

SESSION #24

JOB (part 2)

We go back especially to the three friends who have had such a major role in this dramatic dialogue. When you see what Job says in response to what they say to him, you can understand this description somebody wrote to describe Job's speeches: *"The wail of a desolate soul to a God who could not be found, from a self which could not be escaped, and an anguish which could not be explained."* That's Job. That's his situation. You think you've had some hard times or difficulties? They cannot be anything near as bad as what Job has gone through.

And in the midst of all of his pain and agony and suffering, the worst thing of all is he cries out to God and he just can't reach God. God doesn't seem to be there, He just seems to be the archer continually shooting arrows into Job. As far as Job's concerned, that's what's going on.

You see, Job has become a battlefield in the cosmic battle between Satan and God. It is a cosmic battle ranging from the beginning of human history in the Garden of Eden and it won't be finished until we get through the end of the book of Revelation and the end of human history. And sometimes in that battle between God and Satan, you and I as God's people, like Job, actually become the battlefield. And that's what was happening to Job.

You see in this battle between Satan and God over Job, not only does Job become the battlefield but Satan has a very interesting accusation which he levels against God. Satan's argument to God is, *"Well of course Job loves you. Of course, Job worships you. Look at all the goodies you've piled on him! You've given him absolutely everything. Why shouldn't he love you?"*

Satan's argument is that God's kingdom is based on expediency. *"As long as you keep giving the goodies people will always love You. Take away the goodies and people won't love You or obey You any longer."* That's his argument.

And so God says, *“You think that’s how I build My Kingdom – on the basis of expediency? I’ve got news for you. And we’ll test it out with this man, Job.”* It’s an incredible gamble. Philip Yancey calls it “a cosmic gamble” because God puts His own divine reputation on the line over this one man’s response to what Satan does to him. And that man doesn’t even know what’s going on! God says to Satan, in effect, *“I’m going to show you by what happens in Job’s life that a righteous person can love God without any reward and can continue to have faith in God even in the midst of misunderstandings about God.”*

Job in 13:15 expresses that kind of faith, *“Even though He (that is, God; he thinks God is his enemy; he doesn’t know Satan is doing all this) even though God kills me yet will I trust Him.”* Phenomenal statement of faith. And as Job comes through this terrible testing successfully, he proves to all the cosmic powers, and Satan in particular that God’s kingdom is not based on the obedience of expediency; it is based on the obedience of love. And Job continues to love God, to trust Him even though he can’t understand at all why any of this should be happening to him. That’s the dramatic dialogue in the main chapters of the book.

Then the third section of the book is an epilogue, a conclusion that helps us to understand the full picture. And in that epilogue God approves Job, and disapproves of Job’s comforters, his friends. In that approval we see that God multiplies Job’s wealth and gives him back double what he had in chapter one. So, for all of his livestock, he gets double in every case.

And when it comes to his family there’s a very interesting thing – he doesn’t get 20 children. He just gets 10 more, 7 more sons and 3 more daughters. But his family has doubled just like his livestock have doubled. Oh, the first 10 are dead but they’re not dead and gone into dust forever. They live on in eternity. It’s a very interesting hint that there is a sense of eternity. He has 10 children somewhere waiting for him. And here’s another 10. His family has indeed doubled. God does it to show that He approves Job at the end of the story by what happens to Job in terms of his physical and family life.

And by that, we see very clearly that for the godly sufferer there is a reward. For Job it has to come in this life so that it can be recorded, and we can see it and we can get a

sense of what is the principle involved here. But it doesn't mean that our reward may necessarily come in this life. For the godly sufferer there will be a reward, but it may not be here; it may be in the life yet to come. But it will come. It will absolutely come. The New Testament makes it very clear that God has crowns of reward for those who will be faithful to Him.

4. Satan

In the midst of all that's going on in the book of Job, we need to note this very important character: Satan. What is interesting is that Satan, Lucifer, appears 19 times in the Old Testament and 14 of those 19 are in this book. Only 5 other times do you read about Satan in the Old Testament.

So, this book highlights the focus on this evil personality in the oldest book in the world, clearly revealing that Satan is the personal enemy of God and the personal enemy therefore of all God's children. What this book says about Satan is a real part of the actual history that's recorded here. It's not just legend or myth or some kind of example to help us understand some other kind of reality. Luke 22:31 in the words of Jesus make it very clear that Satan is a real person who really had this conversation with God about a real man named Job.

Let's go back now and take a look just quickly at the 'miserable comforters' to summarize the content of their arguments.

5. Characters and Arguments

Eliphaz – he's the leading spokesman of the three, undoubtedly the oldest of these friends. In Middle Eastern culture the oldest has the right to start speaking first. Eliphaz takes that right. And as he does so then it's not surprising, as the oldest, that he bases his arguments to Job on experience. He's got the most experience of any of them – he's the oldest. So he says, *"when I look back on life, here's what I've always seen. This has been my experience and this is how it is."*

He is the moralist as a result, or perhaps the voice of philosophy. If you want to encapsulate his argument in one short sentence it would be like this: *"If Job had not*

sinned, then he would not be suffering.” For Eliphaz, it’s as simple as that. It’s a moral dilemma. Job has sinned – that’s why he’s suffering. If he hadn’t sinned he wouldn’t be suffering. Cut and dried, black and white, game over. If Job would just admit that he’s a bad guy we could get on with life here and get back to our businesses in the Middle East. But Job won’t admit it because that isn’t the truth.

