

“Job vs. His Critics, Round 2”

Job 15-21

It was Art Linkletter who used to say that kids say the darndest things. If you teach children or spend a lot of time with them, you certainly know that to be the case. It reminds me of a story I heard about a little girl in Sunday School. She was busy drawing a picture, and she was totally caught up in her work. Her teacher asked, “What is that you are drawing?” Without looking up, she answered, “I’m drawing a picture of God!” Somewhat surprised, the teacher said, “Sweetheart, nobody knows what God looks like.” With much confidence, the little girl responded, “Well, they will when I get through with my picture!”

We all have a picture of God in our minds, and that picture is an important part of who we are.

A.W. Tozer - *“The most important thing about you is what comes into your mind when you think of God.”*

Sometimes we allow our circumstances and preconceived ideas shape our picture of God. If they are good, then we can find it easy to believe that God is good. If they are bad, we can draw some false conclusions about God.

The second commandment warns us against making graven images when it comes to God. In other words, God alone tells us what He is like. We only know God because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us in His Word. That rules out all subjective conclusions. We cannot say, “Well to me, God is like this,” or, “Well to me, God is like that.” To do this is the essence of idolatry.

One of the things that is evident to me as I study through Job is that his friends appeal to their own experience as they try to counsel Job on the nature and character of God. Not all that they say about God is untrue, for they are correct in many of their convictions. However, they come to the wrong conclusions because much of what they say doesn’t apply to Job’s situation.

Job is wrestling with God in these chapters. He desperately longs to hear from God some reasons for his suffering, but heaven will remain silent. Job speaks from his pain and makes some statements himself about God that are not true:

Job 7:20 - **“What have I done to You, watcher of mankind? Why have You made me Your mark?”**

Job 13:24 - “Why do You hide Your face and count me as Your enemy?”

Job 19:7 - “Behold, I call for help, but there is no justice.”

Job 19:11 - “He has kindled His wrath against me and counts me as His adversary.”

From Job’s point of view, these statements are true. Keep in mind that he is trying to process his situation. He knows that he has done nothing to deserve punishment from God. He is unaware of the true nature behind his suffering. He needs divine truth.

By the time we pick up in chapter 15, the sparring match continues between Job and his friends. What began as a candid discussion now becomes an intense debate.

Eliphaz began in chapter 7 by accusing Job of sin, Bildad advises him to repent, and Zophar approaches him in anger. Each of these men come at Job from different angles:

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

Thomas A Kempis - *“How rarely we weigh our neighbor in the same balance in which we weigh ourselves.”*

The second round of arguments between Job and his friends begins in chapter 15 and continues through the end of chapter 21. Their arguments will remain the same, but they will express them with much more forcefulness and intensity. It reminds me of a story I heard about Winston Churchill and one of his notes he made for himself on the manuscript of one of his speeches. As the story goes, there was a section underlined in red and in the margin was written, “Weak point. Speak louder!”

Sometimes rather than reconsidering our position, our pride leads us to be stubborn. Such is the case with Job’s friends. To sum up these chapters, I want to make two observations:

1. With FRIENDS like these, who needs enemies? (19:1-22)

“Then Job answered and said: How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me?”

Job has had enough! With their words, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have tortured and broken this already broken man into smaller pieces. Their words hurt him rather than help him. Their presence adds to his pain rather than giving him comfort.

When we consider their arguments in these chapters, there are three observations that can be made:

Job's friends are impressed with their own wisdom

Job 15:7-10 - “Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Both the gray haired and the aged are among us, older than your father.”

Job 15:17 - “I will show you; hear me, and what I have seen I will declare.”

Job knew that his friends were older than he was and had more life experience than he had, but age is no guarantee of wisdom.

Psalms 119:100 - “I understand more than the aged, for I keep Your precepts.”

