

“The System”

Job 7:7-11-8:10; 8:20-9:4; 9:13-35

Intro: Well, here we are in our 4th week of Livestreamed worship. And this coming Tuesday will mark 2 weeks of “shelter in place”. In other words, we’ve been at this long enough to start to feel the impact of this pandemic in real and personal ways. Most of us would agree that there have been some happy surprises along the way: the ability to have supper together as a family, time to read books, take walks or complete some home projects.

And there have been some less happy surprises:

- maybe the discovery that you had been living at such a frantic pace that you had neglected your soul.
- Maybe you’ve found that your marriage isn’t as healthy as you thought it was or that your family isn’t as unified as you had assumed.
- Maybe temptation to a besetting sin has returned and you aren’t as strong as you thought you were.

Times of suffering often exposes things we wouldn’t ordinarily see.

One of the things that surprised me about the suffering of Job is how God uses it to expose the false assumptions and mistaken faith of Job’s three friends. They come to Job to comfort him but spend most of their time accusing him of sin. Consequently, not only do they fail to comfort him, they offend God! Little did they realize; as they were analyzing and indicting Job’s faith, God was analyzing and indicting theirs. In the end, God angrily rebukes them and Job has to offer a sacrifice to cover their sin!

This morning’s sermon is really ‘Part 2’ of last weeks. In the speech of Eliphaz, we discovered a religious and moral worldview that Ash calls “The System”.

I. The System

The book of Job invites us to sit in on the conversation between Job and his friends as they debate the reason for and solution to Job’s suffering. For Job’s friends, the issue is straightforward and can be explained in three easy steps:

1. God is absolutely sovereign – he is the primary cause of both good and evil.
2. God is also perfectly just. He punishes evildoers and blesses the righteous.
3. Job is being punished *by God* – therefore Job must have sinned. In their mind, nothing could be clearer. This is the way the moral universe works.

4. However, just as the **cause** of Job's suffering is clear – so is the **solution**. Job needs to repent. These men believe that God is merciful to those who acknowledge their sin and so, if Job will just humble himself and confess his sin, God will bless him once more. Their speeches therefore are repeated attempts to get Job to confess his sin and place himself once again under the sunshine of Gods' blessing.

In chapter 8 we have the first speech of Bildad. Bildad is most likely the youngest of the 3 friends. He's also the rashest. He is an eager young man with more answers than insight. He bit his tongue while Eliphaz tried to straighten Job out. But Eliphaz clearly failed – and Job's response has left Bildad bursting at the seams.

Now, to be fair, Job has said some hard things about God and to God.

¹⁶ I loathe my life; I would not live forever.

Leave me alone, for my days are a breath....

²⁰ If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?

Why have you made me your mark?

Why have I become a burden to you?

²¹ Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?

Job is writhing under the pain of Gods' dealings with him. He doesn't deny that he is a sinner – but he cannot reconcile his devastation with any of his sins.

- And why does God care anyway? What harm could our sin possibly do to the Uncreated, Eternal Ruler and Lord of all Things?
- And if Job has sinned – why won't God pardon him??

Job seems to be charging God with unjustly tormenting him – which is precisely how it feels! But Bildad can't believe what he is hearing. His speech begins with a sense of shocked incredulity.

"How long will you say these things?!"

Does God pervert justice?

Does the Almighty pervert the right??

These are rhetorical questions. "Does God pervert justice?" The answer, of course, is, No. God only does what is right and good. Bildad is absolutely correct in his affirmation of God's impeccable justice – and he's correct to be offended at the suggestion that God would act unjustly! But he is absolutely, and wickedly wrong, about Job.

You see, Bildad, in his own mind, has this whole thing figured out. There is no mystery here: God is just. Job is suffering God's punishment. Therefore, ipso facto, Job is wicked. This is as evident to Bildad as the nose on his face. Job is suffering because Job has sinned. In fact, Job's dead children only got what they deserved.

⁴ If your children have sinned against him,
he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.

He speaks it as a hypothetical – but there is nothing hypothetical about it. Not with 10 fresh graves in the cemetery. Let's just cut to the chase, Job. Why did your children die?? Isn't it clear? God is perfectly just, and He has delivered them into the hands of their transgressions. They are paying for their crimes.

This is 'the system' in its purest and coldest form. Bildad has no *evidence* that they've sinned. He doesn't need evidence. Bad things happen to bad people. Good things happen to good people.

This worldview isn't strange to us. It is the default moral conviction of all mankind. This conviction is catechized through well-known "proverbs".

- What goes around comes around.
- Your sins will find you out.
- Christopher Ash mentions a Peanuts cartoon where Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "There is one thing you're going to have to learn: you reap what you sow; you get out of life what you put into it, no more and no less." Snoopy mutters from the corner, "I'd like to see some kind of margin for error." (95)

Lucy is just a contemporary Bildad, speaking what is universally accepted as a fixed law of the moral universe. In Acts 28 we read of the Apostle Paul when he was shipwrecked on the Island of Malta. When he picked up some sticks to put on the fire, a poisonous viper latched on to his hand.

Acts 28:4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."

This is what you and I tend to believe. Haven't you ever suffered some great trial, or maybe a series of trials, one after another and you've thought to yourself, "God must be punishing me for some great sin." Maybe you've even said to God – "just show me what it is, show me what I've done wrong so I can repent and be done with this trial!"

This is man's default religious conviction. And it is what drives the counsel of Job's three friends. As the speeches progress they get more adamant about Job's guilt and more bold about charging him with wrong.

- Listen to what Zophar says in Job 11:6 (ESV)

11:6 "Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves."

