

Sermons from the Book of Job (I):

Prologue (I:1-5)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

The book of Job is an enthralling examination of the reasons behind the suffering of men and how a group of them try to figure out what caused one particular series of calamities in the life of Job. Through their curiosity and speculation, we begin to learn the right and wrong answers to some of our deepest questions. Hopefully, we also learn to trust God a little more and to loathe the devil a bit more as well. In this series of lessons, we want to study the text of Job with an eye toward understanding better the reason for human suffering, especially so that we might be better prepared when it hits.

Discussion

I. Background

A. Cast of Characters

1. Job is described by the educated, but anonymous, author of the book that bears his name as “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (1:1); Job was the husband of one and father of 10, a very wealthy man whose faith was recognizable and practical

2. Job’s wife is hardly mentioned, but she presents a counterpoint to his intention of suffering faithfully as she counsels him to curse God and die

3. Jehovah is the God and creator of the universe who touts Job’s faith as exemplary and who explains to Job and his friends the true reasons for human suffering

4. Satan is Job’s celestial adversary, who audaciously seeks to challenge Job’s faith in order to prove it was the result of a divine bribe from God

5. Job’s three friends each err as they come to console Job and end up presuming that he is secretly wicked while showing no sympathy at all

a. Eliphaz is the first and apparently most prominent of Job’s three friends, who come to console him when they learn how terribly he has been afflicted; he is supposedly a wise man and his original speeches reveal deep study, but even deeper misunderstanding about suffering

b. Bildad seems to represent an Eastern wisdom in his speeches and he has a way of ratcheting up the polite rebukes of Eliphaz

c. Zophar is the most impetuous and dogmatic of the three friends; his words seem exaggerated and his response to Job unkind

5. Elihu is a young man who has kept silent during the discourses of the three friends, but then tries to assemble their arguments against Job in a more powerful way

6. Miscellaneous characters include Job’s children and the messengers who bring Job such bad news

B. Setting

1. Job lived in the land of Uz, a place that may have been in either Edom or Syria

2. commentators speculate that he lived during the patriarchal age, rather than under the Law of Moses, and may have been a contemporary of Abraham

3. regardless, the book was written much later, possibly in the eighth century B.C., due to some similarities with another book of that era, Isaiah

C. Outline

1. Prologue (1:1-5)

2. Behind The Curtain (1:6-2:13)

3. Job’s Complaints (3:1-26)

4. First Round of Dialogues (4:1-14:22)

5. Second Round of Dialogues (15:1-21:34)

6. Third Round of Dialogues (22:1-26:14)

7. Job Affirms His Righteousness (27:1-28:28)

8. Job’s Claim of Innocence (29:1-31:40)

9. Elihu’s Speeches (32:1-37:24)

10. Jehovah Speaks (38:1-42:6)

11. Epilogue (42:7-17)

D. Why Study Job?

1. the book of Job provides the reader an opportunity to look behind the curtain at the sometimes comedic, always dramatic play that is human life
2. we see the often-secret roles played by both God and Satan in the hardships and blessings of mankind and come to understand better how we should respond and interact with them and one another
3. great questions are pondered
 - a. is the allowance of human suffering consistent with God's nature?
 - b. is God or Satan to blame for suffering?
 - c. can we prepare ourselves to handle suffering when it comes?
 - d. how should we respond to suffering, both ours and that of those around us?
 - e. what is the end intended by God?

E. What Is It All About?

1. while the writer allows us to see behind the curtain to understand why Job is suffering, Job himself cannot and so he spends most of the book trying to figure it out
 - a. his wife and friends present their own counsel, mostly faulty, until God himself speaks up in the end
 - b. the key is in seeing that the reasons for Job's suffering may likewise play a role in yours
2. Job is a piece of wisdom literature, with artistic language and expressions that invite the mind to imagine great illustrations
3. at the same time, its events are treated as actual historical episodes, dating from creation to Job's time, and the Bible treats Job as historical (see Ezekiel 14:14,20; James 5:11)
4. it is very important to remember that Job was written by an inspired person, but that the actual speeches of the human characters reflect their own misunderstandings of truth

II. Prologue (Job 1:1-5)

A. Job

1. Job lived in the land of Uz and is described in noble terms—blameless, upright, God-fearing, evil-shunning
2. yet he is also a blessed man, in that he has a large family and even larger assets; his household and livestock helped to make him “the greatest of all the people of the East”
3. his children—seven sons and three daughters—formed a close family who celebrated important days like birthdays together with feasting
4. for his part, Job played the role of concerned patriarch, for in the days before Moses, men like Job offered sacrifices themselves to show contrition for sin
5. Job feared that his children might have sinned and cursed God in their hearts and so he made an offering on their behalf
 - a. the matter of cursing God is an important one to this book, and we learn early on that Job has no stomach for cursing God
 - b. that loyal stance is going to be put to the test very soon

III. Some Applications

A. Integrity

1. Job is and will continue to be a man of integrity, but it is always easier to do the right thing when there are few costs and consequences
2. buildings and ships and bridges are regularly tested for integrity—structural soundness, that is—and the disciples of Christ will likewise be tested for integrity—spiritual soundness
 - a. blamelessness is the result of doing one's best not to sin and repenting openly, sincerely and completely when he has sinned
 - b. uprightness is the product of living according to God's word, in a way that is confident with no need for shame
 - c. the fear of God is healthy respect for our Creator, Savior and Judge as one who holds our eternal fate in his hands
 - d. shunning evil is the conscious decision to look evil in the eye without blinking, to turn

away rather than buckle under

3. integrity is about spiritual soundness

a. sound doctrine

1. sin is contrary to sound doctrine (First Timothy 1:8-11)

2. but sound words have to be grasped (Second Timothy 1:13-14)

3. not all will (Second Timothy 4:3-4)

4. sound doctrine is profitable for exhortation and conviction of those who contradict it

(see Titus 1:9)

b. sound mind

1. soundness of mind depends upon attention to truth (Second Timothy 1:7)

c. sound speech (Titus 2:6-8)

d. sound love and patience (Titus 2:1-2)

4. Satan rightly recognizes that spiritual integrity is tested by hardships, but God more rightly shows that such tests can prove and polish and strengthen one's soundness (First Peter 1:6-7)

B. Cursing God

1. Satan's goal is going to be to get Job to do what he feared his children might have thoughtlessly done—curse God

2. commentators differ widely on the meaning of the Hebrew phrase here, but it seems plain enough that he feared they might have forsaken God, attributing evil to him, in the interest perhaps of obeying pagan deities

3. there are many ways to curse God

a. to reject the fact of his existence; "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1).

b. to attribute to him evil acts (see blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12:22-32)

c. to show ingratitude for his blessings (Romans 1:20-21)

d. to sin willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth (see Hebrews 10:26-31)

4. only such shortsightedness as we seen in the book of Job could explain how men could curse God

Conclusion

In our next study in the book of Job, we will examine the events that lead to his struggles.

Sermons from the Book of Job (2):

Behind The Curtain (1:6-2:13)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

This second lesson on the book of Job brings us to midst of the action, but in reality, it mostly occurs backstage where Satan requests permission from God to try the patience and faith of the patriarch. What we learn by reading here is information that Job will not have as he responds to his trials. We must keep that in mind because sometimes the answers come easier to us who are not inside the trial and who know authoritatively that God is not to blame for them.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Satan Attacks Job's Wealth and Family (Job 1:6-19)

1. most commentators place the discussion between God and Satan in Heaven, but it is most unsettling to imagine Satan with such access to the very throne of God

a. it is more likely that a day of human worship is described (see Hebrews 12:7-8, Romans 8:14), on which Satan appeared in the presence of God on Earth, as much as God's presence is here in this building today, and Satan is also aware of our strengths and vulnerabilities

b. of course, this event occurs at some point after Satan was cursed in the Garden of Eden for tempting Eve and Adam to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil

c. this is his character and the reason that he was such a disappointment to his creator, who made all these celestial beings, some of whom chose through free will to pursue their own glorification

2. it is Satan who teased a hungry Jesus and craftily tempted him to give up his mission for instant self-gratification; Jesus exposed his ways (John 8:44)

a. he is the father of lies, with many devices at his disposal to entice people to serve him instead of fearing God and keeping his commandments to live (see Second Corinthians 2:11)

b. he is our adversary, who walks to and fro on the Earth like a roaring lion, seeking souls to devour (see First Peter 5:8)

3. it is God who brings Job to Satan's attention, but apparently Satan already knew about Job, for he reasons that the man is really only faithful because God has built a protective hedge around his heart—a hedge composed of blessings and possessions

a. Satan challenges God to let him afflict Job, believing that once the hedge is chopped down, Job would curse God to his face

b. although the terminology sometimes shifts regarding who will do the afflicting, it becomes clear as one reads that God only allows Satan to do the afflicting, and only under strict limitations

4. Job experiences a series of tragedies within a short time

a. a Sabean raiding party murders his servants and rustles his oxen and donkeys

b. a lightning strike kills his sheep and the shepherds with them

c. a Chaldean raiding party murders more servants and steals Job's camels

d. a tornado struck his oldest son's house, killing every one of his 10 children at once

B. Job Responds (Job 1:20-22)

1. we have heard the expression, "If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all."

a. but this is not about luck and few things really are; neither is this a coincidence

b. it is a planned event with a definite purpose

2. Job responds with traditional mourning and expressions of extreme sorrow

a. much of what was said about Job in the first five verses of this book is no longer true, for the better part of what Satan called a hedge has been defoliated

b. but what matters to Job and to God remains to be seen—will his integrity hold?

3. it does, for Job does not curse God to his face, but falls down to worship him and to confess that he still understands the transitory nature of such blessings

a. we understand that God did not himself raise his hand against Job, but that he did permit Satan to do so

b. Job does not charge God with any wrong, even in permitting the evil to occur

C. Satan Destroys Job's Health (Job 2:1-10)

1. Job has lost nothing of his character to the assaults of the tempter and in fact, he has also proven his integrity—that he will do right thing regardless of the immediate consequences or rewards
2. undeterred, Satan suggests that one thing remains, that if removed would convince Job to curse God—his health
3. again, Satan is restricted by God, even as the Lord permits him to assault Job's flesh; Satan cannot kill him
4. Satan chooses then to afflict Job with painful boils from his head to his feet
5. and although he killed all of Job's children and most of his servants, he has not lifted a finger to remove Job's wife, and for good reason; she is Satan's instrument to persuade him to curse God

D. Job's Friends Arrive (Job 2:11-13)

1. like good friends, Job's three come to visit him in the midst of his adversity
 - a. Eliphaz (see whose name means "God is fine gold") is a Temanite from northern Edom, a place known for its excellent wisdom
 - b. Bildad (see possibly "son of Hadad") is a Shuhite from a somewhere on the Middle Euphrates
 - c. Zophar (see meaning "young bird") is a Naamathite, possibly from northwest Arabia
2. ostensibly, they come to comfort him, but in the end, they do little comforting and more accusing
3. they are probably quite a comfort anyway, until they open their mouths

II. Some Applications

A. Satan And You

1. Satan is our adversary as much as he was Job's and Christ's
 - a. he has at his disposal knowledge of the will of God and the weaknesses of humanity and he spends his time trying to exploit the gap in between so that people will choose promises outside of the New Testament over those within
 - b. where the New Testament promises things future, eternal reward, Satan offers instant gratification through more convenient, self-serving and shortsighted options
2. he employs powerful deceptions, often making evil look tolerable and inviting (Second Corinthians 11:14)
 - a. forbidden fruit, for instance, takes on extra luster when Satan polishes it
 - b. he appealed to Jesus to take an alternate throne over Earth by serving Satan in life instead of his father through death (see Matthew 4:1-11)
3. it is Satan who tempts you, not God (James 1:12-18)
 - a. he thinks there is a hedge around your heart, too; maybe not as high as Job's, but high enough to keep you faithful in the short term
 - b. still, if he can gain permission to defoliate your hedge, maybe you will curse God, too
4. and so he exploits the things of this world that rival those of the next (First John 2:15-17)

B. Purpose and Providence

1. what would be the hedge around your heart that Satan would target?
 - a. would it be your job, your savings, your health, your children, your house?
 - b. at some point, Satan is going to take aim at one or more of them and how you respond will determine not only your current integrity, but also your eternal destiny
2. life has purpose and the events, large and small, are a part of that purpose
 - a. we must be sober-minded about both our blessings and our hardships, seeing them in the scope of what they mean for eternity
 - b. we need to avoid sweating meaningless details, getting too low when things are rough and too high when things are good; the imbalance tends to be when Satan strikes (Philippians 4:10-13)
3. for this reason, we need to redeem the time (James 4:13-17)
 - a. every temptation and hardship is an opportunity to grow and strengthen (James 1:2-8)
 - b. every blessing is an occasion to thank God and put the tangible in perspective against the intangible (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)

C. When Tragedy Strikes

1. but how will we respond when tragedy strikes?
 - a. our health is compromised by disease, our children are kidnapped or killed, our jobs are lost, our savings is stolen, our relationships are sundered?
 - b. maybe, behind the curtain, God has presented you for Satan to consider and Satan has made the challenge against your integrity
2. will you curse God for what is lost or praise God for what is left?
 - a. with loss of things, it is a matter of perspective (First Timothy 6:6-10)
 - b. with loss of people, it is a matter of faith and hope
3. Satan has been leashed since the ministry and atonement of Jesus Christ (see John 12:31, Revelation 20:1-3), so we know more about the temptation process than Job could have understood (First Corinthians 10:12-13)

D. Commiseration

1. we will discuss this more later, but commiserating with someone in the midst of tragedy can be a very necessary, but difficult proposition
2. sometimes the best thing is to be there and to listen
3. if there really is a need for reproof, be gentle and patient and consider how you would feel in the same circumstances and make allowances for what you hear

Conclusion

In the next lesson, we will see how Job responds further to his misery.

