions spread over the earth,^[c]*
³⁰ *he will not depart from darkness;
the flame will dry up his shoots,
and by the breath of his mouth he will depart.*

Eliphaz does not believe that Job is “ruthless” (the word could be translated “gangster”).
The description of the wicked in verses 20-30
is supposed to be a description of what Job is *not*.
If Job is experiencing the fate of the wicked,
it is only a temporary aberration
which Job is only making worse with his complaint.

Verse 25 is worth some comment:

“Because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty” –
literally, “plays the warrior” with the Almighty!
The word “gibor” is the word for “mighty man” in the OT.
Here, the wicked “plays the gibor” – “acts the hero” against God.

Do you really think that you can play the hero with God?

Don Quixote had a better chance tilting against windmills
than you have playing the warrior with God!

b. The Godless Are Empty and Barren (v31-35)

³¹ *Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself,
for emptiness will be his payment.*
³² *It will be paid in full before his time,
and his branch will not be green.*
³³ *He will shake off his unripe grape like the vine,
and cast off his blossom like the olive tree.*

³⁴ *For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.*
³⁵ *They conceive trouble and give birth to evil,
and their womb prepares deceit.”*

In verses 31-35, Eliphaz concludes by saying that the godless are empty and barren.

In chapter 14, Job had used the image of a tree,
saying that man was not like a tree –
because even if a tree dies, it may put forth shoots.

Now Eliphaz says that a man *is* like a tree –
the wicked are like a barren tree,
while the righteous (presumably) are like a fruitful tree.

In Genesis 1, the original creation was “tohu vbohu” – formless and barren –
but God brought fruitfulness and order out of the disorder of the primeval creation.

The words used here are not “tohu vbohu” – but the image is very much the same.

The company of the godless is barren.

Disorder, emptiness, and barrenness follow them in all their paths.

The company of the godless is not fruitful, and does not multiply –
or, in the words of verse 35,
they are fruitful – but only of trouble.

*They conceive trouble and give birth to evil,
and their womb prepares deceit.”*

You can hear in the background, Eliphaz’s basic point:

“what is man that he can be clean?

or he that is born of a woman that he can be righteous?” (v14-16)

Psalm 14 generally agrees with Eliphaz.

“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.
They all have turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good, not even one.”

Since the fall, after the curse,
Eliphaz is right.

And so as Psalm 14 says, God is going to have to do something to bring salvation for his people!

Sing Psalm 14

John 12 tells us that indeed, in Jesus, God *has* done something to bring salvation for his people.
In Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Read John 12:1-36

“Where I Am, There Will My Servant Be Also”

Today we come to Job 16.

Job is finished with his appeal to God.

He has stated his case before the court of heaven – before the Divine Council –
he has maintained his integrity,
and has declared that he is innocent of anything
that would be worthy of what has happened to him;
and so the rest of the wisdom debate will consist of Job sparring with his friends,
and waiting for God to answer.

Why does God take so long to answer?

Job would be a much shorter book if we could just skip from Job 14 to Job 38!

But if God just popped up to answer whenever Job asked a question,
that would convey the idea that God is simply Job’s personal “answer man.”

We often have questions for God:

why are you doing this in my life?
why am I going through this situation?

The book of Job reminds us that God does not owe us an answer!

Indeed, even when God answers Job, he doesn’t answer Job’s questions!

Job had asked,

“Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?” (3:20)

When God shows up at the end of the book,

Job realizes that he was asking the wrong questions!

This is why I have taken the words of Jesus in John 12 as the title of this sermon.

As Job continues his wisdom debate with his friends,
he moves more and more into the “place” of Jesus.

Where Jesus – the great and final suffering Servant of the LORD – is,
there also Job, the servant of the LORD, must be.

It’s okay – indeed, it is a good thing! – to bring your questions to God.

Those questions – those struggles –

may be precisely what God will use to bring you to himself.

But never forget that you are bringing your questions
to the living and true *God*.