Not only is Job suffering for his sins, he should be thankful he isn't suffering what he deserves! Wow, these are Job's **friends!**

- By the time Eliphaz gets to his final speech he is hurling angry accusations at Job!
Job 22:5–9 (ESV)

⁵ 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.....

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

None of this is true! GOD declared Job blameless and upright. So why do these "friends" torment Job this way??

Imagine being arrested simply for being a Christian, thrown into a dirty prison, and then having angry men yell at you, charging you with all sorts of wicked crimes you would never dream of doing - and demanding that you confess your guilt! Then imagine your friends doing it. Do you see how twisted and evil this is?

How did these men end up doing these terrible things to Job? Because they are speaking out of their own legalism, religion and tradition – rather than out of a true understanding of God. They are doing to Job precisely what the Pharisees did to Jesus – accusing him of sin though he was without sin, all the while professing to speak for God.

One of the great ironies of the book is that these men think they are speaking for God, but they are actually speaking for the Devil. They are taking Satan's side – they have become accusers, which is Satan's very name and role.

Hywell Jones, "Job is facing more than human opposition here. The 'father of lies' is perpetuating a wicked distortion of the truth." (113)

One of the Devil's most effective weapons is to take what is true – for example, the perfect justice and righteousness of God – and use it as a weapon over the head of God's people. Nearly everything Job's friends say about God is true! But they use that truth to bludgeon a righteous man. Why? Because they have no grasp of God's grace.

Notice, even Bildad's encouragement for Job to repent, is couched in law.

8:5 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.

In other words, Job, if you just become worthy and pure, God will bless you again. You see, the "system" is fundamentally and inherently legalistic. ***It roots the relationship between God and man fully upon the moral worth of the man.***

But Job is coming to realize that the system isn't sufficient. We don't have time this morning to work through Job's response to Bildad. But notice how he begins in chapt 9.

9:1 Then Job answered and said: ² "Truly I know that it is so:
 But how can a man be in the right before God?"

And for the rest of his speech Job wrestles with the great gulf that exists between mortal man and the Eternal God. He wishes to appear before God and argue his case, manifest his integrity. But how can a man be in the right before God?

Job 9:32 *"For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
 that we should come to trial together."*

How can a mere man, a pitiful creature, possibly stand on trial before the Eternal God? We are a vapor, here today, gone tomorrow. And He is....God. The chasm between God and man is too vast, too great. And then we have this prophetic wish:

³³ *"There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both."*

In my ESV Bible there is a footnote here that shows this can also be read as a wish:

"Would that there were an arbiter between us!"

That's how the NIV translates it as well.

***"If only* there were someone to mediate between us..."**

If only there were a Mediator! If only there were someone who "might lay his hand upon us both". In other words, someone who could bridge the gulf between God and man. He would need to be truly man – to represent man. And he would need to be able to stand before God, to speak to God as His equal. If only there were someone like this,

someone who could reconcile the God in all his Eternal glory – and man, the flawed and fleeting creature. Job deeply senses that this is the only possible solution to his great need. He needs a Mediator to reconcile God to him; an Intercessor who could plead his case before God and make God’s face shine on him once more. Oh, if only!

And Job’s prophetic wish will be answered, won’t it. The whole point of the Scripture is to proclaim the good news of just such a Mediator.

- **1 Timothy 2:5** For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
- The gospel is the good news that “God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. (**2 Corinthians 5:19**)
- We have a Mediator, an Intercessor! Jesus is able “to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:25)

In the gospel we find the whole truth about God – both the truth concerning his justice AND the truth concerning his love and grace. The cross answers Bildad’s question “Shall God pervert justice?” with a thunderous repudiation. No, God shall not pervert justice. Never in the least degree! Justice **shall** be satisfied - even if it requires the sacrifice and condemnation of His only Beloved Son.

If you think that your sin is not a big deal, or that God’s holiness isn’t something to fear – look at the cross! God will not, ever, pervert justice!

But the glory of the cross is that, in the death of His own Son, God has made a way to be both infinitely just and the justifier of the ungodly. At Calvary, God does everything Bildad and his three friends promise – he punishes the wicked. But He does so in way they could have never imagined - by making the spotless Lamb bear our sin and suffering the penalty in our place.

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us – so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.” (**2 Cor 5:21**)

And that makes all the difference!

“When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Christ there, who made an end to all my sin!
Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free,
For God, the just, is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.”

Let me close with a very brief application, to help you see the difference this can make in your life.

Some of you have been living in 'the system' your entire "Christian" life. You live with secret fears and regrets because of past sins and present weakness. I know. I've done it. And when you counsel *yourself*, you sound just like Job's three friends.

"Try harder, Do better. You're only getting what you deserve. Don't expect great things from God. You are too great a sinner and too weak a saint."

Some of you have been taking the Devil's side for years – tormenting yourself with self-accusation and self-condemnation. You hope that somehow, sometime in the future you will be good enough to have a sense of assurance that God really does love you.

Friend, if I've just described you, then I have very good news for you. You've been living in the system. Jesus invites you into the gospel.

"God has, in Christ, **reconciled** you to himself, **not counting** your sins against you." Your life isn't driven by the consequences of your past sins and failures but by loving, purposes of your heavenly Fatherly. That doesn't mean there aren't consequences. But everything we would call a 'consequence', is actually a loving providence! Every single thing that will ever come into your life comes to you, not by chance, not by mere consequence, but by the loving hand of your Father in heaven. The driving principle that saturates and directs your life is not the law of sowing and reaping but the law of the gospel – Grace and peace multiplied to you in Jesus Christ! That's the gospel. Let's believe it. Let's live in it!