According to Eliphaz, God punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous. What he says is true, but he fails to understand a crucial truth—it is not always the case in this life. Plenty of immoral people go through life happy and seem to be successful, while a lot of godly men and women suffer and seem like failures.

Bildad and Zophar will come along and argue this same case in chapters 18 and 20. According to their logic, God is just and fair, punishing the wicked and blessing the righteous. They will tell Job, “If you repent, God will bless you and relieve you of your pain. If you don't, He will judge you and your pain will persist. Repent, Job!”

Their theology is black and white and leaves no room for mystery. They have God in their perfect little rigid box. Those who are in God's will enjoy prosperity and good health, while those who are sinful will suffer. Their logic is flawed.

God will ultimately punish the wicked and bless those who are righteous, but in this life it is often delayed. Jesus even said this much in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:2 - “They have their reward.”

Better a little suffering in this life and peace in the next rather than peace in this life and suffering in the next! The only peace that the unrighteous will ever experience is in this life, while the only affliction that the righteous will ever experience is in this life.

Job’s friends are insistent upon their own way

They insist that Job repent, though he has nothing to repent of. They are not willing to budge an inch from their rigid, inconsiderate thought system. Instead of listening to Job, they lecture him. I love how Job responds:

Job 16:1-5 (Message) - “I’ve had all I can take of your talk. What a bunch of miserable comforters! Is there no end to your windbag speeches? What’s your problem that you go on and on like this? If you were in my shoes, I could talk just like you. I could put together a terrific harangue and really let you have it. But I’d never do that. I’d console and comfort, make things better, not worse!”

He says, “If the roles were reversed, I’d give you some words of comfort rather than a pointless lecture.” Instead of jumping the gun and giving them an ear full, Job says that he would listen with his heart and try to help them bear the load.

Galatians 6:2 - “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

We have a responsibility to one another in the body of Christ, which is why participation in the local church is not optional—it is a given part of the Christian life. Those who neglect the body also neglect its Head. We are to be intentional in our involvement.

Job’s friends are insecure in their own walk

I believe that one of the reasons that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are so persistent in their rigid system is because of personal insecurity.

Warren Wiersbe - *“After all, their own peace of mind was at stake, and they were not about to surrender. If Job was not a sinner being punished by God, then the three friends’ understanding of God was all wrong. But that meant they had no protection against personal suffering themselves!”*

If they were wrong and Job was right, then they could find themselves in the same predicament as he was in. Their insecurity leads them to stubbornly maintain their own foolish ideas rather than humbly accept the fact that Job may be a righteous sufferer. The bottom line is that personal insecurity has a way of ruining relationships.

Ours is the selfie crazed social media generation that is crying out for some attention. People are often all too quick to point out someone else's flaws, and it may just be their own subtle attempt to try and cover up their own imperfections.

Relationships have been destroyed by our failure to show grace.

James writes about this in the fourth chapter of his small book. Listen to what he says about God's dealings with us:

James 4:6 - "But He gives more grace."

God is far more gracious toward us than we are toward one another. In spite of our weaknesses and failures, He gives more grace. When we fail to live up to His perfect standards, He gives more grace.

Job's friends know nothing about grace. They are cold and merciless, impressed with their wisdom, insistent upon their own way, and more than likely insecure in their own walk. They are clueless when it comes to showing grace to a hurting man.

When it comes to being a friend to one who is in need:

- don't minimize
- don't criticize
- don't sermonize
- don't ostracize

We may wonder why these chapters are even in the Bible. Why has the Holy Spirit seen to it that these chapters upon chapters of verbal grenades lobbed at Job by his friends be preserved for all generations in Scripture?

Perhaps it is because the spirit of Job's friends is still alive and well. How so?

There are times it surfaces in the form of a harsh and critical spouse who, no matter what, cannot offer a word of encouragement or affirmation. Other times it emerges in the form of an impossible-to-please boss who criticizes you and constantly rides your back. Sometimes, it is even displayed by preachers who use their pulpit as a hammer to beat and abuse the sheep.

