

God Under A Microscope

Job 11-14

Go ahead and turn to Job 11 in your Bibles. We're diving into the third set of arguments tonight, Zophar's arguments and Job's rebuttal. By way of review, the perfectly just God has destroyed a blameless, upright man who fears Him, AND HE'S STILL GOOD AND JUST. Job has LOST EVERYTHING—his wealth, his children, his health, and his reputation—and he doesn't understand why. WE KNOW about the heavenly wager, if you will, between God and Satan, but Job is left to petition God for an explanation. Then Job's "friends" arrive, and they're all too ready to tell Job why this has happened to him: HE'S WICKED. Case closed! There was no other explanation in their minds, so now facing this FALSE ACCUSATION along with the rest of his afflictions, Job's discourse transitions to include not only a petition TO GOD for RELIEF and an EXPLANATION, but also a plea for Him to EXONERATE him before these three and the onlooking world. Before we go any further, I want to remind you of how God summarizes this event in the last chapter...

Job 42:7

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

The three friends didn't speak rightly of the LORD, but Job did. Remember that as we delve into the words of Zophar and Job in chapter 11, starting in verse 1...

Job 11 - Zophar's First Speech

Job 11:1-6

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

**2 Should a multitude of words go unanswered,
and a man full of talk be judged right?**

**3 Should your babble silence men,
and when you mock, shall no one shame you?**

**4 For you say, My doctrine is pure,
and I am clean in God's eyes.**

**5 But oh, that God would speak
and open his lips to you,**

**6 and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For he is manifold in understanding.**

Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

“YOU DESERVE WORSE.” This is what ARROGANT counsel sounds like. *“You say you’re pure, Job, but we know better! We’re like GOD, we see right through you! If only God would show up and speak to you, He would tell you WHAT WE’VE BEEN TELLING YOU, “the secrets of wisdom!”* Talk about CONDESCENDING! This sign, I believe, is just Zophar’s speed...



Zophar was certainly talking down to Job, and SHARPLY too! Apparently he felt that it was the only way to get through Job’s THICK SKULL. It’s easy to get SARCASTIC or SHARP when we’re frustrated with someone, isn’t it? Our irritation spills over from our hearts and out our mouths, and we wind up tearing down when we intended to build up. These guys meant to be comforters and counselors to Job in the midst of this terrible ordeal, but as soon as Job confronted their erroneous understanding of God’s righteousness and justice, their godly façade gave way to cynicism and cruelty. What was their understanding of God’s righteousness and justice? Zophar puts it this way...

Job 11:10-11

**10 If he passes through and imprisons
and summons the court, who can turn him back?**

**11 For he knows worthless men;
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?**

He was saying, *“When God sees sin, He punishes it THEN AND THERE. PERIOD.”* God rewarded righteousness and punished evil, and in Zophar’s eyes, divine punishment was the SOLE purpose of suffering. For Job to claim he was blameless despite the suffering he was facing, he was impugning the righteousness and justice of God, and Zophar’s INCENSED response was to tell Job that he deserved WORSE. Job had lost all of his earthly security, his wealth and livelihood. All ten children were killed in an afternoon. Who knows if he even got to bury them before he was struck with rotting, stinking, maggoty, sores that racked his body with constant pain, and Zophar said he hadn’t suffered enough.

"God has passed by and seen your iniquity, Job, and He's punishing you for it." The meanness doesn't end there. Zophar says...

Job 11:12

**But a stupid man will get understanding
when a wild donkey's colt is born a man!** (or "when pigs fly!")

He was saying, "A stupid man is about as likely to get understanding as a man is to be born from a wild donkey, and guess what, Job. That's YOU. You're STUPID, and you'll never come to grips with what's happening to you because you won't admit you're wrong!" But then, as if still holding out a glimmer of hope for Job, Zophar presents this OVER-SIMPLIFIED UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE. In verse 13, he says...

Job 11:13-15

**13 If you prepare your heart,
you will STRETCH OUT your hands toward him.** ("spread out your palms," i.e. PROSTRATION, or PALMS UP, in NEED of God)

**14 If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,
and let not injustice dwell in your tents.**

**15 SURELY then you will lift up your face without blemish;
you will be secure and will not fear.**

Sounds good, right? "Just appease your Maker, Job, and He'll stop punishing you and bring reward again." Remember, Zophar and the gang believed that God always and immediately punished wrong and rewarded right IN THIS WORLD. This showed their lack of understanding regarding eternal judgment; their system left no room for it, just as Zophar left little room for Job's restoration. Zophar keeps kicking him, saying...