Sermons from the Book of Job (3):

Job's Complaints (3:1-26)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

By custom, it was Job's prerogative to break the silence of mourning, and this he does with words that seem awfully familiar to suffering people who live thousands of years afterward. Not only does Job curse the day in which he was born, wishing it had been skipped on the calendar of time, but he also openly expresses resentment for the tragedies that have befallen him. Job has suffered nobly thus far, but we cannot expect him to conceal the depths of his anguish forever. In his speech, we will likely find some of our own confusion and sorrow when hardship hits.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Job Regrets His Birth (Job 3:1-10)

1. some words require a great deal of explanation and then there are words that are almost universal in their comprehension

2. almost everyone has felt himself in such dire straits that life itself hardly seems worth living any more

a. here is Job, who has lost the possessions that made him the greatest man in the East and the family that brought him happiness; all that remains are some mysterious boils upon every inch of his flesh and a wife who is encouraging him to punch his ticket for Hell

b. the fact that he had enjoyed all those blessings before is no comfort right now, either, for one could not miss what he never knew

3. life is so precious and brief, but when it is marked by constant sadness, it seems like an unworthy and expendable commodity

4. some sadness is almost entirely spiritual—emotional and psychological—while other sadness results from physical maladies and tangible loss

5. whatever the combination, every man is susceptible to falling into this kind of regret and grief

B. Job Dreams of Rest (Job 3:11-19)

1. Job continues futilely wishing that he might have died at birth and joined one of four companies

a. notable kings and counselors who have died

b. rich princes

c. stillborn infants

d. weary, oppressed men

2. Job understands that in death, souls continue to exist until some future point, and in the interim, there is a state of rest and liberty from life's oppression

C. Job Admits His Problem (Job 3:20-26)

1. Job yearns to die and bring his life to a final conclusion, for he feels he has had enough and that things will never be better

2. he feels hedged in by God through the construction of a maze of misery that prevents his escape and ensures that he will wander deeper into darkness

3. in verse 25, Job admits that what he had greatly feared had now come upon him

a. he does not understand that Satan had studied him and discovered that vulnerability so as to exploit it

b. in his prosperity and joy, Job had concealed a driving fear that he would lose the things that warmed his spirit—his riches and his children, and now he has

c. this is why we learn that money cannot buy happiness and that even the wealthy who seem so insulated from the cares of life often harbor crippling anxiety about its loss

4. Satan has cut down the hedge around Job's heart, leaving the man to wander in a labyrinth of self-pity, but Satan has not been satisfied for Job has not succumbed to the pressure to curse God in return

II. Some Applications

A. What We Dread

1. are some or most of us harboring a powerful secret fear behind a façade of contentment?
 - a. we claim to be content with what we have and to have overcome worry through faith and hope, but is it possible that we have done so imperfectly?
 - b. for five verses in Job 1, it is impossible to imagine Job worrying about anything, until you read more closely
 1. in spite of the fact that he was blameless and upright, God-fearing and evil-shunning, his blessings presented a challenge to all that virtue
 2. in addition, his concern for his children's spiritual welfare exposed another vulnerability to the tempter—that maybe their loss would be too great for Job to endure
2. this is why Job admits, "For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me."
 - a. life is filled with blessings from God, some far beyond our basic needs and reaching into the realm of luxury, and there is nothing wrong with that
 - b. but those blessings can become inflated in importance, so that we secretly dread their removal and expose to the tempter our vulnerability (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12)
3. it is not uncommon for those who have lost young children to disease and death to curse God for Satan's affliction; it is not uncommon for those who have lost homes to fire or hurricane to curse God
 - a. some of them were even faithful people prior to the tragedy, but the blessings really were a hedge around the heart, that when removed, exposed a raw organ, ready to bleed
 - b. the danger of blessings is that their attainment and maintenance can begin to define our lives far more than the religion we practice (Matthew 6:19-25)
4. when we are haunted by fear and dread that blessings might be threatened or removed, we begin to protect them with carnal vigor, and if they should be taken, we are tempted to curse God

B. Future Rest

1. Job recognizes on a primitive level a hope for future rest after the point of death, what we understand today to be the Haden Paradise described by Jesus, and ultimately, a Heavenly reward (see Luke 16:19-31)
 - a. in Paradise, people like Lazarus, the penitent thief on the cross and Jesus himself were rewarded in the bosom of Abraham with rest until the day of resurrection
 - b. Jesus emerged from behind the gates of Hades long ago to live again eternally, and for all of mankind, there is an appointment with that destiny when Christ returns in the clouds to commence Judgment Day
 - c. Hades also provides a place of temporary torment for those who died without grace until Judgment Day dawns
2. Job longed to leave behind miserable life and travel to a place where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary find rest
3. but if Job curses God and then dies in that condition, he won't find the rest he sought at all, but instead torment; the same applies to us when we are tempted by misery to curse God and invite eternity (Hebrews 3:12-14, 4:1-2)

C. Vulnerability

1. Satan showed in Eden and in the wilderness that he seeks to discern people's vulnerabilities to use against them
 - a. he appealed to Eve's pride and hunger by offering her forbidden fruit that could make her wise like God and please her tastes
 - b. he appealed to Jesus to see his mission on Earth in new and more convenient terms, whereby he could become King over men without having to suffer and die
2. truly, Satan can discern your weaknesses as well, and use them against you (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - a. Paul turned his weakness into a strength by retreating into the arms of God every time that Satan twisted that thorn into his flesh
 - b. the only way that you will overcome your weakness and keep the adversary from exploiting it is by causing Christ to rest upon you in moments of truth—pray and meditate (Ephesians 6:10-12)

D. Don't Try Suicide

1. as bad as Job feels, there is not the slightest hint that he contemplates suicide, even though that might have been what his wife would have counseled
2. choosing to murder oneself is no less serious a crime than murdering another and it will not bring relief, but only a deeper and more lasting torment
3. no matter what you are suffering today, there is an answer
 - a. because Satan is exploiting your weakness, you have to find a way to turn it into a strength by intensifying your devotion to God
 - b. you have to hold onto your hope (James 5:7-11)

Conclusion

In our next lesson, Eliphaz will break his silence and begin to lecture the man he came to comfort.

Sermons from the Book of Job (4): Eliphaz Breaks His Silence (4:1-5:27)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

The book of Job is immensely instructive, in that it helps to explain God's and Satan's roles in the temptation of man. Simply put, God does not tempt anyone, nor can he himself be tempted with evil, but Satan is clearly permitted by God to test and try human beings who exist in a world corrupted by their own sin. Job bounds onto the Bible stage as the object of Satan's disdain and affliction, only to prove the reality of his faith even against the complaints of a few miserable counselors, including his wife. Chapters one and two have been analyzed often. In them, Satan dismisses Job's faith in the presence of God as being only proof that the Lord had built a hedge of happiness and prosperity around him. God agrees to allow Satan to destroy his prosperity, even his family and then to afflict his person to show whether or not Job would curse God and die. Only Job's wife is left standing, perhaps because she proved to be of greater service to the tempter, rather than the tempted. Job's friends then arrive, ostensibly to provide comfort and commiseration, only to hear Job rehearse the familiar wish to have never been born. Eliphaz is the first of the visitors to break his week-long silence and address Job; his speech is subtler than the others, but nonetheless reveals his confidence that Job was only getting what he secretly deserved.

Discussion

I. Job Chapter Four

A. Eliphaz Commends Job (Job 4:1-6)

1. Eliphaz the Temanite responds to Job's complaint because he feels like he just has to say something
2. he begins by rehearsing the former good deeds of Job's life and reminding the sufferer that before he had always been the counselor and helper of those in need
3. now the tables have turned and Job sits pitifully before them; it is always easier, of course to comment on what others should do, but harder to apply one's own convictions to one's own troubles
4. the most important words he says here are in verse 6; it is the kind of reminder we would issue to someone who has suffered the untimely loss of a loved one or who faces a terminal disease
 - a. your reverence for God has always been your confidence; would you cast it away when it is most severely tested and most desperately required?
 - b. the integrity of your lifestyle has defined your hope that God would uphold you; now you are down but not destroyed and are you prepared to surrender your integrity to give up on God?
5. this is the theme of all of Job's counselors to some degree, but Eliphaz is the least confrontational about the true reason for Job's suffering

B. Eliphaz's Theory (Job 4:7-11)

1. Eliphaz's theory is essentially that you reap what you sow, and we know that to be generally and ultimately true
 - a. Solomon and the inspired writer of the New Testament applied that concept to the matter of sharing (see Proverbs 22:8, Galatians 6:6-10), for one cannot be stingy with the Lord and his neighbor and expect to reap a bounty of spiritual growth and kingdom activity (see Hosea 8:7, 10:12-13; Matthew 7:16-18)
 - b. ultimately, of course sowing and reaping also holds true, for "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (Second Corinthians 5:10)
2. but does the concept of reaping what you sow, illustrated by the lions, apply to every particular instance of suffering and good fortune?
3. obviously no, for all men suffer temptations and the other pangs of flesh, while the righteous are often persecuted for their faith and the wicked receive the same blessed rain and sunshine from God
4. and we know for certain that Job is suffering precisely because of his integrity!
5. Eliphaz's speech would have the affect of causing Job to blame God, because if Eliphaz is right and all suffering is the direct result of the sufferer's sin, God has erred horribly for Job has not betrayed him

C. Eliphaz's Dream (Job 4:12-21)

1. Eliphaz validates his theory by relating the message he received in a dream, in which a ghostly voice instructed him on the relationship of God and man
 - a. if angels are fallible before God and sometimes err, should it be any surprise that human do much more?
 - b. Eliphaz is anticipating that Job will simply continue to claim innocence, but he sees the evidence as proving that Job is in fact guilty
2. but is that what Job is doing?
 - a. is Job claiming to be sinlessly perfect and deserving of merited divine favor?
 - b. isn't Job really just stating a true fact—that he had not so sinned to bring about directly this current series of calamities?

