

August 16, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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IF GOD IS JUST, WHY . . . ? Job 8-9

Most everyone is familiar with the statue named “Lady Justice.” It is a familiar picture or symbol that appears at many courthouses around our nation. Lady Justice holds a scale in her hands that represents independent conclusions based on the weighing of evidence from the prosecutor and the defense alike. Since the sixteenth century she has been blindfolded to illustrate that true justice is impartial, not influenced by bribes, wealth, appearance, or social standing. She holds a sword in her right hand that represented final authority in ancient times. The sword illustrates that justice is supposed to be swift and final.

Many people in many cultures long for justice from their authorities but find little or none. Others are confused about what true justice is and are actually crying out for favoritism. Eventually, all seeking, all crying out for, all debates about justice are going to lead to God. In that ultimate consideration of justice, the world will ask questions like, “If God is just, why is there so much pain and heartache in the world?” “If God is really in control, why would He, being a just God, allow an earthquake that devastates a poor nation like Haiti?”

Religious people and Christians are not immune from questioning God’s justice. They wonder why a just God would allow a Hitler or Kim Jong-un or Castro to rise to power. Why does a just God allow radical religionists to kill innocent Christians by the scores in the Middle East, India, and African nations?

But is it not true that we who love God and truly endeavor to live in fellowship with Him are prone to ask similar questions about God’s justice? “Why does God allow you to endure a chronic

illness?” “Why does God not change the heart of your wayward spouse or wayward children?” “Why doesn’t God, who controls all things, not allow you to conceive children?” These questions shade God’s justice in the hearts of people who love Him and are sincerely trying to trust Him.

Welcome to Job’s world. Job was not ignorant of the fact that he lived a righteous, sin-shunning kind of lifestyle. He was pretty sure that even if Satan or his own peers blamed him, the blame wouldn’t stick. So in the typical theology of humanity, a theology that expects God to punish sin and bless righteous living, Job wondered why was God punishing him? And if God wasn’t the “punisher,” why didn’t God stop whoever or whatever it was? Where was justice? In fact, didn’t God at the very least owe Job an opportunity to ask questions? Job could not even get an audience with God. Where was justice?

Justice was with God. How amazing it is that we who truly know so much about God fail to trust His justice. We forget that we are not the originators, definers, or determiners of justice. More often than not, we are crying out for our preferred standard of fairness rather than for justice. And because we are not invited to the counsel table in heaven, we are ignorant about important and unknown issues. Therefore, in times of confusion and doubt, we must trust God to do what is right – because when God does right, He does best.

God is Just (8:1-22).

Chapter eight contains Bildad’s first speech in the long conversations with Job. Here he sarcastically asked Job, “God doesn’t pervert justice, does He?” (8:1-7). It was a very direct address. *Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said: “How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?”* These are “in-your-face” rhetorical questions. At least Eliphaz opened his rebuttal of Job with respect, “*If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?*” (4:1).

Bildad chose a different approach and, out of the gate, labeled Job, “the righteous man who avoided sin,” as a bag of wind. His rhetorical questions accuse Job of accusing God of perverting justice. It is important for us to take a couple of minutes and flesh out the

meaning of justice. Justice is simply the act of the judge or authority deciding a case. But Bildad pointed out, God does not make such decisions haphazardly or carelessly. God's decisions are always based on *right*. This Hebrew word is well known in the Old Testament. Right or righteousness is the perfect standard of correct behavior.

It is clear that Bildad accused Job of accusing God of twisting justice. Did Job accuse God of twisting or perverting "right" in making decisions with resulting actions regarding Job? Does God ever twist, bend, or make crooked the perfectly straight way of righteousness in His control of the universe? Has God ever made a choice in conflict with "right" in the history of humanity? Those are Bildad's rhetorical questions.

Though an answer is not required, how would you answer? Does God ever do or author anything that is not right? What about Hurricane Marie (2017) that devastated Puerto Rico and Caribbean Islands killing over 3,000 people? Does God not control weather? Do you believe that God has allowed or not permitted events in your life that are a breach of righteousness?

