

## Man of Sorrows Job 2:11-7:21

Why do bad things happen to good people? It is a question as old as time. The book of Job, which many believe is the oldest book in the Bible, possibly written before the days of Moses, answers this question. It is a theodicy, a vindication of God's sovereignty and goodness in spite of the existence of evil and suffering. Over the last two weeks, we have seen the stage set. Satan has been unleashed by God to have his way with a blameless and upright man's family, possessions, and finally, with the man himself. In a breathtakingly short period of time, we watched as Job went from having it all to having nothing at all. It is quite a drama. Tonight, we come to the meat of the book of Job. The majority of the book, from chapters 3-31, is composed of a heated conversation between Job, the blameless sufferer, and his three theologically knowledgeable but sorely unloving friends. For the next several weeks, we will be exploring the wisdom that is offered to us in this lengthy, and somewhat perplexing conversation.

We begin tonight with an introduction to these three friends.

<sup>11</sup> Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. <sup>13</sup> And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. (Job 2:11-13)

Who are these men? The little information that we are given does provide us with some small insights about them, and we learn a good deal more from them in the course of their conversation. We know that they are older, respectable men who obviously have a deep bond with Job, based on the fact that they weep for him and sit with him on the ground for seven days in silence. They are likely men of influence, just as Job was. They speak of having given counsel to others along with Job. They are wise men of the world.

Eliphaz, who was likely the eldest of the three, was a Temanite, a place in Edom known for its wisdom (Jer. 49:7). As an Edomite, he was a descendant of Esau. Less is known about the places Bildad and Zophar are from. The wisdom these friends offered Job was not so much spiritual wisdom as it was worldly wisdom. Eliphaz speaks about the things he has seen. He is an older man who possesses the wisdom of age, but it is the kind of wisdom that is completely devoid of the grace of God. Their message could be summed up like this, "God punishes the wicked and rewards the innocent. Therefore, Job, you are suffering for your wickedness and need to repent." It is an argument based on man's finite, limited understanding of God's justice. It is a theological system which ultimately renders the cross of Jesus Christ unimaginable and unnecessary. Unimaginable, because God would never allow an innocent man to suffer.

Unnecessary, because it makes our works, not God's works, the source of our righteousness before God.

In the end, God rebukes Job's three friends for not speaking what is right about Him. That is helpful for us to remember as we study their words. Their words are a strange mixture of truth and error. They speak many maxims which are theologically accurate, but at the core of their theological system, there is a serious problem. There is something vital missing: the grace which humbles a sinner. They are not humble in their understanding of God. They think they have God's ways and His justice completely encompassed in their small, feeble minds. They can look at a suffering man and explain his situation completely. They are the wise men concerning whose wisdom God has said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (1 Corinthians 1:19) The right approach to the subject of God's judgments is displayed for us by Paul. <sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33) There is no subject about which we should be slower to speak, or that should humble us more, than the judgment of God, especially in the light of the cross, through which His mercy is extended to all.

At the start of chapter 3, there is a striking change in the form and style of Job. We move from prose or narrative into a poetic conversation that has the marks of wisdom literature. That is why the book of Job is placed where it is in our Bibles. The majority of the book has the style of wisdom literature, so it is grouped with the other books of wisdom literature, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

There is a structure to the conversation between Job and his friends. It all begins when Job breaks the silence of these 7 days in chapter 3 with a desperate cry of sorrow. We see Job, in this chapter, as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He finally gives full vent to the anguish of his soul. His agony is so great that he longs to die rather than suffer as he is. Job laments the day he was born.

<sup>3</sup> "Let the day perish on which I was born,  
and the night that said,  
'A man is conceived.'

<sup>4</sup> Let that day be darkness!  
May God above not seek it,  
nor light shine upon it. (Job 3:3-4)

By the end, he even goes so far as to question why God gave him life to begin with.