II. Job Chapter Five

A. Eliphaz's Warning Against Anger (Job 5:1-7)

1. Eliphaz continues to see Job as a convicted sinner, simply suffering the consequences of some pretty awful iniquity—his livestock rustled, servants murdered, children crushed, health afflicted
 - a. if this happened to someone today, he might cry out, "What did I do to deserve all this?"
 - b. Eliphaz thinks he knows that Job must have committed some heinous offense to merit such divine disapproval, but we know he is wrong
 - c. yes, Job is a sinner, like any mortal man, but we saw behind the curtain of spiritual proceedings that it was not Job's sin, but his goodness that occasioned this reversal of fortunes
2. Eliphaz, however, cannot get past the certainty that man only reaps what he sows; he argues that affliction and trouble do not simply spring up from nothing, but that they are directly and divinely intended

B. If I Were You (Job 5:8-16)

1. it is pretty hard to argue with Eliphaz's advice here, even if it were founded on a false notion about the reason for Job's suffering—"to God I would commit my cause"
2. Eliphaz has some very definite ideas about the justice of God, and while he stops short of contending that the righteous never suffer and the wicked never prosper, he tends to define the outcome of such behavior more temporally and physically than is accurate
3. Eliphaz seems to promise Job immediate relief if only he would repent
 - a. we know that Job's suffering is not the direct result of any particular sin
 - b. and we know that even the righteous are never promised instantaneous relief from their suffering, but that some pain persists (e.g. the letters of Christ to the seven persecuted churches in Revelation 2-3)
4. yet there remains wisdom in casting one's burden upon the Lord

C. Happy is the Man Whom God Corrects (see Job 5:17-27)

1. finally, Eliphaz has something valuable to say to Job, words that he had probably used to counsel others when they suffered unusual trials without apparent reason
2. the chastening of the Almighty does not necessarily imply that the sufferer is being punished for specific wrongs, but that God is exercising his faith that it might grow stronger
 - a. how God chastens his children is one of the most mysterious subjects in the faith, for we often wonder if a calamity, challenge or opportunity is of greater importance than it initially seems
 - b. the answer is yes, for God can use any portion of life to advance his objective that you persevere in the faith and be redeemed in the end, when sowing and reaping are judged within a framework of divine grace and human response
3. the seven troubles of this passage symbolically show the completeness, or the very worst that can afflict man, but God can deliver him out of them all
 - a. a limited understanding of the eternal spirit of man hamstrings Eliphaz from seeing that sometimes this deliverance is not temporal, but involves the rescue of death and appointment with infinity
 - b. because Christ emerged from the tomb, we better comprehend that divine deliverance is even greater than this

III. Some Applications

A. When You Have To Say Something

1. in times of mourning or other tragedy, the comforter often feels that overwhelming need to say something, even if it is only, "What can I say?"

2. when someone has suffered a terrible blow, it is unlikely you will be able to find words any more encouraging than those of Eliphaz, so tread carefully and speak cautiously

a. "He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive" (Proverbs 17:27-28).

b. only say, "I know how you feel" if you really do and resist the urge to say, "If it were me, I would ..."

3. in the immediate aftermath of tragedy, the best you can do is be present and respond to what the sufferer says, without introducing your own perspective too quickly

4. be swift to hear and slow to speak, but full of compassion and patience, for the sufferer may say things out of emotion he does not really believe

5. yes you will need to reprove and correct when one blames God for his misfortune, but do so gently and understanding that you might respond the same way if similarly afflicted (Galatians 6:1-2)

B. Integrity

1. integrity is special, because even an out-of-shape, penniless, ugly, unintelligent person can have a faith that renders him more blessed than beauty queens and billionaires

2. integrity is doing the right thing even when no one else is looking; it means practicing your faith without hypocrisy or interruption and it provides a security inside of grace that cannot be measured

3. integrity revives our hope when the hardships of life get us down, for the person of integrity is on a path toward heaven, where tears and sorrows are unknown (First Peter 1:6-9)

C. Reaping What You Sow

1. it generally and ultimately holds true that you will reap what you

a. if you sow carrots, you will not reap corn

b. if you sow a wind of incremental backsliding, you will reap a whirlwind of apostasy

c. if you sow to the flesh, you will not reap according to the spirit

2. this is especially important when it comes to sharing and giving back (Galatians 6:6-10)

a. but it also applies to sowing words, kind deeds and the gospel invitation

b. you will not reap happiness at home after sowing words of wrath and you will not reap favor in society after sowing selfishness and inconsiderateness and you will not reap converts without sowing the gospel seed

3. but this axiom does not imply that every instance of human suffering is the direct result of that person's sin

a. the apostles departed the council, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41)

b. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

c. "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified" (First Peter 4:12-14).

D. Human Suffering

1. humans suffer because of the introduction of sin into the world and because of their persistence in giving it power through the centuries, but not every instance of human suffering can be assigned to a particular sin that person committed (John 9:1-3)

2. suffering may result from many sources

a. it can be the consequence of one's own sin (see Psalm 107:17)

b. the devil inflicts suffering upon mankind (see Job 1:12-19; 2:6-7)

c. it is sometimes the result of someone else's sin (see Proverbs 14:11, Luke 13:1-5)

d. it can be an example of chastening from God (see Hebrews 12:5-11)
e. and, although Eliphaz discounted it, there is the element of time and chance (“I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

3. it is too simplistic to look at one’s suffering or that of another and judge that it must be a divinely sent lightning bolt to punish a sinner; one does better to think more soberly and circumspectly and to commit his cause to God, as Eliphaz counseled

E. Chastening

1. the Hebrew writer references Eliphaz as he comments upon the persecution of first century Christians at the hands of countrymen and family (Hebrews 12:3-11)

2. God can use every instance of human suffering, regardless of the source or cause, to strengthen his people and instruct them, as surely as any parent can take any event from his child’s life and use it to teach

3. that does not convict God of causing the tragedy or hardship, but it credits him with being shrewd enough to turn it around to his purposes (see James 1:12-18)

4. God will not prevent every tragedy and injury, because that is part of the precarious balance that this Earth took on when sin entered it

5. moreover, such things chasten the soft-hearted and keep them trained on Heaven

Conclusion

While the speech of Eliphaz sometimes strays from truth, there is value in examining it and considering the chastening of the Lord upon all his children.

Sermons from the Book of Job (5): Job Responds to Eliphaz (6:1-7:21)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

Eliphaz' speech reflected the misconceptions of his day about the issue of human suffering. Eliphaz believed that each person's pain was the direct result of his own sin, but we know that Satan chose Job as a target for exactly the opposite reason. Eliphaz has compounded Job's misery by arguing that he is responsible himself, for Job knows that he has not slipped in his faithfulness. In this section of the book, Job responds to Eliphaz and asserts that his affliction is beyond measure, as he pleads with God for renewed mercy.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Job's Right to Complain (Job 6:1-13)

1. we all complain sometimes—about our health, the behavior of people around us, world events, etc.—and Job begins his response to Eliphaz by asserting that his complaints are also reasonable

2. you begin to feel the anguish of this man who has lost his beloved children and his possessions, who is surrounded by an unhelpful wife and miserable friends, as he lingers in painful boils from head to toe; I would be shocked if Job did not complain a little

3. just as the wild donkey and ox complain when they have no food, so Job feels justified in complaining, for his life has become something like flavorless food, drinking in a poison that he attributes to God's mysterious arrows of unjust judgment

4. so miserable is Job's life that he believes he would be less anguished if God would simply get it over with and crush him

5. Eliphaz's assertion that an upright life prevents all suffering has proven false, for Job knows (see and we know even better) that no particular sin has led to this episode in Job's life

B. Miserable Counselors (see Job 6:14-30)

1. Job simply did not expect his pain to be compounded by the coming of his friends, who are choosing to act more like prosecutors than counselors (Job 6:14)

a. he compares them to streams that run during the rainy season or when the snow melts, but which dry up when the summer sun beats down

b. they are proving to be unreliable friends, for Job was confident that they would bring words of wisdom, but have come instead with intellectual rationalizations that are irrelevant to his situation

c. even an unbeliever could provide some comfort to a friend, but Job's friends have fallen short even of that

2. and Job continues to take issue with Eliphaz's accusation that he has brought all this misery upon himself by sinning grievously somewhere along the line (Job 6:24-30)

a. Job does not deny the certainty that he has sinned in his life or that he has likely sinned ignorantly on occasion

b. but he is certain that he has not so sinned as consciously and willfully as this suffering would seem to indicate

c. again, these words reflect the false conception that each person's suffering is entirely the direct result of his own sins, and that sins can be graded on a sliding scale of heinousness, according to personal discretion, so that God should mete out commensurate punishments

C. Job Pleads For Mercy (see Job 7:1-21)

1. finished with Eliphaz and his associates, Job turns to speak to God and to reassert his right to complain and his hope for relief (Job 7:6-7)

a. Job finds no relief in the shade or in sleep, and he is not optimistic about things ever getting better

b. he acknowledges the brevity of life and foresees that his must be briefer even than others, as he contemplates dying and going down to Sheol, the Hebrew term for both the grave and the unseen

world inhabited by the disembodied spirits of the dead

2. in Eastern mythology, the sea and sea serpent were forces of evil opposing God; Job wonders why God is treating him like such an enemy (Job 7:11-16)

3. yet Job also recognizes that God sometimes permits his people to be challenged so that their faith and strength might be refined (Job 7:17-21)

a. Job argues that if his suffering is for that purpose, it is too great, for it will kill him and what good will refined faith be for a dead man?

b. if you have prayed and not received the answer you desired, you have a small clue as to how Job felt—abandoned, forsaken and afflicted

II. Some Applications

A. The Arrows of the Almighty

1. Job attributed his suffering to the “arrows of the Almighty” within him, dispensing a bitter poison to destroy his flesh and spirit

a. David felt likewise (Psalm 38:1-2)

b. as did the sons of Korah (Psalm 88:13-18)

2. it is common for suffering people to wonder what they did to God to deserve their pain or why God is not taking it away more swiftly

a. and sometimes our pain does result from our sins, for angry people often end up with bloody noses and drunks often suffer with hangovers and broken homes

b. but just as often, people suffer as a result of living in a world where sin generally exists and results in death, disease, heartbreak and disappointment

c. this life is not about this life; it’s about the next, but sometimes we get so caught up in this life that we forget about the next and our suffering drifts out of context and perspective into something eternal, which really isn’t

3. because of chapters 1-2, we know that Satan is the source of Job’s pain and that righteousness is the real reason

a. it is reasonable to conclude that our own suffering might sometimes result from the same equation

b. instead of the arrows of the Almighty, we should be concerned about the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:14-17)

B. Better Off Dead

1. at some point, we have all felt as if we would be better off dead than facing the challenge in front of us, be it health, financial, academic, social or religious

2. we have all felt that our tests are too severe and that it is hopeless that we should succeed in overcoming them, but death comes only once, and usually after many, many such challenges

3. some we conquer and some conquer us, but they are only battles—life in its entirety is the war

4. Paul suffered greatly himself, and because of his faith, not in spite of it, but his attitude was clearer (Philippians 1:19-26)

C. Kindness To The Afflicted

1. there are few things more difficult than trying to comfort or counsel a friend who is suffering from grief or worry or disappointment

2. it is hard to know what to say and sometimes it feels like all our wisdom goes flying out of our heads just when we need it most

3. Job is clearly disappointed in the useless and accusatory words of Eliphaz, who has lent his friend no comfort, but has actually compounded his misery by blaming him for it

4. usually, the smartest thing you can do when going to comfort someone is to let them talk and explain how they are feeling; what they say will often direct your mind to the response you need to give from God’s word

a. when you choose instead to make presumptions, you are more likely to err

b. too, there may be a time for correcting a suffering person who actually has sinned, but it should be done in a way that is gentle, not coldhearted (Galatians 6:1-2)

5. we are often guilty of pretending we know how we would respond to such trials, but unless we have actually faced them, we only know in prospect, not reality

D. Pessimism

1. Job is a pessimist and it is hard to judge him for it, yet we learn in the end of this book that his pessimism was misguided, for God restored his losses and lent him much comfort
2. don't give up on God when you pray and do not get your wish immediately; understand that God will do what is best even if that takes you through some tense moments and unpleasant circumstances
3. faith means trusting in God rather than feeling abandoned, especially when it seems as if things could not get any worse
4. every life includes joy and pain, but what you do with each determines how far your spirit grows (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14)
5. "If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10).

Conclusion

We can understand why Job responds to Eliphaz as he does, but we hope that optimism might replace his pessimism, and that his faith might not be compromised by Satan's darts. We hope for the same for ourselves, into every life, a little rain must fall.

