

Wavering Faith

Job 16:1-17:16

- A. Job's friends offered him only speeches when what he wanted and needed was comfort **1-6**
1. Job was an example that proved their theology of retributive justice, not a friend they tried to comfort
 - a. He had heard their view of God's moral universe before: he rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked
 - b. He had in fact believed what they were saying, which was why God's actions seemed so unfair to him
 - c. Their words were nothing more than a lecture on how divine justice worked; a long-winded speech
 - d. They kept arguing more because they were provoked (ailed) by Job than as a means of comforting him
 - e. They were miserable comforters with no real interest in him or his questions about why this was happening
 2. One thing making this so miserable for Job was knowing if roles were reversed he would have offered comfort
 - a. It is easier to offer well worn answers to those in despair than it is to mourn with those who are mourning
 - b. It is easier to shake our head (or finger) in scorn than to involve ourselves in the messiness of grief
 - c. That is the easier way, but Job knew it was not one he would have taken; he would have offered comfort
 - d. He would have demonstrated a genuine compassion for them and offered words of encouragement **4:3-4**
 - e. There was no grace in his friends' words, only the cruel demand to repent for sin he had not committed
 3. Job's words had brought comfort to others before, but at present he had no such words for himself
 - a. Whether he spoke or remained silent, he found no relief from the oppressive thoughts that plagued him
 - b. Speaking or not speaking brought no new light, but complaint filled his heart so he continued to speak
- B. All that had happened to him seemed to tell Job that the Lord had for some reason become his enemy **7-14**
1. With the afflictions God had inflicted that weakened him physically, Job says the Lord had worn him out
 - a. This affliction extended to the devastation of his household, children and servants, so he was nearly alone
 - b. There was no one to stand by his side for comfort and encouragement, which only made the pain greater
 - c. He felt bound like a prisoner brought before a tribunal so his weakened condition testified against him
 - d. His suffering seemed to say to everyone who looked upon him that he was guilty of some great sin
 - e. The physical and emotional toll all this had on him left him feeling worn out, unable to keep pressing on
 2. Rather than seeing Job as a faithful servant, God saw him as prey and used the wicked to help destroy him
 - a. God's sharp eyes had fixed on Job as a predator would his prey, and angrily attacked to tear him apart
 - b. What was left of Job after this attack was given over to evil men who united to together against him
 - c. Like a pack of scavengers, they opened their mouths eager to devour whatever the Lord had left behind
 3. The image of striking his cheek with scorn brings to mind the treatment of our Lord at his trial
 - a. He who was made sin for us did endure the anger of his Father who turned him over to wicked men
 - b. Though his life was one of perfect righteousness, he was left to be mocked and attacked by evil men
 - c. Job is thus a sort of prototype of the righteous sufferer, even though he had no idea such a thing existed
 - d. He is type of our Lord and a reminder that sometimes we suffer even if we have done nothing to deserve it
 4. As a blameless man Job was enjoying the peace of the righteous when out of nowhere God shattered his life
 - a. There was no fall into sin, no warning of impending judgment, just a sudden assault by God against him
 - b. He was grabbed by the back of his neck and crushed, and then set up for target practice as the target
 - c. Over and over he was pierced by archers' arrows so that his lifeblood was spilled out on the ground
 - d. And then, like a city whose walls have been breached, God ran at Job like a warrior to destroy him
 - e. The images Job uses are quite violent, expressing Job's sense of how vicious God was in his attack
- C. Despite the ferocity of God's attack, and the grief he endured, Job responds as a blameless man would **15-17**
1. He is not what some think a man of faith ought to be, an immovable stone unaffected by his suffering
 - a. He doesn't just don sackcloth, he sews it over his skin, a sign mourning was now characteristic of his life
 - b. There was nothing left of his blessed life, so he buried his horn (brow), a symbol of strength, in dust
 - c. His grief and pain also lead to incessant weeping, which turns his face red and his eyelids black
 - 1) As the NIV indicates this likely referred to dark circles that appear with lack of sleep and worry
 2. Though many in his condition might have thought his wife's counsel was sounding better, Job did not
 - a. He still claimed to be a blameless man, one with clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:4)
 - b. Both outwardly (hands free of violence) and inwardly (pure prayer) he remained a righteous man
 - c. This clean conscience before God served as the basis for the hope we see from time to time in Job
- D. Because he was a blameless man with a clear conscience, his faith gave rise to a hope in a mediator's help **18-21**
1. Like Abel, the innocent man of faith whose blood cried from the ground for vindication, Job cries for the same
 - a. Tho his friends may wish him to confess his sin and move on, Job won't be quiet till his name is cleared

