

When Your Friends Are Miserable Comforters

Job 15:1–17:16

Studies in Job #6

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I SAID a while back that Job’s friends were better friends when they said nothing; but once they opened their mouths, everything fell apart! One thing we can see in action here is the principle of James that it is better to be quick to listen and slow to speak as a friend. Of course, as we resume we know it’s about more than that! It’s also about more than the personal question we all ask, “Why am I suffering?” It’s about when I suffer, whom do I trust? Job thinks he’s suffering because God is being unjust. His friends think he’s suffering because God is just. But behind the scenes God has said Job is righteous and he’s allowed Satan permission to throw everything at him but the kitchen sink. Why? God is vindicating his own declaration about Job to demonstrate his all wise plan in the life of Job. Will Job trust? Will we?

To help us understand God’s wise plans in the midst of seeming chaos, we always have to come back to Jesus. He is the Father’s eternally begotten and eternally loved Son. The Father declared that openly, “This is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.” But then he allowed the gates of hell to be opened against him. Then the resurrection vindicated God’s all

wise plan for sinners like you and me. And so when it feels like hell is opened against us, our wise and loving Father calls us to him! He say, “I loved my Son; I love you my sons and daughters! And all your struggles and sufferings, temptations and trials are meant to magnify my choice of you!”

We get back into Job today with chapters 15–17 and Eliphaz and Job’s second dialog with *When Your Friends Are Miserable Comforters*.

Miserable “Comforter” Eliphaz...Again (15:1–35)

In chapter 15 we have *miserable “comforter” Eliphaz...again*. You should have felt the force of his words right from their opening as he throws caution to the wind. He began his first in hushed dialog; now it’s harsh diatribe! In all Job’s friends’ previous speeches, they offered the remedy of repentance for Job’s restoration: there’s none of that here!

The first part of his miserable comfort is in verses 1–16 where *he denounces the “wisdom” of Job*. He sarcastically calls Job **a wise man...with windy knowledge** (15:2). He’s full of hot air! And because of the way Job has been answering—saying he is innocent of any specific wrongdoing that has resulted in his life situation—Eliphaz says he is **doing away with the fear of God and hindering meditation before God** (15:4). What Eliphaz is saying is that when Job speaks it’s like he’s pointing his finger at Eliphaz only to

have three pointing back: **your iniquity teaches your mouth...you choose the tongue of the crafty...your mouth condemns you and not I...your own lips testify against you** (15:5-6).

One of the side lessons we're learning from the bad example of Job's friends is not to be too quick to tell a hurting friend the reason why he or she is hurting. Words hurt. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Wrong! The more we speak, the more we can hurt.

Eliphaz then asks a list of rhetorical questions to drive home his denunciation of Job's wisdom. He says Job is trying to be wiser than God in 15:7-8. He says Job is trying to be wiser than the ancient wise men in 15:9-10. Then he says something that shows just how wide the gap is between Job and his friends' mindsets. Look at verse 11: **Are the comforts of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you?** Eliphaz thinks the constant condemnations of Job's guilt are **comforts**; he thinks the constant harsh words are **gentl[e]**. Amazing! What you felt comforted by their words yet? Imagine suffering as much as Job and hearing them.

So what comfort and gentle word does Eliphaz have for Job today?
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 (meaning, angels), **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!*** (15:14–16) Who is he talking about? Job! So much for comfort! So much for gentleness!

Then comes the second part of his miserable comfort in verses 17–35 where *he declares Job's lot in the fate of the wicked*. But notice how Eliphaz speaks in words that are reminiscent of Job: **The wicked man writhes in pain all his days** (15:20). Think of Job's sores. **Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him** (15:21). Remember the words of his three messengers who announced the loss of all his possessions, but especially the death of his children? **He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword...distress and anguish terrify him; they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle** (15:22, 24). Think of his depression and even fear in chapter 3.

