

When Only God Has the Answer

Job 13:1-19

- A. Because his friends preferred neat theology to obvious truth Job found their arguments useless **1-12**
1. They were worthless physicians whose cure for his battered soul only made things worse **1-3**
 - a. They had come to comfort him (2:11), but had offered him only familiar, worn out platitudes
 - 1) What Job said about God's unexpected, inexplicable ways with men he had seen with his own eyes
 - 2) His friends' theology that refused to see this and pinned blame for his suffering on sin Job knew well
 - 3) There was nothing in their arguments he did not know; they were not teaching him anything new
 - 4) He was not their spiritual inferior so that their words offered him ideas he had never thought of before
 - 5) Rather than treat him as an equal and wrestle with his questions, they easily dismissed his confusion
 - 6) That is why he was so eager to make his case to God; he knew that the Lord would have answers
 - b. Rather than smear his wounds with the salve of truth, humility and grace, they smeared him with lies **4-5**
 - 1) At minimum they could have given the benefit of the doubt to righteous Job's claims of innocence
 - 2) They could have encouraged him to hold to his faith and trust God's goodness would be seen again
 - 3) Instead, they insisted, without evidence, that there was some great sin in Job that was behind all this
 - 4) Without greater knowledge than they had and without kindness, Job thought it best they remain silent
 - 5) It is not saying much when a friend tells us the best we can do is to do nothing to help them
 2. Their arguments defending God's role in his suffering were based on lies the Lord would not welcome **6-12**
 - a. They painted the Lord's actions in terms that fit perfectly with their ideas of what justice looked like
 - 1) God blessed those who were righteous and he brought suffering to men to the extent their sin deserved
 - 2) In their system, good men rarely suffered, and if they did, it was only slightly for a short time
 - 3) Conversely, the wicked enjoyed wealth and status only briefly before sin brought ruin and suffering
 - b. Job saw this description of God's activity as wicked and deceitful for it failed to take note of the obvious
 - 1) As noted, Job had seen with his own eyes God's work among men did not come so neatly packaged
 - 2) The last part of Chapter 12 gives many examples of how God acts in ways that do not fit this scheme
 - 3) They thought they were speaking for God, but as the end of the story shows, they were not
 - 4) They showed God partiality, saying whatever they thought it took to make him look good
 - 5) God does not need that kind of help from us; lying for the sake of what we think is good is still sin
 - c. While his friends were rebuking him for his sin, calling him to repent, they were the ones in trouble with God
 - 1) When examined by God and found to be speaking deceitfully on his behalf, they would face his rebuke
 - 2) They would be terrified when the dread of his righteous judgment was passed against them
 - 3) It turned out that Job was right; God was angry with them and it was Job's prayer that brought mercy
 3. Finding their counsel utterly worthless, Job wanted only to stand before God, dangerous as that was **13-19**
 - a. Though the Lord might slay him for presumption in confronting him, he was determined to face God
 - 1) Job has already expressed the hopelessness and danger of confronting God **9:14-18**, more than once
 - 2) So desperate is he to know why this is happening to him, he is willing to take his life in his hands
 - 3) He preferred to die proclaiming his innocence than live with the shame of a presumed guilty verdict
 - 4) The suffering was more than he could bear, but it was his righteous reputation that mattered most
 - b. This move was one of desperation, but is at the same time one in which Job's faith shines brightest
 - 1) Fully prepared to die at God's hands Job knows that God is the only reason to hope that he has
 - 2) And while he reasoned that little good would come from speaking to God, faith said it would
 - a) Trusting God's goodness and justice he could say, 'Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance'
 - b) Paul was facing death and said, 'this will turn out for my deliverance' (identical to LXX of Job)
 - c) While nothing else may be certain for the believer, the goodness of God always is
 - c. What comfort there is for the righteous saint who has given himself in faithful service to God
 - 1) He was confident that there was no sin in his life worthy of the kind of suffering he was enduring
 - 2) Job did not claim a sinless life, but one that was consistent in its heartfelt devotion to the Lord
 - 3) After listening to his friends he was still convinced no one could bring a charge of great sin against him
 - 4) So sure was he of this he put it all on the line: if such sin existed he was ready to be silent and die
 - 5) The comfort of a life given to serving God is such that even death is no longer the dread it once was
 - d. There are some who translate vs 15 differently and come out with a much different view than ours
 - 1) 'Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope; yet I will defend my ways to his face' (RSV)
 - 2) This translation is based on a reading of the Hebrew, and on the idea it doesn't fit Job's state of mind