Maybe we need to consider Bildad's facts about God's justice. According to miserable counselor number two, *If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great (8:4-7).*

This is a very unkind argument. Bildad told Job that his children simply reaped the harvest of their sins against God (8:4). That is bad enough in itself, but then the guy went on to assure Job that he could have recourse with God if he so chose. All he needed to do was to plead for God's mercy (8:5) and live righteously to get God's attention (8:6). Did Bildad mean that Job should live like God said he had been living all along (1:8)? Obviously, Bildad was as ignorant about God's assessment of Job as Job (and everyone else on earth) was.

Furthermore, Bildad argued that if Job would just order his life according to Bildad's assessment of "right," God would take him from a living standard of "small" to very "great." This is the false

theology of the "Health, Wealth, and Prosperity" gospel. It is to impose finite human reason on infinitely wise and righteous God.

Am I suggesting that Bildad was not accurate in his assessment of what God will or will not do? Then I have also become a target of Bildad's rebuke and he tells me to quit being so ignorant. He would tell me to do a little research and learn for myself about God's justice. He would tell me to check out his theology (8:8-19). Yes, Job, do a little research and the fathers will teach you. *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? (8:8-10).*

We have no idea how much ancient Job's peers understood about God. Based on the statements of this book, it might have been quite an impressive body of knowledge. In spite of Bildad's condescending attitude, this is sage advice. We are foolish to think that we have all the answers based on our experience and observation. We do need to learn from those who have gone before us and built on the acquired knowledge of those who have gone before them. Considering the fact that thousands of years of knowledge has been amassed by the time we came on the scene, we have much information about God available to us in explanations and applications of the Bible.

But what do we learn about God's justice? Bildad would say, "Let me illustrate." Consider the reeds. *Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish (8:11-13).*

It is certainly true that reeds die without water. People who reject God (the word is stronger than *forget*) cut themselves off from the most critical resource and will perish. Therefore, the godless perish in this life spiritually. But worse is the fact that the godless will perish eternally. And yet it is also obvious to the casual observer that the godless do not necessarily suffer poverty or bad times in this life. They are some of the most "blessed" according to human understanding. So where is God's justice?

Bildad would say, “Well, consider the spider web.” *His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider’s web. He leans against his house, but it does not stand; he lays hold of it, but it does not endure (8:14-15).* The person who rejects God trusts in nothing more substantial than a spider web. Even that which should be trustworthy (a well-built house) falls over when he depends on it.

Furthermore, in contrast to the previous two illustrations, consider the uprooted plant. The righteous person, unlike the godless, *is a lush plant before the sun, and his shoots spread over his garden. His roots entwine the stone heap; he looks upon a house of stones. If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, “I have never seen you.” Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the soil others will spring (8:16-19).* The godless person does not have the hope of a righteous person who looks like a thriving, luxuriant plant. Even if the afflictions of life uproot the righteous person, they will spring up again and thrive (8:18-19).

So then, according to Bildad, in God’s justice, He will not reject the blameless (8:20-22). *Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers (8:20).* It is true that God will ultimately not reject the righteous person. Nor will God ultimately uphold the evildoer. But is it true that God always blesses the blameless. *He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting. Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more (8:21-22).*

It is true that ultimately God will fill the righteous person with joy. It is true that ultimately the evildoer who shames the righteous will be undone. This is indeed God’s justice. But the key here is the word ultimately. Ultimately refers to eternity. The person who is made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin will rejoice in Christ’s presence forever. But that person might not look so blessed or experience joyful circumstances in this life.

In fact Jesus taught, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed*

are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:1-12). That is God’s justice.

Likewise, the unrighteous person will suffer the consequences of sin in eternal punishment. They often appear to be having a blast in this life. But because they have rejected their Eternal Arbiter, they are not “right” according to God’s justice.

And Job replied,

I Know, But (9:1-35).

In chapters six and seven, we found twenty-three questions posed by Job. Here are nine more questions from Job. Among those questions is an important one: “How can a man be right before God?” *Then Job answered and said: “Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength -who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded? – he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’ God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab” (9:1-13).*

Here Job rightly concluded that God is truly Almighty. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength (9:4). He removes mountains in His anger (9:5). He shakes the earth (9:6). He commands the sun and stars having created the heavens (9:7-8). He controls the seas (9:8). He established the constellations (9:9). In short, God does stuff we cannot imagine or comprehend (9:10-13).