All this has come upon Job, according to Eliphaz, **because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty, running stubbornly against him with a thickly bossed shield; because**

he has covered his face with his fat—a symbol of power and prosperity (15:25–27).¹ Because of his sin he is **liv[ing] in desolate cities, in houses that none should inhabit** (15:28). Think of the ash heap he’s sitting on. Now listen to this. Back in chapter 14 as Job lamented, he spoke in faith and hope that he was like a tree that is cut down, only to regrow. But Eliphaz says **the flame will dry up his shoots...his branch will not be green...he will shake off his unripe grape like the vine, and cast off his blossom like the olive tree** (15:30, 32, 33). And echoing the story of the fire of God falling from heaven on his son’s house and consuming all within, Elphaz concludes: **For the company of the godless is barren, and fire consumes the tents of bribery. They conceive trouble and give birth to evil, and their womb prepares deceit** (15:34–35).

Job is singing, “What a friend I have in Eliphaz.” Not! This is no comfort! These are not gentle words! He denounces Job’s wisdom. He declares Job’s lot in the fate of the wicked.

Uncomforted Job (16:1–17:16)

As before, this leads to the response of *uncomforted Job*. He begins with sarcasm, calling his friends **miserable comforters** full of **windy words**

¹ Jones, 136.

(16:2, 3); but look at how he speaks in genuine love for them: **I also could speak as you do, if you were in my place** (16:4). And Job is saying my words could hurt you or help you. Not only does he humiliate them with his sarcasm but with his love. The tongue can be an untamable fire; so let yours bring refreshing water to your friends, brothers and sisters! But what I want to do is focus in deeply on two aspects of his words.

First, look at *Job's uncomforted grief*. His friends' words can't bring him comfort and neither can his own (16:6). Why not? Look at verse 9: **my adversary sharpens his eye against me**. Who is Job's adversary? As we read the prologue in chapters 1-2, Satan, which means adversary. But I want you to realize that Job's speaking of *God* here. He calls God his **adversary!** That's how low he is! And look at how he says God is the agent of his demise throughout his speech: **God has worn me out; he has made desolate all my company** (16:7), which I take not only to mean his family and servants are dead but that his friends have forsaken him. **He has shriveled me up...he has torn me in his wrath and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me** (16:8, 9). Do you feel this way today? **God gives me up to the ungodly and casts me into the hands of the wicked...He broke me apart; he seized me by the neck**

and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare; he pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with breach upon breach; he runs upon me like a warrior (16:11–14). Wow! But who has actually done all this? Satan, who is his adversary, who accused him before God, and who tried to get God to reach out his hand and touch Job with death. But Job calls God his adversary! Brothers and sisters, one of the things we're learning here in Job is that there are going to times you and I are going to feel abandoned by God. There are times we are going to feel God has forgotten us. There are going to be times we say things about God and against God that are wrong—he knows it and so do we. There are going to be times we feel God is not just completely absent, but completely against us and harshly so! What should we do? First, tell God that! Vent! Lament! It's okay. But it's more than okay; he wants to hear it. Second, trust him in it. "Lord, to whom else can I go, you alone have the words of eternal life." Time doesn't permit, but he goes on to express more of his uncomforted grief in 16:18–17:16 where he says—again, I might add—that he just wants to die. Note just one verse, 16:18: **O earth, cover not my blood, and let my cry find no resting place.** Sounds strange to us, doesn't it? What he's referring

to is the ancient idea from the time of Abel that you would have no rest in death until you were buried or avenged. So he's actually saying here that God has wronged him!

The second thing I want you to see here is *Job's faith in discomfort*. Even as he cries out that God is his adversary (16:9) he expresses faith that God is also his advocate! **Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high.** And in contrast to his friends who scorn this one who is his witness and one who testifies for him will **argue the case of a man with God** (16:19–21). But this is no earthly advocate, is it? His family, except his wife, is gone. All his servants are gone. His friends are against him. There's no one left to advocate for him. So his hope is a heavenly one. His hope is in God himself.

“But how can his adversary also be his witness? How can God advocate with God?” Job's faith is still during the time of human history that the New Testament calls the time of shadows. The light of the coming Advocate is casting its shadow during these times, but it's still just a shadow. Yet Job hopes! And so do we in the fullness of his coming. “If anyone of us does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins.” And it's to him we cry out in confusion when it

feels God our Father hates us. It's to him we lament when we feel abandoned by our Father. And it's him you are to trust, *when your friends are miserable comforters*. Let us pray...