- b. He had no sin that was worthy of the level of suffering he endured and wanted others to know this
 - c. A good man's reputation is more dear to him than his wealth or even his freedom from pain
2. Job believed that God had taken on the role of his enemy, but still had hope of an advocate in heaven
- a. Some will criticize Job for his vacillation between despair and hope, between distrust of God and faith
 - 1) His faith was not perfect, but it was genuine and we understand how circumstances affected him
 - 2) Many saints have found in times of intense suffering that same wavering in spiritual matters
 - b. What is important is that Job did not give up on finding a way to be reconciled to God
 - 1) The means he sees for doing this is a heavenly witness, an intercessor, who stands before God for him
 - 2) This advocate pleads with God on behalf of men as our friend to insure our interests are heard
 - 3) What man cannot do because of the greatness and holiness of God, Job believed this advocate could
 - c. So the obvious question is, Who did Job think that this intercessor who speak up for him was?
 - 1) Since Job has already said that God places no trust in his holy ones (15:15), an angel is unlikely
 - 2) The only heavenly witness who could stand before God to plead the case of sinners had to be divine
 - 3) While it is unlikely that Job understood how God could argue before God, the answer is easy for us
 - a) We know from the light of Jesus' teachings that the coming Messiah would be that Advocate
 - 4) What for Job was only a stab of faith in much darkness is a comforting illuminated truth for us
 - a) How blessed are we to know that Christ always stands at the Father's right hand interceding for us
- E. After a moment in which his faith blazed brightly, Job descended again into the slough of despond **16:22-17:2**
- 1. He had a marvelous hope that things could be made right with God, but that did not erase some harsh truths
 - 2. He had only a few years before the grim reality of death would overtake him, and there was no escaping it
 - 3. A few years was not enough time to restore his fortunes or his family; it was a dark, lonely future ahead
 - 4. His spirit was broken; there was no zeal for life, no reason for going on; he was depressed and despondent
 - 5. As great as the joy of restored relation with God was, it didn't eliminate the terrible sorrow darkening his days
 - 6. It only made matters worse that his 'friends' offered him hostility rather than sympathy and compassion
 - 7. This swing from faith to despair tells us the need to tend to our faith is not a daily affair, but an hourly one
- F. Job's back and forth between trust in God and blaming him as the source of the problem continues **3-9**
- 1. He begins by asking the Lord to 'Lay down a pledge for me with you' (ESV), that is, come to my aid
 - a. Exactly what the pledge, the security, is for is not stated, but it seems it is to make his case more firm
 - b. Job wants God to back him up in his claim that he is not the sinner people are making him out to be
 - c. No one else was standing with him to add their voice to his claim; God's voice would make a difference
 - 2. But as he thought about it he realized that they would not stand with him because God had closed their minds
 - a. But if God had closed their minds to the truth, then He knew the truth that Job was innocent
 - b. Knowing this, Job was convinced that the Lord would not allow the lies about him to prevail
 - c. Denouncing a friend without evidence just to win an argument would bring God's judgment
 - d. Job is warning his friends that what they are doing would have consequences for them and their children
 - 3. Job had become a byword for a disgraced, impenitent sinner under the judgment of God (v. 6)
 - a. As a result he was held in such contempt that people would spit in his face to show their scorn
 - b. His eyes had grown dim with grief so it was hard to see anything good, anything worth looking forward to
 - c. He was only a shadow of his former self when he was recognized as the greatest man of the east
 - 4. Job may have been living under a cloud of dishonor, but refused to give up and start to live dishonorably **8-10**
 - a. He believed the truly upright would look at his case, be appalled and turn on those who treated him unfairly
 - b. Until that day the righteous, though falsely accused, would continue in righteousness and grow stronger
 - c. Despite what Satan said, when his life was in ruins Job refused to use circumstance as an excuse to sin
 - d. It is somewhat easy to be godly when all is going well; it is when we are tested that we must hold fast
- G. Job was a broken man and as far as he could see his only real hope for relief from suffering lay in death **11-16**
- 1. He felt his days were nearing their end, his plans were all shattered and all his hopes lay in ruins
 - a. And thru all this the best 'wise' men could do was mouth the words that hope was just around the corner
 - b. He did not need empty platitudes and false hope, he needed someone to help him understand God's ways
 - c. Without that, his only hope was that death would come and the hardship of this life would finally end
 - 2. He needed someone to give a word from God, a word we have that tells us Someone else's death is the answer
 - a. There was One who was struck on the cheek, pierced by his enemies, had his face spit on by mockers
 - b. The suffering of this Righteous One though was not in vain and did not mean God's plan was mistaken
 - c. His suffering tells us that God's inscrutable plan will end in victory for the godly, and joy for all eternity
 - d. It tells us that there is meaning and purpose in our suffering so that we never give up on God's goodness