

A Most Callous Friend

Job 11:1-20

- A. A friend who is so convinced of Job's guilt that he has no need to consider the evidence in the case **1-6**
 - 1. He felt listening to Job was entirely unnecessary because his words were only those of a fool **1-3**
 - a. Job had his chance to talk, but Zophar sums up all he said as idle, empty talk, ie, babbling (ESV, HCSB)
 - 1) By labeling it as empty chatter there is no need to answer any point Job made specifically
 - 2) Zophar is free at this point to speak in broad generalities of truths that everybody knew was right
 - 3) He feels no need to address matters like Job's righteousness or questions about what he had done **10:2**
 - a) Though his friends do later accuse him of specific sins, we know Job was not guilty of them
 - b) They did not need facts because their (flawed) theology told them great sin lay behind his suffering
 - b. Because Job's words made a mockery of God's justice, Zophar felt free to respond with a rebuke
 - 1) He felt a need to rise to God's defense and not allow Job's arguments to go unanswered
 - a) When the wicked mock God it is right for those who love the Lord to rise up and defend him
 - b) If we do not, these people who fill their air with their talk will seem to be vindicated by our silence
 - 2) The problem with Zophar's defense was twofold: he did not have all the facts, and Job was not wicked
 - a) Rebuke requires a knowledge of the people involved and their situation
 - b) Zophar gets off on the wrong foot because he has refused to really listen to Job, 'this talker'
 - 2. Either he had not given real thought to what Job said or he intentionally distorted his words **4**
 - a. We see Zophar's ignorance, or malice, in his summary of what Job had been trying to say
 - 1) 'My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight' is a distortion of what Job said about himself
 - 2) We don't know if he thought Job said this because he wasn't really listening, or if he was exaggerating
 - b. What Zophar seems to imply is in claiming pure doctrine and a clean life Job claimed sinless perfection
 - 1) Job makes no such claim for he speaks of 'the iniquities of my youth' (13:26) and of 'my sin' (14:16)
 - 2) All Job was claiming was that he had committed no great sin that was the cause for his suffering
 - c. When people ignore the testimony of a life of godliness because circumstances *seem* to suggest sin
 - 1) they can tend to put everything the person under suspicion says and does in the worst possible light
 - 2) We must be careful to guard against this tendency and remember the good God begins he finishes
 - 3. Zophar was so certain that he was right about Job he knew God was on his side and would condemn Job **5-6**
 - a. Job was sure that he was innocent of any great sin, but Zophar was just as sure that he was guilty
 - b. Zophar trusts God's wisdom gives him insight into everything about Job's life so he knows all about him
 - c. Zophar does not want God to speak so he can learn something new, but so God will prove he was right
 - d. It is a common malady among the self-righteous that they are all very certain God thinks just like them
 - e. When dealing with other people's lives, much of which we are ignorant of, humility is always necessary
 - 1) We know Zophar was wrong in believing God would support him in his denunciation of Job
 - 4. As bad as things were for Job, Zophar thought his sins, whatever they were, deserved worse **6**
 - a. Job believed that the Lord was inflicting punishment greater than his sin deserved
 - b. Zophar thought he was getting off easier than he deserved since God had forgotten some of his sin
 - 1) This does not mean he believed the omniscient God had literally forgotten sins Job had committed
 - 2) It means only that there were sins that for some reason he had chosen not to prosecute Job for
 - c. While we do not want to offer the suffering false hope, Zophar was trying to burden Job with false guilt
 - 1) Again, we know according to God's statements that there was no sin for which Job was being punished
- B. Zophar takes the glory of God, a thing that in itself lifts the heart of the saint, and uses it to dishearten Job **7-12**
 - 1. The Lord is inscrutable in his very nature so that his ways are beyond the comprehension of men **7-9**
 - a. Job thought he knew what was just better than God, but Zophar says God's ways are too far above us
 - 1) He asks Job whether he could discover the deep things of God or the limits of his being and power
 - 2) He rejects the idea that Job could since they were higher than heaven and deeper than Sheol
 - 3) No matter which way we turn to consider God and his work, they are too broad and long to understand
 - 4) It is simply impossible for the finite human mind to grasp God and his mind so as to argue with him
 - b. The truth in Zophar's words is one that lifts us to praise the Lord that we know **Rom 11:33-36**
 - 1) Zophar though was not using them to encourage Job to faithfulness, but to humble him further
 - 2) Job already confessed he had no hope of winning a case against God, and it only made things worse
 - 3) For one who was supposed to be comforting Job (2:11), Zophar was offering little to do that

