

"Job Specifically Accused"
 Job 22:1 – 26:14
 Carol Martin

One of the great benefits of the book of Job is the glimpse we get in Job's three friends of what it means to be a Pharisee. Of course, that party didn't come into existence until many centuries after Job was written, but in the New Testament, they were the primary enemies of Jesus. When we hear the word "Pharisee," we think of outward orthodoxy or religion without inward godliness. It has the appearance of being correct in theology and outwardly righteous in behavior . . . but it actually represents a distortion of Christian truth.

The three men who were assaulting Job represent three varying styles of Pharisaism. These same attitudes are the deadliest enemies of truth in the church today. So often, we exhibit an outward rightness in the way we live our lives, but inwardly we are full of hypocritical attitudes and prejudices.

In today's lesson we want to size up, or picture, how each friend of Job must have looked to Job. In each of the three cycles of the speeches made, both words and emotions got louder and stronger. Let's try to imagine again the "whole picture" of what each had to say to Job.

It's important to remember, of course, that each was a friend to Job and had sat seven days without saying anything until Job spoke first. No doubt they wanted to help and comfort him. They thought they knew God and they thought they knew Job.

Elihu is a fourth friend we'll meet in another lesson. He says he's held off speaking until the older, wiser men have had their say. So, let's assume for today that they spoke in order of age – each bringing his wisdom to Job.

Eliphaz remember started out with kind of an elderly statesman smoothness and courtesy that indicated he'd probably learned how to say unpleasant things in a gracious way. Yet, he was Job's severest critic. Basically, he started by saying:

"Job, you've counseled others and found out what was troubling them; now your turn has come, so follow your own advice. After all, have the innocent ever been punished? **In my experience (remember that phrase)**, you reap what you sow! Just fear God, admit your sin and things will be all right. After all, God is holy, pure and spotless - even angels stand defiled before him - so what chance does man have to claim sinlessness?"

Eliphaz saw God only as a God of justice. He called for Job to cast himself on God's mercy, be forgiven and restored. Nice neat package, right? I see Eliphaz leaning back with a smug attitude thinking self-righteously, "I know the truth is hard to take,

Job, but it's for your own good." How many times have we said something for "someone's own good?" And we've already examined how that usually comes across. Frankly, confrontation is not my style. I'm usually guilty of not speaking out even when I should say something.

Job's reaction? He was angry, irritated and cried out to God for relief from his pain.

Although each friend spoke in turn, let's take one at a time and finish Eliphaz.

What?? Job doesn't want to take his advice and repent? So, the second time the courtesy disappeared. He accused Job of pretentious claims. "What do you know that we don't know? It's true, Job, God will not let a man get by with wickedness. The wicked will be punished. You're being punished, you **MUST** be wicked."

Job's reply . . . all I can conclude from what I'm suffering is that God must hate me.

By round three in today's lesson, Eliphaz has lost his cool entirely. He accused Job of taking pledges from his brothers; foreclosing on the poor; withholding water from the weary; rejecting widows, crushing orphans. – This getting nasty!

What's incredible about these charges is that they're completely fabricated. Job hasn't treated people this way. Eliphaz has no such evidence. He's throwing the book at Job, trying to intimidate, hoping that some charge – any charge – will stick. Do you recognize the hiss in Eliphaz's voice? It's the voice of the serpent again. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, speaking through Eliphaz. He's constantly accusing us of wrongdoing. He'll even conjure up charges . . . anything to heap coals of false guilt upon our heads and incapacitate us.

There's an important lesson to learn here. We must carefully distinguish between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the accusation of Satan. There is a difference.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of specific sin. He probes with the sharp pain of conviction until we deal with it, confess it . . . and then He restores peace and joy to our hearts. He'll no longer convict us of that specific sinful act because it's forgiven.

Satan, on the other hand, is a grave digger. He uncovers all kinds of dirt from our past and throws a barrage of sin against us. Sins we have committed but not confessed, sins we have committed but already confessed, even sins we haven't committed . . . anything to heap guilt on our heads.

The difference between Holy Spirit conviction and Satanic accusation is the difference between a rifle and a shotgun. The Holy Spirit directly targets individual sin

that must be confessed. He's clear, specific and truthful. Satan is vague, generic and false aiming to leave us feeling confused and guilty and often unclear about what we're to do. It's a real step of spiritual growth to find that discernment.

