

August 30, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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DOES GOD WORK ACCORDING TO LOGIC?

Job 11

In his opening speech, a rebuttal of Job's initial complaint, Eliphaz insisted that God works consistently with human experience. He was quite sure that the wise men of life had come to this conclusion. *"Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear, and know it for your good"* (Job 5:27). And we generally concur that our experience in life does reveal that God consistently punishes evil and rewards good. But God wasn't working according to human experience in Job's life and circumstances.

In his opening speech, a rebuttal of Job's second complaint, Bildad argued that God works according to traditions. Humans often develop traditions based on what they have observed from God's work or based on what God has revealed in the Bible (in these later years after Job). *"For inquire, please, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have searched out. For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?"* (Job 8:8-10).

This is our practice also. We have developed certain traditions (like the observation of Communion this evening) based on what God has already revealed. Do you wonder why we do such things? *"Inquire please of bygone ages and consider what the fathers have searched out."* But God wasn't working in Job's life according to traditions. He was doing something unique.

Now we will learn how Zophar, the third person who had come to offer helpful counsel, argued that God works according to logic. God sees and knows wickedness, and logically He will not bless that

(11:11). And God sees and knows repentance (11:13-14) and will make the penitent sinner's life brighter than sunshine (11:17).

It is true that God's work is logical. That is part of wisdom. But God does not always work in His people's lives according to human logic. God's dealing with Satan defies the principles of human logic.

In the same way, it is possible for us to become overwhelmed with affliction or trials that defy explanation. At the outset of the trial, we are likely to do a spiritual assessment of life and confess all known sin. But the trial continues. Then we might become even more spiritual and conclude that God is simply testing us to make us more like Christ. And yet, another assessment leaves us wondering in what particular way God expects us to mature and grow.

If you are like Job, your trial will defy human experience, human traditions, and even human logic. But that does not mean that God is not working, that you are the victim of fate, or that God let things get out of control. He will still reward those He makes righteous with eternal rewards. He will still punish those who make themselves evil with eternal punishment. But His timing will not be our timing. In the long periods of questions and confusion, we have great opportunity to yield our desired control to God as we are learning to depend more wholly on Him.

God Knows When Sinners Sin (vv.1-6).

It seems quite obvious that the counselor accused Job of sin. But would we not agree that we should not ignore self-righteous talkers? *Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said: "Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right?"* (vv.1-2). The wise person is convinced that a multitude of words proves the talker is foolish. Solomon concluded the same by writing, *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent* (Proverbs 10:19).

The problem comes up when people act like Mr. Talkative who Christian and Faithful met in the Pilgrim's Progress. He could talk about anything with anyone at anytime. The danger, as Mr. Talkative demonstrated, is that verbose person is often attempting to hide truth.

Maybe they talk a lot to try to cover up a sinful lifestyle. Or maybe they talk because they are insecure, fearful, or proud. Those are all sins.

Zophar proposed that he was willing to take the task upon himself of pulling the lid off from Job's life to reveal his sin. First, this indicates that Zophar was of the opinion that Job was talking too much. And that is an opinion. In modern relevance, we must conclude that others are free to disagree with our opinions. Second, Zophar's assertion indicates that he was right before God and, therefore, qualified to expose Job's sin. When a person is suffering (even justifiably), a self-righteous judge and advisor who takes it upon himself to fix our problem is not going to be appreciated or helpful.

Zophar proposed that someone should answer the fool according to his folly. *Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? For you say, "My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's eyes" (vv.3-4).* It is true that Job was quite sure he was living in unhindered fellowship with God. He even made sacrifices to cover any possible sins of his children. Job continually respected God highly (*fears God*) which caused him to avoid sin (Job 1:1). It is true that God affirmed Job's pure doctrine and clean eyes (Job 1:8). But neither Job nor any of his friends, nor his family or neighbors knew anything about Satan's attempt to prove God wrong.

Furthermore, Zophar's own words were loaded, which kind-of makes him appear to be a hypocrite. He judged Job's advice and teaching as ***babble***, which refers to empty, idle, meaningless talk aimed at ***men***, a word that speaks of powerless people who could not defend themselves. Zophar also accused Job of ***mocking***, which is to speak rashly or hypocritically.

Therefore, because Job was so out of bounds (according to the counselor's opinion), Zophar determined it was his responsibility to *shame* this babbling man who presumed that his teaching was correct. The Hebrew word behind the English *shame* means to publicly insult, humiliate, embarrass. This is a form of punishment. Why did Zophar believe it was his responsibility to prove Job wrong to his embarrassment?

The short answer to the previous question is likely that Zophar was a self-righteous man. He, in his humble opinion, was the standard of righteousness that Job should strive to achieve. In reality, it is quite

interesting that when Satan put God to the test, God did not ask Satan to consider Zophar. The man proves the principle that people with a high opinion of themselves do not make good counselors. The best counselors have been humbled before God, forgiven of sin, desiring to walk in fellowship with God.

