

“Job Versus His Critics: Round 1”

Job 4-14

The last chapter in Job’s life left us with the brokenhearted cry of a man asking why. He has hit rock bottom and his words reveal the depth of his despair. For the next several chapters, the heavy chains of despair will wrap themselves tightly against his body and spirit. And to make matters worse, his friends come along and make it their mission to give him advice that he doesn’t need or ask for.

Beginning in chapter 4, Job’s ‘friends’ begin to surmise that he is suffering because of his sin. Each one will take his turn and try to lecture Job. These friends prove to be more hurtful to him than they are helpful. We will discover that Job’s friends are more attached to their theories than they are to their friend. It’s like what James Dobson once said about parenting, “I used to have four theories on child-rearing and no kids. Now I have four kids and no theories.”

Alexander Whyte - *“What Satan could not do with all his Sabeans, and all his Chaldeans, and all his winds from the wilderness to help him, that he soon did with the debating approaches and controversial assaults of [Job’s friends]!”*

At first, they remain silent for seven days. And when they do open their mouth to talk, they don’t know when to stop.

These three men—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—have answers for everything. They have rigid systems of theology and a lack of true compassion. They fail to understand that you do not heal a broken heart with logic. You heal a broken heart with love.

Ephesians 4:15 - **“Rather, speaking the truth in love...”**

Based on what we read in Job, all three of these men were older than Job, and more than likely they speak from the oldest to the youngest since that was the cultural practice of the day.

Eliphaz is the oldest, and he has a rigid theology that left very little room for the grace of God. Bildad is the legalist, and he could quote ancient proverbs and he had respect for tradition. But he seemed to have no feelings when it came to his hurting friend. Zophar seems to be the harshest and most arrogant. In many ways, he is merciless in what he says to Job.

Warren Wiersbe - *“All three men said some good and true things, as well as some foolish things; but they were of no help to Job because their viewpoint was too narrow. Their theology*

was not vital and vibrant but dead and rigid, and the God they tried to defend was small enough to be understood and explained.”

Theological arrogance is often a problem among those of us who are conservative in our convictions. You can study all the theology you want to, and still be as cold as ice in your dealings with people.

Jesus had right theology. But He also had real love for people. He said that we are known as His disciples, not because we have every theological ‘i’ dotted and ‘t’ crossed, but because of the love we have for others. Sometimes we can be correct in our convictions, but wrong in our conclusions.

As you study the book of Job, you will discover that most of the book is a back-and-forth discussion between Job and these three friends. It is tough to read. What begins as a mild discussion turns into an intense debate and ends in a heated dispute. The conversations come in three rounds, each friend taking a turn to speak, and Job giving a rebuttal.

It is important to point out that each of Job’s friends come at him from different angles:

- Eliphaz bases his arguments on experience
- Bildad bases his arguments on tradition
- Zophar bases his arguments on assumptions

Round one begins in chapter 4 and ends at the close of chapter 14. Job’s friends will prove the fact that we can talk a lot, say a little, and give no comfort. In chapter 4, the bell rings, and round 1 begins.

1. Eliphaz ACCUSES Job of sin (4-5)

“If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed...Remember, who that was innocent ever perished?”

Eliphaz begins by telling Job that he has 'a few words' for him. When it comes to our words, the Bible has a lot to say!

Words that are spoken at the right time and with the right motive can make a difference in the lives of others. They can nourish those who are hungry, give strength to those who are weak, and inspire those who are dejected and down in the dumps.

There are times when a helpful word from someone comes just at the right time:

Proverbs 12:25 - "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad."

Proverbs 15:23 - "A word in season, how good it is!"

The Bible also warns us against the foolish use of words. If we are not careful, our words can be harmful rather than helpful:

Proverbs 15:1-2 - "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly."

Proverbs 15:4 - "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit."

In my own life, I've learned that nothing is more destructive, defeating, discouraging, or depressing than ill-timed, unwise, uncaring, self-centered words. Our words can heal, and our words can hurt. Our words can build up, and our words can tear down. With our words we can bless, and with our words we can curse.

James tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue, and that we should be swift to listen and slow to speak. It is evident that Job's friends fail to recognize this.

What Job says in the previous chapter proves to be too much for Eliphaz, whom most scholars believe to be the oldest of Job's three friends. In ancient Middle Eastern culture, it was a considered to be appropriate and respectful for the oldest to speak first when having a conversation.

Eliphaz begins by essentially saying to Job, "I'm getting ready to speak, and what I'm about to say, you may not like to hear." And so for the next 47 verses, Eliphaz is going to speak his mind.

His concern is admirable (4:1-6)

Eliphaz acknowledges that Job has instructed many. He has strengthened weak hands and his words have upheld those who were stumbling. In other words, Job had been a real help to a lot of people. Now, Job was in the position of needing help himself. Eliphaz reminds him that he is a man who fears God, and this is his confidence.

His condemnation is astonishing (4:7-11)

We could sum up Eliphaz's argument by what he says in verse 7, "Remember, who that was innocent ever perished?" In a rather shocking way, he accuses Job of concealing sin. His suffering was a result of sin, and God only punishes those who are guilty.

He basically says, "Job, if you are as innocent as you maintain, then why are you in this fix? It's my observation that people who suffer like this have got sin in their life!"

His condescension is arrogant (4:12-21)

The arrogance of Eliphaz is noticeable through his words. He speaks from a position of superiority. He is condescending toward Job, something that all of us have experienced at some point in our lives. He talks down to Job.

"Condescending" - *showing that you believe you are more intelligent or better than other people*

His counsel is amiss (5:1-27)

He implies that Job's children died because of his own foolishness. Eliphaz holds to a rigid theological system that says sin always equals suffering, therefore suffering is always the result of sin. Job is suffering, therefore Job has sinned in some way. His counsel is way off base because we know that Job is a blameless man.