And he is not obligated to answer you when you want him to –

and he is *certainly* not obligated to give you the answer that *you want*!

Indeed, when his answer comes,

you may realize that, like Job, *you* have been asking the wrong questions!

1. You Think My Words Are Windy?! (16:1-6)

16 Then Job answered and said:

² “I have heard many such things;
miserable comforters are you all.

³ Shall windy words have an end?
Or what provokes you that you answer?

⁴ I also could speak as you do,
if you were in my place;
I could join words together against you
and shake my head at you.

⁵ I could strengthen you with my mouth,
and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.

⁶ If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?

Job’s opening question is,

what is the efficacy of *words*?

Words are powerful.

At least, words *can be* powerful.

Job says that words are capable of strengthening, assuaging pain, bringing solace.

But not “windy words”!

There is perhaps a real irony in this way of saying it.

Because in Hebrew the phrase, “dibre^y ruach”

could mean either “words of wind” or “words of the Spirit”!

Eliphaz had used the phrase the “knowledge of wind” (windy knowledge)

and had spoken of Job filling his belly with the east wind (the wind of judgment).

So “ruach” here cannot be taken as “Spirit”.

In 15:13, Eliphaz had spoken of how Job had turned his “ruach” (his wind) against God,

and in 15:30, Eliphaz had said that by the “ruach” (or breath) of his mouth

the wicked would depart.

Words have power (or lack power) depending on what wind is in them!

If the *ruach* (the breath/wind/spirit) of God is in them,

then your words have great power.

But if some other breath animates your words,

then they are merely windy words.

Think about our catechism question for this week.

How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word

an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners,

and of building them up in holiness and comfort,

through faith, unto salvation.

Windy words do not produce holiness or comfort!

It is interesting that the catechism uses the term “comfort” here.
Because that is precisely what Eliphaz’s words do not bring!

You have come to comfort me – but you are “miserable comforters”

You torment me – your “comfort” brings trouble!

The word “miserable” here is the same word used by Eliphaz in 15:35 –
“the company of the godless conceives *trouble*” –
well, Job says, *your comfort* brings trouble to me!

Job knows that the word, animated by the right spirit,
could bring comfort to someone in his situation.
But their words do not assuage *his* pain.

And the reason is found in verses 7-17,
as Job describes God’s assault upon him:

2. God Has Attacked Me and Handed Me over to the Wicked (6:7-17)

⁷ “Surely now God has worn me out;
he has^d made desolate all my company.

⁸ And he has shriveled me up,
which is a witness against me,
and my leanness has risen up against me;
it testifies to my face.

⁹ He has torn me in his wrath and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.

Job says that God has “torn me in his wrath and hated me.”

God *hated* Job?

The word here means to bear a grudge against someone.

Job says that God has a grudge against me.

The word is only used six times in the OT.

It is used for Esau’s hatred for Jacob (Gen 27:41)

Joseph’s brothers fear that Joseph hates them (Gen 50:15)

In Psalm 55 and Gen 49, my enemies hate me (55:4)

And twice in Job (here and 30:21) Job says that God hates me.

The idea is one of intense personal animosity.

And Job expresses this in very physical language:

“God has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.”

How can God have a grudge against Job?

How can God be described as Job’s adversary?

Job does not understand yet what God is doing:

but the description of what God is doing reminds us of what happened to Jesus:
in rapid succession, Job describes God's assault as a wild animal (v9-10),
a traitor (v11), a wrestler (v12), an archer (v12-13), and a swordsman (v13-14):

¹⁰ *Men have gaped at me with their mouth;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.*
¹¹ *God gives me up to the ungodly
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.*
¹² *I was at ease, and he broke me apart;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;*
¹³ *his archers surround me.*
*He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare;
he pours out my gall on the ground.*
¹⁴ *He breaks me with breach upon breach;
he runs upon me like a warrior.*
¹⁵ *I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin
and have laid my strength in the dust.*
¹⁶ *My face is red with weeping,
and on my eyelids is deep darkness,*
¹⁷ *although there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.*

Notice what Job says:

God is attacking me – he is dashing me to pieces, slashing open my kidneys!
Although there is no violence in my hands – and my prayer is pure.

