

Job: Suffering in View of the Cross  
Judgment  
Job 4-5, 8

Jesse Carey, in a recent article in Relevant Magazine, titled, “Showing Grace in the Era of Outrage,” said that “It is hard to love your enemies when you spend most of your energy being angry at them.” He went on to say, “When we don’t reserve our anger for genuine cases of injustice and victimization, our outrage loses its power.” Some things are worth our outrage. Many are not.

Are you as weary as I am with “moral outrage” being expressed 24/7 by immoral people? That is not an indictment on specific individuals; that is an indictment on the entire human race! We are all immoral at the core; totally depraved. If you are not outraged by my comment, someone will be when they hear the podcast – “How DARE you call me immoral! I will have you to know I do not cheat on my spouse, I do not cheat on my taxes, and I serve at the homeless shelter once a week – not once a month, but once a week!”

That is very nice and I am glad to hear it. But, you need to know that you are a sinner, hopelessly and helplessly lost without God unless *he* intervenes in your life. That is not my view of things. Those are the words of Scripture. “Oh, no! Scripture tells me that if I am a good person then I please God and he will accept me.”

Scripture doesn’t say that, though. Oh, there is enough that can be read a particular way to make a case, but you do not have to look too deeply in the Bible to see that apart from Jesus, not one of us is any better in God’s sight than is the worst sinner we know. “But I was taught and I have believed my whole life.” Indeed! Furthermore, if we can find something about someone else that outrages our moral sensibilities, we will feel better about ourselves ---- won’t we? That has been the false cry of the ages – live as you should and all will go well with you. If someone suffers, no doubt, it is karma. He deserves it in the big scheme of things.” But, the closer error is to truth, the more dangerous it is, don’t you know?

If you are here for the first time, you most likely think this is a rather bold introduction – and, it is, indeed, but it comes as we begin to move to the middle part of our study about suffering in the book of Job, where many of these very questions were being raised. Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection were likely some 2,000 years in the future when Job suffered as he did, but as is true in all of the OT, God was pointing to Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross for sin and for sinners.

That is why we began the series with the hope of perfection in eternity that is promised for those who believe in Jesus, as taught in Romans 8. You should never read an OT book without considering NT truth. The historical drama recorded in the book of Job begins with a conversation in heaven about Job. God brags about Job to Satan, who says, “No wonder he is so good – you have blessed him like no other. Take it all away, including his health, and he will curse you to your face.” Job didn’t know any of this, of course, when disaster after disaster hit him. He lost everything, yet praised the Lord. Initially, that is. But the suffering didn’t go away. His friends – and, every indication is that these were good friends – Eliphaz, Bildad, and

Zophar, came to comfort him. But Job and his three friends just sat in silence for seven days until Job finally said, “This really hurts – I wish I had never been born.”

Today, we will begin to hear the “comfort” that these three men offered Job. They came from lands that were known for the wise men who lived in them, but their collective conclusion was one of judgment – God was meting out justice on Job. Job’s three friends had a simple understanding of God and how the universe works: 1. God is good, 2. God always does what is right; 3. God rewards righteous living and punishes evil. With such an understanding, Job’s friends easily concluded that Job must have secret sin in his life and he was finally getting his just desserts. They were quite smug in the judge’s seat, and when Job refused to agree with their judgments, they were morally outraged.

Since we are looking at general themes in Job, most of the texts that we will read between now and the climax of God’s speech and Job’s response will be representative in nature. Today our focus is on judgmental attacks from Eliphaz and Bildad. In a few weeks we will hear from Zophar, whose speeches will drip with condemnation. Today’s reading will come from the fourth chapter of Job. Look for these thoughts in what is only half of Eliphaz’ first speech to Job: 1) You have been a pretty good guy, Job; 2) However, you must have done something wrong because God does not punish the innocent; 3) In fact, God, in the form of a spirit, spoke privately to me in a vision and told me so. Are you ready for Eliphaz? Please stand as the Word is read – Job 4. I will be reading from the ESV:

1 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 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 plow 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.

10 The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,  
the teeth of the young lions are broken.

11 The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,  
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

12 “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 God?  
Can a man be pure before his Maker?  
18 Even in his servants he puts no trust,  
and his angels he charges with error;  
19 how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,  
whose foundation is in the dust,  
who are crushed like the moth.  
20 Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces;  
they perish forever without anyone regarding it.  
21 Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them,  
do they not die, and that without wisdom?’

And thus, concludes, the extremely kind and gentle section of the speeches Job heard from his three “comforters.” Let’s pray.

Someone said, “In the beginning God made man in his image and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since.” And, that is exactly what Job’s friends did! They fashioned a God that fit their stories. “We are doing pretty well for ourselves, and why wouldn’t we be independently wealthy? We are morally upright men, we treat others fairly, and we are hard workers. We have never had as much as Job, mind you, but we do all right, and now, wouldn’t you know, it appears, we were better than Job all along! *Now* the truth is coming to light. Job, obviously you have sinned before our holy God and you had better do some repenting, son.”

It is a fearful thing to presume to speak for God. We had better let God speak for himself and not say anything about him that he does not reveal to us about himself. To speak wrongly about God – well, that is dangerous! Some of the meanest people you will ever meet are those who think that you have done something wrong and think that they have God on their side when they rebuke you.

