



Where Then Is My Hope?

Grappling with God: The Gospel According to Job #9

Job 15-17

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Job 15 contains another of Eliphaz's speeches to Job. We're going to focus more on Job's response to Eliphaz in Job 16-17.

This past week, you couldn't turn on a TV or computer without seeing several articles about Robin Williams' tragic death. More than in any other week I can remember, people have been thinking, talking and writing about depression because of this incident. When I was growing up Robin Williams was the genie in Aladdin, Mrs. Doubtfire and Peter Pan in the movie Hook. His popularity started with Mork and Mindy, a program I didn't watch. He went on to appear in dozens of movies and television shows and had a career in stand-up comedy.

I don't want to speak into that situation because there have been so many articles and things written about it. I don't want to over-simplify what was undoubtedly a complex life and situation. I bring it up because a lot of people this past week are thinking about despair.

In Job 16, we find Job crying out on the cliff-edge of utter hopelessness. He says, "*My face is red with weeping, and on my eyelids is deep darkness (16:16) ... my eye pours out tears to God (16:20) ... My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the graveyard is ready for me*" (17:2). He asks this haunting question: "*Where then is my hope?*" (17:15).

We are going to focus on two things in this message:

1. Job's despair
2. Job's hope

We will see in Job's despair two parallel thoughts:

1. God is not acting in the way I think He should (chapter 16).
2. There is nothing left for me but death (chapter 17).

These two thoughts are plaguing Job and leading him to despair. Yet in between those thoughts Job reaches for hope as he says there must be an Advocate.

Job's Despair

⁷ Surely now God has worn me out;
he has made desolate all my company.
⁸ And he has shriveled me up,
which is a witness against me,
and my leanness has risen up against me;
it testifies to my face.
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.
¹² I was at ease, and he broke me apart;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;
¹³ his archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare;
he pours out my gall on the ground.
¹⁴ He breaks me with breach upon breach;
he runs upon me like a warrior.
¹⁵ I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin
and have laid my strength in the dust.
¹⁶ My face is red with weeping,
and on my eyelids is deep darkness,
¹⁷ although there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.

Job has experienced an immense hurricane of suffering—severe, strong and constant. He lost everything he had—livestock, wife, children and health. His friends are turning against him. Yet I think this chapter is not merely describing Job thinking about the external, physical loss he has experienced. Job is feeling a deeper, internal suffering as if God is against him. He feels God is treating him like a hated enemy. He says to God, “You have worn me out, shriveled me up, torn me in Your wrath and hated me.” Beyond all that Job has faced externally is an internal

turmoil as he feels wrath from God. He describes God as a ferocious beast—a lion ripping him apart with His teeth and biting at him.

Job says something which gives us more insight into his struggle: “...*there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure*” (Job 16:17). In a sense, Job is struggling with the same question and worldview as his friends. “God, this would make sense if I were hiding something, had some unconfessed sin, were violent or impure and You were judging me for my sin. But this doesn’t make sense because—as far as I can tell—my sins are forgiven, my hands are clean and my prayers are pure. Why do bad things happen to good people? God, You are not acting the way I think You should. I’ve lived for You, honored You and worshipped You. Even when the heat of the first trials came and You took everything from me, I responded the right way. I said, “*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*” (Job 1:21). I passed the test.”

Although Job doesn’t say this directly, you can hear his struggle to understand why he knows his own desire to follow God but knows anger, wrath and punishment from God. He feels God is treating him like an enemy and it doesn’t seem right to him.

Every one of us has probably been there. If not, we are just not thinking about it. We cry out, “God, don’t do this. If I were You, I wouldn’t do it this way. Please don’t take them away. It doesn’t seem right because they are good people. I’m trying to follow You but why is my life like this? I’m trying to trust You, yet...”

Maybe you are miserable at your job and have been praying, “God, please give me an escape.” Every morning the alarm goes off and you dread getting out of bed because you hate the life God has given you in your work.

Or perhaps you feel financially enslaved. You don’t spend much and are trying to be careful, yet you have needs. Your children need clothes, you need food, your car needs repairs. You have been praying for work or better pay but it seems God likes watching you in your stress. You feel He enjoys seeing you have ulcers and sleepless nights of worry.

Maybe He has taken a loved one from you or afflicted you with some kind of sickness or disease which makes it impossible to do normal things. You might be in a marriage that seems like all work and no joy. Or maybe your kids wander away from God or get sick. At some point in every one of our lives, it feels like God is not acting the way we think He should. We think, “I’m trying to live for You and this is what You’ve given me?”

I’m going to pause for a moment and share something I struggled with as I worked on this message. In the beginning of this book, Job responds to his trial by saying, “...*blessed be the name of the Lord*” (Job 1:21). It says of Job, “*In all this Job did not sin or charge God*

with wrong” (1:22). But after God appears to him in Job 42, Job repents of his sin. It is difficult to know where in this book Job crosses the line.