Job does not yet see Jesus –
but he experiences what Jesus will experience.

There are all sorts of echoes of Isaiah 52-53 here.

The suffering Servant must endure the wrath and curse of God –
not just the assaults of the wicked,
but even the assaults of Most High.

But why?

Why would God assault an innocent man?
Why would God crush one whose prayer is pure?

This is why I am convinced that we *must* read Job in the light of the rest of the OT!

Israel knows from Moses – from Isaiah – from Kings – from the rest of the prophets! –
that God is going to judge rebellious Israel for their sins.
The wages of sin is death.

But if God is going to destroy the wicked –

and if, according to Psalm 14, there is none who seeks God –
and *all* have turned aside –
then who will stand in the judgment?

And so God gives us the book of Job.

Who knows, in the mysterious workings of the Spirit of God,
how he revealed all this to the author of Job –
but as our author works through the story of Job,
he realizes that Israel’s only hope is for God to crush the innocent.

Because if God crushes the guilty – then we’re all in trouble!
Because the wages of sin is death.

The book of Job does not yet have a theology of substitution worked out.
We don’t have the full doctrine of justification by faith laid out here.
But we certainly have the first steps!

And verses 18-22 are at the center of this:

3. Man Cannot Help: only Earth and Heaven Can Bear Witness Now (v18-22)

¹⁸ *“O earth, cover not my blood,
and let my cry find no resting place.
¹⁹ Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
and he who testifies for me is on high.
²⁰ My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
²¹ that he would argue the case of a man with God,
as^{el} a son of man does with his neighbor.
²² For when a few years have come
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.*

Job recognizes that his friends cannot help him –
there is no comfort that Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar can bring.

And so he appeals to earth and heaven:

“O earth, cover not my blood” –
What does this mean?

Remember Genesis 4? When God said to Cain,
“the voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”
Now Job says, “O earth, cover not my blood” –
let the voice of my blood rise up to God!

So, Job’s first witness before God is his own (innocent) blood.

And his second witness is “in heaven”:

“Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high.”

Who is this witness?

In his appeal before the throne of God, Job had wished for an arbiter –
a mediator who would stand between him and God.

In 9:33 Job had asserted “There is no arbiter between us.”

But now, as he wrestles with his friends,

Job begins to realize that if there is no arbiter – if there is no mediator –
then God cannot be just.

And since God is just,

there *must be* someone who testifies for me on high.

Who is this mysterious witness?

It is possible that Job is simply referring to his own testimony.

The appeal that I have lodged with God will be vindicated in the judgment day.

Or perhaps Job thinks that someone in the heavenly court will take up his case,

and when he does, his innocent blood will testify on his behalf,

and therefore, someone in heaven will bear witness for him.

Of course, we who live on this, more glorious side of the cross

know that we have a witness in heaven!

Job knew, by faith, that there *must be* such a one.

We know, by the same faith, that there *is* such a one!

Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father.

And *his blood* –

his innocent blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel –

now intercedes for you before the Father.

There are lots of echoes of Job in Hebrews 5:7-9:

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications,

with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death,

and he was heard because of his reverence.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”

Job was a partial and incomplete picture of Jesus.

Job is not the source of eternal salvation –

but he points us to the one who is!

In chapter 17, then, Job asserts his confidence that he will survive both mockers and friends:

4. He Who Has Clean Hands Will Survive both Mockers and Friends (17:1-9)

17 “My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;

the graveyard is ready for me.

² Surely there are mockers about me,

and my eye dwells on their provocation.

Right now, this is all I can see.

But don't bet against me!

