

## Job's Friends

*Job: View From The Ashes*

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**Bible Text:** Job 2:11-13  
**Preached On:** Sunday, May 15, 2022

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Job 2. Now if you're new with us or a visitor, we are walking through what we know as the book of Job looking at the character of Job and his surrounding cast, understanding how was it that God was faithful in his day and will remain faithful in ours. The book of Job is the book of the Bible immediately before the book of Psalms which typically lies right in the middle of your Bibles so somewhat easy to find. And today as we come to the end of chapter 2, we are officially on the ash heap. Job has lost his children, he's lost his fortune, as we studied last week, he had a very difficult conversation with his wife, and for the overwhelming majority of this book of the Bible, we have this dramatic scene where Job and his three friends are going to discuss, they're going to dialog, and they're going to debate the philosophies and the faith and the aspects of life.

Today as we turn to the end of chapter 2, we're going to meet these three respective friends. We're going to discover that all of them have the same view about life that somehow, someday, Job has done something wrong to deserve what has happened to him, but more importantly we're going to discover that each of them presents it in a way kind of a different angle that you and I need to be observant of to make sure that we don't fall into the trap of listening to the Eliphaz's, the Bildad's and the Zophar's of our life.

Beginning in verse 11 of chapter 2 it says,

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. 12 And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. 13 So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

Now I think we can all agree at this point in the story everything's pretty good. Everything's going well. He is comforted. They are mourning with him. But notice what

it says that they did not say a word. In just a moment beginning in chapter 4, we're going to discover that as soon as they opened their mouth everything went sideways. But to begin with today, we need to understand where did these friends come from. This will set the stage for the dialog that takes place with them and Job.

We know that Job, from chapter 1, verse 1, is from the famous land of Uz. All the Bible tells us is that is a place in the east. Well, the descriptions of these three friends here in verses 11 through 13 actually help us to understand their geographical location. Eliphaz who, by the way, is the most verbose of the friends will speak the most words. He is from a place that we know as Edom, the descendants of Esau, the eastern side of the Jordan River. Bildad, who in chronological order will also speak the second most amount of words, is actually from a place, if you go and study where the Shuhites came from, basically what we call southern Arabia. And Zophar who not only speaks the least amount of words but won't even get his "third speech," Elihu hijacks that, we'll take care of that when we get to chapter 32, Zophar according to the book of Judges 15 comes from the land of Judea, modern-day state of Israel. Think Jerusalem. Think that land that we qualify and classify as the Holy Land.

Now you maybe wonder why is this so important? Because these three men, according to what we just read, heard about what happened to Job. I'm sure they heard about his family, they heard about his finances. I'm sure they heard about the sickness that came upon him because we looked at it last week; in chapter 29 he says, "I've been here for months." But I want you to think what did it take for them to come together? Notice what we read, it says they actually talked to one another about doing this together. This was a world that did not have electricity, did not have indoor plumbing, did not have text messaging and, praise God, did not have social media. They didn't have any of that stuff and so news would have traveled very slow, and so by the time they come to Job's side, he has been there for months, his sores are beginning to be infected, he'll talk about that a little bit later in the passage. In fact, it says when they come upon him, they could not even recognize who he was. The reason it's so important to understand that they came from different places and they coordinated their efforts is because we have to understand what did these guys do that was so comforting to Job because we have to admit, at least for seven days and seven nights everything was headed in the right direction.

What's the first thing they did? They sacrificed. You understand seven days and seven nights, that's just the time they were on the dunghill in silence. It doesn't include the time it took to get there. It doesn't include the time that it took to dialog and debate with him. Just conservatively speaking let's just say that this is about a month's experience in their life. Can you imagine how important and how special somebody must be in your life to take an entire month away from your family, from your business, from your obligations just because you know that they're in the condition that Job was. You know, it's interesting that social media tells us, at least it tells me that supposedly I have thousands of friends but if I were Job, more importantly if you were Job, how many people do you know in your life that would actually do what his friends did? Willing to leave for an extended period of time, willing to sacrifice their own financial wherewithal, willing to go that proverbial extra mile? I know that in a later service we will recognize our

graduating high school seniors, and for those of us that it's been more years since our graduation than the years we had prior to graduation, we will recognize all those individuals that we thought were our friends down the road we discover there's very few people in our lives that would do what these men did.