Job 11:20

**But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
all way of escape will be lost to them,
and their hope is to breathe their last.** (You know, like you've been hoping?)

Job 12 - Job's Response to Zophar

Now, whether Zophar was done or not, Job was done listening to him. Strongly stated error deserves even stronger REBUTTAL, and I can only imagine Job thinking, "Where do I begin? Which of the many fallacies do I correct first?" He chose to address the HEART ISSUE first, that being Zophar's PRIDE...

Job 12:2

No doubt you are the people,

and wisdom will die with you.

"After you die, everyone in the world will wander aimlessly in the dark because wisdom died with you." It's SARCASTIC for sure, but bear in mind how HEATED this debate had become, and with whom Job was debating. He had to FIERCELY RESPOND to the three critics because of THEIR FIERCE VERBAL ASSAULT of him! Job was actually modeling the wisdom that Solomon would later record when he wrote to **"answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself,"** but to **"answer a fool according to his folly,"** or AS HIS FOLLY DESERVES, **"lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Proverbs 26:4-5).** Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were operating out of error that they thought was wisdom; their arguments DEMANDED rebuttal, and the rebuttal had to be delivered in like manner so as to penetrate their steel-plated arrogance! Job continued, saying that the "wisdom" they espoused was nothing more than COMMON KNOWLEDGE. He said...

Job 12:3-4

**3 But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?**

You see, generally speaking, their claims true, but not appropriate in this instance. Job said...

**4 I am a laughingstock to my friends;
I, who called to God and he answered me,
a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock.**

He had lost his possessions, his family, and his health, and we've already talked some about this, but here he's lamenting the loss of his REPUTATION. Everyone who was watching Job suffer from a distance was thinking, *"I wonder what he did...I guess he isn't the 'blameless' man we thought he was."* Even the disciples, when they encountered the blind man, asked, **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind" (John 9:3)?** They were only operating out of understanding that had been common for centuries. Neither the man's blindness nor Job's suffering was due to sin in their lives. In both cases God would be glorified, but these men bore reproach for no reason.

Few things sting more than ridicule. SELFISHNESS and PRIDE hold hands at the core of our flesh. It's the most tender spot on us, the chink in our armor. You know those tender (fatty) spots on the back of your arms and legs? Well, an insult to one's pride is like someone reaching over and pinching the fool out of it. That's getting maximum effect! A well-placed barb...

Ridicule does that! I know we aren't supposed to focus on ourselves, seeking to be popular or well thought of by others (especially those in the surrounding pagan culture), BUT WE DO. Some of the most defensive, argumentative people I know are those who claim that *"they don't care about what others think of them."* We know we shouldn't, but we just do! On top of that, it's one thing to be made fun of because of who you are (your appearance, job, interests, overall lifestyle), but it's something else

entirely to be ridiculed for being something you're NOT. Job had prayed to God, and God had answered his prayers, but now he's being derided as a VILE human who deserves to suffer and be mocked for it.

If you'd say, *"I really DON'T care what people think of me,"* my question to you would be: when's the last time you witnessed to someone? When's the last time you confronted someone promoting godlessness? While we say we care little about the opinions of others, the number one reason most Christians don't witness or otherwise speak up for biblical truth is concern for what others will think. The fear of being ridiculed for our beliefs is such a gripping fear that, at best, it causes us to remain silent when we should speak up, or at worst, causes us to compromise and begin repeating the worldly claims of the surrounding culture. What others think about us matters, and the ridicule Job faced at the hands of his would-be comforters and counselors, not to mention the misinformed opinions of those at a distance, is just ONE MORE THING that he suffered. THIS IS HOW JESUS SUFFERED. Peter tells us...

1 Peter 2:19-23

19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 FOR TO THIS YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Job didn't **"revile in return."** The Bible tells us that he never sinned with his lips through the whole ordeal, and that's hard to do! We want to lash back! When people tell lies about us, we want to DEFEND ourselves! However, Job and Jesus both ENTRUSTED THEMSELVES to the One that they knew judged justly. THIS IS WHY we later see Job transition from rebutting his friends' arguments to demanding to argue his case before the LORD Himself. His "friends" only ridiculed him and acted as if he deserved this suffering, and THEY WERE THE ONES WHO WERE WRONG! They weren't wrong for saying that God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness, but they were wrong to think it was that simple and to PRESUME that that's what was happening in this instance. Job pointed out how their system of thinking wasn't grounded in reality. He said...