Now Eliphaz goes on to say, "the trouble with you Job is you think God is so limited He can't see what you're doing" and what's more, in vs. 15-20 he suggests Job is only pretending to hate iniquity when actually he holds on to it.

Have you ever found that when you don't agree with someone theologically, they tend to attack you, or your character, or things in your life? That was Eliphaz' brand of Pharisaism. Are we guilty of thinking someone can't possibly be a Christian because they do or don't do this or that? All we see is externals. God knows the heart. It's not necessary to have full agreement on all theological questions in order to extend the right hand of fellowship . . . if a person names Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and accepts His blood as totally sufficient for sin's atonement, then we have the bond of brotherhood in Christ.

But Eliphaz is a diligent soul-winner and returns to a warmer, more friendly attitude as he very eloquently calls for Job to repent. He uses four excellent synonyms for repentance in chapter 22:21-24 – It is yielding to God, receiving His Word, returning to purity, and removing sin. Each word conveys a vital part of repentance – yield, receive, return, remove. Excellent advice! The only problem is that this does not apply to Job. Correct theology, but the wrong audience.

Like a fast-paced tennis match, the ball is back in Job's court. But instead of arguing with Eliphaz, Job does something very wise here. Don't miss it. He ignores Eliphaz and speaks to God. Job's dispute is not with men, but with God. So, he pours out his heart to God - not Eliphaz - and asks two great questions that we ask today when our life is in turmoil. Job asks, "God, where are You?" (chapter 23) and "Why doesn't God do something?" (chapter 24).

In chapter 23 Job asks, "Why does God seem to be absent from human affairs?" He expresses his own longing for God. He wanted to present his case and he'd listen to God's response. Job knew he'd be vindicated because God was just and Job knew his feet followed in God's path of godliness. (*I'll come back to that in a minute.*) In fact, he'd placed a higher value on God's Word than on his daily bread. (Our memory verse stressed that.)

Have you ever felt that way - abandoned? You don't feel the presence of God, you can't seem to find any answers to your doubts and troubles? Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate and He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Faith is not a feeling. He's there even when we don't "feel" Him and He's working all things out for our good. Every disappointment is a divine appointment. His plan is to bless us, not blast us. Not to crush us, but to make us into the image of Christ.

Suddenly a thought strikes Job . . . appearing before the Lord God Almighty!! Why argue with a God who can't be overruled? It would be terrifying to be in His presence. This breeds discouragement because now he feels "this is totally a no-win situation." Aren't you blessed that we have a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus that invites us into His presence with full assurance of unqualified acceptance?

In chapter 24, Job raises the second question many people ask - "Why is God silent? Why doesn't He judge evil?" It's only when we get to the New Testament that we get any revelation to help us with this. Both Peter and Paul tell us these are but evidences of God's patience and long-suffering with men. Paul tells us in Romans 2:4, "His goodness is meant to lead us to repentance." So, if we're getting by with things now, it's only because God is withholding His hand that He might give us a chance to learn the truth about ourselves.

Peter says, "Don't accuse God of slowness in fulfilling His promises, as men count slowness, because God is not willing that any should perish, but wants to give all men a chance to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) That is why God lets these things so on sometimes. For if He started judging, He would have to include us, as well as everyone else. Job has not come to that conclusion yet . . . the questions still remain unanswered at this point.

Now let's look at Bildad. His style is to ask questions in an effort to force everything into a nice neat logical framework. He's the cold, intellectual thinker who debates the issue at the level of the mind. (Makes you think of a logical Mr. Spock in the Star Trek series.) He started out reminding Job that **the experience of the past** (Ah – here's that familiar reference point again) confirms the fact that God blesses those who turn to Him and rebukes and punishes those who turn away. He earnestly exhorted Job to own up to whatever sin he was hiding from them, from God, and possibly from himself.

Another attitude characteristic of a Pharisee emerges in Bildad. Everything is black or white – right or wrong. Even if what Bildad said was right, it's what's left out that's wrong and/or – that it was said in the wrongful spirit of accusation.

So, what was left out in this friend's advice? **First**, there was no identification with the hurt. No compassion. Before you offer even godly advice, try to identify with the person's hurt. **Second**, he spoke with the utmost confidence that he had the final word on the subject. There was no apparent thought that perhaps there were aspects of God which he and his friends had not yet seen. God was in a nice neat little box. **Third**, these friends never prayed with Job. The book is full of prayers. . . but notice, they're all Job's prayers. How important it is that we pray not only for our friends, but with our friends.