They didn't just sacrifice, what does it say they did? They sat down with him, that's what it says, for seven days and seven nights they sat with him and here's the key thing I want you to notice: it says according to the word of God, it says they did not speak a word. You know, verse 13 says they didn't speak a word to him, I think many of us have forgotten the power of just being with somebody yet we live in a world today that tells us if you're with somebody who's struggling, you must give your opinion. No, you don't have to. You must share your feelings. No, you don't have to. In fact, one of the things I've discovered in life is oftentimes just our silent presence is of greater value than when we "open our mouth." Now I know I'm a very verbose person. I love language, if you didn't know is words. It's who I am. But people are surprised to find out that when their life is upside down, inside out, and they come and they cry in my office and they're poring out their life, you might be surprised how little I talk because when somebody's life looks like Job they don't want your opinion, they don't want your philosophy, all they want is your presence.

You know, some years ago in the church I was serving there was a young man who was in his early 30's. He and his wife had about a two year old child and by chance they found themselves in a car wreck. It was what you and I would classify as a fender-bender. It wasn't that big a deal but because of the magnitude of it, it was necessary, you know, they called the authorities, the police came. But that young child was in a safety seat apparently strapped in the proper way, but when the paramedics and the EMT came on the scene because they heard a child had been involved, they started doing some tests particularly on the neck and they got very concerned. So they wanted to make sure that this young child though early in age got the best treatment and so they took the child by ambulance to the hospital. Well, you can imagine what we see as a fender-bender that we think we're just going to clean up in a couple of hours turns into a serious endeavor.

I got word of what was taking place and got requested to go by and visit. When I showed up to the hospital in the waiting room there was only one person in the waiting room, it was the young dad. He was in his early 30's as I mentioned and life was inside out, upside down, the mom, his wife, was back in the triage with the little baby. I mean, the phone was ringing, nurses were coming in. You have to sign all those documents and forms. I mean, it was Grand Central Station with one person, and here I am, I'm a pastor and I'm thinking to myself, "You know, this would be a good time to just open up heaven and give some really good wisdom about life. This would be a good time. I mean, it's a 1:1 audience. This would be a good time for just 'a word from God.'"

Well, about 60-75 minutes pass. I had to make my way out of there for some other obligations and I hadn't said a word. I didn't have an opportunity to, there was so much that was going on. I mean, occasionally like a pen would drop, I would pick it up and give it to him. I left the hospital that day dejected. I mean, I had my chin on my chest. I'm

walking to my car and I'm thinking to myself, "What kind of pastor do you think you are? You spent an hour with a guy who's hurting and you don't even say a word." I beat myself up for days until I got a thank-you card from that young dad. It changed my life. When I read that thank-you card, do you know what he said to me? He said, "Thank you for just sitting with me. Thank you for just being with me." Listen to this, "Thank you for not saying anything and just being with me." Wow, what a lesson in life. Here I was beating myself up.

Not me, just making sure. But I recognize the voice, it's the Bible app. I know what it is. It's why I wasn't going to stop. I thought, "All right, we might need to hear it."

So when did it all go sideways? When did everything in this story go sideways? Turn to chapter 4. Just around the corner, Eliphaz, the first and the most frequent to offer his opinion, verse 1 it says, "Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking?" Basically what Eliphaz is saying is, "Hey, we've sat for seven days, seven nights, but the condition you're in, who would we be if we did not offer up our opinion?" Can I give you some biblical warning about why this went the direction that it did? Back in the book of Numbers 22 we have one of the most famous characters and stories in all of the Bible, we have a man by the name of Balaam, prophet of God, famous not because of what he said but what his donkey said. I mean, it's a story we teach in Sunday school and vacation Bible school but it's a pretty good adult story too. Here is this "man of God" riding on a beast of burden when all of a sudden the angel of the Lord shows up and the donkey sees the angel and he doesn't. He beats the donkey. He whips the donkey. The Bible gives us the indication he curses the donkey. And all of a sudden the donkey opens its mouth and says, "Have you lost your mind?" That's the New Revised Jeff Version of that story. If you want to see the 21<sup>st</sup> century version, watch the movie "Shrek." Nonetheless, there you go. But how does that story begin? You may not be familiar with how it began. The story begins with the prophet of God being solicited by a man by the name of Balak. He says, "I will give you more money than you could ever spend. I'll give you more power than you could ever imagine if you'll just do me this one favor, curse the Israelites." He says, "I can't do that." He says, "Well, entreat your God and see if he'll let you."

