

“Comforters Turn Challengers”
Job 15:1-21:34
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I should have concluded last week’s lecture with a quote from the Terminator, “*I’ll be back.*” Well, I’m back probably sooner than you expected or wanted as we continue our journey in the dialogue between Job and his alleged three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. For those of you who have been sentenced to listening to me over these last 15 years, I have, at times, been successful at unearthing ancient photographs of certain Biblical characters. Through much toil and sweat, I have found a picture of these three men. Are you ready?



Just as we did in last week’s lesson, we’re covering seven chapters. That’s a lot of Scripture to cover in 30 minutes, so I’m going to break down the reading into the following sections:

- Follow-up to last week’s thoughts
- Finding God’s perspective
- Frailties in comfort

I’m sure you’re getting to the point that this going back-and-forth between Job and Moe, Larry, and Curly is starting to sound like the same thing. There are, though, nuggets and lessons we can glean from that I hope you will find helpful in each of your faith paths. Let’s begin with some follow-up comments to the points I covered in last week’s lecture.

In chapter 16, verses 7-13, Job’s comments make it clear that all of what is happening to him is coming from God. I touched on this last week – the truth of what is happening is, Satan is doing all of this. Notably, though, he is doing this under God’s permissive authority. In verse 12, Job made an important statement, “*All was well with me.*” I can relate to this comment. Just before our trials started, our life was pretty good. We had a home that we could spend the rest of our lives in with a low mortgage and payment. We were pretty healthy, and we were enjoying our children and grandchildren. I had a good job. Again, life was good.

What also was true was we were not prepared for the intense suffering side of being Christians. When the trials began, we were blindsided and handled them very poorly in terms of spiritual maturity. In the case of Job and all that happened to him, it would seemingly be impossible to prepare for that kind of devastation. Yet, he was far better prepared than we were – and we know Jesus! My point in these comments is that we *now* know that our circumstances are not what should dictate our sense of the “*good life.*” The good life is *only* found in a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ and Him being our true Lord – regardless of our circumstances.

I mentioned last week about the story of the disciples fearing for their lives when out on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. Before they left the shore, while they were in the boat during the storm, and when they arrived to the other side, per His promise, Jesus was still with them. Therefore, their circumstances didn't change the fact that Jesus was always with them, and He was in complete control of the circumstances of their lives. Jesus is God, and God does not change. Jesus said that He'll always be with us, and He is, via the Holy Spirit that indwells every believer. Therefore, He is with us in *all* of our circumstances. Consequently, it is only in Him that we can find what the Apostle Paul promises in Philippians 4:7, "*and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"

Further in chapter 16, verses 19-21 offer what I believe can only be explained by Divine revelation Job's remarkable understanding of God and how He deals with us. He describes God as:

- My witness is in heaven
- My advocate is on high
- My intercessor is my friend
- On behalf of a man, he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend

I hope this sounds familiar to you. Let's see how Job's assessment of God line up with what we learn about Jesus in the New Testament:

1 John 2:1: My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Romans 8:34b: "*It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*"

John 15:15a: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends."

Like I've been saying last week and this week, Job had a remarkable understanding of God. Job is near the top of my bucket list of Biblical characters I'm looking forward to meeting in heaven.

In today's text, there are several sections that bring forth the second component of our outline - the need for us to find God's perspective on our circumstances. In other words – we need to become discerners of what is earthly or fleshly vs. what is spiritual. Beginning with Chapter 15, verses 8-9 we hear from Eliphaz, "*Do you listen in on God's council? Do you have a monopoly on wisdom? What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have?*" These are the words of the pridefully uninformed. 1 Corinthians 2:14 reveals this truth: "*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.*"

In chapter 17:1, Job is at his low when he says, "*My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me.*" Have you been there? Maybe you are, now. His words describe a lowliness of a person that King David, Isaiah, and Jesus made important truths and promises to:

Psalms 34:18: "The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."

Isaiah 57:15b: “I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Matthew 5:3: “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Once again, we are confronted with what so often seems to be the case that our circumstances don't line up with God's promises. We read of these glorious promises of God despite the fact that we're feeling completely abandoned by Him in our suffering. Faith often challenges us to believe the opposite of what our feelings are screaming at us. These words of King David, Isaiah, and Jesus force us to contemplate the possibility there is more to this life than we can see.

God's Word clearly points out there is another world. Jesus, Himself, said in John 18:36, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*” Does this mean He's abandoned us to Satan's rule in this world? Absolutely not! For every believer, we are partakers in His grace and mercy – even when we can't see it. Yes, He may deliver us out of our earthly painful circumstances – but maybe He won't. What He will absolutely do is, ultimately, deliver us into His Kingdom where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

In chapter 20, verses 5 & 6 we read, “*that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though the pride of the godless person reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds.*” These are fleshly accusations against Job coming from Zophar. What is the spiritual truth regarding Job? From chapter 1, God sees him as blameless. Romans 12:2 tells us, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” This transformation process of the mind is to migrate from an earthly or fleshly perspective to a Godly, or spiritual, perspective. My point here is don't let others who don't have the best opinions of you become your truth. The truth is how *God* sees you – as a beloved adopted child fully reconciled to Him in a loving relationship where all His thoughts towards you are of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. This is the destination and landing place of those who take on the Apostle Paul's admonition to not be conformed to [the perspectives of] this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds into God's perspective.