Bildad had also worked up a pretty good “mad” because Job wouldn’t accept his assessment of the problem. He says, “Dominion and awe belong to God; He establishes order in the heights of heaven. How can a man be righteous before God? Man is a maggot and a worm!” That’s Satan’s opinion – man is never treated as a worm in Scripture. God’s view of man is that he was created in His image for fellowship - he is deeply loved – loved enough to send His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to die that we might be restored to that fellowship. Man, fallen to sin? Yes. An object of creation, not the Creator? Yes. Considered a worm? No.

Job resented Bildad’s attitude that he was a person with no power, strength or wisdom. His sarcastic comeback kind of nets out to, “Oh, you’re really a BIG help, Bildad!”

Bildad tried to convince Job by describing how God is all-powerful, so Job expands the description of God’s majesty in nature and the greatness of God’s wisdom and helps us remember that we can’t put God in a box. And what’s more, God doesn’t “owe” us an explanation as to why things happen. He is God!! We must let God be God!!

There are two kinds of speakers – those who have something to say and those who have to say something.

Zophar represented the brand of Pharisaism that speaks with impassioned words and a strong outburst of feelings. We kind of get the impression that he was the hot-headed youngest of these three. He tried to carry his arguments by the force of his eloquence with a litany of horrible things that happen to the wicked.

Have you ever known someone who was a fanatic or over-zealous on a certain religious topic? No matter what the topic under discussion, the conversation always works back to their favorite topic. Zophar had accused Job of self-righteousness and even argued “God is punishing you far less than you deserve, Job” and he was dead sure that the wicked are always punished.

Actually, you’ll notice next week that chapter 27 begins with the words, “And Job continued.” Most scholars think Job paused here to see if Zophar was going to speak again. He didn’t. I get the impression that he only had one argument, he’d expressed it twice and was in a frustrated emotional knot and refused to – or just couldn’t, speak any further.

Remember Jesus had His strongest words for the Pharisees and their attitudes.

1. Eliphaz had the attitude “he knew all spiritual truth.”
2. Bildad had the attitude “it’s as simple as black/white – right/wrong.”
3. Zophar had the attitude of “moral superiority.” I’m OK – you’re not.

Let's not forget for a moment that these men knew about God, they had deep convictions and really believed themselves friends of Job. What a time for our own introspection . . . do any of these attitudes of Pharisees exist in us? What we know as spiritual truth is all the truth there is . . . everything is black or white . . . I'm okay, but I'm not so sure you are.

In Matthew 23, Jesus had a list of woes for the Pharisees and Scribes. William Hendricksen has an anagram of the word SCRIBE to help us remember Jesus' criticism of them: They . . .

S - Shut the door of the kingdom
 C - Corrupt proselytes
 R - Reverse the truth
 I - Invert values
 B - Boost ritualism
 E - External religion only
 S - Swagger their superiority

It would seem that Job's friends were probably Satan's secret weapon. They would like to have convinced Job that God balances the books in September instead of December (so to speak). But if every sinner were cut off immediately, there would be no opportunity for freedom of moral choice. By delaying His judgment, both the wicked and the righteous are given time to make decisions on a moral basis, rather than on the basis of instant reward or punishment. We need to learn from Job's comforters that it isn't wise to be too "pat" in our interpretations of God's providence, either with ourselves or with others. If we could fully explain all of God's dealings with individuals, we'd be as wise as He is.

We noticed how the friends presented their wisdom from the viewpoint of human experience. The conventional theology of Job's day, remember, was simply not equipped to handle the realm of experience through which this man was passing. It is Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Obviously, we can't avoid tribulation, adversity or affliction, but if we understand that these things have purpose; that nothing intrinsically evil can come to the child of God; that only a wrong reaction to them can injure us; and that we can actually grow in spiritual maturity from them; then we have it made. If God's blessings are for our good, and if Satan's assaults are transformed into blessings by our reactions of faith in God, then we have nothing to fear because everything is working for our good.

Mike Mason in his book The Gospel According to Job has a thought I'd like to share with you before I close. It has to do with Job's statement in chapter 23 that "My

feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside." We who see ourselves as sometimes straying from the straight and narrow path may be somewhat skeptical of Job's claim that he has not turned aside.