So that night he goes into his prayer closet and he says, "Okay, God, man, I've got a great offer here. Your people aren't behaving the way they're supposed to be, can I just curse them this one time and let them get what they really deserve?" Do you know what God says? He goes, "All right, Balaam." He goes, "Tomorrow morning when you wake up, if I tell you to go with Balak, go with him. If I don't, don't." You know how the story goes, Balaam gets up and he takes off. God never told him to speak. Where do you find here that God said, "Eliphaz, open your mouth. Bildad, open your mouth. Zophar, open your mouth." You see, one of the most dangerous positions we can put ourselves in is when we start "speaking when God tells us not to." By the way, there are these really famous things called the 10 Commandments and one of them is do not take the Lord's name in vain. Do you know what that means? Do not speak on behalf of what God thinks when he has not told you what he says and/or thinks. And that's what we see happening here.

Now what I want to walk through are the three ways or the "how's" that these three men spoke unto his life so that all of us, number 1, do not do this in other people's lives, and number two, if we see it happening in our life we have that proverbial warning shot to say, "Whoa, maybe we need to turn our ears deaf to this scenario."

What was the first thing or how do we see this first exemplified? Stay in chapter 4 for a moment, verse 7. I want you to hear what Eliphaz says. He says, "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" That's a pretty narcissistic rhetorical question. Do you know why? Because Eliphaz has not met every single person who's ever lived on planet earth and what did he say? He said, "I know how God operates in the life of every single person. Oh, I haven't met them but I know." What's the warning here? What did Eliphaz do that was so wrong other than speaking when God did not tell him or give him permission to speak? Is he fell into the trap of expertise over experience. Be very careful when people speak into your life that have never walked the path you've walked. Be very careful of people who decide to give their opinion, their perspective, their idea, and they use these blanket terms like, "This is just how it works." He had never met every single person. He had never lost a child. He'd never lost a fortune. He'd never had the disease that Job had. He had never walked through what Job was walking through.

Now let me tell you how this plays out in our world today. All you have to do, it's either "go online or if you can find one, go to a bookstore." We live in a world today where from everything to handling your finances, to impending danger, to our marriages, to our kids, we've got a bunch of folks writing books and writing articles telling us what we should or shouldn't do and, folks, I'm just gonna go there today: does it not blow your mind that people with journalism degrees are telling us what science is? Hey, why don't we listen to the person who actually looks through the microscope? Why don't we listen to the person who actually looks through the telescope? And if you want me to go there, I will, I am sick and tired of people on social media giving their opinion on the Bible when they've never read what the Bible even says. But they're an expert. They're an expert because, "I read a book once." Hey, I've said this before and I know this is graduation Sunday so just endear me: do you know some of the smartest people I know might have a high school diploma, and some of the dumbest people I know have a Ph.D. It's not because of the number of pieces of paper that you have on the wall, the problem is when we subject ourselves, "Well, this is what 'the experts' say." What does experience say? How about we talk to somebody who's actually walked through, been through, or been a part of this?

Then we go to the second layer and, by the way, throughout the book of Job we have these speeches by one friend, Job comes back. We're actually going to study Job's responses over the course of the next few weeks, but when we get to chapter 8, we find Bildad's first speech and in verses 8 through 10 Bildad does something very unique. He basically calls Job's attention to the traditions of the past. In verse 8 of chapter 8 he says, "For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?"

What is Bildad doing there? He's alluding to the past, the traditions, the former things, and what he's telling Job is this, that people who are experiencing what you're experiencing can be categorized into a group that have done wrong and you cannot argue it because that's the way it's always been.

