

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 10/4/2022

Series: "Seeing God through Suffering"

Part 5" "When human reason fails"

Text: Job Chapter 4 v 1-9, Chapter 8 v 1-7 and Chapter 11 v 1-6

Scripture references from ESV

Job 4: 1-9 Then **Eliphaz** the Temanite answered and said:² "If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?

Yet who can keep from speaking? ³ Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands.

⁴ Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees.⁵ But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed.⁶ Is not your fear of God^[a] your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?⁷ "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?⁸ As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.⁹ By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

Job 8:1-7 Then **Bildad** the Shuhite answered and said:² "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?³ Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?⁴ If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.⁵ If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy,⁶ if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation.⁷ And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

Job 11:1-6 Then **Zophar** the Naamathite answered and said:² "Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right?³ Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?⁴ For you say, 'My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's^[a] eyes.'⁵ But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you,

⁶ and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

We are looking at the book of Job because we have questions and want to understand suffering.

- Is there a link between sin and specific suffering? Is it right to say God is punishing someone because of sin?

- Is the explanation for suffering as simple as saying 'good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? Are bad things are only happening to us because we have done something bad?

Though we may not consciously think this, it shows in our heart whenever we have a bad day and attribute it to God punishing us simply because our quiet time was rushed that morning.

Job's friends took this approach when they applied their doctrine to Job's suffering. His friends were loyal, grieving, wise and, for a while, silent. They only spoke after Job had spoken. Out of the anguish of his heart, Job cursed the day of his birth and wished God would end his life.

His friends thought they knew all there was to know about God and suffering, but their wisdom was just human wisdom, based on dubious spiritual experiences and limited human experience of sin and suffering. They are an example to us of what happens **when human reason fails.**

The three friends didn't mean to be cruel. However, because they saw Job's sufferings as a theological problem to be fixed, rather than seeing Job as a man to be comforted and love, they added to his suffering.

Their human wisdom failed. It failed to make sense of God's suffering and it failed to comfort Job.

How can we avoid doing the same thing? We need to look at what the friends said to Job. The 39 chapters that contain their speeches and Job's responses are hard to read. They say things that are right, but also things that are clearly wrong. Their speeches are written in poetry which uses metaphors intended to draw out our emotions, but need us to work at understanding what they mean.

There are three rounds of verbal sparring, rather like a boxing match but with three men against one. We need to find our way through this, understand what is being said and, more importantly, discover what we need to learn.

The core arguments of the three friends through the next chapters:

1. **Eliphaz** begins by commending Job as a man who has been a blessing to others in the past, but then he goes

on to lay out his doctrine – his view of who God is and how he runs the world. (4:1-9 above)

- Innocent people don't suffer (v7). It is only the wicked who reap trouble (v8), and that is because God is angry with them (v9)
- He claims his doctrine was given to him through a spiritual experience (4:12-17 see p4).

He goes on to speak about the way God acts justly in the world (5:8-16 see p4).

- God frustrates the plans of the wicked, bringing their schemes to an end (5:12 see p4).
- God saves the poor and oppressed from the hands of the wicked.

His conclusion is that God is chastising Job because of some wrong he has done (5:17 see p4), and counsels him to accept the discipline of the Lord and seek God's mercy.

2. Eliphaz next accuses Job of not fearing God, using his own words against him. (15:4-6 see p4).

- He repeats his assertion that no human born on earth can be righteous (15:14 see p4), implying that therefore Job's suffering must be because of sin in his life.

Eliphaz speaks of his own wisdom, which he has acquired by observing what happens in the world.

- He asserts that evil people suffer loss because God runs the world with justice.

3. Eliphaz falsely accuses Job of sins he hasn't committed (22:5-11 see p4) to make the situation fit his theology.

- Eliphaz again counsels Job to confess his sin and seek God's mercy.

Bildad is the second friend to speak in each round of speeches.

1. Bildad first speaks in **Chapter 8** (above) and accuses Job of perverting the justice of God (v1-3 above).

Then he says something that is truly shocking (v4). To a man who is grieving the death of his ten children, Bildad says

- your children got what they deserved because they were sinful.
- He goes on to imply that Job's suffering is because of his own unrighteousness (v6).

In summary, Bildad, Job's friend (!) says to him:

- You are suffering because of your sin and your children are dead because of their sin
- If you don't want to follow them to the grave, you need to repent of your sin and plead for God's mercy (v5)

2. **Bildad** continues in a similar vein to Eliphaz (18:5 see p4).

- Evil people suffer loss in this world because God is a just God.

3. **Bildad** is adamant that his original assertion holds true.

- since all humans are sinful, Job is suffering because of his sin (25:4 see p4).

Zophar is the last friend to speak each time (11:1-6 above).

1. He is angry with Job for what he has said in his responses.

- He accuses Job of hidden sins that God would reveal if he spoke
- He knows that Job has lost everything, but declares that Job is suffering less than he deserves for his sins (v6).

