

Job: Suffering in View of the Cross
Condemnation
Job 20
Ephesians 4:29-32

Suffering is felt far more keenly when there has been little before, especially when suffering has been kept at bay by one's careful manipulation of resources to avoid calamities. Throw in belief in a God who promises that good things will be in abundance for those who follow him and you have ready-made disillusionment, at best.

One of the beautiful benefits of community is that we allow the one who is suffering to grieve properly – to cry out, even in anger or resentment because that will only be for a time. If you are a believer, it is not that you have to hold on to Jesus – he is holding on to you. One of the tangible expressions of his care is the church, his covenant community, the body of Christ, who holds your heart tenderly as members prepare meals, watch children, pray and cry with you, and gently point you to the loving God of Scripture.

When the body fails to provide comfort to one who is suffering, but, instead, makes judgments about the sufferer's spiritual life, based solely on the physical or emotional suffering at hand, it feels an awful like condemnation to the sufferer.

Condemnation is absolutely what Job received from his friends. Eliphaz began the speeches to Job with a clever outreached hand, gently appealing for Job to repent of whatever he had done and to find the ready forgiveness of the Lord. When Job said, "I haven't done anything," they began calling him a windbag and accused him of taking advantage of the poor, in order to gain his wealth, saying things like, "You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed." They just made it up! Job responded with sarcasm and the war of words was on, and, as you already know if you have been here for any of this study in Job, the war was hot. Job's friends made a judgment about his personal life based on the calamities that had come upon him. Job was defensive – both toward his friends and toward God. In the face of Job's defensiveness and obvious unwillingness to repent from what he clearly must have done, the attacks grow more pointed, to the point of, essentially, handing Job over to God for full condemnation.

Today, we will experience the wrath of Zophar, who attacked Job in chapter 20. Again, this passage is only representative of the assumptions that Job's three friends made about his spiritual condition. The longer that Job defended himself, the more certain his friends were about their assumptions concerning his sin. That ought to be a warning to us! As much because of the nature of this text as its length, I will ask you to remain seated as I read. Keep in mind as we read Zophar's words that much of what he says is right about God's judgment of sin – it is just that he was wrong about Job being under God's judgment and that means his words about God will be judged, by God, as wrong. Zophar was certain, as Bildad had been a few chapters earlier, that Job's suffering was evidence of God's specific judgment on him.

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

2 “Therefore my thoughts answer me,
because of my haste within me.
3 I hear censure that insults me,
and out of my understanding a spirit answers me.
4 Do you not know this from of old,
since man was placed on earth,
5 that the exulting of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless but for a moment?
6 Though his height mount up to the heavens,
and his head reach to the clouds,
7 he will perish forever like his own dung;
those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’
8 He will fly away like a dream and not be found;
he will be chased away like a vision of the night.
9 The eye that saw him will see him no more,
nor will his place any more behold him.
10 His children will seek the favor of the poor,
and his hands will give back his wealth.
11 His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
but it will lie down with him in the dust.
12 “Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
though he hides it under his tongue,
13 though he is loath to let it go
and holds it in his mouth,
14 yet his food is turned in his stomach;
it is the venom of cobras within him.
15 He swallows down riches and vomits them up again;
God casts them out of his belly.
16 He will suck the poison of cobras;
the tongue of a viper will kill him.
17 He will not look upon the rivers,
the streams flowing with honey and curds.
18 He will give back the fruit of his toil
and will not swallow it down;
from the profit of his trading
he will get no enjoyment.
19 For he has crushed and abandoned the poor;
he has seized a house that he did not build.
20 “Because he knew no contentment in his belly,
he will not let anything in which he delights escape him.
21 There was nothing left after he had eaten;
therefore his prosperity will not endure.
22 In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress;
the hand of everyone in misery will come against him.
23 To fill his belly to the full,

God will send his burning anger against him
and rain it upon him into his body.
24 He will flee from an iron weapon;
a bronze arrow will strike him through.
25 It is drawn forth and comes out of his body;
the glittering point comes out of his gallbladder;
terrors come upon him.
26 Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures;
a fire not fanned will devour him;
what is left in his tent will be consumed.
27 The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
and the earth will rise up against him.
28 The possessions of his house will be carried away,
dragged off in the day of God's wrath.
29 This is the wicked man's portion from God,
the heritage decreed for him by God.”