He asks God for vindication and says these kinds of things to God. We read a chapter like this—where Job says, “God, You have hated me”—and have to ask if Job is sinning. I’m not really sure. I’m not really convinced that he is. It is my guess that Job is not necessarily charging or accusing God of hating him.

I don’t think this chapter is prescriptive. I don’t want to say everyone should say these kinds of things to God or that this is the example of Job. Rather, I think this chapter is descriptive of Job’s feelings and of many of our feelings.

I think Job’s honesty and vulnerability are commendable here. He is probably not expressing theological beliefs. Rather—out of a heart of suffering—he is crying out to God and explaining to his friends, “This is how I feel.” It is helpful to us in our suffering to know we have a God we can trust and come to when we feel this way.

I think it is helpful for us as we minister to and care for each other to understand how—in the middle of trials—we’ll say things that are not theologically accurate. Someone might say things like, “God hates me.” In that moment we may need to decide if it is a time to remind them of God’s love for them or simply to listen. Is it a time to say, “Job, you’ve just said heresy. Get ready for another boil”? We are learning throughout the book of Job both how to respond to trials and how to care for each other in the middle of trials.

I’m not really sure how to interpret Job’s words to God in this passage. I think we can know that they describe the way followers of God feel despair when God doesn’t act the way they think He should.

We are now going to jump to Job 17 and examine this thought: “There is nothing left for me except for death.” Here Job really expresses his hopelessness:

*¹“My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;
the graveyard is ready for me...*

*¹¹My days are past; my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart.*

¹² They make night into day:

‘The light,’ they say, ‘is near to the darkness.’

*¹³ If I hope for Sheol [the Old Testament word for ‘grave’ or ‘place of the dead’]
as my house,*

if I make my bed in darkness,

*¹⁴ if I say to the pit, ‘You are my father,’
and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister,’*

¹⁵ where then is my hope?

Who will see my hope?

¹⁶ Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?

Shall we descend together into the dust?”

The word ‘hope’ appears three times in this passage—once in verse 13 and twice in verse 15. Job is wrestling with this question, “Is there any hope for me?” He describes his spirit as “*broken*” and his days as “*extinct*.” He says there is nothing left to which he is looking forward and nothing he expects except death. He is staring into the doorway of death with uncertainty. He is certain it is coming but is uncertain what is next.

Dave DeHaan preached on chapter 14 and the question of life after death. Will a person rise again? Job is coming back to this theme in our passage, saying, “If all I have to hope for is the place of the dead, do I have any hope? Will my hope go down with me to the grave along with my vindication?”

There are many people in this world who believe that this life is all there is. You get this life and nothing else. You are merely a combination of chemicals or cells and when you die, it’s over. This is a nihilistic worldview that can take many different forms. It can sometimes lead to immediate cynicism or depression. If this is all there is, what’s the point?

Others think, “If this life is all there is, I might as well live it up and try to find as much pleasure as I can by whatever means possible.” That only lasts so long. I suppose someone could have a catastrophic death in the middle of their temporal pleasure. But more often, one will grow old and the ability to numb their pain with pleasure diminishes. Even in the middle of the life that feels good there are times—sleepless nights—when that question haunts. Is this all there is? Is there anything else? Any life after this death? Job is wrestling with that question.

For several reasons, this has been one of the most difficult sermons I’ve ever prepared:

1. It was difficult to work on because of the nature of the book of Job. There are some difficult texts in here.
2. As I studied Job’s discouragement, trial and despair, it triggered pain and sadness in me as I thought about my own trials and those of family and friends.
3. It was difficult because of the weight of responsibility in dealing with a topic as important as this. I know every passage in the Bible is important. I think there is a temptation to try to give quick, easy answers to this passage. I have been fighting this all week. I know there are people in this room who battle discouragement, depression and despair.

We are all tempted in different ways. Some battle daily a temptation to lie or give others a false impression. Some struggle with temptation toward constant self-centered thinking, others struggle with temptation toward one or another kind of sexual sin, some struggle with the words they say. We each struggle with different kinds of sins.

All of us will probably struggle at one point with mild forms of discouragement and depression. But there are some for whom this will be a battle for most or all of their lives. I want

to give hope and I think this passage does give it. Yet I've been wrestling with not wanting to simply say, "Believe in Jesus and you'll never be sad again." I think those types of quick, easy answers leave people feeling more hopeless when it doesn't happen.

Job's Hope

My desire is that you hear this and do find hope and that you hear it coming from love. There are people here who want to help. We've seen Job's despair, discouragement and hopelessness as he has felt God is not acting the way he thinks God should. Job has felt that nothing is left for him except death. He is asking if there is hope.