Sermons from the Book of Job (6): Bildad and Zophar Speak Up (8:1-14:22)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

Having responded to Eliphaz and pleaded with God for mercy or an answer, Job is now confronted with the speeches of his other friends, Bildad and Zophar. Neither of these miserable counselors does anything to explain the source of Job's suffering or to console his weary spirit. Instead, they continue laying theological land-mines in his path, reaching false conclusions and resorting to rank accusation.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Bildad Speaks (see 8:1-22)

1. blunt, blustery Bildad begins in fitting form (Job 8:2)
 - a. Job has never claimed sinless perfection, but he knows in his heart that he has not so sinned as to merit such an awful punishment as the simultaneous and instantaneous destruction of his family, prosperity and health
 - b. we know Job is right because God allowed us to look behind the curtain of the spirit world to see him permitting Satan to test Job, precisely because the man had proven himself to be righteous
2. Bildad's position on Job's suffering is summarized early (Job 8:3-7)
 - a. God, he says, does not subvert justice or permit injustice to reign; therefore, Job is suffering the due punishment for some secret sin he refuses to acknowledge
 - b. moreover, God also killed his children for some sin of theirs, as well
3. he accuses Job of playing at religion (Job 8:11-13)
 - a. the things that Bildad claims generally and ultimately hold true—hypocrites suffer many indignities in this life and torment in the next—but this life is also filled with many injustices in which righteous people like Job are made to suffer like anyone else, and sometimes worse because of their faith through persecution and self-denial
 - b. like the writers of the Proverbs, Bildad is well versed in such general truths, but there are many occasions when evil subverts justice and the righteous can only endure

B. Job Responds (see 9:1-10:22)

1. rightly, Job accepts Bildad's claims, but continues to contend that they do not apply to his current situation (Job 9:2-3, 14-20, 32-33)
 - a. throughout this speech, Satan must be listening intently, waiting for Job to curse God for failing to insulate him against suffering
 - b. of all the suffering Job endures, the sense that God is not listening must be the harshest, for God is abiding by his side of the challenge and refusing to hedge his child in
2. Job, however, continues to acknowledge the power and wisdom of God, even while expressing the incomprehensibility of his life's turn
3. and so he turns again to plead directly with God (Job 10:1-7)
 - a. because Job had sought, like most of us, to live a righteous life, he cannot understand why God had now chosen to condemn, oppress, despise and ignore him
 - b. Job is not wicked, although he is a sinner like any man; sometimes the righteous suffer and it doesn't mean that God has abandoned them
 - c. Job feels hopeless and his friends have helped him to feel that way—if he sins, he will be punished, but if he lifts up his head to defend his righteousness, he will be condemned for arrogance (see 16-17)

C. Zophar Speaks (see 11:1-20)

1. now Zophar appears with the same stale theory, but accompanied by an even harsher attitude toward his friend (Job 11:2-6)
 - a. Zophar takes an even more extreme position than Eliphaz or Bildad in claiming that Job's sins are actually greater than his punishment, so he should be grateful!
 - b. we accept the reverence that he and the others have for God, but it almost seems as if they

are children of a strict unaffectionate, unemotional disciplinarian type father, whom they respect, but really do not love or understand

c. God is not really like that, but sometimes we are led to see him that way, especially if our fathers are that way; remember God is love (see First John 4:8)

2. in the end, Zophar's contentions are not new—Job just needs to repent (Job 11:13-15, 20)

D. Job Responds (see 12:1-14:22)

1. first, Job responds to his friends (see Job 12:1-13:19)

a. Job begins facetiously (Job 12:2-4)

b. then he breaks down their theology as being overly simplistic, suggesting that a study of life does not yield the consistent set of principles that his friends have rehearsed for him (Job 13:4, 12)

c. life and relating to God is not as simple and predictable as they believe, for sometimes the apparently just fortunes of men are reversed and the wicked prosper over the righteous

2. now, Job addresses God (see Job 13:20-14:22)

a. Job feels as if God has sentenced him to punishment and will now not hear his appeal (Job 13:23-24)

b. moreover, Job finds the state of all humanity to be hopeless and pointless (Job 14:1-2)

1. but he wonders if there might be some in life after death (Job 14:7-15)

2. could it be in this suspected afterlife that Earth's injustices are sorted out, that the devastating effects of human iniquity could be overcome by divine mercy upon the one who faithfully strove to live righteously, but did so imperfectly?

3. Job is so in tune with God that he is guessing about something which no ancient seems to have understood, not until Jesus came and made it clear and apparent and hopeful

II. Some Applications

A. The Hope of the Hypocrite Shall Perish

1. we must remember that these speeches are not inspired, and although the historian recorded them just as they were spoken, each of the four men is prone to speak error and go to extremes

2. still, many of their statements hold true, when considered in a better context

3. consider Bildad's warning ("So are the paths of all who forget God; And the hope of the hypocrite shall perish" (Job 8:13)

a. consider the state of a Christian who recants his faith in Christ—not by some grand, dramatic renunciation, but by a simple, slow drift into complacency or low-level sin tolerance (Titus 1:16)

b. the hypocrite espouses certain convictions and standards, but refuses to live up to them (Matthew 23:3-4)

c. the hope of the hypocrite to be heavenly rewarded anyway will perish in the ashes of apostasy (Matthew 7:21-23)

B. Wear A Smile

1. have you ever been suffering severely and had a friend tell you just to forget your troubles and put on a happy face?

2. Job thought about trying that (Job 9:27-28)

a. we recognize that the early disciples rejoiced in the midst of their persecution to have been counted worthy to suffer for their savior and that James instructs all of us to count it joy when we fall into various trials, but does that mean that we should just act like our troubles have disappeared in order to wear a fake smile?

b. no, it is all right to despair and to weep when difficult times come (see Jesus did not giggle when he discovered the mourners at Lazarus's house, nor did he celebrate his fate in the Garden of Gethsemane)

3. owning joy means keeping temporal hardship in perspective against eternal hope (Second Corinthians 4:16-5:1)

a. there will still be occasions of anxiousness and times to weep and lament, but they will destroy the joy of being God's child or the hope of spending eternity in Heaven

b. true joy is not expressed by forced, false smiles anyway

C. Water Under the Bridge

1. Zophar is almost the father of the modern axiom about "water under the bridge" (Job 11:13-16)

2. he is applying the proverb to the wrong person and in the wrong setting, but he is right about waters that have passed away
 - a. when we repent of our sins, God is able to blot them out, but sinners and forgivers alike are challenged to accomplish the same
 - b. David's sin with Bathsheba was ever before him, so that he could not forget it and sometimes our own brethren will not let us forget the mistakes of the past so that we can fully move on
3. when we genuinely repent of a sin, we ought to be able to forgive ourselves and accept the forgiveness of others, including God (see First Timothy 1:14-16)
4. and when others around us repent, we ought to be able to forgive them as fully as we would want to be forgiven, instead of holding mercy hostage against future hurt (see Matthew 18:21-22)

D. God Is Love

1. when you think of God, do you see an angry Judge, sitting upon a throne waiting to hurl lightning bolts at his children, the moment they stray in mind or purpose?
2. or do you see a loving Father, yearning for his children to do the right thing, ready to embrace them as his own, even when they are returning from doing the wrong thing?
3. too often, our impression of God is shaped more by experience with our earthly fathers than knowledge of the Scriptures
 - a. God is love (First John 4:7-11, 17-19)
 - b. but he is also just, to forgive the sins of the penitent and to punish the iniquity of the impenitent (see Psalm 51:17, First John 5:5-10, Revelation 16:11)
 - c. if you are his child, he will love and chasten you for your own good, but he is not yearning for the opportunity to harm you or punish you with fire from on high
4. Bildad and Zophar saw God in a warped way and some of us do as well
 - a. some see him as a slightly senile grandfather type whose love is harmless and usually not conscious of reality
 - b. others see him as a force for terror and devastation, just waiting for the joy of spanking his sons and daughters for the slightest stumble
 - c. both views are simplistic and extreme, for God is both love and a consuming fire, balanced perfectly by grace and a desire that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth

E. Resurrection

1. Job guesses that there must be more to life than what happens on Earth, that perhaps the affairs of men are sorted out after death
2. Job was right, but until Christ came and the Holy Spirit completed his revelation, men knew only shadowy facts about Sheol, Heaven and Hell
 - a. we know that when people die, they are reserved for the day of judgment, in which all souls will go either to Heaven or Hell (Second Corinthians 5:9-11)
 - b. all men who have ever lived have had the opportunity to seize God's grace for themselves, and only with that grace applied is there any hope of being on the heavenly end of the sorting out
3. the story of the rich man and Lazarus fulfills Job's dream (see Luke 16:19-31)

Conclusion

Bildad and Zophar have had their say, but they really just continued Eliphaz's simplistic theology. Job has answered them and revealed how deep is his suffering.

*Sermons from the Book of Job (7):
Second Round of Dialogues (15:1-21:34)*
a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

The first round of dialogues between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, concluded in our last lesson. Clearly, the three friends believed that the source of Job's suffering was a direct punishment from God for some secret sin that Job had committed and hidden from everyone else. Job only raised their pique by contending that he had not so sinned as to deserve the loss of his family, prosperity and health. Job is not yet able to see or understand that his suffering is a trial inflicted by Satan, but only permitted and limited by God. In the second round of dialogues, each friend makes his point again, only to be answered each time by an increasingly frustrated Job.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Eliphaz Speaks Again (see Job 15:1-35)

1. Eliphaz is not satisfied with Job's reasoning (Job 15:1-6)
2. he has a mighty low estimation of mankind to begin with (Job 15:14-16)
3. what Eliphaz wants Job to see is that his earlier successes in life should not deceive him into thinking that God will let him escape this judgment so cleanly (Job 15:31-34)
4. what began as a misjudgment of Job's problem was mixed with bad theology and has produced a condemnation of an innocent man as a hypocrite
 - a. if you can imagine what it would feel like to be diagnosed with cancer and go to your friends for comfort, only to have them accuse you of being a hypocrite and bringing the disease on yourself through some secret sin, you can understand how Job must feel
 - b. imagine if one of your children is murdered and your friends come over to blame you and them for sinning your way into this tragedy—that's what Job's friends believe

B. Job Responds (see 16:1-17:16)

1. Job lets loose on his friends (Job 16:2-5)
2. and he continues to assert his innocence (Job 16:15-22)
3. but Job feels hopeless and yearns for the relief that death could bring (Job 17:13-16)

C. Bildad Speaks Again (see 18:1-21)

1. Bildad answers Job with disappointment that the man has not heeded their warning and repented of whatever it is he needs to repent of (Job 18:2-4)
2. Bildad paints a horribly graphic picture of the doom of the wicked at God's hands, but manages to transfer all of that punishment in this life, ignoring the possibility of an afterlife altogether (Job 18:5-8, 17-21)
3. while it is true that unrighteousness leads to temporal hardship and sorrow, it does not follow that all who experience tragedy must be guilty of some secret, heinous transgression against God

D. Job Responds (see 19:1-29)

1. Job responds to the growing familiarity and ferocity of his friends' accusations with frustration and persistent claims of innocence (Job 19:2-6)
 - a. he asserts that God has unjustly cast him before men as a wrongdoer, for Job also believes that human suffering equates to divine punishment, but he knows that he is a just and blameless man who walked with God and did nothing to so heinous as to merit this degree of punishment
 - b. this is the classic expression of "Lord, why me?"
2. Job's suffering is growing beyond material loss and spiritual sorrow to estrangement from men as well as disappointment with God (Job 19:14-22)
3. in spite of all of this, Job continues to believe in God and that he will eventually right this awful wrong (Job 19:23-27)

E. Zophar Speaks Again (see 20:1-29)

1. Zophar responds to Job's accusations that his friends are miserable counselors by contending again that evil must befall every unrighteous person and that Job certainly must be in that company (Job 20:2-5)

2. and we appreciate what he says about the transitory pleasure of sin (Job 20:12-15, 20)

3. Job's last appeal to his redeemer who lives was the ultimate presumption to Zophar, for he wants Job to repent, not trust (Job 20:27)

F. Job Responds (see 21:1-34)

1. Job again rejects the simplistic doctrine of immediate, absolute retribution that his friends have suggested

a. it may be that Job believed exactly as they do prior to his tragedy, but now the facts do not bear out what they and he believed

b. here is a blameless man suffering horrific pain; how can that be if their theology of retribution is correct? (Job 21:7-9, 13-15)

2. he begins to discover some of the same hard truths that the Preacher would discuss much later in the book of Ecclesiastes (Job 21:22-26)

3. never does he waver from opposing the doctrine of his three friends, for it is wrong (Job 21:34)

II. Some Applications

A. Inherited Depravity

1. Eliphaz made himself the devil's tool by reproducing theological lies, that if believed, would have given Job ample reason to curse God and die

a. don't forget that is the point of this entire operation—Satan has boasted that he could get Job to curse God by merely taking away the hedge around his faithful heart, his money, family and health

b. what better reason to curse God than to conclude that he had behaved unjustly by inflicting this punishment on Job for a sin he did not commit?