To lack that humility that comes with regeneration will make a person as guilty as Zophar proposed Job was. He was concerned that Job was out of line to express his frustration at his circumstances, but he himself was being pretty verbose in his criticism. Zophar would not have qualified for Solomon's advice a thousand years later: *Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).*

And yet (this is almost astonishing) Zophar unpacks many truths about God and our relationship with God! He fancied himself to be the counselor who spoke for God. And he was actually quite right to conclude that wise people desire to hear God speak. *But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding (vv.5-6a).*

We agree, right? It is good and right for God to speak to us. In fact, God has already spoken clearly in the things He has made so that we are without excuse for not knowing Him. Paul wrote, *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).* More than through creation, God has already spoken as He wrote His law on our consciences. Speaking of us Gentiles, who by nature were outside God's promises to Israel, Paul taught, *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Romans 2:15).*

Okay, Job and friends had at least that much revelation of God. Actually, the conclusions they articulate about God reveal that they knew a lot more than we can imagine. And we have the written Word of God, all the self-revelation God desires for us to have. God speaks to us in our trials and afflictions! It is good and right for God to give us wisdom. He is the source of all wisdom. Solomon illustrated that.

And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice (1 Kings 3:28). Because God is the source of true wisdom, He offers wisdom freely to those in need. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5).*

It is even truth that God's understanding is double. What does that mean? Look at the text which states, *For he is manifold in understanding.* The word translated *manifold* actually means double, or two-sided (as with a double-edged sword). Possibly that idea speaks of the wisdom of the world versus God's wisdom. Consider James' instruction on that difference. *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:13-18).*

However, it seems that this use of double is more likely a contrast between the wisdom that God reveals and the wisdom that is secret, cannot be revealed because we would not comprehend it. In your affliction, draw on and appreciate the wisdom that God has supplied in His Word. At the same time, in your affliction, realize that God is acting according to His secret wisdom that gives the reason and goal for the trial. Yes, true faith in God hopes for, rests on the unseen. That is the definition of faith. *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).*

Zophar was exactly right to present that it would be good for God to speak and reveal wisdom (in particular to Job). But, wise people who hear from God do not mistake their conclusions for God's. It is possible that Zophar did that when he challenged Job, *Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves (6b).*

On one hand, this accusation is true regarding all of us. It is true that none of us get a really fair deal because of our sins. Our sins and

offenses against God's perfect, holy character deserve eternal punishment – immediately! But God graciously offers forgiveness through faith in Christ's finished work. Zophar's argument to Job was that God was graciously overlooking sins that Job could not even recall. The statement is very encouraging because it literally says, *"God is granting oblivion to your depravity."* That is what salvation from sin does.

On the other hand, Zophar didn't know what he was talking about. Zophar argued that it wasn't that Job was pure and his eyes clean, but that Job was unaware of his sin against God, for which God was judging him. Therefore, (Zophar thought) if God would speak wisdom loud and clear, everyone (including Job) would know that God was justified in punishing Job – not even for all his sins which he deserved. Zophar was so ignorant about what God was doing. He was so wrong, but thought he was so right. In Zophar's humble opinion, all people are either repentant worshipers of God or mocking, arrogant sinners.

God is not Foolish Like Sinners (vv.7-12).

Zophar rightly concluded that mere humans cannot fathom God's deep things. *Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea (vv.7-9).* Here we are reminded that God is majestic beyond human comprehending. At the end of the story, God pulls back the curtain on a sliver of His creative, sustaining wisdom and power. Job will be awestruck. We should be awestruck. We are awestruck to observe just the created things and try to grasp the power on display for God to simply speak everything into existence. Therefore, to attempt to explain or discover *the limit of the Almighty* is futile from the outset.

And yet, God has graciously revealed much of His majesty to us. Between the testimony of Creation and the testimony of God's Word, we have a treasure beyond price. How utterly sad it is to listen to the brilliant minds of our age attempt to explain away God's majestic, creative power. Far and away, the vast majority of teachers and professors from elementary school through graduate school speak

knowingly and confidently about how this astonishing universe came into being through a very long and gradual process that requires astonishing faith to believe. Does it not make your heart ache to hear well-educated scientists reject God's clear statements about what He did in the beginning? God is stupendously majestic in creation and in maintaining what He created.

Even limited comprehension reveals that this majestic God deals with sin and with sinners. *If he passes through and imprisons and summons the court, who can turn him back? For he knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?* (vv.10-11). When God calls the offender to court, the offender has no recourse but to go. And when the sinner arrives in God's court, he or she discovers God already has all the evidence needed to condemn sinners. But that truth did not apply to Job.

And if someone is below limited comprehension, well, there isn't much hope according to Zophar. Foolish people do not understand. *But a stupid man will get understanding when a wild donkey's colt is born a man!* (v.12). This is the same as the response to a highly unlikely suggestion, "When cows fly." About ten years ago Tom Watson published a book by this title. It is a children's story about what happens when a boy makes it possible for his pet cow to fly. It reminds me of the movie where the crows sitting on the fence sing a song when they heard about Dumbo the Flying Elephant. They said they had seen a house fly, a horse fly, and even a dragon fly. But they concluded they would have seen everything when they see an elephant fly.