Throughout chapter 20, Zophar is basically accusing Job of being the equivalent of the wicked wealthy one that deserves what he's getting. As a quick sidenote, as I was reading this garbage from Zophar, I was reminded of a scene in Clint Eastwood's movie western, “Unforgiven.” Eastwood plays an old man whose past has been that of a killer, but he is seeking to no longer be this person. A young man who knows about Eastwood's character's history wants to be like he was in his past life. The young man kills his first person and is devastated by what it is doing him. He takes a swig of whiskey and attempts to rationalize the evil he's done, and says the man had it coming. Eastwood looks out into the wilderness and says, “*We all got it coming, kid.*”

This is the mindset Zophar needs in order to get off his high horse of judgment. Who is really the wicked one in this exchange in with Job? Zophar is! In verse 29, he claims that all that is “coming” to the wicked is appointed for them by God. What's the real truth? God does not appoint, or send, people to Hell. People send themselves to Hell via their evil and disbelieving choices. Numbers 32:23 tell us to be sure that our *sin* will find us out. This is the insidiousness of sin – we sin because it, initially, seems pleasurable or justifiable. Yet, this pleasurable or justifiable sin *itself* is what reveals our wickedness and condemnation. One of the great lies that is running through society today is we are not accountable to some singular moral standard. We're seeing the fruit of this lie steepening this world's descent into an

immoral abyss. The campaign to remove accountability is a rebellion of the non-believer and a total rejection of the purpose of Christ crucified.

The third component of our outline focuses on the frailties that come with comfort. As I keep reading all this foolish junk from the three stooges, I can't help but to think of the wisdom in Abraham Lincoln's quote, "*Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.*"

I covered in last week's lecture this seemingly contradictory concept of God initiating or allowing pain in a righteous person's life. A lot of Christians simply can't get there with this Biblical truth. I want to add a little more to this discussion. For those who struggle with God initiating/allowing pain and suffering, I ask you to consider the alternative. If God is not in complete control of *all* of our circumstances, then we must conclude He is not powerful enough to defeat Satan and his efforts, or He does not care about what Satan is doing to us. There is no other conclusion you can arrive at if you refuse to believe God does not have a role in your suffering. What is Satan's desire for each of us? 1 Peter 5:8 tells us, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" So, for those of you who understandably have a hard time accepting God's role in our hurting circumstances, which is a worse conclusion?

1. God is not in complete control or doesn't care, and, therefore, Satan can do whatever he wants with the mindset to devour us; or,
2. God is in control of our circumstances, and the good purpose that came out of His *own* suffering at the cross is enough for us to trust that what He is allowing/initiating in our lives has the potential to have a good purpose as well.

I have come into agreement with the second conclusion not only because I believe it is Biblically true, but also because conclusion #1 is a lot scarier – at least it is for me. I don't find any comfort whatsoever in the first conclusion.

Throughout 36 chapters of Scripture, Job has lamented at great lengths of his suffering. Here in chapter 16, verse 6, he says, "*Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away.*" He has reached the point that whether or not he speaks of his hurting, the pain remains. This forces us to consider the value in our words – especially in difficult circumstances. For me, when I speak something out, it becomes more real. This is admittedly unique to me as a person. There are those people, though, who need to talk and get out every drop of what they're feeling. I'm not saying one is better than the other, but Job's words in verse 6 should at least make us pause at what our complaining can yield. This is especially true when we're around others. Our public lamenting can deliver a defeated message to a non-believer who is looking for a faith-system that offers hope. I'm not at all saying we should stuff our emotions, but we need to be careful who we are around when we're wrenching our hearts out. Words have power, and they can do great harm even when our intentions are for good.

Interwoven as an undertow to the three stooges' comfort is shame. For the suffering person, this shame they feel from others is like pouring gas on a fire. In this year's study on Job, I've come to the conclusion that the "cake" of Job's suffering delivered to him by Satan was the loss of his family, possessions, and health. The "icing on the cake" is the Devil's sending of Job's "friends" to spew their judgment, condemnation, and shame in their alleged comforting of him. In my opinion, they are a material component of what God is allowing Satan to do to Job to inflict suffering. He laments in chapter 17, verses 2 and 6, "*Surely mockers surround me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility. God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit.*" Job speaks to the shame he feels as a result of his suffering.