2. His justice is impeccable because he sees evil wherever and in whomever it exists **10-11**
 - a. Because God's ways are beyond our comprehension, we have no right to question whether they are right
 - b. If he comes along, sentences a person to prison and convenes a court to announce his sentence
 - 1) who among men could oppose his condemnation and tell him that he had done what was wrong
 - c. It is not that he is right just because he has the power to enforce his will, he is right because he knows all
 - 1) He sees beyond the surface of a man's actions to see what is in his heart, and recognizes what is evil
 - 2) His judgment is not flawed by lack of knowledge, but takes into account what is hidden from others
 - 3) When God punishes a man for his sin, we can trust that there really is sin there worthy of punishment
 - d. We note once more that Zophar has it right; when God punishes a man for his sin, he is just in doing so
 - 1) His problem is that he does not see that there is suffering in this world that is endured by the righteous
 - 2) We note this is much more obvious to those who stand on this side of Jesus' suffering at the cross

3. From these truths and what he heard from Job he deduces that Job will never understand God's ways **12**
 - a. To Zophar it seemed that Job thought he knew better than God what was right, and what his sin deserved
 - 1) Part of Zophar's problem was that he treated Job's lament as a calm, reasoned discourse on suffering
 - 2) Job was not in a faculty lounge discussing the nature of evil, he was in pain, crying out in despair
 - 3) There are times for correcting an erring brother's wayward thoughts and times for comforting
 - b. While this verse is delivered as a general principle about witless people, context tells us it is aimed at Job
 - 1) These words are not comforting, they are not even instructive; they are an insult born of contempt
 - 2) Zophar had heard Job disparage God's justice and comes close to seeing Job as a lost cause

C. He finally comes to the offer of restoration through repentance, but even here closes with a subtle warning **13-20**

1. Zophar calls on Job to forsake his sinful ways and devote himself to the Lord **13-14**
 - a. He offers excellent advice to the sinner whose ways have led him to suffer God's judgment against him
 - 1) True repentance starts with the heart, with turning our desires and direction, our love, towards God
 - 2) We must stretch out our hands in supplication, striving in prayer to lay hold of him and his blessings
 - 3) Whatever sin he was practicing (sin in your hand) was to be put away as the vile thing that it was
 - 4) Whatever evil he tolerated around him that might tempt him was to be banished from his surroundings
 - b. This is sound counsel for times we are caught up and ruined by sin, but they did not apply to Job here
 - 1) There is much Scriptural advice we can offer, we need to pray for wisdom to apply it to the situation
2. He then reassures Job that with repentance the floodgates of blessing will be opened for him **15-19**
 - a. With the guilt of sin and suffering as its mark removed, he would no longer dread the shame he felt
 - b. For that dark, hopeless future he would be granted security and life without fear by the Lord
 - c. Memories of suffering would not haunt him, but would disappear from mind like water poured from a jar
 - d. Job despaired of seeing good days again, but his future would be bright so even evil days would be bearable
 - e. He would no longer lay down and fear what might happen next, but would take his rest in perfect safety
 - f. At present even people high and low looked on him pity or suspicion, but would once more seek his favor
 - g. It was not just restoration of health and wealth, but of dignity and honor that would come with repentance
 - 1) Repentance may not bring all the earthly comfort we desire, but it undoubtedly makes life better
 - 2) To live without shame before God, to face tomorrow without fear and with hope, these can be ours
 - 3) The life God gives to those who repent and trust in him is one the riches of this world cannot offer
3. Zophar closes his counsel to a godly friend in need of comfort with a warning rather than encouragement **20**
 - a. There are times when those we call to repent need to be reminded of the dangers that await if they do not
 - 1) Their eyes will scan the future for pleasure, honor and joy, but will dim then fail and never see them
 - a) 'Disappointments will be their doom, their shame, their endless torment' in eternal darkness
 - 2) Dreams will become nightmares and they will find failure to turn to God makes escape impossible
 - 3) Their hope for all that makes life good will fade away like a dying gasp that leads only to judgment
 - b. The unrepentant need to be reminded of what the future holds for them, but Job was not a wicked man
 - 1) The Lord would speak to Job (vs 5) and put him in his place, but not in the way Zophar thought
 - 2) God is infinitely higher than man in wisdom, but he didn't see in Job that evil, witless man Zophar did
 - 3) Job had no secret sin that lay behind all his suffering that he needed to repent of
 - c. Zophar's words were wise and correct in general terms, but they did not apply to Job
 - 1) As a result, the friend who needed his comfort received only confirmation no one was listening to him
 - 2) When trying to counsel a needy saint let us remember not only to speak the truth, but do so with love
 - 3) Let us make sure that we weep with those who weep so our words will encourage, not destroy, faith