Bildad, the second character, is a legalist, in a sense the voice of history. And he rests his argument not on experience but on tradition. What has traditionally been the case as far as he can see, and based on his studies in the history of other peoples. This leads him to take a legalistic view saying, *“Job must be sinful because he is now suffering.”* So, it’s clear, just like Eliphaz’s statement. It’s absolutely black and white. This is the legal situation.

Zophar is probably the youngest of those three. Interestingly enough, he becomes the dogmatist. A blunt dogmatist. The other two at least used some diplomatic language at the beginning of the cycles of dialogue; it deteriorates after a while, but they had some semblance of diplomacy. Not Zophar. He had to wait a long time for the long-winded speeches of the other two to get finished. By the time he gets his chance... kaboom! He just bursts in, bluntly, dogmatically stating his case.

He becomes the voice of orthodoxy basing his arguments not on experience or on tradition but on assumption, which also leads us to suspect he’s the youngest of the three. So, he’s assuming lots of things that he doesn’t know by personal experience or by other exposure. And his word to Job and the others is simply *“Job is a sinner.”* There’s no doubts, no buts, ifs, or maybes. Job “is”! Zophar is very dogmatic. *“And he deserves his suffering.”* Full stop, game over. Can you imagine how blessed and comforted you would feel if you were Job in that situation and this guy who is supposed to be one of your friends – you used to play tennis with him every Saturday afternoon – and now he comes along and says, *“You’re a sinner and you deserve what you’re getting!”* Wow! Rugged!

Then Elihu, certainly the youngest of all four but not really an integral member of the group of three. He appeals to Job to have submissive patience and to have faith in God.

He gives a reasonably good diagnosis but he doesn't go far enough and he wanders all over the place in his speech.

The basic problem with the arguments of all these counsellors, especially the first three is this: their philosophy and their doctrine, their understanding of life and the world and what's going on around them contains no horizon outside of this material world. They live in a box that's bounded by the material world. And everything they talk about is based on what they can see or experience or experiment with here in this material box. They don't have a horizon beyond the box. And that's the basic problem with their arguments; they don't see properly. In fact, they see very simplistically.

Their basic argument over and over again, although there are shades of differences among them, is the same every time: cause equals effect. Sin brings suffering. Job is suffering. Therefore, he's a sinner. Cause produces effect. Simple! Well, it's less than simple, it's simplistic because that doesn't take into account all of the factors. Only the factors they can see and understand.

In my personal study through the book of Job, at one point I made two columns on a piece of paper and wrote down everything that the four guys said about God in one column and everything Job said about God in the other column. It was an interesting list by the time I got to chapter 42, because one list was really long and the other list was really short. Who had the short list?

It was these comforters. They all say the same things about God, just a few little basic statements. But Job, when he talks about God, his view of God is complex. He goes on and on with many different concepts and views about who God is and the character of God. His view of God approaches something of the complexity of who God really is. Nobody can touch how truly complex God is. We can't begin to understand Him.

But the problem with these comforters of Job was that they thought they could. They thought they had God in their little box and they could understand God completely. They could understand how God does everything and they're there to tell Job how it works. And they were wrong! When God shows up He says clearly, "*These men have said what was wrong.*"

I went back again to my lists when I came to that sentence, and asked myself, “*How can that be? What they’re actually saying about God is true.*” But God said that the things they said about Him were wrong, because their view was too simplistic. They didn’t have a proper view of the greatness and complexity of God at all.

Larry Richards suggests that Job’s friends preferred to “*distort reality in order to hold on to a flawed theology, their idea of God.*” The reality was that Job was good. God said, “*Job is good, he’s upright. There’s nobody righteous like him in all the earth.*” That’s the reality. These friends didn’t see that reality. They chose to distort the reality of who Job was so that they could fit him into their box of theology which said, “*Job must be a sinner because he’s suffering.*” So, they squeezed this righteous man down into their little box of confined suffering in order to hang onto their idea of theology, their concept of God. They made a God of their beliefs and they refused to re-examine them.

Job, on the other hand, challenged his own views of God. He challenged his views of God over and over again. He questioned God. He argued with God. He fought with God. But he never gave up his trust in God. Ah, what a phenomenal difference of approach between these characters!

You see, our trust must be in God, not in our view of God, not in our theology, not in what we think we understand about Him. That isn’t it. Our trust must be beyond that; it must be in God Himself, whom we cannot understand. And Job has that kind of approach. I think it’s one of the most important lessons in the whole story.

In the next and final session on Job, we find out what happens when God shows up. And we will note some principles about pain and suffering.