Let's pray.

Tullian Tchividjian said, “The Devil’s masterpiece is not the prostitute, but the Pharisee.” And it is SO very easy to become the Pharisee! Not only is the believer *able* to make judgments about others, but we are commanded *to* make judgments about others!

Job’s friends are confident in their assumptions about him and vicious in their attacks. “There is no such thing as suffering apart from punishment.” “You are the victim of your own schemes – you will be blown up by your own bomb, and when you die, you will go straight to hell, where you will experience the terrors you so richly deserve.”

It is ironic that Job’s friends would attack him as they do when they acknowledged his kindness to others who were suffering. At the very beginning of their speeches to Job, Eliphaz had said, in Job 4:4, “Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees.” Since Job was known for his kindness to those who were struggling, he desired it for himself and he only received unfounded judgment and condemnation.

Part of Job’s problem, with regard to his friends, was that he confessed his own feelings that God was against him. He possessed no theological category for redemptive suffering, and his friends made no effort to wrestle with the apparent contradiction of such suffering coming to one of the best men alive. When Job complained about the heavy hand of God upon him, his friends said, “Exactly! Out of your own mouth, you are condemned, Job, yet you persist in proclaiming your innocence. Let us direct the arrows of God where they belong!”

Just in case you have forgotten this little reminder from Tullian Tchividjian, “The Devil’s masterpiece is not the prostitute, but the Pharisee.” You can say, as Eliphaz did early on, “We have discussed all of this and know that what we are saying is for your good,” or, you can say, as Bildad and Zophar did, in so many words, “I am not sure that hell has ever had a more worthy

occupant than you will be, Mr. Phony, Baloney Job.” The difficulty in identifying a Pharisee is that he or she combines a broad knowledge of Scripture with an outward morality that will stand up to any test. But, none of us is without sin, and the better we are, the greater the danger to forget that any righteousness we possess is not our own, but comes from the one who bore the wrath of God against sin in our place.

Indeed, with Job, it seemed very much as though he was experiencing the wrath of God – wrath that felt very much like condemnation. Listen to how Job describes his agony in Job 16:9-11:

9 He has torn me in his wrath and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.
10 Men have gaped at me with their mouth;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.
11 God gives me up to the ungodly
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.

Have you ever felt as if God is flat-out against you? Likely, you have, but I doubt you have ever felt quite like Job felt. Does this remind you of anyone in the NT? Does Jesus come to mind, possibly? Listen to what Christopher Ash says about this text:

“Yet again we see this terrible loneliness of Job fulfilled in the mockery of Jesus – the Roman soldiers abusing him (Matthew 27:27-31), the strange alliance of the Gentiles with Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:5-6, 27, fulfilling Psalm 2:1, 2) all massing together against him, free to do so with impunity because the Father has forsaken the Son and abandoned him to the mockery of the people.”

Even though Job senses the wrath of God, he knows that he has been forgiven of his past sins and that the accusations of his friends are unjust. In Job 19:28-29, he offers a warning to his friends: be very careful about wielding the sword of judgment – it is a double edged sword.

28 If you say, “How we will pursue him!”
and, “The root of the matter is found in him,”
29 be afraid of the sword,
for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
that you may know there is a judgment.