He says, "Job, you've gotten on God's bad side. If I were you, here's what I would do. I would seek God and commit my cause to Him."

Job's response to Eliphaz is seen in chapters 6-7.

In chapter 6, he speaks to his friends:

- he apologizes for the rashness of his words (6:1-3)
- he admits the pain of his wounded spirit (6:4-13)
- he appeals for real compassion (6:14-23)
- he argues that they have not been helpful (6:24-30)

In chapter 7, Job speaks directly to God for the first time in the book.

- “My life is full of misery” (7:1-10)
- “I will not restrain my mouth” (7:11-16)
- “God has made me His mark” (7:17-21)

2. Bildad ADVISES Job to repent (8)

“How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against Him, He has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then He will rouse Himself for you and restore you to your rightful habitation.”

Bildad chimes in and takes Eliphaz’s argument a step further. Eliphaz says that Job has not been innocent, and Bildad says that he needs to repent. Listen to the rigidity of his words:

He insults Job’s integrity

Job 8:2 - “How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?”

Bildad basically calls Job a noisy windbag. Can you imagine trying to console someone in grief and you begin by insulting them? Job had poured out his heart and was waiting for some sympathy, but his friend says he’s full of nothing but hot air. There’s no compassion in the words of Bildad.

He indicts Job’s family

Job 8:3-4 (Message) - “It’s plain that your children have sinned against Him— otherwise, why would God have punished them?”

Job’s integrity is further seen in the simple act that he didn’t punch this guy in the mouth. I’m not so sure that I wouldn’t have!

Perhaps in some twisted way, Bildad thinks he is comforting Job by saying that his children didn’t die for his sin, but for their own sins. Like any father would, Job loved his children. He prayed for his children. Nowhere in the book of Job are they portrayed as being evil or rebellious.

Bildad is an illustration of what not to say to a man in the throws of grief. Job didn’t need a philosopher; he needed an advocate.

He insists that Job confess his sin

Job 8:5-7 - “If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty or mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then He will rouse Himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.”

In other words, if Job would just repent, then God would remove his suffering. If he would seek God, then God would fix everything.

He insinuates that Job has turned his back on God

Job 8:13 - “Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish.”

Bildad can’t handle Job’s honesty. He lives in his own little world where the righteous always prosper and the wicked always suffer. His theology has no room for righteous suffering.

Job’s response to Bildad is seen in chapters 9-10.

Since Bildad’s argument is centered around the justice of God, the image that Job uses as an illustration is a legal trial. He wants to take God to court and have opportunity to prove his own integrity.

Consider some of the words that he uses:

- contend (9:3; 10:2)—means to enter into litigation
- answer (9:3, 16)—to testify in a court of law
- accuser (9:15)—literally means judge
- summon (9:19)—a set time for court
- arbiter (9:33)—someone to stand in one’s defense

Job says, “If only God were a man, then I could approach Him and plead my case!”

Job 16:20-21 - “My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God, that He would argue the case of a man with God, as a son of man does with his neighbor.”

Job needs someone to take up his case, for he knows that he is helpless and defenseless. He feels like God is judging him without telling him what the charges were against him. He is in the dark and has no one to turn to. He needs a Mediator!

3. Zophar APPROACHES Job in anger (11)

“Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right? Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?”

Zophar’s speech is the shortest of the three, but what it lacks in length it makes up for in animosity. His words reveal that he is angry and speaks with Job out of a skewed sense of righteous indignation.

James 1:20 - “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

He levels three accusations against Job:

- he is guilty of sin (11:1-4)
- he is ignorant of God (11:5-12)
- he is unwilling to repent (11:13-20)

The counsel that these three men give to Job is worthless and doesn’t apply to his situation. Their words will only intensify Job’s misery because they put him in a position in which he has to defend himself.

In chapters 12-14, Job responds to his friends at the end of round 1:

He affirms God's greatness (12)

In his sovereignty over people, God is in complete control. Job's argument is that people from different backgrounds experience difficulties in life because God is no respecter of persons. He is not impressed with man's wealth, rank, or accomplishments.

Job says that God is sovereign over both nations and individuals. He can enlarge a nation or destroy it. He can give it freedom or He can keep it in bondage. All He has to do is take wisdom away from the leaders, and the nation's destruction is sure.

All that man tries to build without God is destined for failure.

He affirms his own integrity (13)

His friends had not been a help to him. Rather than being a comfort, they were a disappointment. They gave him lectures rather than showing him love and compassion while in the midst of his pain and deep grief.

Job 13:15 - "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him."

He affirms his personal need (14)

Job is hurting and feels hopeless. He says there is hope for a tree if it is cut down, for it will sprout again. But when a man dies and is laid low, where is he?

Job 14:14 - "If a man dies, shall he live again?"

The only thing that Job has to cling to while in the prison of despair is the promise of God, and it will prove to be a key that unlocks the prison door.

There will come a time when you find yourself in the same prison of despair. When that day comes, your friends and loved one may prove to be unhelpful. When that day comes, what you will need is not greater strength or more resolve. What you need is a key.

When it comes to pain and suffering in this life, we are given no easy answers, but we are given some precious promises!

Life Application:

- When you think that God isn't there, trust that He is
- When you feel like life is hopeless, remember that it's not
- When you doubt that God cares, believe that He does
- When you don't have any answers, know that you have Jesus

You and I need a Friend who gives us true counsel in times of conflict, and that Friend is Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator that Job longs for, the One to plead his case before the bar of God's holy justice.

Job is going to get to the place soon where he can say:

Job 23:10-12 - "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His path: I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

We get through dark times by trusting in the promises of God.

*Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God!*