2. it is Eliphaz who began the recitation of lies, casting blame on God for the acts of Satan and attributing false theories to the Lord, namely that God always renders to each man in this life exactly what he has merited by virtue of sin or righteousness

3. Eliphaz's low estimation of mankind is revealed (Job 15:14-16)

a. these verses were appropriated for the doctrine of inherited depravity held by Augustine and adopted by Wesley, who wrote, "The heart - There is nothing so false and deceitful as the heart of man; deceitful in its apprehensions of things, in the hopes and promises which it nourishes, in the assurances that it gives us; unsearchable by others, deceitful with reference to ourselves, and abominably wicked, so that neither can a man know his own heart, nor can any other know that of his neighbour's."¹

b. can you not see the absurdity in basing modern theology on the rejected words of a pessimist like Eliphaz?; is all of Calvinism rooted in such uninspired nonsense?

4. the world has long been a repository of evil men, but there have always been a few who sought and found divine grace (Gen. 6:5-9)

a. the cooing baby in the cradle, the little boy who picks a flower for his mother, the young man who risks his life to save a brother's—all are examples of the goodness that dwells in God's best creation

b. depravity is not inherited (see Ezekiel 18:18-20); it is influenced, suggested and adopted unless man chooses in his free will to fight against it to pursue holiness (First Peter 1:13-16)

B. The Way of No Return

1. back in chapters 13-14, Job had guessed at the possibility of an afterlife, in which God could finally sort out all the temporary injustices committed on Earth

2. Eliphaz seems to have ignored that in favor of his provably false doctrine of immediate retribution and now Job describes his inevitable death going "the way of no return" (16:22)

3. but death is not a way of no return, for Job had guessed right—there is a return, or resurrection, to judgment in the future of every one of the billions of souls that God has endowed in human bodies

¹ John Wesley's Notes on Jeremiah 17:9. Internet:

<http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/bibleBook/24/sChap/17/sVerse/9/sVerseID/19367/eVerseID/19367/version/KJV/opt/COMM/RTD/JWN>

throughout history so far and to come (Revelation 20:11-15)

C. The Place of Him Who Does Not Know God

1. if Bildad could only translate his certainty of God's judgment past the temporal and earthly into the eternal, he would be closer to accuracy ("The light of the wicked indeed goes out, And the flame of his fire does not shine ... Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, And this is the place of him who does not know God" (Job 18:5, 21).

2. wickedness, whether defined by criminal acts, simple transgressions or the idolatry of materialism, promises only doom (Proverbs 1:10-19)

3. if not in this life, certainly in the next (Matthew 6:19-21)

4. and this life is all about the next!

D. I Know That My Redeemer Lives

1. Job really angers his friends (see and Satan) when he expresses continued trust in God despite his current sufferings ("For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25)

2. our Redeemer does live and he is Jesus Christ, the son of God, who stood at last on Earth and was lifted above it, first on the cross and then through the clouds

3. you know what Job guessed about (First Peter 1:10-12)

Conclusion

Job has answered his three friends and begun to turn over the false doctrine of immediate retribution so prevalent then, and even the Calvinism so common today. Sometimes the righteous suffer in this life, but the redeemed never suffer again when it is over.

*Sermons from the Book of Job (8):
Third Round of Dialogues (22:1-26:14)*
a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

The discussion among these four friends continues to intensify. Job has refuted their theologically-flawed claims that he is being punished by God for specific and heinous personal sins, but his resistance has only served to frustrate the three miserable comforters, who are each intent upon compelling Job to repent of sins he really hasn't committed. In this section of Scripture, only Eliphaz and Bildad speak to Job; Zophar is notably silent awhile.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Eliphaz Speaks (see 22:1-30)

1. Eliphaz prefaces the cruel and completely unfair attack he is planning on Job's character by suggesting that God is not really concerned with his righteousness anyway (Job 22:2-3)
 - a. the inference one may draw is that Eliphaz believes God jumps at the chance to punish the evildoer, but is hardly pleased by the righteousness of a mere man
 - b. of course, God may bless the righteous man, but still he is of no profit or gain to God
 - c. what a bleak, pessimistic, narrow-minded perspective, and what better words to destroy the embers of Job's character and faith in that God
2. it is the plan of Eliphaz to get more specific here by enumerating the sins he suspects Job of committing, which merit the kind of punishment that appears to have come in the form of the destruction of his family, wealth and flesh (Job 22:4-11)
 - a. he views human suffering, especially Job's, as if it were an ocean of water drowning a guilty man, with God filling the tank
 - b. and he believes he knows exactly why Job is drowning—committing theft and oppression
3. not only has Eliphaz misunderstood the source of Job's suffering, he has misunderstood Job's earlier ode to the majesty and greatness of God, thinking that Job was asserting God's distance and ignorance of the affairs of men rather than his nearness and omniscience (Job 22:12-14)
4. we cannot argue with Eliphaz's recommendation of repentance for sinful persons, but we must find fault with the guarantees he and the others promise regarding the revival of material prosperity as a result (Job 22:21-27)
 - a. and we must argue with his presumption that Job's suffering requires that he deserves such pain because of some personal transgression
 - b. a better promise is that God will be the redeemed man's gold when he delights in the Almighty

B. Job Responds to Eliphaz (see 23:1-24:25)

1. rather than continue responding to the same, trite arguments, Job expresses a determination to take his case directly to God (Job 23:2-7)
 - a. his friends have suggested that he appease an angry God by offering repentance for some imaginary transgressions, but Job's integrity and faith are too great to participate in such a sham
 - b. that is the kind of thing that Earth-worshippers and idolaters do—sacrificing virgin girls in flames of fire after a loss in battle to appease the god who didn't bless their weapons
 - c. to Job, it would be like responding to hunger pangs by getting a haircut—long hair doesn't cause hunger anymore than personal iniquity caused Job's tragedies
2. Job's deepest pain is in the false sense that his fellowship with God has been destroyed in the process of these trials
 - a. think of his current situation in chapter 23 as much like ours today
 1. Satan has been given permission to try Job without God interfering in such a way to purchase his faithfulness; God cannot speak directly to Job and reveal the back-story that we learned in chapters 1-2 without cheating
 2. today, we suffer many hardships without understanding why, and we sometimes feel as isolated and abandoned as Job did, but God does not speak to us directly either

3. what separates Job from so many modern sufferers is that he has the integrity Satan assumed he did not (Job 23:8-12)

- a. Job's problem is not secret sin, as his friends believe
 - b. Job's problem is coming to an understanding of God's actions and reasons
4. just here, Job tries to solve the puzzle of injustice in the world (Job 24:1, 9-12)
- a. why doesn't God set up a time to judge men's conduct and assign them what they deserve
 - b. experience has proven that the righteous do not always prosper and the wicked do not always suffer, so why doesn't God sort out such injustice immediately?
 - c. in this life, it is impossible that God should order things in just that way, for we no longer inhabit a place like Eden²
 1. all men possess freedom of will, in which they can choose evil or good
 2. because mankind exists in a fallen world, Satan exercises great power as the god of this world

3. God has cursed the ground for Adam's sake and the result has been all manner of natural disaster and human tragedy
4. time and chance happen upon all as well; there is a random element built in
5. if the translation and interpolation is correct, Job recognizes what should befall the wicked, but often does not in this life (Job 24:18-21)
6. and he seems to understand that while the wicked should be punished, God grants even them time to repent, for if they do not, a worse punishment than anything possible on Earth is assured (Job 24:22-24)

C. Bildad Speaks (see 25:1-6)

1. Bildad responds by abandoning any logic or reason; he simply glorifies God and debases humanity (Job 25:2-6)
2. to Bildad, we respond, speak for yourself, but as for us, we rather prefer the psalmist's inspired view of humankind (Psalm 8:3-6)

D. Job Responds to Bildad (see 26:1-14)

1. Job characterizes his friends again as rather poor comforters, who offered neither solace nor sound guidance (Job 26:2-4)
2. Job continues to glorify God as sweetly as Bildad and Eliphaz do, but he refuses to debase himself or his fellow men as mere maggots upon the Earth
3. Job believes in a more personal God than these men do, and against all odds, considering his sorrows and the bad advice he has been receiving from the unwitting instruments of Satan
4. after considering the wonders of creation, Job asks (Job 26:14)
 - a. we are aware of so small a percentage of God's power and works; should it be any great surprise that we are incapable of understanding him completely?
 - b. God's perspective contains eternity from one end to the other, while ours is limited to a matter of decades; God's perspective knows billions of souls over thousands of years, while ours knows only a few and is mainly concerned with just our own; God is charged with ordering a universe in which forces are often in conflict—personal ambitions, good and evil, right and wrong—and it is hard for us to see how God might have to turn a switch here in order to start a gear there

II. Some Applications

A. Does God Care?

1. Eliphaz suggested that God is hardly profited by the righteousness of a single man and probably only cares when that man behaves unrighteously anyway; Bildad compared man to a maggot
2. but the righteousness of man is important to God (Leviticus 11:44-45)
3. when man is compared to God, there is certainly a wide gap concerning righteousness and man is left far behind, so how can a man be righteous before God?
 - a. if sinless perfection is a practical impossibility, is man doomed to maggot status?

² Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on Job 24". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". <<http://www.studylight.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?book=job&chapter=024>>. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

- b. no, for the just can find righteousness through living by faith
 - 1. by heeding the gospel invitation (Romans 1:16-19)
 - 2. by accepting God's offer of mercy and diligently pursuing righteousness (Galatians 3:10-14)
 - 3. by not looking back to a time when unrighteousness brought momentary pleasure, but lasting guilt (Hebrews 10:35-39)

B. Delighting In The Almighty

- 1. for all their flowery words, Job is the only one among the four who comes close to understanding what it means to delight in the Almighty
 - a. Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad are so caught up in their broken theology that they view God as an impatient punisher, leaving no room for longsuffering and mercy
 - b. Job is sure that God is just and he is just hoping to live long enough to see his justice renewed and his suffering explained
- 2. Job's faith is consistent, and that contradicted Satan's flawed estimation that he would crumble if the hedge of happiness around his heart were trimmed
- 3. can we delight in the Almighty both when times are good and not so good, or is there really an artificial hedge around our hearts?
 - a. in Romans 14:17, we learn that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."
 - 1. as Jesus taught, life should not become an obsession over food, clothing and shelter, but should consist in something beyond the tangible
 - 2. true joy is not tangible, but derives from a contented, purposeful spirit—one that pursues righteousness and covets peace
 - b. delight in the Almighty by getting to know him better than Job's three friends did, and even better than Job himself (Colossians 1:9-14)

C. Does God Hear?

- 1. Job felt abandoned by God in the midst of his pain—abandoned to suffer unjustly and without explanation from above
- 2. haven't we all been there—suffering a trial that seems to be unusually difficult and with no way to explain how God could permit it?
- 3. the fact that God does not prevent every calamity or immediately rescue every righteous sufferer is not proof that he refuses to hear or cannot act
- 4. often, in the midst of keeping all those plates spinning—billions of people, natural forces like weather and orbits, moral forces like free will and personal ambition—one person's answer would have a ripple effect on everyone else's question
- 5. we remind you that sometimes the answer God gives is negative (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - a. learn to delight in the Almighty who knows better than to pluck out a thorn that serves you better in your flesh than out
 - b. learn to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2)

D. Randomness

- 1. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).
- 2. while we try to identify God's responses to our prayers and when and how he has acted providentially, we have to remember that life in a sinful world contains an element of chance and randomness that cannot be explained as easily as everything being God's desire
- 3. the combination of human free will, Satan's adversarial intent and sheer randomness participate in the passage of events in which God will not always intervene

Conclusion

We have heard Bildad and Eliphaz speak once more, but without the strained reason they used before. Job has answered them well, but now only wants to be heard by God.