Job 12:6

**The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hand.**

These wicked ones are just fine, but later he says...

Job 12:17-20

**17 He leads counselors away stripped,
and judges he makes fools.**

**18 He looses the bonds of kings
and binds a waistcloth on their hips.
19 He leads priests away stripped
and overthrows the mighty.
20 He deprives of speech those who are trusted
and takes away the discernment of the elders.**

Our God is a God of REVERSALS. Job tells them that he's seen this happen with his own eyes; they had too if they were being honest with themselves. Their claims weren't grounded in reality; therefore, their system was BANKRUPT. Punishment is NOT the only reason for which people suffer. Jesus said the man was born blind **"that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3b)**. Paul teaches us that **"suffering produces endurance,"** which produces character, which produces hope (Romans 5:3), and James writes that we should actually REJOICE over trials because they test our faith and produce steadfastness (James 1:2).

In the middle of Job's examples of how God operates outside of the cut-and-dry retribution system of the three friends, Job calls on Creation to testify. The theme of creation features heavily in wisdom literature because true wisdom is seen most clearly in God's creative, organizational, and sustaining work observed throughout the earth and (now by us) in the universe at large. **"With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13)**. Job essentially argues, in this instance, that the creatures of the earth, sky, and seas understand that God directs the course of Creation in ways that are incomprehensible to us. All God's creatures just know it works, and God's dealings with Job—as well as His confusing dealings with the wicked who are at peace and the upheaval of what seemed secure and established, like the counsel of elders and the authority of kings—all of these dealings are just part of how God orchestrates and rules the universe in WAYS WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND.

This is actually a great statement of faith. Job REFUSES to accuse God of wrongdoing; instead, he falls back on his understanding of who God is and entrusts himself to Him. This section of how God operates according to His will and not ours is also a response to Zophar's OVERLY SIMPLISTIC "if-then" formula of how to APPEASE GOD. Remember, Zophar argued that, if Job puts away his obvious wickedness, he will be lifted up (Job 11:13-19). While it's true that God is pleased to reward the righteous and punish the wicked, the wisdom of God is not so "cut-and-dry." Job says...

Job 12:13-14
**13 With God are wisdom and might;
he has counsel and understanding.
14 If he tears down, none can rebuild;
if he shuts a man in, none can open.**

And that's ESPECIALLY true for the one who has been shut in. NO ONE CAN MANIPULATE GOD (like a crane game, or something else for which you do a song and dance to get a predictably favorable outcome). God does what He does because HE WILLS IT, not because of any obligation or fascination we

assume He has with us, and THAT TRUTH WORKS BOTH WAYS. Just as there's nothing we can do to turn away God's wrath or manipulate His blessing, there's nothing that we can do to make Him stop loving us; NOTHING can separate us from His love, NOT EVEN OURSELVES (Romans 8:35-39).

Job 13 - Job Continues

Again in chapter 13, Job addresses the high-mindedness of the three. When Job says "you," he's speaking to all of them, and he tells them...

Job 13:5

**Oh that you would keep silent,
and it would be your wisdom!**

There's that sarcasm again! This has been said elsewhere in scripture. King Solomon said...

Proverbs 17:28

**Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.**

And the idea has made its way into our own vernacular. It's been said over the years that...

"It is better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool, than to open it and remove all doubt!"

Job was essentially saying, *"Keep your two cents to yourself; you clearly don't have it to give..."* Job's friends were pretty high on themselves. They had God totally figured out, and Zophar tells Job that, if God were to speak to him, He would tell him as much! Job knows better.

Job is ready to argue his case before God because he knows he isn't going to get a fair shake with these three! They SPOKE FALSELY of God! They were saying that He was punishing Job for some hidden sin, BUT HE WASN'T! We KNOW this because we were privy to the conversation between God and Satan in the heavenlies. You say, *"Well, these guys didn't know that!"* That's true. They didn't, but Job has already pointed out that there are many situations wherein their "tidy system" as Tim called it, BREAKS DOWN. They just never had to WRESTLE with it like Job was having to.