- 3) The latter point seems to be of great importance to some, but neglects the experience of many saints
 - 4) How often have we, or those we know, been depressed to the point we were ready to give into despair
 - 5) In the midst of this darkness there is a moment of clarity and faith that lifts the spirit to great heights
 - 6) The fact that the believer falls back quickly into that darkness does not mean the faith wasn't genuine
 - 7) We ought to be grateful for such moments for there can be a means given by God for faith to survive
- B. Job finally turns from his friends to address the Lord directly concerning his desperate situation **13:20-14:22**
1. He begins with two requests: that God would stop afflicting him and explain why he was suffering **20-28**
 - a. Job's pain and fear of God who was inflicting it were so great that it was difficult for him to think wisely
 - 1) He pleaded for a brief respite, a period of relief so he could gather himself to come before the Lord
 - 2) In this calm away from the storm Job thought he would be ready to ask God questions or answer His
 - 3) His frustration was that God was not communicating with him at all so his pain was inexplicable
 - b. What Job wanted to find out was why he was suffering, why God was treating him so harshly
 - 1) If there was sin that angered God, he wanted to know what it was so he could do something about it
 - 2) The Lord was treating him as an enemy and Job had no idea what had changed in their relationship
 - 3) Why was God wasting so much time tormenting one who was hardly more than a windblown leaf
 - 4) Why was God reaching back to sins of his youth, sins that one like Job had surely made sacrifices for
 - 5) Despite his blameless life, Job was being shamed publically like a criminal with his feet in shackles
 - c. Suffering was hard enough, but senseless suffering that contradicted God's character was worse
 2. He then looks past his situation at how God treats mankind and sees how brief and full of trouble life is **14:1-6**
 - a. It seems that Job's experience of suffering brought him to reflect more broadly on mankind's suffering
 - 1) As he thought about it he came to realize that suffering was part and parcel of being human
 - 2) And it is not just that we endure hardship from time to time; our lives are full of trouble
 - b. Making this seem even more unfair is the brief time on earth that each of us is allotted
 - 1) We are like flowers that spring up and wither away quickly, as Jesus says, here today, gone tomorrow
 - 2) We are as fleeting as a shadow that vanishes when a mere cloud passes overhead
 - 3) And this is not by accident for our days are determined by God who decrees the limits of our lifespan
 - 4) We all descend from impure Adam and Eve so sin and the trouble it brings eventually ensnares us all
 - c. The German Lutheran pastor Helmut Thielicke wrote: 'Goethe (poet, statesman) . . . once said in his old age that he could hardly think that he had been really happy for more than a month in his whole life
 - 1) 'And I believe that proportion would hold true in history as a whole: the happy times are like tiny islands in an ocean of blood and tears. The history of the world, taken as a whole, is a story of war, deeply marked with the hoofprints of the apocalyptic horseman
 3. Further reflection on humanity's mortality and the finality of death brings a sense of hopelessness **7-12**
 - a. If we were like trees then death would not have that terrible sense of finality we associate with it
 - 1) A tree can be cut down, its roots grow old, the stump that is left begin to decay and die
 - 2) At the first sign of water though it can sprout again and produce new shoots that prove it is alive
 - b. Man is different though because when we die, it is over; we are done with this world and will not return
 - 1) We are more like a river whose source dries up or has its waters diverted; it will remain parched and dry
 - 2) When we lie down in death we will not awaken from this sleep to enjoy the things of this world again
 - 3) Whatever work we have to do, whatever pleasures we know in this world, they are over
 4. Yet despite what experience tells him about death, faith still looks with hope to a time after death **13-17**
 - a. Job knew he was headed for the grave (sheol) like all men, but found that acceptable if God hid him there
 - 1) If he could be shielded there from God's anger until the day of his renewal came, he would go gladly
 - 2) That day he was looking forward to when God's anger passed would come when sin was dealt with
 - 3) At that time his sin would no longer be counted but would instead be sealed up and covered over
 - b. When that day came Job said that the Lord would remember him and call for him, and he would come
 - 1) In that day God would long for his creature and Job would gladly come; fellowship was what he wanted
 - 2) Despite how badly he felt God had treated him, there was nothing Job wanted more than that
 5. That ray of hope offered by resurrection vanishes quickly behind the clouds of despair and hopelessness **18-22**
 - a. In times of great stress and duress, it is easy for us to slip quickly from faith back into despair
 - b. Job compares God's judgment to the process of erosion; once it has begun, there is no turning it back
 - c. The one who has fallen under God's judgment can only suffer the present while waiting for final demise
 - d. Job's only hope was for renewal, and there were times that was enough, there were times it was not