Yet in the middle of this, Job is reaching for hope. Job 16:18-21 says:

¹⁸ *"O earth, cover not my blood,
and let my cry find no resting place.
¹⁹ Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
and he who testifies for me is on high.
²⁰ My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
²¹ that he would argue the case of a man with God,
as a son of man does with his neighbor.*

Job is living in a time before Christ and likely before much—if any—of the Old Testament Scriptures were written. He couldn't open to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and read:

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away,
our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light
momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory
beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen
but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are
transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Wouldn't Job have loved to read these words? Job didn't hear a message preached from John 8:51 where Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.*" He had never read Romans 6:5 which says, "*For if we have been united with him [Jesus] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*" Job didn't have these kinds of truths revealed to him in the Scriptures.

Yet in the face of death and uncertainty, Job reached for hope. I want you to picture Job in his physical torment—sitting or perhaps lying down. His friends are there accusing him of sin. Keep this picture in mind as you think of Job. Think of what he has just said: "God hates me and has torn me in His wrath like a vicious beast. He is gnashing at me with His teeth."

Yet then Job reaches toward heaven and hope as he says, "*My witness is in heaven...*" (Job 16:19). This doesn't sound like the kind of faith that has no doubts. It is more like faith in

the middle of fog and gloom. Job is reaching for a truth he believes to be true. We will see in Job 19 that this confidence is going to build a more certain faith in Job. However, here in the middle of despair Job reaches for a truth. He says, “...*my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high*” (verse 19). We have even more certainty of this truth than Job had.

Look at what he says next: “...*[M]y eye pours out tears to God, that he would argue the case of a man with God*” (verse 20). Job knows God is the One doing this to him and is crying out to God to argue the case with Him. He wants an Advocate in heaven who will argue his case before God. He believes there will be justice.

Job also knows his sins are forgiven. I don't think Job ever claims that he has never sinned but that his sins are forgiven and he has right standing before God. He knows his hands are clean and his heart and prayers are pure. He knows of God's justice and mercy. He pulls these things together and says, “There must be an Advocate and hope.”

I want us to think of two applications as we finish:

1. How does this apply to me when I'm depressed?
2. How do I need to think about others who are depressed and facing despair?

Like Job, the writer of Psalm 42 is down:

³ *My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”*

The Psalmist is talking to himself and says,

⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?*

This is helpful to think of when you are in turmoil. You can identify with the Psalmist when you are struggling with discouragement. It's not that you sit there and think, “I want to be discouraged because I like being down and depressed.” Like the Psalmist, you're probably logically thinking, “I know these truths about God.”

The Psalmist says this to himself:

⁵ *Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation ⁶and my God.*

He also closes Psalm 42 this way:

¹¹ *Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.*

I know this is broad and that there is a danger of ending with, “Okay, I’m supposed to hope in God.” There are several truths we can cultivate in our minds and remember about our God when we are facing discouragement and despair:

1. There is a God Who is much bigger than us. Isaiah says His ways are beyond our ways and His thoughts beyond our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). He is sovereign and powerful.
2. He loves us. If we believe in and follow Him, then He has made a covenant promise that He delights in doing good to us (Jeremiah 32:40). We need to remind ourselves of this because it doesn’t feel like this sometimes. Job was experiencing some truths about God that didn’t line up with the way he felt about God. We need to remind ourselves that God does love us.

The gospel message is that Jesus—the God-man—died for our sins. He has redeemed us to believe in and trust in Him and there is coming a day when He will remove our sin, suffering, sickness, loneliness, anger, insecurity and depression. He is coming again to cast all of those things away. We need to remember that and find hope in truths which we believe about God but sometimes don’t feel.

How do we think about others? There were many posts this last week. Like Job’s friends, people were quick to give answers and thoughts. They said things that were sometimes true but not always helpful—even inconsiderate or untimely. There was one post by Ann Voskamp which I know some of you read. I don’t know much about her but she began with a story about a time when she was in a church and heard a joke about mental illness:

That’s what I’d wanted as a kid sitting there in a church full of folks chuckling at mental illness, what I wanted the whole church to say all together, like one Body, for us to say it all together to each other because there is not even one of us who hasn’t lost something, who doesn’t fear something, who doesn’t ache with something. I wanted us to turn to the hurting, to each other, and promise it till we’re hoarse:

- We won’t give you some cliché—but something to cling to — and that will mean our hands.
- We won’t give you some platitudes—but some place for your pain—and that will mean our time.
- We won’t give you some excuses—but we’ll be some example—and that will mean bending down and washing your wounds. Wounds that we don’t understand, wounds that keep festering, that don’t heal, that downright stink—wounds that can never make us turn away.

Let’s ask as we go through the book of Job that God would give us hope in a world which can sometimes feel hopeless. As we have that hope for ourselves, let’s desire to learn how better

to speak that hope to one another and to the world around us. There are many hurting people here and in our lives, among our friends and families. We have in Jesus Christ the hope for the world.

I pray God would give us eyes like Jesus to see the hurting and broken; that He would give us hearts like Jesus to come alongside people to speak the truth in a way that builds up and loves.

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