

Job

Knowing God in Pain



Lesson 5 ————— Job 15:1-21:34

My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

*I was at ease, but He shattered me,
85931 And He has grasped me by the neck
and shaken me to pieces....
—Job 16:12*

I have to admit, if I was going to write a story about a righteous man suffering great affliction, he wouldn't look anything like Job. I would have him sitting in a white monk's robe with a grave but serene look on his uplifted face, eyes closed, hands folded in prayer. His words would be sweet and profound... the kind of stuff I imagine people only think up after long days of meditation. But Job isn't a "story," he was real human being. And God feels no need to gloss over the brutality of his suffering. The words God inspired in this amazing book are gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, and disturbingly honest.

As we enter round two in the cycle of dialogues, this is what Job really looks like: He sits curled in a fetal position with his brow in the dirt, face swollen from endless crying, deep dark shadows encircling his eyes. His shriveled skin clings to his bones. He has sewn together pieces of sackcloth to cover his painful, itching, oozing skin. (Where is Mrs. Job?) As if his excruciating pain isn't enough, everyone he has ever loved has deserted him: brothers, neighbors, relatives, intimate friends, employees, business partners... his own wife can't stand to be near him. Even the little children make fun of him and call him names. Add to this the endless torment of crushing insults from his three "friends." They wound and humiliate him before everyone, telling all who will listen that Job is to blame... that he is getting exactly what he deserves.

But wait, we still haven't even gotten to the worst part... Job believes God has forsaken him. "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and He has put darkness on my paths. He has also kindled His anger against me and considered me as His enemy" (Job 19:7, 8, 11). Poor Job, it's as if God has turned His back, slammed the door, and shut off the lights.

Phillip Yancey in his book, *Disappointment with God*, illustrates Job's experience with this true story.

Once a friend of mine went swimming in a large lake at dusk. As he was paddling at a leisurely pace about a hundred yards offshore, a freak evening fog rolled in across the water. Suddenly he could see nothing: no horizon, no landmarks, no objects or lights on shore. Because the fog diffused all light, he could not even make out the direction of the setting sun.

For thirty minutes he splashed around in panic. He would start off in one direction, lose confidence, and turn ninety degrees to the right. Or left—it made no difference which way he turned. He could feel his heart racing uncontrollably. He would stop and float, trying to conserve energy, and force himself to breathe slower. Then he would blindly strike out again. At last he heard a faint voice calling from shore. He pointed his body toward the sounds and followed them to safety.

Something like that sensation of utter lostness must have settled in on Job as he sat in the rubble and tried to comprehend what had happened. He too had lost all landmarks, all points of orientation. Where should he turn? God, the One who could guide him through the fog, stayed silent.

The whole point of The Wager was to keep Job in the dark. If God had delivered an inspiring pep talk—*Do this for me, Job, as a Knight of Faith, as a martyr*—then Job, ennobled, would have suffered gladly. But Satan had challenged whether Job's faith could survive with no outside help or explanation. When God accepted those terms, the fog rolled in around Job.

God ultimately "won" The Wager, of course. Though Job lashed out with a stream of bitter complaint, and though he despaired of life and longed for death, still he defiantly refused to give up on God: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." Job believed when there was no reason to believe. He believed in the midst of the fog....

The kind of faith God values seems to develop best when everything fuzzes over, when God stays silent, when the fog rolls in.

Job was so close to God that even when He was nowhere to be found, Job clung to him with all of his being. This is a man who can teach us a thing or two.

DAY 1

- 1) Read the account of Eliphaz's second speech in Job 15.
- 2) In verse 4 Eliphaz accuses Job of *doing away with reverence* or the fear of God by the things he has said. Do you agree with this charge? Why or why not? If you wouldn't describe Job as *irreverent*, how would you describe his words?