So, how do you plan to get right with such a God? That is what Job wondered. How can mere man be made right with God the Creator (9:2)? You have about a 1 in 1,000 chance of even talking to God (9:3). That brings up another question. How can mere humans answer God? Job argued that even if your case is justifiable, you have no audience with God. *How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (9:14-15). Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life (9:20-21).*

Four times in these verses Job asserts his righteousness. Twice he said, “*Though I am in the right*” (vv.15,20). Twice he avowed, “*I am blameless*” (vv.20,21). But notice three important conclusions. “*God would prove me perverse*” (v.20). “*My own mouth would condemn me*” (v.20). “*I must appeal for mercy to my Accuser*” (v.14). These three conclusions are the key to understanding God’s justice. We will return to these important conclusions at the end of the sermon.

Apart from these conclusions, God can seem to be so unjust. That was how Job felt. *If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice. For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him (9:16-19)?*

God is so right and so mighty. In light of God’s might and right, I have no recourse with Him whatsoever. Who will argue with, resist, fight with God and win? No one! This is where, as Daniel Estes concluded, Job’s theology collides with his experience. On one hand, it is true that God is perfectly righteous and, therefore, He must be just. But on the other hand, in experience, it seems like God doesn’t give the sufferer a chance.

Therefore, we mere humans must wrestle with the question, “Is it vain to seek justice?” The principle behind this very difficult question is: The judges’ faces are covered. How can there be justice? *It is all one; therefore I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity*

of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges – if it is not he, who then is it (9:22-24)?

Job rebuffed Bildad’s conclusion that God always blesses the righteous person (8:20-22). That wasn’t working out in Job’s experience. And that doesn’t seem to be the case in the experience of our friends, loved ones, and even ourselves if we suffer affliction. That seems especially true when our affliction comes at the hands of other mere people. We appeal to the justice of the land only to discover that the judges don’t want to know the truth.

How did that sad reality apply to Job? First, he concluded that life is but a vapor. *My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey (9:25-26).* We feel this same way. Too quickly life will be over. Will there be enough time to learn that God is perfectly just?

Job decided he would not be a hypocrite about how he felt. He wasn’t going to put on a happy face while his life was falling apart. *If I say, “I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,” I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me (9:27-31).*

What was Job to do? What can we do when it appears that God is absolutely right, He treats us like we are offensive to Him, and it appears we have no recourse? We must conclude with Job that we need an arbiter with God. *For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself (9:32-35).*

This is the key to understanding God’s justice. We concluded earlier in the sermon that three statements from Job held the key to understanding God’s justice (cf. 9:14,20). “*God would prove me perverse*” (v.20). “*My own mouth would condemn me*” (v.20). “*I must appeal for mercy to my Accuser*” (v.14). Now let’s apply those truths to ourselves. We are all guilty for evildoing in the sight of the perfectly Holy, righteous God. We are born with the propensity to sin

and prove that propensity by wanting to offend God with our sins. Therefore, God is perfectly just to condemn every person to eternal punishment.

What recourse could we have? Who will argue with God? How can you argue with God when you can't even gain an audience with God? God, in justice (i.e. doing right and best), has provided us with the Supreme Arbiter, Jesus Christ. Notice Job's words, "*There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both*" (v.33). We do have an audience with the offended God through Jesus Christ. God the Son became like us in order to pay the price to bring us into fellowship with God our Creator. In so doing, our Arbiter was tempted in every kind of test, temptation, and affliction we face. But He never sinned. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).*

If we long for God to be fair, we must admit that we have sinned against Him and deserve eternal punishment. If we instead ask God to be just, we have confidence that He laid all of our offenses and sins on Christ at the cross. Therefore, God can justifiably hear the plea for forgiveness and remove our offenses from us because Christ our Arbiter has already paid the price. Cry out to Him in the face of your affliction and find that God is indeed just.