The verbal abuse Job takes from these guys proves to be too much:

Job 19:2-3 - “How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me?”

Their words are without compassion and grace. Instead of bringing comfort, they're adding to his misery. Rather than building him up, they're tearing him down. Their words were very destructive.

An anonymous poem expresses this thought very well:

*I saw them tearing a building down,
A group of men in a busy town,
With a hefty blow and a lusty yell,
They swung with zest,
And a side wall fell.
Asked of the Foreman,
“Are these men skilled? The kind you would hire if you had to build?”
He looked at me, and laughed, “No, indeed! Unskilled labor is all I need.
Why, they can wreck in a day or two,
What it has taken builders years to do.”
I asked myself, as I went my way,
Which of these roles have I tried to play?
Am I a builder with rule and square,
Measuring and constructing with skill and care?
Or am I the wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the business of tearing down?*

When our words are full of both grace and truth, we are like Jesus.

When we become more concerned about our own rigid performance-based system than we are the souls of people, we are no different than Job's friends or the Pharisees who come along later. As those who have experienced grace, we must also express grace.

2. With FAITH like this, we can move mountains! (19:23-29)

“Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

What we read in chapter 19 is nothing short of an amazing miracle of faith. Job has endured insult and injury. He has been the recipient of accusation and slander. The one wish that he had was that his words might be preserved so that future generations could read them and learn from them.

19:23-24 - “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!”

He thought that he would be forgotten. He thought that his righteous suffering would go unnoticed, that he would go down in history as a man who had no one to plead his case.

Out of darkness, there comes a ray of light.

19:25 - “I know that my Redeemer lives.”

In the midst of his pain, the light of faith broke through inside Job's weary and wounded spirit. No matter what happened to him or what people said about him, he knew the truth, and God knew the truth, and his Redeemer would vindicate him in the end.

His faith is confident

He says, “For I know...” Charles Spurgeon once preached from this text and said that you would expect Job to be certain of nothing. Here was a man who appears to have had his confidence in life shaken. The winds may blow in life and beat on this frail house, and the floods may come and overwhelm it, but they cannot shake the Rock!

1 John 5:13 - “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”

His faith is personal

Job says, “For I know that my Redeemer lives...” Job had a personal knowledge of his Redeemer, not a second hand knowledge. His faith was real, it was his own, and not someone else’s.

It is personal faith in Jesus Christ that will carry you through tough and difficult times. And it is only through personal faith that you will ever have a future hope.

His faith is optimistic

He says, “For I know that my Redeemer lives...” What does Job mean when he uses the word ‘Redeemer?’ When used in Hebrew, the word speaks of a kinsman who acted on the behalf of another.

- someone who could buy a relative out of slavery
- one who defended a relative in court
- one who married a widow to give her a future and a hope

Job’s faith acknowledges that there is only One who could qualify as his Redeemer, only One who could rescue him from his situation.

His faith is living

He says, “For I know that my Redeemer **lives!**” Though he feels like he is at the threshold of death itself, his Redeemer is alive and well. His Redeemer is large and in charge.

1 Corinthians 15:14 - “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

Job says, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last He will stand upon the earth.” When all the smoke clears and the fog lifts in this life, He will be the last Man standing.

It is faith in a living Savior that sustains us through life, and that gives us strength to endure.

His faith is expectant

Listen to Job as he says, “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.” In other words, not only is my Redeemer going to be the last Man standing, but I’m going to be standing right there with Him when it is all said and done!

Stephen Davey - *“In this prophetic paragraph, you have the doctrines of the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and coronation, along with a future physical resurrection for those who [believe.]”*

As believers we are not destined for the beginning of the end, but for the end of the beginning. We are headed toward a kingdom. Not death—but deliverance and total triumph in the eternal presence of our Kinsman Redeemer.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have a future and a hope that lives because, like Job, we have a Redeemer who lives!