

August 2, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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GOD IS JUST IN REPROOF Job 4-5

Because God has created us in His image, and because God has been gracious to reveal His character in the things He has created (Romans 1:19-20), and because God has written His law on our consciences (Romans 2:15), we are aware of certain truths about God – or at least should be. But even with the written testimony from God (the Bible), we don't always get it right. Therefore, we should cut ancient humans a break if they did not always interpret the revelation of God's character accurately, or interpret His actions appropriately.

Job's friends demonstrated the problem. For twenty-four chapters (4-27) Job's friends comforted him by arguing that he misunderstood God, or misunderstood himself, or was just plain lying. They certainly do not set the standard for how we comfort and sympathize with our suffering friends. The problem was rooted in the friends' theology. Their arguments reveal a very simple, succinct theology about trouble or suffering:

1. God is absolutely sovereign, in control of all things (we agree).
2. God is absolutely fair and just (we agree).
 - a. Therefore, God must always punish evil doing.
 - b. And, therefore, if I am suffering, God must be punishing me for doing some kind of sin.
 - c. And, therefore, if I am being blessed, God must be rewarding me.

Again, generally speaking, most professing Christians today would agree with this theology. It is the theology of Maria in *The Sound of Music*. Realizing that she and Captain Von Trapp had fallen

in love she sang about her deep theological convictions (though she had no idea that is what they were):

For here you are, standing there, loving me
Whether or not you should
But somewhere in my youth or childhood
I must have done something good

Nothing comes from nothing
Nothing ever could
So somewhere in my youth or childhood
I must have done something good.

The good news is that modern Christians have a lot more revelation than Job's friends had, and obviously more than Julie Andrews had. Then why do so many professing followers of Christ in this age embrace a "health, wealth, and prosperity" gospel?

It is very easy for us to fall into the very simplistic—but wrong—belief that all suffering equals divine judgment and all prosperity in life equals God's blessing. That theology betrays a very limited understanding of God's sovereign control. That belief system gives a very limited description of "good" in God's promise "that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

We will consider today the opening "words of comfort" from Eliphaz the Temanite. He speaks much truth. But his conclusions are so far out of the context of God's actions that the truth doesn't apply.

Respect Turned to Reproof (vv.1-6).

The comforter began a conversation (or more like a lecture) respectfully. *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: "If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?" (4:1-2a)*. The opening word "then" means that after awhile Eliphaz spoke. It is good reminder to us that there is a time to listen. That is especially true when someone is suffering. The deeper the suffering, the less we need to say or even can say to comfort the sufferer.

Often, if we attempt to say something to the sufferer, it will only exacerbate the grief they feel. Job's friends understood that

because we read in 2:13 that they sat in silence on the ground with Job for seven days and nights. Quite honestly that sounds impossible in our age of nervous activity. At the end of those seven days of silence, Job spoke first in the soliloquy recorded in chapter three.

Apparently, Eliphaz felt that because Job broke the silence, it was now appropriate to speak. When the time to speak comes, enter it carefully and thoughtfully. According to our text, Eliphaz spoke respectfully. *“If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?”* (4:2). He was cognizant of Job’s feelings, but nonetheless, he just had to say something.

But a kind and respectful request to speak does not guarantee helpful advice. The supposed comforter quickly became the judge which we should have anticipated when he gave his excuse for just having to talk. *“Yet who can keep from speaking?”* (4:2b). In other words, someone must say something and I am just the guy who is qualified to do it. Someone with wisdom and insight needed to correct Job’s error in thinking. In light of the common understanding of divine judgment, Job’s soliloquy about wishing he had never been born was very wrong. That Job was born was proof enough of God’s choice in the matter. That Job was suffering was the point that needed debating.

Eliphaz’s accusation took into account that Job had instructed others throughout life. *“Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees”* (4:3-4). Job had a reputation for helping others. That fits with God’s description of him being *“a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil who held fast to his integrity”* (2:3). However, when Job was in need of helpful, supportive words, it appeared he was not receptive.

Job couldn’t take his own medicine, according to Eliphaz. *“But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?”* (4:5-6). To say publicly that you wished you had never been born and that the night you were conceived was the worse night possible is an expression of utter frustration. Our relationship with God (fear being the utmost respect

is the basis of our confidence. The resulting integrity of our lives indicates reason for our hope.

In the face of trouble, it should be encouraging for us to review the past and be able to conclude that we have always found God faithful as we walked with Him. But in Job’s situation, the accusation from Eliphaz was patently unfair because neither Job or Eliphaz or anyone else really knew what God was doing. Yes, Job had been a helpful, sympathetic counselor. He had proved many times that God is faithful. But the circumstances here were unique. The bulk of this book is made up of all the evidence that Job’s three counselors became a greater burden, a more intense source of pain and discouragement than his financial loss, familial loss, or loss of health. How can that happen?