The Bible does teach that a fool does not grasp wisdom. The wise man Solomon wrote, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction* (Proverbs 1:7). *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion* (Proverbs 18:2). The word translated *stupid* in this text is found only here and in Jeremiah 52:21 where it speaks of a hallowed out pillar. The NAS is a bit less kind in describing the person as an *idiot*, which is actually someone whose head is hallowed out (or GNT "empty-headed").

All of this is typically true but it doesn't apply to Job in the least! Nor does it apply to you when you are afflicted or to your friend and loved one who is facing a trial.

God Blesses the Penitent (vv.13-20).

Because Zophar was convinced that Job was a secret sinner, he challenged him to come clean with God. We would agree that it is good teaching to challenge sinners to be forward, open, and honest with God. They should determine to come to God. That is what Zophar meant by, *If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him* (v.13).

God often uses trials to help a person see that he or she has offended God. When God brings your sin to the surface through discipline, it is wise to do some serious work in the heart. "In the heart" is where we become sensitive to sin and in the heart is where we confess it. Saying the same thing about my sin that God says (confession) is the first step in stretching out your hands to God.

Second, the sinner needs to determine to turn from sin. *If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents* (v.14). Here are two statements describing sin (common Hebrew parallelism). First is the word *iniquity*. Iniquity is a bit of an unusual translation for the Hebrew word. Often the focus of this word is on the trouble that is the result of evil, or emptiness, or idolatry. And yet idolatry (honoring and serving a god of our making instead of our Creator) is a most common root to sin.

The second word, *injustice*, obviously speaks of wrong relationships with others. It is unfairness, unrighteousness in word or deed. This seems to be a common complaint leveled against Job by His friends. It is possible that idolatry resulting in treating others unjustly will be found in our hands. Part of the problem is that iniquity and injustice is in our hands and we don't see it. God uses the commands and righteous standards of His Word to reveal when we are hanging on to stuff that offends Him and hurts others.

What do you do when it becomes obvious that you are hanging on to something that offends God? Zophar was right to teach that we should approach God confidently when we become aware of the problem of offense. *Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear* (v.15). The challenge is to confidently bring your sin to God. Our natural response is to run away and try to hide. We know that God is holy and is offended by

all the sins that His Word identifies. We know that we are stubborn and rebellious and deserve God's wrath because of our sins.

Therefore, we often respond like Adam and Eve did when they immediately knew they had stepped over God's boundary. They sewed fig leaves together in an effort to hide what they now knew was unacceptable. They had discovered iniquity in themselves. Then they tried to hide under a bush or something. Far better for us to walk boldly into God's presence and say what He says about our sin.

Yes, but who is foolish enough to present themselves to the Holy Eternal Judge with sin? Anyone who understands that Jesus, God the Son shed His blood to pay the penalty for that sin we bear. And He sits at the Holy, Eternal Judge's right hand to plead for forgiveness when we confess our sins and turn away from them (*put them far away* and refuse to let *injustice dwell*). God has promised to pick up those offenses we confess and take them away. We must always remember God's incredible promise that *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)*. But this really was an unnecessary admonition for Job because he did this regularly.

Finally, Zophar asserted that those who confess their sins to God are then able to enjoy God's forgiveness. Like the Apostle Paul said, we are forgetting those things that are behind. *You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away (v.16)*. Okay, considering the trauma that Job had endured, it is not likely that he would ever forget. However, God's forgiveness given to us sinners should make us refuse to think about our past sins. That was one of the lessons Christian's friend Faithful needed to learn in *the Pilgrim's Progress*. Moses kept knocking him down with the Law because of his "fondness for the old Adam." It really is best to follow Paul and forget those things that are behind (Philippians 3:13).

Having chosen not to keep thinking about past sin, we can enjoy the new dawning. *And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security. You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many will court your favor (vv.17-19)*.

It is true that joy comes in the morning after a dark night of suffering as we wholly depend on God. It is true that the believer who

walks in fellowship with God has confidence and security. But Job, who had most reason to be confident and secure, was thrown into confusion and misery because he did not understand God's work.

And it is also true that sinners cannot have that joy. *But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last (v.20)*. It is true that wicked, unrepentant sinners will fail. They would and should come to a hopeless end. But that truth did not apply to Job either.

So, is God logical? Yes, He invented logic. Is all wisdom the same? No. There is the wisdom of the world, and often standing in contrast to that wisdom is the wisdom of God. Does God work in predictable ways? Yes, He will always be true to His Word and always keep His promises. But God's timing and secret works are unknown to us. And that is where the struggle occurs. We must remember in the face of unexplainable suffering and trials that God is still dependable, trustworthy, and in control of all things all the time.