Sermons from the Book of Job (9): Job Affirms His Righteousness (27:1-28:28)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

In this section of Scripture, Job continues the discourse he began to answer Bildad's brief comments. In spite of his friends recommendation that he repent of some phantom transgression, Job continues to maintain his innocence and now also begins to question whether life is really as simple as the immediate retribution principle contends.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Job Insists He Is Innocent (see Job 27:1-10)

1. earlier in the book, Eliphaz had claimed that Job's integrity was his strength and he was right—that integrity cemented his relationship with God as submissive servant and worshiper
2. Eliphaz and the other two friends believed Job's integrity had been breached, causing this sudden series of tragedies in his life, but Job and we know better (Job 27:2-6)
3. Job continues to contend that he is no hypocrite (see 8)

B. Doctrine of Retribution (see 27:11-23)

1. throughout his ordeal, the friends have tried to convince Job of something he had always believed anyway, but which no longer seemed to be consistently accurate
 - a. they all believed that God quickly and physically punished the wicked for their transgression, because this was his only recourse
 - b. they also believed the righteous could not suffer to the degree that Job was afflicted
 - c. the obvious implication, then, is that Job has secretly sinned in such a heinous manner that God is punishing him relentlessly until he should repent
2. Job now illustrates his own lifelong belief in that concept (Job 27:11-13)
 - a. he lists the consequences of wickedness, trying to prove that God brings sudden punishment upon every misdeed
 - b. in this long ago era, there was little or no anticipation of an afterlife or a final judgment in which God could do a more thorough and permanent job of judging his creatures
 3. but all this raises the conflict in Job's heart—if such is true, why is he suffering, being blameless and upright himself?

C. Is Life That Simple? (see 28:1-28)

1. humble Job recognizes that his best efforts as a man to understand the nature and actions of God are doomed to come up short
 - a. their system of categorization was very simple, stating that every righteous deed leads to immediate, physical reward and every transgression leads to immediate, physical retribution
 - b. but that system ignored eternity, overvalued the physical at the expense of the spiritual, and oversimplified the nature of God
 - c. innocents like Job were injured and the character of God was defamed, making him unjust
2. humans demonstrate superior ingenuity in taming animals and mastering the planet, but are unable to make God submit to them (Job 28:1-3, 12-15)
3. wisdom, therefore, belongs to God and man only purchases a share from him by choosing a life of submissive faith (Job 28:20-28)

II. Some Applications

A. Integrity

1. we learn from the book of Job that it is possible to appear to be a righteous and upright person, but still be a man or woman without integrity
 - a. integrity is a word we use to describe the soundness of something—roads and buildings are built so that they have integrity and can withstand not only sunny, quiet days, but also high winds and heavy traffic

b. Satan recognized that it was a comparatively simple thing for Job to serve God when all his days were quiet and sunny, but he figured his integrity would crumble if high winds beat against his house and he was trampled by hardship

2. the question becomes one of what surrounded Job's heart—faithful integrity or a hedge of divinely-purchased happiness and material prosperity

a. Job's hedge was trimmed away, exposing his heart, but thus far, his integrity has held true and he has not cursed God for his loss

b. but he has questioned God and begged for relief, not understanding the source of his suffering

3. people today maintain their faithful integrity when Satan similarly attacks them where he thinks it will hurt the most—their jobs, possessions, families, health, etc.

a. and many such sufferers blame God and renounce their covenant with him, if they ever had any to begin with

b. others are tempted by convenience, materialism or lust to compromise their convictions and trade their spiritual soundness for a few moments of sinful joy

4. Moses, too, had integrity (Hebrews 11:24-26)

a. the apostles and early disciples sacrificed much, including their lives, to remain sound in the faith

b. what might Satan identify as the hedge around your heart, thinking that by attacking it, he can regain your allegiance and certify your doom?

c. for Judas, it was money; for David, it was sex; for Ananias and Sapphira, it was prestige; for Demas, it was this present world

5. will your integrity hold? (Titus 2:1-10)

B. Immediate Retribution

1. we have noted often that a byproduct of the book of Job is that the doctrine of immediate, divine retribution is disproved forever

2. sometimes the explanation for human suffering is just not that simple and does not fit the tidy little categories we want to arrange for human experience

3. and sometimes temptation and persecution are the direct and unpleasant consequences of righteous living (Acts 5:40-42)

4. in this life, the righteous may suffer unjustly and the wicked may prosper unjustly, but give God time; Judgment Day will come (James 5:1-8)

C. More To Be Desired

1. like Solomon, Job sees the wisdom of God as a noble objective, a lifelong goal, but one that is ultimately beyond human attainment

a. we can only dine on small morsels compared to all that is in the mind of God, and our understanding of God himself will always be incomplete

b. wisdom demands that we recognize our human frailty and resist the urge to assume that we are capable of more than is real

2. wisdom is a wonderful objective, for many knowledgeable people stumble for lack of experience and uncommon sense

3. Solomon desired wisdom above all else and gained much else because of his priorities (First Kings 3:4-14)

a. the first step in pursuing wisdom is to invest your heart with a healthy, respectful fear of God

b. second, you must ask God for wisdom, for godly wisdom won't come from human philosophy

c. third, you must persist in walking in God's ways and statutes so that the communication is not broken

4. be aware that there is a competing version of wisdom in this world that favors self and convenience and materialism over divine wisdom's focus on others, sacrifice and the spirit (James 1:2-8, 3:13-18)

D. The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom

1. reverence is indeed a necessary attitude in the quest for wisdom, for wisdom is gained when

God's word is activated and applied to human experience

2. we have to trust God enough to follow his will even and especially when it seems costly or perilous or impossible (Matthew 14:22-31)

Conclusion

Job will continue this discourse in our next lesson, but thus far, he has poured out his heart and contended earnestly for his faith against these three prosecutors.

Sermons from the Book of Job (10): Job Reflects On His Life (29:1-31:40)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

Job begins now to lament the losses of his life, including the prestige he formerly held in the community. It is perplexing to Job that he should suffer the ridicule of social and moral outcasts after living a life of uprightness and honor. Job issues an oath of innocence and begs God to try him and acquit him.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Lost Honor (see 29:1-25)

1. Job does well to remember the blessed times in his life when God had given and not taken away, but the reader can sense the melancholy in his words (Job 29:2-6)
2. Job had been an honored man in the gate and open square—people respected him and listened to him, but now he is pitied and despised by the very unfortunate people he championed (see 7-17, 21-25)
3. Job admits the same assumption that we sometimes make—that nothing evil can touch us and life and health and happiness will never change (Job 29:18-20)

B. Human Dishonor; Divine Silence (see 30:1-31)

1. if Job had any pride at all, it is gone—he is mocked by the children of social and moral outcasts whom he had once judged (Job 30:1-10)
2. the original tragedies had been followed by miserable counsel from his wife and friends, silence from God when he prayed for relief and now ridicule in the open square (Job 30:16-19)
3. Job turns his speech to God and surely the ears of Satan perk up, waiting for Job to curse God and renounce his faith, rewarding the tempter in his contention with Jehovah (Job 30:20-23)
 - a. Job repeats his contention that he is suffering unjustly, not yet inferring that sometimes the righteous suffer precisely because of their integrity and not in spite of it (Job 30:25-31)
 - b. but in all this, Job has not renounced God and made a winner of the devil
 - c. how close we all come at times to blaming God for the evil done by Satan?

C. Innocent! (see 31:1-40)

1. chapter 31 is Job's oath of innocence in which he swears that he is not guilty of any of the sins that might justify such punishment as he was experiencing
 - a. he has not lusted after young women (31:1-4)
 - b. he has not cheated others (see 5-8)
 - c. he has not committed adultery or coveted his neighbor's wife (see 9-12)
 - d. he has not abused his servants (see 13-15)
 - e. he has not ignored the widow, orphan or indigent (see 16-23)
 - f. he has not made money, man or object into an idol (see 24-28)
 - g. he has not withheld kindness and generosity even from his enemies (see 29-32)
2. Job claims his fear of God has led him to be righteous, so he has nothing to hide (Job 31:33-40)

II. Some Applications

A. Counting Blessings

1. we all have a tendency to look back on the past and think about how wonderful things used to be; that is the origin of phrases like “the good old days” and “golden age”
2. we hear Job recounting those blessings and, knowing ourselves, we have to wonder if he only began really to appreciate them when they were gone
3. how wise it is to learn to count your blessings and refuse to take a single one for granted (Colossians 3:12-15)
 - a. be thankful in prayer, by sharing the gospel with others, by keeping ambition in perspective
 - b. be thankful most for spiritual blessings, like salvation, instruction and mercy
4. raise up an ebenezer so that you don't forget the blessing of God (First Samuel 7:9-12)

B. Humbled

1. poor Job was being ridiculed by miserable and sinful people; he had been brought down low from where he once sat in judgment of their fathers as an elder of his community
2. like the athlete who loses a step, the teacher whose eyes grow dim, the doctor whose hands begin to tremble, Job had been humbled and he didn't much care for it; who would?
3. sometimes, though, it is this kind of humbling that we need the most to get our attention and pull us down off a high horse of arrogance and disdain of others who may be younger or less able than we esteem ourselves to be (Romans 12:14-16)
4. Paul's thorn in the flesh was left there to keep him from becoming arrogant in his position and ability and hopefully you have enough thorn as well to keep you humble (First Peter 5:5-7)

C. Satan Is The Adversary

1. chapter one was so long ago that it is easy to forget that the real adversary and prosecutor in this book is Satan himself, who afflicted Job but only under severe limitations and through the permission of God (First Peter 5:8-10)
2. it is sad that one of the oldest books in the Bible holds the answers to human suffering, but is completely ignored when it is required most
3. in times of personal and national tragedy, it is common to hear people questioning God and even blaming him for killing children, crashing planes into buildings and splashing tsunamis onto the shoreline of backward nations
4. it is Satan who is the father of lies, a hindrance to truth, who disguises himself as an angel of light and who seeks to take advantage of the weak and ignorant
 - a. the word "Satan" itself means "adversary" and he is every bit that (Ephesians 6:10-18)
 - b. the paradox of human suffering as it touches both the wicked and righteous afflicts everything the armor of God is designed to protect
 1. as we see in Job, it seems to contradict the girding truth of God's goodness that the righteous should suffer while the wicked often prosper in this life
 2. it pings against the breastplate of righteousness that assures the righteous person will be rewarded eventually by God
 3. the conflict between good and evil threatens our concept of peace
 4. the shield of faith has to quench all those fiery darts of doubt and frustration
 5. the helmet of salvation protects our minds from the kind of error the friends taught
 6. only the sword of the Spirit can slice through the bunk and expose what is right

D. Oath of Innocence

1. Job's oath of innocence may sound a little self-serving at first
 - a. Job is not suggesting he is flawless and worthy on his own merit of God's blessing
 - b. he is only arguing that he has not so sinned as to bring such tragedy upon himself as he had recently experienced, and he is right about that much
2. we must be careful about pumping up our self-image by enumerating to God our finer points, for he is only too aware of them and the other side as well
 - a. we know more than Job about grace and salvation (Luke 18:9-14)
 - b. Job is much closer to the publican than the Pharisee
3. many are the merits of Job's oath, though
 - a. we must not lust either (see Matthew 5:27-28)
 - b. we must not cheat others (see Ephesians 4:28)
 - c. we must never commit adultery (see First Thessalonians 4:1-8)
 - d. we must not abuse those who serve us (see Colossians 4:1)
 - e. we must not ignore the needs of the widow, orphan and indigent (see James 1:27)
 - f. we must have no idols in our hearts (see Matthew 6:19-24)
 - g. we must not withhold kindness even from our enemies (see Romans 12:17-21)
4. know God is aware of all that goes on in our lives and in our hearts (Hebrews 4:11-13)

Conclusion

Job has concluded his long discourse on his own innocence and has begged God to judge him righteously and to relieve his suffering. He is a man of integrity whose soundness has held firm thus far in spite of the devil's best efforts against him. Job, however, still does not understand why he is suffering.