Human Understanding of Divine Justice (vv.7-11).

The problem with human understanding of divine justice is that it offers a limited perspective. It is not that we are totally ignorant about the matter. Humans know about divine justice. *“Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same”* (4:7-8). Eliphaz revealed that finite human wisdom concludes that God rewards righteousness and punishes sin. Ultimately that is true. Those whom God has declared righteous inherit eternal life and those who sin against God receive eternal suffering.

Typically that is true in passing life as well. There are many texts throughout the Bible that teach and illustrate God’s law of sowing and reaping. Paul reminded us that *God will render to each one according to his works* (Romans 2:6). While the rule is generally true, there is wonderful exception to the rule also. David realized that *God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities* (Psalm 103:10).

Notice that Eliphaz’s conclusion is based on *as I have seen*. Most of our decisions are based on human experience. But, human experience seldom uncovers the magnitude of God’s amazing works. How well do we observe that God is the mighty Judge? *“By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are*

consumed” (4:9). God uses people and any part of His creation He chooses to render judgment for sin. But it is God who chooses.

Eliphaz gave an illustration of God’s might being mightier than anything He chooses to use in judgment. God is mightier than the mighty. *“The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions are broken”* (v.10). But, when God judges, the practical ramifications are obvious. *“The strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered”* (v.11).

Bad Source of Quasi-Truth (4:12-21; 5:1-5).

Quasi-truth (a.k.a. pragmatic truth or partial truth) is typically advanced as a framework accounting for incompleteness and uncertainty in the actual practices of science. Or in our case, the incompleteness and uncertainty of the eternal truth of God revealed in the Bible.

That is important for us to remember when we are trying to ascertain truth via a spirit in the night (4:12-21). Beware of whispers in the night. *“Now a word was brought to me stealthily; my ear received the whisper of it. Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice”* (4:12-16)

Human experience will verify that there are times when weird, hard-to-explain things happen. Before the Bible was completed, God communicated in many different forms of visions, dreams, voices, and such. But how do you know if the dream, vision, premonition is from God? Better for us to consult the Bible when someone or something whispers something to you.

It is human nature and too easy to listen to unique voices and conclude “Sounds good to me.” That is how Eliphaz responded to the voice in the dark. *“Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?”* (4:17) That does sound right, right? God said there is none righteous, not one (Romans 3:10). So then human wisdom has to conclude that God should not and, therefore, does not trust anyone! Yep, that’s what Eliphaz concluded.

“Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth” (4:18-19).

But wait! Didn’t God say and imply that His servant Job was trustworthy? *And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”* (Job 1:8). Sounds like God trusts Job to do right, maybe. To Satan’s challenge that Job would be untrustworthy and curse God, God essentially said, “Go ahead and try and you will see” (1:12).

Eliphaz concluded that, generally, God sees mortal man as pretty much worthless. *“Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces; they perish forever without anyone regarding it. Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them, do they not die, and that without wisdom?”* (4:20-21). But the Bible proves this is not true. God loves us so much that He paid the price to redeem us from sin. That God is even mindful of us, reminds us that He cares. David marveled: *What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?* (Psalm 8:4) Job will ask the same question. *“What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him”* (Job 7:17).

Of course God does not place His trust in us. But still He loves us. The “spirit” didn’t give full disclosure of the truth. Be careful to discern spirits to measure what is done or said against the Word of God. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1). Be careful about listening to whispers in the night.

A second source for truth Eliphaz appealed to was his personal experience (5:1-5). “I have seen” is an important appeal. He said to Job, “Be instructed my friend.” *“Call now; is there anyone who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple”* (5:1-2). Like the sufferer needs to be challenged and confronted about sin at this point? Of course deep anger and a desire for vengeance shortens life (Proverbs 10:8,10,14,21). But why do we think (with Eliphaz) that such a truth applies to our suffering friend?

We need to be careful about coming across like Eliphaz did which sounds like, “Let me tell you the truth as I have seen it.” “*I have seen the fool taking root, but suddenly I cursed his dwelling. His children are far from safety; they are crushed in the gate, and there is no one to deliver them. The hungry eat his harvest, and he takes it even out of thorns, and the thirsty pant after his wealth*” (5:3-5). There is another statement in chapter four that sounds just like this. “*As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same*” (4:8). These words mean, “Listen to our arguments, the basis of our conclusions.” “I know,” “I have experienced,” “I have read,” are all appeals to personal knowledge and experience. The conclusions might be true but who is the authority for truth? Far better to appeal to the Bible. It IS our authority.