In many religions, and sometimes even in Christianity, spiritual progress is equated with the path up a mountain – a long route notoriously difficult, treacherous and all-but-impassible. Slipping is frequent and potentially fatal. But in the Bible the way of righteousness is more commonly pictured as a smooth, level path. Psalms and Proverbs speak of this level path. Jeremiah promises that the Lord will lead His people "on a level path where they will not stumble," (Jeremiah 31:9) and Isaiah declares, "The path of the righteous is level (26:7)."

If the Bible wanted to make mountain climbing the principal sport of the faithful, it would have placed its holy city on the snowy peak of Mount Herman, the country's highest point of land, rather than Jerusalem. As it is, the road to Mount Zion had such a gentle rise that pilgrims could sing as they traveled along, which is why Psalms 120-134 are known as the "Songs of Ascent."

Climbing mountains is hard work and will wear you out. But Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Far from scaling mountains in order to reach God, it is precisely from such torturous paths that we must turn in order to accept the smooth and level highway of simple faith that Jesus had paved for us. In truth, to be saved is already to have reached the mountaintop – just as Noah in his ark, without raising any canvas or pulling at any oar, came to rest on the summit of Mount Ararat. In Christ we have arrived at the summit – we need not work for righteousness any longer. Job had that faith in God.

Everything in God's order is directed toward the enlargement of a saint's character, the enlargement of his moral and spiritual resources. In order to attain this, God has to be willing many times to be misjudged and misunderstood. One evidence of God's love for us is just that – He is willing to be misunderstood by the one He is seeking to bless and enrich.

I have mentioned it before and I'll mention it again, an outstanding book by Philip Yancey titled Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud. It searches for the answers to the questions: Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? We tend to think life should be fair because God is fair. Yancey offers some insight to the fact that God doesn't want to be analyzed, He just wants to be loved. "The Bible never belittles human disappointment, but it does add one key word: temporary. What we feel now, we will not always feel. Our disappointment is itself a sign, an aching, a hunger for something better. And faith is, in the end, a kind of homesickness – for a home we have never visited but have never once stopped longing for." (pp.245-246) If you struggle with these questions, I recommend the book.

Well, Job's friends – what can we say? Human comforters will always be inadequate. Sufferers know that. Comforters do too. But the God revealed in Jesus Christ loves even the unlovable, the outcast, the hateful one, even the unbeliever. Sufferers can look beyond the feeble attempts of friends to bring comfort and know that there is a God who does not condemn or hide from their pain. And the comforter can try to help the sufferer see beyond our imperfect human response to suffering by looking to Jesus, God incarnate, Who has loved us enough to die for us. That is the God we can come to in time of trouble - and we will not be turned away empty.

God doesn't waste our suffering. Either we learn something from it or someone else benefits by how you handle adversity, your display of faith, your acceptance of God's will for your life. Whatever is facing you today – whether you're the sufferer or the comforter – meditate a little this week on what we've learned in this lesson. Acts 14:22 "For we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Victor Frankl's book The Cry for Meaning makes the statement, "One can endure almost anything if he knows the reason why." Maybe that's true, it certainly helps. But in case you haven't gotten the point of Job so far . . . we may never know why. What is more important than "why" is that we know the identity of "Who." I know you're all familiar with the old Andre Crouch song, "Through It All." I want to close by reading his lyrics to you . . . they're encouraging:

I've had many tears and sorrow; I've had questions for tomorrow;
There've been times I didn't know right from wrong
But in every situation, God gave blessed consolation
That my trials come to only make me strong.

I've been to lots of places, And I've seen a lot of faces;
There've been times I felt so all alone,
But in my lonely hours, yes, those precious, lonely hours
Jesus let me know that I was His Own.

I thank God for the mountains and I thank Him for the valleys,
I thank Him for the storms He brought me through,
For if I'd never had a problem, I wouldn't know that He could solve them,
I'd never know what faith in God could do.

Through it all, through it all,
Oh, I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His Word.

Let's close in prayer.

Father, thank You for this book of Job and for the lessons we are learning from it. We see, and sometimes feel, the pain and suffering that abounds in this world. Yet we know You are a faithful God that honors faith. We put our faith in Your character and in Your Word. Thank you for sending the Lord Jesus to identify with our humanity and conquer the evil one. Through Jesus we rejoice in our salvation because He paid the price for our sins on the cross and we rest in the assurance of eternity to come in Your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen

Stand for the Doxology.