Again, we see their PRIDE as they make DEFINITIVE assertions about God with little to no consideration about whether or not they're TRUE. Job largely spoke about how God had worked in the past and how He was apparently working in his current situation (no "spin," you know, like the news used to be). He was not as prideful as his friends who presumed to explain WHY God was allowing these things to happen. They had no problem SPEAKING FOR GOD, and Job rebuked them for it, saying...

Job 13:7-8

7 Will you speak falsely for God

and speak deceitfully for him?

8 Will you show partiality toward him?

Will you plead the case for God?

The general claims that the three made of God concerning His goodness and justice were TRUE. However, in their application, they were in error. They dared to speak for God, adamantly declaring that God was punishing Job for some sin he was refusing to confess. However, because of his understanding of God's goodness and justice and even greater understanding of his own uprightness, it was CLEAR to Job that God had other reasons for suffering than merely punishing wickedness. Job asked...

Job 13:9-10

9 Will it be well with you when he searches you out?

Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man?

**10 He will surely rebuke you
if in secret you show partiality.**

And at the end of our study, we'll see God do just that. They were happy to speak for God, but Job primarily asks WHY. He told the three...

Job 13:13-15

**13 Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.**

**14 Why should I take my flesh in my teeth
and put my life in my hand?**

**15 Though he slay me, I will hope in him;
yet I will argue my ways to his face.**

Job desired to SPEAK with El Shaddai, the Almighty God in whose hands rests all wisdom and power. He said, *"It may cost me my very life, but I'll take my chances with God and argue my case with Him face to face."* His desire to no longer WASTE TIME SPEAKING TO THE THREE and speak with God is a picture of how we should be. This what it looks like to find our IDENTITY in God alone. Only God has the WISDOM we seek. Only God has the POWER to affect our situation. We're called to live uprightly before others that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven, but we're not to bow to their opinion or self-proclaimed wisdom. We were made to bow only to God.

As Job concludes his remarks, his momentary hopefulness at the thought of God hearing his argument, exonerating him of all accusations of sin, and relenting in His oppressive dealings with him is QUICKLY REPLACED with melancholy once more. He says...

Job 14 - Job Continues

Job 14:1-6

**1 Man who is born of a woman
is few of days and full of trouble.
2 He comes out like a flower and withers;
he flees like a shadow and continues not.
3 And do you open your eyes on such a one
and bring me into judgment with you?
4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
There is not one.
5 Since his days are determined,
and the number of his months is with you,
and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,
6 look away from him and leave him alone,
that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.**

Like I said, melancholic and dreary, at least, at first glance. As I was preparing for this message, I read Matthew Henry's commentary on this passage, and he described Job 14 as a beautiful FUNERAL passage. We don't have time at this juncture to go into great detail on this one chapter; it's definitely worth spending some quiet time in later. I'd like to just share a FEW of Henry's thoughts on this passage. They amount to Job's meditations upon his sufferings, and they give us INSIGHT INTO HOW HIS SUFFERING WAS CHANGING HIM. It's a reminder of how our perspective and priorities ought to be.

In these first six verses Job basically asks the LORD to relent given that He understands that everyone is unclean, that humanity's days are few, and that they're full of trouble. He compares life to a long workday for a hired hand. It already comes with its difficulties and discomforts; these are the "common sufferings" of man. He says that he's fine with bearing up under those hardships, but he asks that the LORD withholds those "uncommon torments" and just let him finish his workday. After musing over the hardships of life, Job contemplates death, and you're asking, "*So where's this encouragement?*" CONTEXT. I'm establishing context. Job remarks on the FINALITY of death...

Job 14:10-12

**10 But a man dies and is laid low;
man breathes his last, and where is he?
11 As waters fail from a lake
and a river wastes away and dries up,
12 so a man lies down and rises not again;
till the heavens are no more he will not awake
or be roused out of his sleep.**

Previously, Job said that a tree that's chopped down, upon receiving water and the sun's rays, will sprout new growth; I have two or three dozen holly "bushes" (former trees) in the cleared area of woods below my house that bears witness to the claim. It's a picture of dormancy and awakening, like

when we go to bed tonight and (LORD willing) wake up again tomorrow. The same tree sprouts, and when we awake, we awake to THE SAME LIFE. However, when after we die, we will NEVER return to THIS life. Obviously, this was an encouragement to Job (as it is to anyone who suffers with chronic illness, pain, or other affliction). When we close our eyes in death (or are instantly raptured to the Judgment Seat of Christ), the trouble Jesus said we'd find in this world will be OVER. We'll never struggle with sin either **"For one who has died has been set free from sin" (Romans 6:7).**

However, death wasn't the END to Job. No, I believe his willingness for his suffering to end in death is proof that he believed in a resurrection after which he could experience relief and peace in the LORD. He said...