But Eliphaz is sure that he and his friends have a corner on truth because, “we have searched it out.” “*Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear, and know it for your good*” (5:27)” To “search” is to explore and examine thoroughly like our definition of science which is “the systematic study through observation and experiment.” Eliphaz’s argument sounds so much like what we hear so often these days. “Behold, science has determined.” Right. Consider a brief history of the conclusions of “science.” In the eighteenth century the searching out, the science that came to be known as the Enlightenment, questioned God. In the nineteenth century science of Higher Criticism and Darwinism denied God. In the twentieth century the explosion of all the sciences replaced God. And now in the twenty-first century, through humanism, intelligent people talk freely about the personification of science as the cure to all ills. Science can be a dangerous source because it can offer “quasi-truth.” The Bible is God’s Word, truth unchanging.

Appeal to the God of Justice (5:6-16).

Eliphaz recommended that Job (and anyone who suffers) seek God when the inevitable happens (5:6-8). Affliction is going to happen. “*For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground, but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*” (5:6-7). Even as Solomon concluded in Ecclesiastes, this life is going to offer trouble, testing, and problems. God promised

that would be the case if Adam sinned. Adam didn’t trust God. Our first parents rebelled against God and we are born rebelling against God.

Because of the general principle of sin, we experience the general principle of affliction. Affliction can be a direct judgment from God because of personal sin (1 Corinthians 11:30). Affliction can be a direct test from God to purge us and perfect us (James 1:3-4). Affliction can be the common, expected result of the principle of sin in the world (Genesis 3:17-18).

Whatever the cause or circumstances of suffering, it is good and right to commit your cause to God. “*As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause*” (5:8). Here Eliphaz say, “I’ll tell you what I would do Job.” Does that sound like your friends and comforters? What would typically be good and fitting for any of us to do under normal circumstances is not useful in a unique circumstance God has authorized.

We commit our cause to God because He is all-powerful and kind (5:9-16). God does astonishing work in nature. He “*does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields*” (vv.9-10). He also does astonishing work among people. “*He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night*” (5:11-14).

In all His mighty work in the world, God is especially attentive to the needy. He delivers the needy from wicked sinners. “*But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty*” (5:15). Therefore, because God IS and continues to BE forever, the needy have hope. “*So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth*” (v.16). Therefore, Eliphaz argued the needy, suffering person has the right to expect God’s blessings.

Expect God’s Blessings (5:17-26).

God takes care of the one He reproved (5:17-20). Therefore, to be reproved by God is to be blessed. “*Behold, blessed is the one*

whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty” (v.17). It is true that the recipient of God’s testing and even discipline should be happy. James reminded us to, *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds (James 1:2)*. The writer to the Hebrew Christians asked, *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Hebrews 12:5-7)*. Remembering these wonderful truths works very well for us, if we are certain that our suffering is God’s discipline.

It is also good for the sufferer to remember that God brings beauty from ashes. *“For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword” (5:18-20)*.

“So don’t worry!” Eliphaz would tell us. “In the end life will be great!” (5:21-26). Really? Sure, everything will be coming up roses. *“You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is at peace, and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing” (5:21-24)*. More than that, even Job’s family will be restored according to his comforter’s prediction. *“You shall know also that your offspring shall be many, and your descendants as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up in its season” (5:25-26)*.

If Job would just admit that God was punishing him for sin, everything would turn out great. Ironically, we know that this stuff actually happened in the end. But it didn’t happen because of the reasons Eliphaz proposed. Eliphaz said a lot of stuff that was true, but it didn’t apply to Job’s circumstances. About which circumstances Job and Eliphaz and everyone on earth was ignorant.

In conclusion, we need to admit that Eliphaz (and we) misunderstand Job’s circumstances. We can interpret this passage in the words of commentator Christopher Ashe. “My friend Job, whom I love enough to travel with my friends to bring you sympathy and comfort, I want to bring you all the resources of comfort and wisdom known to the world of the morally upright and religious. You know these truths, for you have taught them to others many times. I want gently to encourage you to be consistent with your beliefs, to be realistic about our mortal condition, to be humble and don’t get ideas above yourself, and gladly to submit to the loving discipline of a good God.” (Christopher Ashe, *Preaching the Word*, “Job,” Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Publishers, 2014, 113).

That wasn’t the issue. We need to understand that Job was wealthier, smarter, more righteous in everyday life than you or I can imagine or will ever begin to approach. We need to understand that Job’s suffering was deeper, broader, more inclusive and intense than any person we know (including ourselves) will ever suffer. God did something unique with, through, in Job. We can learn from him, but we really cannot fully identify with him.

Second, we can misunderstand God’s work in the lives of our brothers and sisters. We need to acknowledge that God’s people can experience suffering as discipline to correct us when we choose to live in sin. We can experience suffering as a means to mature us and make us more like Christ. We can experience suffering to give God opportunity to show His grace is sufficient. We can experience suffering through persecution as we are filling up the afflictions of Christ (what Satan would do to Christ if He were still here, Colossians 1:24). We can experience suffering because we live in a cursed creation. And in the process, we do not always know why we or our brothers and sisters suffer in God’s furnace of affliction. But we do know whose hand is on the thermostat.