Sermons from the Book of Job (II):

Elihu's Speeches (32:1-37:24)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

A sudden disturbance in the flow of the book of Job occurs between the end of chapter 31 and the beginning of chapter 32. A new character is about to walk on the scene—actually, he has been there all the time, waiting quietly as his elders talked to Job about his sufferings. Now Elihu will seize the silence as an opening for his opinion.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Introduction of Elihu (Job 32:1-5)

1. the three friends have thankfully returned to their former silence, but now they are disappointed also that Job has not heeded their advice to repent of the awful, secret sin that he must have committed to deserve such punishment at the hand of God

a. we know of course that Job is actually being afflicted by Satan, whom God has permitted to test the integrity of Job's faith

b. the three friends have contended throughout their speeches, however, that such suffering could not happen to a righteous man and must be explained only as divine retribution

c. Job himself has held to that concept in former times, but now sees in his own experience that the process is not as simple as that—that sometimes the wicked do prosper and the righteous do suffer

2. as his suffering was exacerbated by the miserable counsel of his friends, Job has feared that God is unjustly punishing him and has refused to heed his pleas for mercy or explanation

a. he has described his good deeds and even listed acts of wickedness that he has avoided, never arguing that he was sinless, but that his sins were not heinous enough to merit so much suffering

b. it is not that Job is self-righteous, but that he is sure he is not the vile creature his friends see

3. now young Elihu sees his opportunity to speak, being filled with wrath against Job for justifying himself rather than God in this ordeal, and against the three counselors, for condemning Job without finding the real source of his suffering

4. Elihu's name means "He Is My God" and he tries to defend the honor of God in his own imperfect way

B. Elihu's First Speech (see 32:6-33:33)

1. Elihu acknowledges his relative youth, but argues that age is not always an indicator of wisdom (Job 32:6-9)

2. he claims to have different answers for Job than what the older friends have offered in vain (see 32:10-14)

3. indeed he has been yearning for this moment (Job 32:17-22)

a. he offers to stand on common ground with Job (see 33:1-7), but inaccurately portrays Job's defense as claiming sinless perfection (see 33:8-18)

b. perhaps Elihu has assumed that Job was self-righteous and felt flawless, but he only claimed to be innocent of the very heinous offenses that his friends suspected he had committed

4. in this speech, Elihu suggests two mediums by which God can chasten his people, get their attention and reform their ways

a. Elihu counsels that the terrifying dreams Job complained about (see 7:14) might be a sign from God

1. it is true that God did communicate with people occasionally through dreams and it is also true that dreams can reveal to a person what he is subconsciously thinking, but afraid to face

2. but Eliphaz and Elihu himself both claim to have heard from God in dreams, and their messages conflict, so clearly the interpretation of dreams is less than science or even faith most often

b. he also suggests that physical pain can be used by God to shake people up (see 33:19-33)

1. again, even the New Testament proposes that God chastens his children by permitting them to suffer and be tried by the tempter when they need to be proven and strengthened

2. but is this true in Job's case, or is he simply being challenged by the devil precisely because of his apparent spiritual strength?

C. Elihu's Second Speech (see 34:1-37)

1. Elihu's approach is not met with the same immediate rebuttal as the approach of his three older friends; Job does not interrupt to answer, but allows Elihu to continue

2. his second speech shows that God is just and incapable of injustice; if Job is suffering, God must be trying to teach him something which he hasn't managed to learn yet (Job 34:2-10)

a. many of Elihu's generalities are worthy, but when applied specifically to Job, they fall flat, for we know God is not chastening Job for some sin he has committed, but that Satan is trying to destroy his integrity

b. Elihu's accusation against Job centers on three factors

1. Job wrongly claims to be righteous

2. this claim implies that God must be unjust in punishing him so severely

3. Job now sees no value in religion

c. in reality, of course, Job was as righteous and blameless as a penitent believer could be prior to the new covenant

1. based on the prevailing theory about human suffering, it could only be that God was unjust if he were directly punishing Job by such tragedies for sins he had not committed

2. Job continues to believe that God is going to sort out these issues and clear up the problem, never giving up on his redeemer

3. the prevailing theory of suffering is being exposed as false and an instrument of Satan to turn people against God for the very evil that the devil commits

4. Elihu digs in deeper and ends up in the same theological pit as his three elders (Job 34:31-37)

a. like them, he insists that Job just needs to repent of the murder or rape or theft that he must have secretly committed

b. not only has Job sinned to bring on this suffering, but now he is multiplying his iniquity by rebelling against God's chastening and refusing to repent, according to Elihu's now familiar refrain

D. Elihu's Third Speech (see 35:1-16)

1. Elihu seems to think that Job has claimed that there is no profit to serving God if man's wealth, happiness and health can be taken away, but if he had done that, Satan would have won (Job 35:1-8)

2. in fact, it was Eliphaz who claimed, just as Elihu now does, that God is so disconnected from man's righteousness that he cares not (Job 22:2-3)

a. Elihu is not nearly as original a thinker as he believes, for his accusations and theology are rooted in the same place as the elders

b. like the Calvinist today, he believes that man is inherently depraved and like Job's friends, he believes that Job is on the receiving end of divine retribution

3. like Eliphaz early on, much of what Elihu says has some general merit—it just does not apply to Job or his situation (Job 35:10-16)

a. he belittles Job's suffering and accuses the poor man of empty prayer and blasphemy

b. truly, the four men came to comfort and stayed to criticize

E. Elihu's Fourth Speech (see 36:1-37:24)

1. as Elihu continues now, he almost arrogantly claims divine inspiration for the things that he is saying, but were he inspired, he would know that his accusations against Job were wrong, even if some of the points that he makes are generally true (Job 36:1-4)

2. now he simply repeats the flawed, simplistic theories of his elders concerning immediate divine retribution upon the wicked and material prosperity for the pious and penitent (see 36:5-15)

3. but his accusations turn sharp (Job 36:16-21)

a. Satan is using Elihu in a different strategy, however, for the three friends had unwittingly been used to convince Job that God was unjust and perhaps even unreal, because such a righteous man should not suffer so terribly

b. Elihu is being used to prod Job into repenting of phantom sins just to get his hedge replanted, which attitude and motive would have proven the devil's point almost as much as a renunciation of faith

4. this fourth speech concludes with an entire chapter in which Elihu expounds upon the wonders

of creation as proof of the majesty of God (see 37:1-24)

- a. again, he makes some vital points, but misapplies them as proof that Job deserves what God is doing to him, when in reality, Satan is the actor and the tragedies are not punishments at all
- b. it is his words that God interrupts in the following chapter so that he might apply the proof the universe properly to Job's condition

II. Some Applications

A. Wisdom and Age

1. Elihu is certainly just, especially in this book, when he asserts that age is not necessarily proof of wisdom; yet he and the three elders each show themselves to be arrogant about their own abilities to discern
 2. earlier in the book, Job said, "Wisdom is with aged men, And with length of days, understanding" (12:12), but sometimes prejudices, arrogance and ignorance interfere with wisdom
 - a. these four men are so convinced in their own common theory about immediate retribution that they cannot even consider that there might be some other explanation for Job's suffering
 - b. the elders seem arrogant about their age and the young man seems to think he just knows more than the old fogies
 - c. each of them is ignorant about what we learned in chapters one and two, and are thus accusing an innocent man and recommending that he repent falsely just to get his treasures back from God
 3. wisdom can be a tricky thing, for it sometimes creates arrogance which must invariably lead to great foolishness (Proverbs 3:5-8)

B. Speaking Truth Without Flattery or Partiality

1. Elihu disguises his attack on Job's character as words without flattery or partiality
2. when properly targeted, that is the only way to speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15)
 - a. the truth of God is refracted and warped when shined through a prism of partiality for those in power or who have wealth or other weapons (James 2:1-4, 8-9)
 - b. the apostles did not show partiality to the Sanhedrin when threatened with beatings to stop preaching Christ, nor did they show partiality to the wealthy or powerful or eloquent who sometimes strayed from truth
 - c. when we have opportunity to exhort, rebuke or reprove, we must do so without flattery or partiality

C. No Shadow of Turning

1. each of the four counselors believes in this broken, simplistic theology of immediate recompense—that the righteous must be rewarded with prosperity on Earth and the wicked must be punished with loss
2. not only are they ignorant of Judgment Day and focused on the same carnal hedge that Satan assumed surrounded Job's heart, but they ascribe to God responsibility for the evil committed by the adversary
3. the truth about God is much brighter
 - a. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (First John 1:5)
 - b. God is not our tempter (James 1:12-15)
 - c. God has no dark side that would toy with a man like Job (James 1:16-17)
4. God's role in hardship, tragedy and death is that he permits it to occur as a consequence of mankind's choice to commit sin, first in the Garden and then ever since

D. Filthy Rags

1. Calvinism finds much solace in the words of these four counselors, especially Elihu (see Job 35:7-8) and Eliphaz (see Job 22:1-3)
2. Calvin and these four counselors denigrate man to the point that he is inherently depraved and bent on evil, but while the majority of humans choose to live wickedly and without God, there have always been believers like Noah and Job who found grace in God's eyes because of the fervor of their hearts (see Gen. 6:6-9, Job 1:1)
3. only by trusting in miserable comforters and ignoring the context of a passage like Isaiah 64:6 does one arrive at the conclusion that God is disconnected from our efforts and unmoved by our

righteousness

a. Isaiah speaks for a dying, idolatrous nation when he says, “But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”

b. Isaiah, like Habakkuk and Jeremiah, acknowledged the general sinfulness of society and that their very worship had become nothing more than pretense

4. we know that our prayers are a sweet incense to God and that our good deeds are a pleasant aroma to him (Hebrews 13:15-16)

a. the pious deeds of Cornelius garnered the notice of God who set him up with a rendezvous with truth and it is blameless record of Job that God boasts of when talking with Satan in the first place

b. humility reminds us, though, that we are saved by grace and not through our imperfect efforts alone; God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, but when we have done all that we are commanded, we are still unprofitable servants, having done nothing more than our duty to our redeemer (see Hebrews 11:6, Luke 17:10)

Conclusion

Elihu has spoken uninterrupted for a quite awhile, but what an interruption is coming! While he has made some excellent points, like the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he has abused truth by misapplying it. Job should not repent of imaginary sins just to satisfy his counselors or to replant some hedge of happiness around his heart.

Sermons from the Book of Job (12): Jehovah Speaks (38:1-42:6)

Introduction

It is at this point in the narrative where Elihu has finished his speeches and the prosecution of Job by his three friends and one young counselor. Elihu's words are the ones that finally provoke God to speak up and begin the end of Job's ordeal. The men suddenly go silent as a divine voice thunders forth from inside a whirlwind. Finally, Job will get a response from God, although it may be not exactly be the answer he was demanding.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. God's First Speech (see Job 38:1-40:2)

1. the broken theology of immediate divine retribution suggested by the four visitors and Job's own questioning of God's decisions have provoked God to answer for them and for all of us who would follow with our own occasional miseries and complaints (Job 38:1-3)

2. Jehovah is done being questioned from afar; as Jesus would do much later in his ministry, God will now turn the tables on his questioners and ask for their perspective, in order to show them the shortsightedness of it

a. God asks Job if he was present at the dawn of creation when the forces around him now were spun into motion (Job 38:4-11)

b. God then asks Job if he can explain the elemental forces of the world around him (Job 38:12-38)

c. finally, God asks Job if he understands why nature is as it is (Job 38:39-39:30)

3. all these unanswerable questions are designed, not to mock Job's human ignorance, but to remind him of his humbled status in the hand of his maker (Job 40:1-2)

a. Coffman suggests that we learn at least four things from God's response to Job³

1. it is not possible for man to know all the answers to even his dearest questions

2. it is enough to know that God loves us and has our best interest in mind

3. many of life's misfortunes are not the result of personal transgression

4. sometimes it is better not to know why certain things occur in life

B. Job Responds (Job 40:3-5)

1. Job has finally gotten his wish, to plead his case before God and argue that he doesn't deserve the treatment he has so recently received, but after hearing God out, he no longer wants to plead anymore

2. Job is ready to listen, not talk

C. God's Second Speech (see Job 40:6-41:34)

1. the humbling of Job continues in God's second speech, for the Lord clears his eyes to see the folly of assuming that Job's miseries imply that God had erred or fallen asleep at the switch (Job 40:6-14)

2. Job's suggestions throughout the book that he would plead his case with God and make him understand are tantamount to an arrogant usurpation of God's prerogative and power

a. recall what Job said earlier (Job 19:1-6)

1. Job felt like an innocent man going to the gas chamber feels, but in this case, the governor is God and he never phones the warden in time to stop the miscarriage of justice

2. and indeed, Job is innocent of sinning in such a way to bring up these miseries of his, but what he does not know is that his righteousness actually brought them from Satan as a test

3. God has not wronged Job, but that is how he feels and what he says

3. Jehovah takes issue with Job's habit of accusing God of injustice in order to establish his own innocence

a. Job didn't know what he was talking about—he knew little of the creation week and even

³ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on Job 38". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". <<http://www.studylight.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?book=job&chapter=038>>. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

less about the dialogue between God and Satan that led to Job's temporary, physical, ultimately meaningless downfall