- 3) Considering verse 10, what can we say about the age of Job's counselors?
- 4) What does Eliphaz claim to be the source of his wisdom once again in 15:17? How credible is this source of information? To what other sources of authority would you also appeal?
- 5) Focus on 15:17-35. What do you think is the central message(s) of Eliphaz's speech? Look specifically for what the speaker says about "the wicked man."
- 6) How is Eliphaz's message wrong, incomplete, or misapplied? What have you seen in your life that contradicts his message?

Selah

Job 15:31 says, "Let him not trust in emptiness... for emptiness will be his reward." What types of "empty" thing do people trust in today? How is emptiness their reward?

Ecclesiastes 1:8 expresses it this way, "All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing." No matter what we get, don't we always want more? Compare this with Ps 107:9, "For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good."

The Bible tells us that God is the only thing that can truly satisfy our hearts. Meditate on this truth and take time to reflect on your own life. Where are you spending most of your time, energy, and resources? Where does God fit in? Are you satisfied in your life? Should you be? Do you need to make some changes to give God first place, to make Him your source of trust?

DAY 2

- 1) Job's second response to Eliphaz is found in chapters 16-17. As you read this passage make a note of any observations regarding Job's physical condition at this point.

- 2) Focus on 16:4-5. Job says that if he were in the place of his counselors he could act like them, only making matters worse, *or* he could act differently. What two helpful things does Job say he could do with his words?

1. _____ 2. _____

For each of these, write a real-life example of what you might say to someone you know who is having a difficult time. This is great practice especially if you struggle with knowing what to say.

- 3) Focus on 16:12-14. Describe Job's view of God. Do you think Job can be righteous and still speak this way? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt this way about God? What were the circumstances? How did you overcome this crisis? Be ready to share your experience with your small group.

- 4) Focus on 16:18-22. Compare this passage with Genesis 4:8-10. What do you think Job is saying in these verses?

Selah

Job 17:6 indicates that Job feels deeply humiliated by all that has happened to him. Have you ever felt humiliated by your difficulties, even among believers? Are you ever hesitant to ask for prayer for a particular need, even though you long for such support?

How important is the respect of others to you? How does wanting others to respect you hinder you from building honest relationships? What do you need to do to build friendships that can strengthen you in times of trial and lessen your pain in hardship?

DAY 3

- 1) Read Bildad's speech in chapter 18.
- 2) What do you think is Bildad's central message(s). Look specifically for what the speaker says about "the wicked." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- 3) Read Job's response in chapter 19.
- 4) Focus on 19:7-12. Describe in detail how Job feels he has been mistreated by God. In your heart of hearts, how do you feel God has treated you in your life?
- 5) Focus on 19:13-19. How have you been let down by people in your life? How have you been supported and encouraged? Identify one person who has stood by you and describe what that looked like.
- 6) What does Job ask for in 19:23-24? How was this request answered?
- 7) Focus on 19:25. This same word for *redeemer* is used in Proverbs 23:10-11. Read these verses then use a dictionary, Bible dictionary or commentary to expand your understanding. Write a definition and description of a redeemer.

Selah

When Job reached the very end of his rope, he hung on to God. No matter what he had experienced, regardless of how deep his despair or how great his pain, there was one thing he knew—his Redeemer lived and he would see Him.

What do you cling to when all else fails? Do you have the kind of relationship with God that can withstand the hardships of life? What do you need to do to strengthen your walk with Him today?

DAY 4

- 1) Read Zophar's second speech in chapter 20.
- 2) What do you think are Zophar's central messages? Look specifically at verses 5, 18, and 20. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- 3) Read Job's response in chapter 21.
- 4) Focus on 21:7-16. How does Job describe the lifestyle of the wicked? How does he describe the condition of their hearts before God?
- 5) Focus on 21:23-26. What point do you think Job is trying to communicate?

Selah

Job's description of the wicked is very different from that of his counselors. He identifies them not by their actions or their circumstances but their hearts-the wicked reject God and don't even want to know His ways (21:14).