Job 14:13-15

**13 Oh that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would conceal me until your wrath be past,
that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!**

**14 If a man dies, shall he live again?
All the days of my service I would wait,
till my renewal should come.**

**15 You would call, and I would answer you;
you would long for the work of your hands.**

He asked the LORD to "hide" him in the grave, and here again we as believers are encouraged regarding death. You see, God made the days of our living in frailty and sin, apart from His presence, FEW. Death comes soon for all with the purpose of bringing us to Him and out of this sin-broken world. I love how **Matthew Henry** described this translation. He said...

"The grave is not only a resting-place, but a hiding-place, to the people of God. God has the key of the grave, to let in now and to let out at resurrection. He hides men in the grave, as we hide our treasure in a place of secrecy and safety; and he who hides will find, and nothing shall be lost."

Isn't that beautiful?! One day, if the rapture doesn't come first, the LORD will hide us in the ground like a treasure, and later, He will call our names, and we will answer Him in His presence. Hallelujah! I told you he was right about this being a beautiful funeral passage! I can't help but SMILE! However, despite the hopefulness we've just observed, Job is still struggling to get through his current suffering. He says...

Job 14:18-22

**18 But the mountain falls and crumbles away,
and the rock is removed from its place;**

**19 the waters wear away the stones;
the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
so you destroy the hope of man.**

20 You prevail forever against him, and he passes;

you change his countenance, and send him away.

**21 His sons come to honor, and he does not know it;
they are brought low, and he perceives it not.**

**22 He feels only the pain of his own body,
and he mourns only for himself.**

“Time devours all things.” Just as the mountains are worn away over time and are no more, **“so [God] destroys the hope of man.”** Now, of course, this isn’t the hope of heaven. Henry said, **“*Hope in Christ, and hope in heaven, death will CONSUMMATE and not destroy.*”** The hope of which Job speaks has to do with **WORLDLY ASPIRATIONS**. Any confidence and comfort based in time will end upon death, and this sets our priorities straight. It’s perhaps a bit unnatural to think on death when you’re well and at ease, just as it would be unnatural to **AVOID** the thought of death whilst in the throes of sickness and pain. Nevertheless, there is much clarity to be gained from contemplating one’s death. The things that don’t matter as death approaches shouldn’t matter the rest of our lives, at least, they shouldn’t steal time, energy, and resources from that truly matters.

Conversely, upon death, those things that mattered most here, namely our loved ones, won’t be a concern for us either. We’ll be gone, unable to affect anything or anyone we’ve left behind. This is instructive as well, teaching us to **COMMIT** those things that matter most to the **LORD**, who will know what comes of them and will be able to affect them. We do that now by **SURRENDERING** those vital concerns—our loved ones and their salvation—to the **LORD**, depending on Him to guide us as we steward all that He’s put in our care back to Him.

So, in the end, what have we witnessed tonight? We’ve watched Job work very hard to remain blameless in the face of a very mean-spirited person who said terrible things to him while also saying that he knew and love God. We’ve witnessed Job rebuke this man in a **CONTROLLED** yet **APPROPRIATELY FIERCE** way, carefully **DISCERNING** the error of Zophar’s simplistic argument on how God works. The truth is, Job knew God better than Zophar, and that intimate relationship prepared him, not only for this trial, but also for being blasted by his supposed “friends.” Finally, we witness Job look full-on at his predicament and the uncomfortable reality of suffering and death. He didn’t look away. He **SOAKED** in it, not from a hopelessly defeated position, but in earnest, and he **GAINED FURTHER INSIGHT ABOUT LIFE AND GOD!** The Book of Job is **HARD**, but beautiful. Only God could author a such a **LIFE-GIVING** story about **SUFFERING** and **DEATH**.

*Father, through all of this, I’m reminded of what you said to Moses at the bush concerning the suffering of Your people in Egypt. You told him that “You hear. You see. You know,” and in sending Him, You showed that **YOU CARES**. When we suffer like Job, and we can’t see or feel You, let us not forget that **YOU CARE**. Comfort those who are suffering. Prepare us to suffer unjustly in the future, and more than anything, help us know You more through the suffering, in Christ’s Name. Amen.*