He turns to address God only briefly in verses 3-5,

- ³ *“Lay down a pledge for me with you;
who is there who will put up security for me?”*
⁴ *“Since you have closed their hearts to understanding,
therefore you will not let them triumph.”*
⁵ *“He who informs against his friends to get a share of their property—
the eyes of his children will fail.”*

I mentioned earlier that in Hebrew the belly is the seat of the passions,
and the heart is the seat of understanding and reason.

Verse 4 says that God has “closed their hearts to understanding.”

When we hear the word “heart” we tend to think of the emotions or affections.

But in Hebrew, the heart has to do with understanding.

We would probably say “mind” in English.

“Love the LORD with all your heart” in Hebrew
means to love God with your understanding.

If your mind and heart are filled with windy words –

if your understanding – if your thinking – is guided and directed by some other breath,
then God will close your hearts to understanding.

Verses 6-9 then contrast Job's present condition with his future vindication:

- ⁶ *“He has made me a byword of the peoples,
and I am one before whom men spit.”*
⁷ *“My eye has grown dim from vexation,
and all my members are like a shadow.”*
⁸ *“The upright are appalled at this,
and the innocent stirs himself up against the godless.”*
⁹ *“Yet the righteous holds to his way,
and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.”*

Job is convinced that the righteous will hold to his way.

He who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.

You might say, “wait, this is precisely what his friends are saying!”

True.

But Job does not dispute the rightness of what they say.

He denies its applicability to himself!

And while God has made me a byword – and men spit in my general direction –
I will remain steadfast in my integrity before God!

Remember this, when you are afflicted by various trials.

When you are old and frail, and they tell you that it's time for hospice care,
then you will grow stronger and stronger!
I have seen Christians grow weak and frail at the end of their lives.
They are trying so hard to hold on to this life
that their hands are soiled by their grasping.

But then I have also seen Christians whose bodies are wracked with pain –
and yet they grow in power and strength
because they hold fast to their way!

Consider Job,
sitting on the ash heap,
with the stench of dung and refuse around him,
his body festering with sores,
by all ancient standards most emphatically *unclean!*

And yet he declares that the one with clean hands will grow strong.

And as if to demonstrate his growing strength, in verse 10, Job challenges them to try again!

5. There Is No Hope in the Grave (17:10-16)

- ¹⁰ *But you, come on again, all of you,
and I shall not find a wise man among you.*
- ¹¹ *My days are past; my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart.*
- ¹² *They make night into day:
'The light,' they say, 'is near to the darkness.'*^[1]
- ¹³ *If I hope for Sheol as my house,
if I make my bed in darkness,*
- ¹⁴ *if I say to the pit, 'You are my father,'
and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,'*
- ¹⁵ *where then is my hope?
Who will see my hope?*
- ¹⁶ *Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?
Shall we descend together into the dust?"*

Job is learning.
Job had originally said that he hoped for death.

But there is no hope in the grave.
There is no hope in the pit.

Job's hope is in heaven.
Jesus said in John 12:35,
"The light is among you for a little while longer.
Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.

The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.
While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

We are responding to Job with Cassia’s hymn,
Cassia was a ninth century nun in Constantinople.
She wrote this hymn as a meditation on the anointing of Jesus for his burial,
blending together the stories in Luke 7 and John 12.

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, had just witnessed the raising of Lazarus.
Somehow she recognizes that if Jesus is “the resurrection and the life,”
if he is the one who brings life to the dead for others,
then he must undergo death himself.

And so, on the eve of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem
(or perhaps, as Matthew and Mark place it, during holy week)
she anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive ointment,
“for the day of my burial” – as Jesus explains it.

It is only through the humiliation of the Son of God that life and light come to humanity.
As we reflect on the humiliation and suffering of Christ this week
we must heed the words of our Savior:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”
(he was speaking of the cross! – the cross was the glorification of Christ!)
“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,
it remains alone;
but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
If anyone serves me, he must follow me;
and where I am, there will my servant be also.
If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:23-26)

This is what you are called to do each day,
in your home, in your workplace:
follow Jesus – in his glorification! (in his cross!)