What's happening in our world today? We have become a culture that has decided to place everybody in a group irrespective of who you may be as an individual. Now let me share an important truth with you: when God looks into your life he bypasses all the groups and he sees who are you and how have you responded to him. Now here's the problem with our culture today, among many, is some of you, by no fault of your own, are in the right group. Some of you are in the wrong group. If you're in the wrong group, did you know you can't do anything right? Did you know if you're in the right group it doesn't matter what you do, you can't do anything wrong? And so what we've said is, "Oh, because they're in that group, we've got to let it slide. Or because they're in that group, throw the book at them because those people have always been that way."

It's what Bildad said. Can I make this a little more personal for all of us? Today, right now whether here in person or watching online, listening on the radio, if you are an individual in this culture who is willing to admit that you're not perfect, you've got a sin problem, and you've asked Jesus Christ alone to forgive you and to save you, according to the Bible you are born again, regenerated, our common term is you are a believer, you are a Christian. I've got news for you: you're in the wrong group. You're in the wrong group because according to our culture who you are as a Christian, you must be bigoted, you must be archaic, you must be narrow-minded, you must be old fashioned, and you must hate anybody who is contradictory to you.

Is that not what we've done in our culture? Oh, I can go a little bit further. You see, whether you know it or not, you're in a Baptist church. I didn't say Bahptist, you in a Baptist church and even among those who classify themselves as Christians, oh, you're now a part of even a worst group because we're worse than the other ones because of who we are compared to them. Oh, I'll go one step further. If you actually believe that what the Bible says God meant what God meant he said, you're in the worst group we've got. Why? Because we live in a world and in a culture that says that when God spoke as the Bible records it, according to our world today that's hate language because it upsets the right groups and it was spoken by the wrong group.

Do you see how that works out? And this is what Bildad was doing. When Bildad came to him and he said, "Oh, Job, there's no way what you say can be true. You're in the wrong group." And so Eliphaz has come to him and he's made it very clear, it doesn't matter that you're walking through something I've never walked through, I know what I'm doing because you must be wrong. Bildad comes in and says, "I'm sorry, brother, you're in the wrong group." And then there's Zophar. Now I don't know why he gets the shortest amount of material, I just think he's the most ignorant of the three but nonetheless, go to chapter 11, verse 5, and I want you to hear what Zophar says. Now don't get me wrong, it sounds good. It does, but remember back to chapter 4, verse 2, Eliphaz said, "Man, we've got to speak even though God hasn't told us to." Verse 5, "But oh that God would speak,

and open his lips against thee." Do you know what Zophar is admitting? God hasn't spoken yet. By the way, if you want to know what God has to say, wait until we get to chapter 38. He's got a whole lot to say not only to Job but to his three "friends."

So what is Zophar doing? Zophar is basically saying God hasn't said what needs to be said, so I'm going to say it for him. Let me tell you what I call this, I call it playing the God card. You see, as a believer this is where it gets tough because who are we to argue with God, right? I mean, after all, he's the supreme authority of the world, he's the supreme authority of our lives. I mean, nobody, nothing should come above him in our lives so therefore if he speaks we should pay attention to it. Here's the problem: there are some people because there are Eliphaz's out there, there are Bildad's out there, and there are Zophar's out there who use the God card not to promote righteousness in your life but to push their agenda on your life. "You know, if I were God that's not how I would do it." Can I make it practical for you? Okay, somebody comes up to me and says, "Can I tell you something in love?" Do you know what the answer is? "No." That's church code for, "I'm about to tattoo you with the God card." Here's how the God card works out. Now this may not seem funny to most of us adults but talk to the young people. "God told me we're supposed to break up. God told me we're supposed to get married." Yeah, try that pick-up line, that'll work. "God told me to fire you. God told me to hire you. God told me to draft you. God told me to not draft you." I mean, we could use all kinds of analogies but here's what the God card is: the God card is speaking on behalf of God where he has not spoken because you believe that's what God would say at that time and at that moment. And what do we do? 99.99% of the time, as in Zophar's case, all we're doing is taking our own personal views, our own philosophies, our own agendas and we're guiltting other people to be subject to them because that's what we want to happen.