Do you know any "good" people who according to this description are actually wicked, having rebelled against God? Many people behave in ways that are kind, generous and noteworthy but are totally lost when we remember to look at their heart relationship with God. I Samuel 16:7 says, "... God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Ask God to open your eyes to those around you who are lost and in need of His saving grace. Be willing to speak God's truth winsomely-even when people don't seem to want to know.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

Eliphaz's Second Speech (chp 15)

Eliphaz began his first speech with gentleness and care, more so than either of the other counselors. Not this time around. The gloves are off and Eliphaz is clearly hacked. Why? He's angry about Job's words which he claims are useless, unprofitable and irreverent. He asserts that Job's words alone condemn him as worthy of God's judgment.

"How Can You Say That?" (15:1-16)

What are we to make of Job's words? Is it wrong to speak to God the way Job does? Did Job cease to be righteous as he poured out the anguish of his heart? These aren't easy questions. Let's focus on what we do know:

- 1) **Some of what Job says is wrong.** Job does retract his words and repent in dust and ashes at the end of the book (Job 42: 4-6).
- 2) **Some of what Job says is right.** In Job 42:7 God speaks directly to Eliphaz, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because *you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.*" When the final grades are in, God Himself proclaims Job got it right and the friends got it wrong.
- 3) **Job never curses God.** He withstands the test and maintains his reputation before God, Satan, and all the heavenly host as "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8).
- 4) **God meets Job with grace.** God is harsh with Job in the end, but He also comforts him, helps him, defends, and restores him. Job is not met with judgment but grace.

So, when were Job's words wrong? From the content of God's stormy response to Job at the end of the book, we understand that Job was clearly headed in the wrong direction whenever He accused God of doing wrong. But exactly when his words crossed the line requiring repentance only the Lord can judge. To focus on this fine point is to totally miss the message of Job.

Bad Things Happen to Bad People (15:17-35)

Eliphaz waxes eloquent on how the evil suffer: "The wicked man writhes in pain all his days." Therefore, Job, you're getting what you deserve. Huh? Let's take a look at Eliphaz's reasoning.

- A. All the wicked suffer.
- B. Job suffers.
- C. Therefore, Job is wicked.

Obviously all wicked people don't suffer, at least not all the time. (Some of them look pretty happy to me!) But even if "A" were true, Eliphaz's reasoning is still deeply flawed. The following uses his same pattern of logic:

- A. All Spice Girls are female.
- B. Amber McEwen is a female.
- C. Therefore, Amber is a Spice Girl.

While professing to be wise, Eliphaz's thinking is clearly foolish. Remember: suffering is in our world in general because of sin in general—the *wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23). But we must never apply this general truth across the board. Individual suffering may have many causes and purposes...including bringing glory to God.

Job's Response (chps 16-17)

This time around Job responds to Eliphaz point by point.

Eliphaz	Job
Accused Job of attacking God (15:12-13, 25-26)	Accused God of attacking him (16:8-9, 12-14)
Believed all men are impure and unrighteous (15:14-16)	Believed he had been upright and would be vindicated (16:15-21)
Convinced the words of the wise supported his views (15:17-18)	Convinced there was not a word of wisdom in what his counselors had to say (17:10-12)

—Adapted from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

From Earth to Heaven Above (16:18-22)

Job calls out, "O earth, do not cover my blood." The language reminds us of Genesis 4:8-10 where the blood of Abel cried out from the ground against Cain. Job calls on the earth to allow the voice of his affliction to cry out. Perhaps then God would listen and Job would be vindicated. But Job goes one better: he appeals to his witness in heaven. Who is this witness? J. Gerald Janzen summarizes it well:

Who, then is the heavenly witness to which Job appeals in verse 19? Such a question is misguided, and specific answers blunt the significance of Job's affirmation. The point is precisely that, in the face of a universe whose earthly and heavenly figures—friends and God—are all against him, Job imaginatively reached out into the dark and desperately affirms the reality of a witness whose identity is completely unknown to him.

Job is so convinced he is right that he is certain the truth will someday be known, and he will be vindicated. The more Job struggles in his affliction the more clearly he sees precisely what he needs. Of course, it is God who will vindicate him and be that witness, but it is not the God Job has experienced—yet.

