

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
The Book of Job
October 14, 2020

We have all had it happen to us; we’ve likely all done it at some time or another. Trouble happens and we feel we need to say something comforting, but it ends up not being so comforting at all.

- “I know exactly what you are going through”
- “On the upside, you are young enough to marry again”
- “God needed another angel”
- “God never gives us more than we can handle”

We are no different than those who came before us. After 7 days of silence, Job spoke his lament. That is followed by speeches from each of his three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. The speeches often begin with an introductory question which is followed by comments and thoughts on the question. Most speeches end with some attempts at comforting words toward Job in his misery.

Tempting as it is to dig into each of the speeches and mine out all the little nuances, we will content ourselves with a fairly high level overview of what each of thee friends has to say to Job. Below is a chart which shows the entire cycle of speeches.

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| FIRST CYCLE | ELIPHAZ (Job 4–5) | BILDAD (Job 8) | ZOPHAR (Job 11) |
| | Job to Eliphaz (Job 6) | Job to Bildad (Job 9:1-24) | Job to all three (Job 12:1-13:17) |
| | Job to God (Job 7) | Job to God (Job 9:25-10:22) | Job to God (Job 13:18-14:22) |
| SECOND CYCLE | ELIPHAZ (Job 15) | BILDAD (Job 18) | ZOPHAR (Job 20) |
| | Job to all 3 (Job 16:1-6) | Job to all 3 (Job 19) | Job to all 3 (Job 21) |
| | Job to God (Job 16:7-17:16) | | |
| THIRD CYCLE | ELIPHAZ (Job 22) | BILDAD (Job 25) | ZOPHAR (silenced) |
| | Job about God (Job 23-24) | Job to all 3 (Job 26) | Job’s soliloquy (Job 27-31) |

Eliphaz - You are Getting What you Deserve

Eliphaz appears to be the most senior and respected man present. His comment, at Job 15:9–10, indicates that all of the three friends are possibly a generation older than Job. Being first to speak, Eliphaz probably was the most senior. Job is addressing his elders, not just his peers. Eliphaz speaks gently and approaches Job with a tone of sympathy (Job 15:11) At first his manner is gentler than that of either Job or the other two friends. He seems to be trying to identify with Job as he brings his long years and experience to bear and speaks of the things he has seen In short, he is a caring, sympathizing, gentle old man dedicated to piety and wanting the best for Job.

His main argument is summarized in the following passages:

Job 4:7-8 “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.”

Job 5:6-7 “For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground, but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

“You’re being punished, Job. Actually, you should be thankful because this is God’s way of making you a better person.” To suffer as Job has suffered—such a catastrophic series of events—Job must have committed some great wickedness because only the most wicked would deserve such treatment. God is just. He would never do such a thing to a relatively good man (15:20–35; 22:4). And so Job’s protests of innocence, in Eliphaz’s way of understanding the world, are accusations against the justice of God. As such they are offensive to true godliness (15:4–6, 12–13). In the face of Job’s persistent assertions of his own righteousness, Eliphaz is driven to suggest a list of possible offenses Job has committed that would have brought about such suffering (Job 22:5–11; 13–20). These alleged offenses include:

- Stripping men of their dignity
- Refusing to feed the hungry
- Sending widows away empty-handed
- Breaking the fatherless

His final appeal to Job is to accept these troubles as a call to return to the Lord so that the Lord will relent from punishment.

Job 22:21-23 “Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you remove injustice far from your tents”

So, when hard times come, is it all your fault? Does God mete out punishment to get back at us for our errors. It can be tempting to see things this way. Satan wants us to focus on our sinfulness and to create doubt in our mind about God’s purposes. But Jesus encourages us to resist this simplistic response. In John 9 he meets a man born blind. The disciples want to know whether this blindness was the fault of the man or his parents. Was he being punished for his own sin, or his parents’ sin? Jesus rejects both ideas. This happened he said that the “work of God might be displayed in his life.” (John 9:3)

Bildad - You Don't Have Enough Faith

Bildad is quick to be angry and frustrated and gives sharp expression to his moral outrage (Job 18:2–4). He seems to be more impersonal than Eliphaz. And in one of the most callous outbursts of the whole debate, Bildad asks whether all this came about because of sins committed by Job's children (Job 8:4).