- b. the false theory that earthly afflictions are always punitive should be abandoned, and that Job knew better than anyone
- c. simply put, the prospering of the wicked is not divine injustice any more than the suffering of the righteous
4. consider again verses 9-14
 - a. Job has essentially claimed to know better than God and now God calls him on it
 - b. Job expected God to grind up the wicked, but now Job has to realize it cannot always be that way; it is not always that simple
 - c. man's growing body of knowledge is only dangerous to him when he begins to rely more upon it than upon God, philosophizing that there is no God at all sometimes
 - d. or, as in Job's case, estimating his own knowledge to exceed God's under certain circumstances
 1. sounds awful, but we are all tempted to do it, when we question why God allows certain tragedies to occur or allows the wicked to prosper
 2. when we ask, "Why me" and are discontented at the answer or when we become so obsessed with this world that we can't anymore see the next
5. finally, God uses two enormous animals that may have been dinosaurs to show Job that God continues to be in control of the apparent chaos and confusion of the universe⁴
 - a. God asks Job to think about the behemoth, a creature that is evidently now extinct and may very well have been a dinosaur that lived in Job's day (Job 40:15-24)
 - b. no living creature is like the Leviathan and no man can stand before God and convict him (Job 41:1-11)

D. Job's Answer (Job 42:1-6)

1. never will you again read words of such deep human humility; Job confesses that he had no right to question God's motives, omnipotence and omniscience in the way that he did
2. God may move in mysterious ways which are beyond our understanding, but genuine faith is strong enough to accept that without a detailed analysis
 - a. a child being spanked is assured his parent loves him even though it doesn't feel like it at that point
 - b. a child like Job who was not being spanked, but who was being permitted to face severe trials on his own, must likewise believe his father loves him even if he chooses not to intervene
3. Job's answer to God is one of regret for ever doubting the Lord's goodness, vigilance and love
 - a. what is most interesting and most victorious for God and Job is that the Lord *never* reveals to the man the reason for his suffering
 - b. his faithful integrity holds without having to know the reason

II. Some Applications

A. Keep Silence

1. Habakkuk was another Old Testament character who questioned God's tactics in his age
 - a. Habakkuk wanted to see his nation punished by God, but when he learned that God was going to allow the Babylonians to conquer Judah, he was unhappy
 - b. he argued his point and then waited ("I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected" (Hab. 2:1))
 - c. Habakkuk was corrected and God did what he planned
2. here is where man has to remember his place and his status beneath God, not above him
 - a. we tame animals, explore space and mine the tiniest cells of life, but we cannot abandon our reverence for God without forfeiting a more valuable cache of knowledge; "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."
 - b. like Job and his four visitors, we think we have it all figured out and that God will be our puppet, until it becomes obvious that things are not working out as expected
 - c. then we have a crisis of faith, for we recreated God in our image, but he is not responding

⁴ see also <http://apologeticspress.org/modules.php?name=Search&Terms=behemoth&x=19&y=9>

on cue

3. keeping silence before God entails respecting his prerogative and understanding that “The secret things belong to the LORD our God” (Deuteronomy 29:29)
 - a. you will never know what goes on behind the curtain of this universe where angels and demons tread and where Satan can petition for permission to afflict and challenge
 - b. you may never comprehend why God permits you to suffer or even to prosper
 - c. but you don’t have to know if you believe that it is all under his control, in his hand, and ultimately for your benefit—that is faith, the assurance of things hoped for and the substance of things unseen (see Hebrews 11:1)

B. Secret Things Belong to God

1. God has given to us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (Peter 1:3) and delivered to us a faith that is complete (Jude 3)
2. we have in the Bible all the knowledge necessary to navigate life and survive through grace to see a better day
3. some things will continue to perplex us and like Job, we may be tempted to question God’s tactics or to pretend that if we were in charge, we could do better, but sometimes we are just better off not knowing all that God must see and decide
4. unlike Job, Simon Peter was told what happened behind the scenes (Luke 22:31-34)
 - a. prior to the temptation, Peter could not even imagine failing, but he will
 - b. you would think that forewarning would have helped Peter, but it doesn’t seem to have
5. be content to know that Satan will try to sift every believer like wheat and that we must be prepared, even if we never are able to see the particular temptation coming

C. God Cares For You

1. what bothered Job much was the fact that he was suffering and God was not sweeping in to stop it
2. we, too, say our prayers and expect immediate divine intervention, but often do not receive it, and we enter a crisis of faith
 - a. don’t make excuses for becoming a doubter, for that is Satan’s toehold!
 - b. Satan believes that afflicting you trims away the hedge God built around your heart to keep you faithful—if he can cut down your health, prosperity or happiness, you will renounce God and unwittingly serve the devil; don’t do it
3. God cares for you, even when it seems like he is ignoring your pleas and refusing to give you what you *think* you need (Second Corinthians 12:7-10)

D. Shut Up and Listen A Minute

1. sometimes God is answering but we are too busy pleading and complaining to hear the reply
 - a. listen by reading your Bible and searching for guidance
 - b. listen by consulting trusted brethren to help you see your problem through their eyes
 - c. listen by looking for opportunities to make something positive out of your negative
 - d. listen by admitting that you don’t know everything and that God knows better
2. sometimes appearances can be deceiving and perceptions can be false
 - a. the cross of Christ looked like defeat for God and victory for the devil and his servants for three days
 - b. you may be losing battles like Job did, but the war is about persevering faith, and that you can win without a penny in your pocket or health in your bones

Conclusion

The series and book will conclude next time as God sorts everything out.

Sermons from the Book of Job (13):

Epilogue (42:7-17)

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

The end intended by the Lord is at hand as the narrative of Job's miseries draws to a close with the voice of God still echoing all around. Job has repented, not of the imaginary sins contained in his three friend's false charges, but of demanding that God justify his apparent treatment of Job. Now, it is time to deal with those friends and to restore Job.

Discussion

I. The Text

A. Restoration of Job's Friends (Job 42:7-8)

1. Job has responded humbly and penitently to God's reproof, so that he can now turn his attention to Job's three friends, represented by Eliphaz, who always spoke first in the rounds of dialogues and was probably the oldest
2. God judges that they had not spoken accurately about the nature of God, but Job had
 - a. obviously, this does not mean that Job had made no errors in his speech, but that his assessments of temporal judgment had been wiser than his friends'
 - b. they had adamantly stated that a man's prosperity is a direct indication of his morality and righteousness, while Job had accurately noted that often the wicked do prosper and the righteous are made to suffer
 - c. it was folly to argue that God was somehow required to sort all these temporary, physical matters out, not having his eternal perspective or untainted goodness from which to base that demand
3. the three friends are told to use Job as their priest in order to make atonement for their false doctrine
4. why is Elihu not mentioned?
 - a. is it because his speech was so objectionable that God couldn't stand to think of him or is it because his speech was closer to the truth than the three?
 - b. it is hard to tell for sure, and commentators are divided
5. seven bulls and seven rams makes for an expensive offering, but the utility of Job as pre-Levitical priest proves that he has been restored to God's favor
 - a. remember that the objective of Satan was not just to get Job speculating and depressed, but it was to lead him to renounce God
 - b. Satan has failed

B. Restoration of Job (Job 42:9-17)

1. as Job was praying for the restoration of his three friends, God went about righting the wrong Satan had inflicted upon him, even rewarding Job with twice as much wealth as he had before
2. all of his siblings and acquaintances returned to visit him; remember how he described them before (Job 19:13-17)
3. it is safe also to believe that the boils upon his body were cured and his life became much as it was before, only much better of course
 - a. some wonder if this epilogue does not ruin the point of the book—that genuine faith is not dependent upon material blessing
 - b. actually, it is beside the point, for if Job had been told by God in the beginning that he would have his riches doubled by enduring a few months of anguish, such would be the case
 - c. Job, however, was left entirely ignorant of this fact, even after God arrived in the whirlwind
4. Job's epitaph says that he lived another 140 years, raising these children and seeing four generations of grandchildren until he finally died old and full of days

II. Some Applications

A. Becoming an Instrument of Satan

1. we are confronted with the fact that these three friends of Job, along with Elihu and Job's wife

- to a different degree, unwittingly became instruments of Satan in the challenge against Job's integrity
 - a. all thought they were being of help, speaking unpleasant, but necessary truths and counseling Job to do the right thing
 - b. all were thoroughly convinced and thoroughly mistaken, for Job was being afflicted as a result and test of his faithfulness, not as a punishment for some particular and heinous sin
- 2. even the apostle Peter once became an agent of Satan (Matthew 16:21-23)
 - a. Jesus had been tempted by the devil to avoid his painful but atoning death by submitting to Satan and gaining authority over the world by evil means (see Matthew 4:1-11), and now one of Christ's closest friends is reminding him of the possibility much closer to the moment of truth
 - b. it is frightening how our most passionate and best intentions can misguide us and enlist us in Satan's army, even if only for a moment
- 3. when we advise the troubled couple to separate, the young person to purchase birth control "just in case," the athlete to cheat, the student to put his academic studies and professional ambitions ahead of all else, is it possible we are becoming agents of Satan in bringing about life-altering, soul-destroying situations?
- 4. and there is always a danger when fools rush in where angels fear to tread
 - a. answering a dispute before you have heard all sides
 - b. becoming a teacher before you know anything well enough to teach it (see James 3:1)
 - c. advising people to compromise their convictions in order to soften a physical blow
- 5. let us be careful never to become Satan's ministers

B. Renouncing God

- 1. God challenged Satan to rethink his theories because Job was a man so full of integrity that his faith would not fail even if his happiness did
 - a. the whole challenge was about what would happen if Satan were allowed to remove anything that he considered to be a divine bribe that bought Job's loyalty
 - b. Satan considered his wealth, family and health to be a hedge, which if trimmed away, would expose the true carnal nature of Job's soul, and that Job would have no more reason to serve his former benefactor in Heaven
 - c. Satan touched his possessions and body, leaving behind his wife and counselors to goad him further along the route to cursing a God who would unjustly afflict him with misery, but Job's integrity holds
- 2. understand that Satan is likewise sizing you up, trying to determine what might be the hedge around your heart that explains your presence here and your habit of prayer and Bible study and moral living
 - a. is it your health, job, possessions, family, peace?
 - b. Satan desires just as much to induce you to blame God for any loss and to renounce your faith in him
 - c. when Satan sifted Peter like wheat, he gained temporary success (Luke 22:54-62)
- 3. today, people blame God for their miseries, even though we live in the world that mankind has thrown into the very general sinfulness that leads to such misery
 - a. instead of leaning on God when the devil strikes, as Job did, some retreat from the Lord and give up their faith forever
 - b. others are tempted to give up on Christ and his church to buy a little relief from the costs they never before counted (Hebrews 10:32-39)
- 4. renouncing Christ is a terrible way of canceling your passage to Heaven (Hebrews 6:4-8)
 - a. Jesus warned, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. *But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:28-32).
 - b. but remember it is possible to renounce Christ in a less obvious way (Titus 1:15-16)

C. Full of Days

- 1. Job died old and full of days, although he had once prayed and hoped to be taken away in the depth of his anguish

2. it is God who numbers our days and who sees a brighter future than we can imagine; we must wait on the Lord to redeem us and not get so impatient
3. who knows what blessings we threaten and forfeit by getting impatient for God to act and taking it upon ourselves to step into his prerogative?
4. what is needed is a better perspective that focuses on eternal glory rather than the present (Second Corinthians 4:16-5:7)

D. The End Intended By The Lord

1. it is James who sums up the experience of Job so well as an illustration of patience (James 5:7-11)
 2. the reality of Christ's return and the certainty that everything will be perfectly sorted out on Judgment Day encourages us to bear our hardships patiently, without grumbling and bitterness
 - a. Job waited for a change in his fortunes and so do we when we suffer, but we will only be blessed if we endure the inevitable challenge to our own integrity, not if we faint in the day of adversity because our strength is too small for the occasion (see Proverbs 24:10)
 - b. accept what comes and make the most of it somehow (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14)
 - c. not all suffering is divinely punitive and not all blessing is evidence of righteousness
 - d. Judgment Day will be the first in which life is perfectly fair
 3. the end intended by God throughout Job's suffering always included compassion and mercy
 - a. if your integrity is under attack, believe in that and wait for it
 - b. the devil must be given his opportunity, but it won't last forever; it will only seem like forever

Conclusion

The book of Job provides answers to modern readers that even Job did not himself receive as its chief character. God reveals to us information that Job never became aware of. We are better equipped and armed for the same battle Job fought and won. How can we now concede defeat by giving up on God just because Satan has taken his shears to our hearts? Sometimes on Earth the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, but such is no injustice by God. What matters is what happens on Judgment Day when all that is sorted out. Giving up on God today will put you on the wrong side of that moment then. Keep your integrity and keep the faith so that you can see "the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."