For those of us who have, are, and will suffer – meaning every one of us, what are we supposed to do when the shame comes pounding at the door? God gave us His Word to provide us guidance in life, so what does He say about dealing with shame? Hebrews 12:2 offers this, “*looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” What is meant that Jesus “despised” the shame? The Greek word for shame in Hebrews 12:2 is “*kataphroneo*.” What this means is to think against, dis-esteem. In other words, Jesus *chose* to – and that is important – He *chose* to dismiss the shame as opposed to allow it to add to His suffering.

Candidly, when we are in our weakened state due to suffering, our strength is diminished to dismiss something as harmful as shame-based Satanic attacks. This is why we need to follow the lead of Jesus when He was in His weakened state after fasting for 40 days. What did our Lord do when Satan himself tempted him? Jesus quoted the Word of God. Proverbs 30:5 assures us that, “*Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.*” There is an impurity, or toxicity, in shame. However, the Word of God has a purity that overrides the corrosive effects of shame. Remember, He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Proverbs 3:5-6 wisely encourages us in these weakened moments to, “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*” With this truth that the indwelling Holy Spirit is greater than anything this world and a willingness to lean on God and His Word to ward off the hurtful effects of shame, we can find that it is true that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us.

Job’s lamenting regarding finding no comfort from his friends is in sync with King David’s words in Psalm 69:20: “*Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.*” I want to, for a moment, turn the table and focus not on *our* being comforted, but *our comforting others*. Hopefully, none of us want to be the fulfillment of what both Job and King David in this Psalm claimed that there is no one who offers comfort. Comforting others, though, is no easy task. If you’re willing to get into the trenches with them, it can get very messy. Most people who are truly hurting can be, understandably, completely self-focused. When comforting people, it’s quite possible that your efforts will feel very much one-sided as the person you’re comforting is grasping for whatever you have to offer. There’s little coming back your way. It is said that Christian service comes with double-blessings. When we seek to bless others, God finds a way for this work to bless us. I’ve found this to be true. However, for the really painful situations, the wounds are deep for the sufferer, so the return blessings for the comforter may not come back for some time – or perhaps not even in this life. You can be sure, though, God is watching, and I’m confident He will reward those who are the comforters.

Getting back to our being comforted, there are many verses that offer the promise of God’s comfort. Below are just a couple:

Psalm 119:50: “My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.”

Psalm 119:76: “May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.”

Here in Job, where we know God has picked the fight against him, we find ourselves in a conflict. We are forced to attempt to reconcile that the same God who pointed Job out to Satan and gave him slack in attacking him is the same God who promises comfort. *In my flesh*, frankly, I can’t do it. The cruelty of the pain and devastation on Job, for me *in my flesh*, outweighs the potential comfort some mystical God offers. But that is my flesh talking. God is spirit, so in my efforts to reconcile this apparent polar opposite offering of God – both afflicter and comforter, I must seek to find that reconciliation in the spiritual realm.

The portal to which that realm lies is through the Bible – God’s Word. The Holy Spirit, in my opinion, is the spiritual translator, if you will, of the Scriptures. He brings to life and light the deeper truths of God found in His Word. In this apparent contradiction of afflicter and comforter, for me, God has directed me to the cross. Here I learn God the Father intentionally commanding God the Son – Jesus to step down from His rightful place on the throne in glory, humble Himself to be reduced to a human baby, live some 33 years in His sin-damaged creation, and be rejected, wrongfully accused, and sentenced to a tortuous death by the His own people. In my flesh, I cannot imagine more cruelty from a father. However, in the spirit, I’m confronted that this fleshly cruel assignment is, in actuality, the most glorious spiritual demonstration of love this lowly sinful human being can fathom. In the spirit, I’m faced with the truth that Christ’s sufferings came with a purpose – to save me from my sins. In the spirit, I’ve been taught – very much through the book of Job, that suffering is purposeful as it is under the complete control of a God who looked at my sins and chose to suffer Himself for the purpose of making my salvation possible and breaking down a previously locked door to an intimate relationship with my Creator the best thing I could ever ask for.

In summary, we broke out this lesson’s reading into three segments:

- Follow-up to last week’s thoughts
- Finding God’s perspective
- Frailties in comfort

Personally, I need to constantly be looking for God’s perspective to get to the point of what it means to both *offer* and *receive* true comfort. Satan is relentlessly tempting me to:

- Be judgmental as opposed to compassionate;
- Being a cynic as opposed to trusting in God’s goodness
- Living for myself as opposed to sacrificially loving others

This is not an easy life, and there are no easy answers. What there is to the believer - to each of us, though, is a love that, if you’re willing to wade into the spiritual deep end of the choppy waters of your storm, a place of true comfort. My prayers for each of you is that your hearts will be open, and your surrender complete, to allow you to extend your hand to Jesus’ nail-pierced hand and let Him lead you into His loving arms. Here’s the promise that comes with this encouragement: He’ll never let you go. Let’s stand and sing the Doxology.