A Change of Heart (17:3)

This verse is particularly difficult to translate but will worth the effort. A paraphrase might be helpful, "Consider this O God; become my guarantor (or surety for me) with yourself. For who else is there that is prepared to strike (shake) my hand." A surety is one who has contracted to be responsible for another, to provide protection and assume responsibility for all debts. In Old Testament times handshaking was a way to ratify a pledge. Job's plea was this: *Promise me You will stand up for me, O God, since no one else will stand by me.*

This marks a turning point with Job. So far he has been focused on one issue: God's justice. *Why is this happening? What did I do wrong? How is this fair?* Here Job appeals instead to God's love and faithfulness. *O God, promise to be my protection and meet all my debts before your mighty power.* It's a remarkable picture of our salvation in Christ, where God's justice and love are both satisfied.

In coming chapters Job will continue to cry for justice but the theme of God's love and faithfulness will be more and more evident, as will Job's determination to hold on to his God.

Bildad's Second Speech (chp 18)

As Bildad takes the podium, it's more of the same abusive rhetoric. This time his speech centers around the fate of the wicked. He doesn't bother giving Job any advice this time around. The message is the same: This is what happens to wicked people. You're getting what you deserve, Job.

Job's Response (chp 19)

Chances are you've been in an argument like this: at first there's a lot of anger and defensiveness. Voices are tense and words harsh. Then for some reason something gives. Tears flood. Openness and honesty flow. Now you are at the heart of the matter.

Job has reached this point in chapter 19. He has little energy left to defend himself. Even though his friends have been total jerks, he cries out to them in despair, "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me" (19:21). Here Job drops his fists and opens his heart for all to see.

- God is against me (19:7-12)
- God has caused everyone to desert me (19:13-22)
- I know My redeemer lives, no matter what (19:23-29)

Now that's faith in the midst of the fog! No matter what, Job hung on to his faith.

A Dying Wish (19:23-24)

Job fears he will die before he is ever vindicated, before anyone ever knows he truly is a righteous man. He doesn't want to be forgotten, "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book...engraved in the rock forever." He doesn't want all his integrity and all his suffering to be for nothing.

Little did Job know that his story would be recorded in God's Word and will remain forever, long after heaven and earth pass away. Job's suffering wasn't for nothing. In part it was for you and for me.

One Thing I Know (19:25)

Feeling totally abandoned by God and everyone he loves, Job still clings to his Redeemer. The word "Redeemer" (Hebrew *goel*) was an important legal concept in biblical times. It referred to a vindicator, a "blood avenger" whose duty was to attain justice. He had the responsibility to "buy back" as from slavery, to reclaim a lost inheritance, or to reestablish (as in marrying a deceased brother's widow). Throughout the Old Testament God is seen as the Defender (*goel*) of the oppressed.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains the importance of the grammatical construction of verse 25:

In Hebrew the emphatic position of the pronoun "I" in verse 25a shows Job had a settled conviction: "I, yes I know." The words "my Redeemer" indicate a personal relationship, and the word "lives" must mean more than merely "alive" but implies he would continue his work of vindicating Job's integrity and avenging Job's death.

Zophar's Second Speech {chp 20}

Zophar cannot abide Job's contention that the wicked prosper. He was comfortable in believing that because he himself was healthy and wealthy, his prosperity was proof of his righteousness. Zophar sets out to show that Job is in the wrong.

- The wicked prosper only briefly, then perish (20:1-11).
- The wicked can't enjoy their prosperity (20:12-19).
- Once the wicked have gained all there is to gain, God's anger falls upon them (20:20-29).

Job's Response (chp 21)

As Job closes the second round of dialogue, he disputes specific statements the counselors have made. Job argues that the wicked actually live to a ripe old age, increasing in power, and enjoying watching their children prosper. In the end they die, same as everyone, no better... no worse. Job is in a sense challenging his counselors to open their eyes and consider the total experience of humankind.