That's what Zophar does. So let me give you the antidote here. When somebody plays the God card on you, or by the way if you're ever tempted to do it on somebody else's life, God forbid, if anybody ever comes up to you and uses that guilt mechanism of, "Well, God told me," here's what you need to respond by. Are you ready, it's real simple? "All right, fine, but can you give me the chapter and the verse? Now I know that God doesn't speak to every minute detail of our lives in the 66 books of the Bible but if you're telling me this is what God wants for my life, can you at least, can you at least do me the honor of showing me the book in the Bible, the chapter and the verse that God led you to, to come talk to me about the situation in my life?" You know, it's interesting throughout my years that anytime somebody has "played the God card" with me, "You know, pastor, I think we ought to do this. I think we ought to do that. Not do this. Do this." I say, "Okay, where in the Bible did you get that opinion?" "Well, all of us believe." Do you know who "all of us" is? Me, myself and I. "Hey, friend, you know, some of us have been talking and God told us that you need to..." Isn't that funny how that card gets played on us? That's what Zophar did. He said, "Oh that God would speak." Chapter. Verse.

Can I sum up all four of these guys in one very simple antidote? The chapter or the book of the Bible is the book of Romans, chapter 3, verse 23, "For all have sinned," that's Zophar, Bildad and Eliphaz. Chapter 6, verse 23, "The wages of sin is death," that's Zophar, Bildad and Eliphaz, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our

Lord." In other words, what we discover is when we open up the Bible and we see the chapter and we see the verse, God does this amazing thing is he collectively puts humanity in one big sin-bucket that he was willing to save us from. "While we were yet sinners," this is chapter 5, verse 8 of Romans, "Christ died for us." And in Romans 10:13, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Don't you ever fall for the trick or the God card that he doesn't love you no matter where you've been, what you've done, and he can't save you in spite of the fact of where you've been and what you've done because that, my friends, is chapter and verse.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning as we study these very unique characters in the Bible, the Spirit of God took the word of God and really spoke into your life and maybe today is that day where you realize that you've listened to the wrong voices, maybe you've listened to people who said, "Oh, you're good enough. It's no big deal." Or maybe you've listened to people who have said, "You're so bad it'll never make a difference." According to what we just quoted with chapter and verse, every one of us has a sin problem that only Jesus can fix and maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that one saying, "You know, it's time to call on the name of the Lord." If you're that one today, let me encourage you to do so. You don't have to say the same words that I would say or somebody else would say. You don't necessarily even have to say them out loud. This is your heart's cry but maybe your heart's cry before the Lord would go something like this. "Today, God, I realize I've been listening to the wrong voices, I've been listening to the loudest voices, I've been listening to the most frequent voices but, God, I haven't been listening to the chapter and the verse of your voice. And God, today I realize that in spite of what people have or have not said, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. So God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come and live on my behalf. God, I believe he was willing to resist all temptation and live a sinless life. And God, I believe that when they placed him on that cross on Mount Calvary, when they put the nails in his hands and his feet, he was bearing the punishment and the pain of my sin, my transgression, and my wrongdoing. And God, today I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven, made it feasible for my soul to be saved. God, today with so much that is going sideways in the world, I don't have the answers to the problems in my own life, my own community, the other side of the world, but there's one thing that I know for sure, that no matter who anybody is, and myself included, that our sin problem can only be fixed by Jesus Christ. So God, today I believe and I'm asking you to save me, I'm asking you to forgive me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today, maybe you're here in person or maybe you're watching online, that you called out to the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and we're going to sing together and let me just encourage you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team of individuals, we've got a room set aside, we would love just to spend time listening to what God has been doing in your life. Or maybe today you say, "You know what, I'm already a believer, I've already been baptized, I'm already a part of this great church," maybe today it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is



about when we exit in a few moments and we go to Bible study realizing how to better discern what is the voice of God and what is just the opinion of men.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you, God, thank you that in spite of where we've been and where we were headed that your timing and your grace and your mercy is so perfect that today you took an obscure passage about three very obscure guys and you did a surgical work in our heart. God, I pray right now that whatever it is that you have spoken to us out of this passage, that we would respond to you and to nobody else. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*