2. Like the other friends, he counsels Job.

- If he will only put his sin away and seek God, then God will bless him (11:13ff see p4)
- He too asserts that the exulting of the wicked is short and the joy of the godless but for a moment (20:5)

3. Zophar is silent after the second round of speeches.

In each round of speeches, **Job's** response to his friends follows a pattern:

- He protests his innocence, appeals to God to vindicate him and makes a statement about his trust in God.

To summarise the doctrine of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar:

- God is just, and deals justly with sin, bringing calamity on the wicked
- Humans are sinful. Job is no exception, as evidenced by his suffering and deserved worse than he got.
- Job needs to confess his sin rather than protest his innocence, and turn from that sin to seek God's mercy.

Are they right in their doctrine?

It is true that God is just and deals justly with sin. It is true that God brings calamity on wicked people.

Does this mean that Job's calamity is evidence of hidden unconfessed sin? We can read God's verdict on Job. (1:8, 42:7-8 see p4). Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are right in some of what they say about God but

They are wrong about Job and the reason he is suffering.

What can we learn from all of this?

1. **We need to be careful of right doctrine wrongly applied.** Eliphaz was right that God does discipline us when we sin against him, and suffering **may** be because God is disciplining us. In that case we need to accept it rather than kick against it. (Hebrews 12:5-11 see p4). However, this right doctrine was wrongly applied to Job.

- God says Job was a blameless man, and it would have been unjust of him to discipline a blameless man.

It is easy to rush in with right doctrine and fail to listen to what the suffering person is saying, doing untold damage. We do this to ourselves when suffering comes and we go on a mission to hunt down sin in our life. We end up tormenting ourselves more and finding we are robbed of the joy of the Lord. In doing this, we miss the point that:

2. **We need to live with the mystery of sin and suffering.** Throughout the Bible, we discover that both good and bad people have lives of great suffering, and equally lives of comfort and ease.

**The mystery of sin and suffering cannot be boiled down to
bad people suffer bad things and good people get good things**

This simplistic view of the world led to Job's friends **wrongly applying right doctrine.** Today the same simplistic view has led to a **wrong doctrine**, which, when preached, offers false hope and fleeces people of their wealth:

- You are suffering because you do not have enough faith in God. If you exercise more faith, God will take away illness and pain, and will give you earthly comforts and wealth.

This doctrine is a lie of the devil and is born in the pit of hell

Rather than seeing suffering as a problem to be solved, we need to accept that

**There is suffering in the world that we cannot explain
and we need to see the person suffering as someone to be loved and comforted.**

3. We need to accept that righteous people do suffer unjustly in this world. Job's friends could not accept this as a possibility. If they had really listened to Job, known the life he lived and trusted what he was saying they would have come to a different conclusion. We have no excuse for applying right doctrine wrongly, or for having wrong doctrine, because we have an example of one who was completely righteous and yet still suffered.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The mystery of sin and suffering is ultimately answered in Jesus. God is just and must deal justly with sin. In one sense, Zophar was right. Job may have been blameless, but he wasn't sinless. He did deserve Hell, but he didn't get Hell, because he was looking for a redeemer. He was looking for the Lord Jesus Christ. We also don't get what we deserve (Hell) if we are trusting in Jesus. Jesus, the only righteous man who has ever been born of a woman and who did not deserve Hell, suffered Hell for us so that we might be forgiven of sin and put right with God.

One day, Jesus will justly right every wrong and the mystery of sin and suffering will be resolved.

Until then we need to be careful that we don't wrongly apply right doctrine.

We need to live with the mystery of sin and suffering and accept that righteous people suffer unjustly in this world.

4:12-17 Now a word was brought to me stealthily; my ear received the whisper of it.

¹³ Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men,

¹⁴ dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake.

¹⁵ A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up.

¹⁶ It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice:

¹⁷ 'Can mortal man be in the right before ^[b] God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?

5:8-16 As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause,

⁹ who does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number:

¹⁰ he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields;

¹¹ he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

¹² He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success.

¹³ He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.

¹⁴ They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night.

¹⁵ But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the

mighty.

¹⁶ So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

5:17 Behold, blessed is the one whom God reprove; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

11:13ff If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands towards him.

¹⁴ If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and let not injustice dwell in your tents.

¹⁵ Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear.

¹⁶ You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away.

¹⁷ And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning.

¹⁸ And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security.

¹⁹ You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many will court your favour.

²⁰ 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."

15:4-6 But you are doing away with the fear of God^[a] and hindering meditation before God.

⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty.

⁶ Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you.

15:14 What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?

18:5 "Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine

20:5 the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment

22:5-11 Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities.

⁶ For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing.

⁷ You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry.

⁸ The man with power possessed the land, and the favoured man lived in it.

⁹ You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.

¹⁰ Therefore snares are all round you, and sudden terror overwhelms you,

¹¹ or darkness, so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you.

25:4 How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?

1:8 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?"

42:7-8 After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Hebrews 12:5-11 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. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” ⁷ 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? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.