One of the problems that bubbles just under the surface in a life of success and ease is that you begin to think you are responsible for all the good that has happened to you and that all of your judgments about the world are always right. Job knew better – initially. “Shall we receive good and not evil from the hand of the Lord? The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” In time, though, questions set it – “What did I do?” What is worse, Job’s

friends, known for their wisdom – truly – asked the same question, “What *did* you do, Job? Not only do we think that we can understand the ways of God, but we have sense enough to discern right and wrong. And you, sir, are wrong.” In the process of their rebuke, Eliphaz and Bildad said some cruel things. First Eliphaz, in Job 5:1-5:

“Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?  
To which of the holy ones will you turn?  
2 Surely vexation kills the fool,  
and jealousy slays the simple.  
3 I have seen the fool taking root,  
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling.  
4 His children are far from safety;  
they are crushed in the gate,  
and there is no one to deliver them.  
5 The hungry eat his harvest,  
and he takes it even out of thorns.

Eliphaz’ words here are not as direct as they might seem – he is encouraging Job to repent because those who do not, come to a bad end. What Eliphaz lacked in directness was covered with the first words out of Bildad’s mouth. Job 8

1 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.

Have you ever had people accuse you of sin like this? Do they, in fact, quote Scripture in their charge against you? Even worse, do they say that God told them something about you? Sounds like Eliphaz. Have you been tempted to do the same, to accuse someone of improper motives or of hidden sin? Best be careful. God does not take such accusations lightly. You don’t even know what God’s will for your life is until it has already happened, much less God’s will for someone else. I recognize that there are spiritual gifts that seem to indicate people are given unusual discernment about life in the body, but use such gifts with great care. The longer I go, the greater the burden on my heart when you ask me for advice, especially since most of the requests I receive for advice are about fairly serious matters.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” What we can know for certain about God’s will and about God’s ways is found in God’s word – in what he has revealed to us about himself and his ways. Everything else is speculation. Now, it may be educated speculation, rooted firmly in biblical principles and based on years of observing God work in your life and in the lives of others, but it is speculation. Be very careful when you

offer advice, and especially be careful about judgmental statements. Jesus himself warns us about that. Matthew 7:1-5:

“1 Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

Jesus is *not* saying that we should never make judgments about people, particularly with regard to their actions. In home groups, we will talk about times when we are called, as believers, to discern and make judgments about body life, so know that in Matthew 7, Jesus is not saying to never make biblically-based judgments. He *is* saying, though, to stay away from assumptions about others when you have no idea whether you are right or not. “I KNOW I am right!” Thank you for that, Eliphaz, but what is the basis of your certainty? Most of the time when we say things like, “I know what you are thinking,” or, “I see what you are trying to do, here,” it is because it is what we would be doing or what we would be thinking if we were in their shoes. Our suspicions of others, in fact, are often the result of an intimate knowledge of ourselves. Have you ever put two and two together and come up with six? All the time, right? Maybe you don’t question someone’s character because he or she is suffering, but maybe you subscribe to a stoic, American way of handling suffering and you think others should do the same – “Good gracious, man, get a hold of yourself!” There is a place for that, but be careful, especially if you have not suffered in the same way or at the same level as your friend. There is a place for grief in the life of Jesus’ disciples. Only, it is a grief that is undergirded with hope.

The accusations that Job’s friends leveled at him had a ring much like Satan’s accusations, although they took a different track than Satan. One of the reasons that many of us find it so hard to keep our hearts in the right places is because we feel so judged by others, and we are hard on ourselves, as well. That shouldn’t surprise us though. Revelation 12:10: And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.” There is information, here, and there is good news! Satan accuses us day and night before God’s throne, just like he accused Job. The more things change, the more they stay the same! But, just as in Job’s case, Satan does not have the final word. Nor do others. Jesus has the final word.

I want to close, today, by looking at a NT text that tells us a great deal about God’s purpose in our suffering and also about the judgment that took away Satan’s right – or anyone else’s right – to judge without biblical authority. Romans 5:1-11:

1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

We are justified by faith in Jesus, not by our good works. Job knew the mercy of the Lord and accepted the grace that God bestowed on him, but he still lived with a law schematic in mind – live as you should and God will bless you. That was, after all, the OT promise, and Job had none of the Scriptures, not even the OT Scriptures. He lived before any of the OT was written. Who knows, before all of this happened, Job may have been suspicious of others who suffered, but, something tells me that Job would have been gracious and empathetic, sincerely offering comfort and not assuming the worst about someone going through trials.

It is clear that God's favor was on Job, even though God allowed this suffering in Job's life. OT saints were saved the same way we are – by faith. "Abraham believed the promises of God, and it was counted as righteousness for him." Abraham was *made* righteous by God when he believed God's promises, and God's promises were always pointing to something more. Remember, Job's suffering was pointing to Christ, who would suffer God's wrath in our place. The benefit we have on this side of the cross is that we can rejoice, not only in salvation through Jesus, but we can rejoice in the promise that we have direct access to the Father! We can come directly into his presence at any time.

But, then, Paul says something that Job would have loved to hear. Verse 3:

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

I understand rejoicing in salvation and in access to the Father, but rejoice in suffering? Why? Because God is working through our sufferings to draw us closer to him. Suffering produces endurance. If you have suffered, you know that is true. When we first enter into difficulties in our "right-now, get out of pain, immediately kind of world," we panic and seek to – well, get out. But, over time, we grow patient, learning to trust God's heart and ways. That builds character, and character leads to hope, which is, in the NT, remember, almost always referring to our certainty that we will enjoy an eternal Sabbath rest, free from every form of suffering, with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

I used to think that it was a wrong motivation to want Jesus to return to earth simply in order to eliminate the pain. Then, one day, reading this passage, it occurred to me that one of the purposes of suffering is to make me homesick for heaven. Why desire heaven when you live in heaven? Until you don't. That's it, isn't it? Suffering reminds us that this world is not our home. We were made for eternity and, in Jesus, we will find rest.

When Satan judges you, when others judge you, remember, Jesus took your judgment so that you might have life. Would you stand and read, together with me, this marvelous truth?

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.