If there is no room for undeserved suffering, in the theology of Job’s friends, there is certainly no room for undeserved grace. That is a good word for us, is it not? If there is no room for undeserved suffering in our theology, there is no room for undeserved grace. Were Job’s friends believers? We don’t know, for sure. Do you remember Eliphaz’ words, from 5:13, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness?” Guess who quoted those words? Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:19. Once again, it is not that Job’s friends were wrong about God’s judgment of sin – it is just that that they had no room for grace. At the end of the book, God will tell Eliphaz that that the only

hope of forgiveness for him and his friends is for Job to mediate for them by offering a sacrifice and praying for them, which Job will do at their request. We must assume, since the Lord accepts Job's prayer, that the three friends are believers. God, deliver us from such friends! Yet, they exist within the body of Christ, which is why the NT spends so much time saying to believers, in so many words, "Quit acting like Pharisees! Live according to gospel principles, with the grace that has been extended to you." Truly, our prayer should be, not, "Lord, deliver me from such friends," but, "Lord, change my friends." Actually, there is a more specific prayer that we should offer: "Lord, please keep me from being a Pharisee. Fill my heart and mind with so much grace from you that it overflows toward my brothers and sisters in Christ, and to those who do not know Jesus."

Ephesians 4:29-32 is a good place for us to land today as we seek to avoid a spirit of condemnation toward others:

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

When Paul says not to allow corrupt talk to come out of our mouth, he is using a word that is associated with rot, as in, "Do not allow rotten, putrid, or filthy language to be associated with you." Obscene language, gossip, judgmental language – it's all wrapped up in this word. That does not mean no accountability – indeed, the Christian life cannot be lived without accountability! Please understand my comments from last week – I am not against accountability, I just have concerns about certain accountability groups where members are encouraged to express disappointment with the behavior of others, whom they may or may not know, well. Without question, we are commanded by Scripture to call those who sin openly to account, but in our day to day life as the body of Christ, we are to put far more energy into building up and forbearing and forgiving than we are to rebuking others for what we consider a less than exemplary life. Why? Because we are called to be conduits of God's grace to his children, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Another strong motivation for avoiding corrupt speech is that such practice grieves the Holy Spirit of God. It is true that when God sees us, he sees Jesus, and he is pleased. It is also true that when we quarrel with one another, the Holy Spirit, who calls us to unity, is grieved, just like a parent whose children are at odds with one another.

Verse 31: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

- Bitterness – sour spirit and sour speech (some people have that kind of day; some people have that kind of life)
- Wrath – passionate rage

- Anger – settled and sullen hostility
- Clamor – excited shouting in a quarrel
- Slander – speaking evil of others, especially behind their backs

Augustine hung a plaque on the wall by his table that had these words: “He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table.” Now, what, pray tell, will you talk about at lunch today?

- Malice – wishing ill will; plotting evil against

Is this how you wish to be categorized by others? I cannot imagine that you would. You may not mind others thinking that you are a person who speaks his or her mind, but no one wants to be known as one who is careless with his or her speech. Instead, let us have – the spirit of Christ. Verse 32:

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

There is so much negativity in our world today. No wonder that the world takes notice when someone exudes and extends the grace of God through Jesus! Unfortunately, it is rare to experience such grace at deep levels in the church. Oh, there are people here who would fit this description perfectly – on Sunday mornings or in home group. But, at the core of your being, are you more like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, or are you more like Jesus? If you are a follower of Jesus, you are called to allow his love, his kindness, his forgiveness to flow through you to others, particularly to the other members of God’s covenant community. If you struggle in this area, God is calling you, today, to be more like Jesus. You know what the great encouragement in this word is? *He* wants *you* to be more like *Jesus*. When unbelievers observe that we treat one another in these ways, they will want some of what we have, and what we have is really *who* we have – Jesus.

Much of the suffering you endure in this life is designed to make you more like Jesus. It is also true that much of what you endure comes at the hand of others. Rather than growing bitter because of the ways you are treated, be kind and forgive. You may need to draw lines with others – that is part of accountability – but, always live with kindness and tenderheartedness, forgiving others as God, in Christ, has forgiven you. Treat others, not as you think God would have you treat them – although, you should – but extend the grace and forgiveness to others that God has freely given to you. Let ‘s pray.