Job has forgotten God:

Job 8:11-14 “Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider's web.”

Job does not know God:

Job 18:19-21 – “He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live. They of the west are appalled at his day, and horror seizes them of the east. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous, such is the place of him who knows not God.”

Does God punish us for the weakness of our faith?

Zophar - Cheer up, it could (and should) be worse!

Standing third in line, Zophar is not tempted to display the patience of Eliphaz or to bother with evidence or experience or history. For him it is all a matter of obvious logic. He expresses direct outrage at Job's arrogance (Job 11:2–6; 20:2–3). As far as he is concerned, Job is an ignorant fool (11:7–12). His whole focus is to convict Job of sin, because the only way for blessings to be restored would be for a man to live a life without sin (11:16–19). Most cruelly, Zophar describes the experience of the wicked (20:4–29) in contrast with that of the righteous (11:20), and in so doing he virtually recounts Job's experience. Job then is the paradigm wicked man in Zophar's understanding. Most offensively, Zophar declares that Job's suffering is less than he deserves (11:6). Zophar begins as a man already frustrated by Job's failure to see reason, and so he is first to fall silent, in frustration and disgust, at Job's stubbornness and self-righteousness. One could picture him huffing and puffing with arms folded, face distorted with moral outrage, unable and unwilling to speak.

Job 11:5-6 “But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.”

Zophar does offer a path out of suffering, but it is all based on Job's actions.

Job 11:13-15 “If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away”

Zophar's second (and final) speech is pure anger at Job for his apparent stubbornness.

Job 20:29 “This is the wicked man’s portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God.”

With that Zophar is silent. ¹

Suffering and the Cross

Early in the Reformation, Dr. Martin Luther wrestled with issues of salvation, suffering, and divine punishment similar to those in the Book of Job. He noted that some theologians argued simply that if people obtained grace by doing righteous acts, God would reward them, and if people lived in unrighteousness, God would punish them. This approach to theology left little room for righteous suffering or salvation based on God’s righteousness.

Suffering and Righteousness

At the Heidelberg Disputation in April 1518, Luther presented the following points. They introduce a biblical perspective on righteousness and suffering.

The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

Luther went on to argue that theologians who taught people to seek God’s grace through good works and victorious living mislead people about how God works through suffering. They could never truly understand the good and the sufferings that the righteous experience in life.

He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

The Theology of the Cross

The righteous *do* suffer! And through their suffering God works His mercy and salvation. Later that same year, in his explanations of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther commented further on the theology of the cross:

A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all.... Indeed fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials” (James 1:2). For not all have this grace and glory to receive these treasures, but only the most elect of the children of God.”

When Trials Come

In this sin-broken world, you will experience suffering. When trials come, do not automatically conclude that God is punishing you for a sin. Certainly, confess and repent of whatever sins you know. But also entrust your body and life to the One who accomplishes His purposes in the midst of suffering. See the world with Job's eyes, and behold the countenance of Jesus, your Redeemer, who bore the price of your salvation.

Troubles are not always punishments or signs of wrath. Indeed, terrified consciences should be taught that there are more important purposes for afflictions (2 Corinthians 12:9), so that they do not think God is rejecting them when they see nothing but God's punishment and anger in troubles. The other more important purposes are to be considered, that is, that God is doing His strange work so that He may be able to do His own work.²

¹ These summaries of the arguments of Job's friends draw heavily on the following, Jackson, David R.. *Crying Out for Vindication: The Gospel According to Job (Gospel According to the Old Testament)* (pp. 82-83). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition

² Adapted from Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 837). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.