<sup>20</sup> "Why is light given to him who is in misery,  
and life to the bitter in soul,  
<sup>21</sup> who long for death, but it comes not,  
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,  
<sup>22</sup> who rejoice exceedingly

and are glad when they find the grave?  
<sup>23</sup> Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,  
whom God has hedged in?  
<sup>24</sup> For my sighing comes instead of my bread,  
and my groanings are poured out like water.  
<sup>25</sup> For the thing that I fear comes upon me,  
and what I dread befalls me.  
<sup>26</sup> I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;  
I have no rest, but trouble comes.” (Job 3:20-26)

Job has been emptied of any joy in his life in this world. There is none remaining. He sees no purpose to being alive at all in this world. It is difficult to criticize Job for this cry of despair. Remember, he didn't have the knowledge we have. He didn't know that this was ultimately a contest between God and Satan. He didn't know that it was Satan who had attacked him. All he knew was that the proverbial rug had been ripped up out from under him. All he knew was pain, sorrow, and agony in this moment. He actually thought the Lord had turned against him, but he never let go of his faith. He turned toward the Lord, even when he thought the Lord was against him, and sought answers from his God. That is commendable.

It's important to note that, even though he despaired of life, he never once entertained the idea of suicide. As a man of faith, he understood that his life was in the Lord's hands. The fact that he is saying these things proves that suicide wasn't even a consideration. He just longed for the Lord to end it. He longed for an end to the pain and sorrow. Honestly, that is not a bad place for us to be. Wise Solomon said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.” (Ecclesiastes 7:2) Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4) It is in this place where we are most able to recognize the vanity and emptiness of this world.

Our lives in this world are nothing compared with eternity. Gregory the Great once said, “It is fitting that one who is inflamed to seek the courts of eternity should be weakened in his love of his temporal state. He should become cold to the pursuits of this world in proportion as he rises with a soul more inflamed to the love of God.” That is where Job's faith is leading him, and we will get to watch him rise higher and higher in his understanding of God's good purpose for him over the course of the next several weeks.

Once Job finishes speaking, his friends can no longer hold their silence. They have a problem with his complaints. Eliphaz can't help but respond to what they he thinks is an accusation against the justice of God. They think Job is wrongly complaining that he doesn't deserve to suffer as he is. They feel they must speak up for God.

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?

Yet who can keep from speaking?

<sup>3</sup> Behold, you have instructed many,  
and you have strengthened the weak hands.

<sup>4</sup> Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,  
and you have made firm the feeble knees.

<sup>5</sup> But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;  
it touches you, and you are dismayed.

<sup>6</sup> Is not your fear of God your confidence,  
and the integrity of your ways your hope?

(Job 4:1-6)

Eliphaz begins by speaking flattering words to Job. As I said, he is tactful at the start. He doesn't jump right to the point he is trying to make. Instead, he affirms the fact that Job, in the past, had been a help to many. He had given wise counsel to many. He had strengthened others who were suffering. Then, he gently inserts the knife into Job's wounds. He basically says, "Now that the tables have turned, you are acting like a hypocrite. You've help others, but you aren't helping yourself, Job." His next words really get to the heart of the debate.

<sup>7</sup> “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?

Or where were the upright cut off?

<sup>8</sup> As I have seen, those who plow iniquity  
and sow trouble reap the same.

<sup>9</sup> By the breath of God they perish,  
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

(Job 4:1-9)

Notice the tidiness of Eliphaz's statement. It is a neat, tidy system. Who that was innocent ever perished? That's a rhetorical question that implies the answer "no one." Eliphaz uses the imagery of sowing and reaping to prove his point that those who sow trouble, reap trouble. This is true; however, it is not true in the case to which he is applying it. Job has not plowed iniquity or sown trouble. Sometimes, the righteous suffer in this fallen world. As a matter of fact, all the righteous will suffer at some time or another.

Unwittingly, Eliphaz strikes right at the heart of God. Why so? Because God's whole purpose in creation is to save sinners by suffering in their place, the righteous for the unrighteous. If God was not willing to let the innocent suffer, then we would all be without hope in this world. Eliphaz could not be further from understanding that central truth of God's Word. Job, at this point, doesn't fully understand it, either. Later on in the conversation, Job is going to make statements that indicate that God is helping him to see that there is a Redeemer who will bear his sorrows and carry his griefs, but he's not there yet. At this moment, Job feels utterly alone and in the dark. And Eliphaz, though he's trying to help, is not helping.

He goes on to relate a haunting vision he had in the night.

<sup>12</sup> “Now a word was brought to me stealthily;  
my ear received the whisper of it.  
<sup>13</sup> Amid thoughts from visions of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on men,  
<sup>14</sup> dread came upon me, and trembling,  
which made all my bones shake.  
<sup>15</sup> A spirit glided past my face;  
the hair of my flesh stood up.  
<sup>16</sup> It stood still,  
but I could not discern its appearance.  
A form was before my eyes;  
there was silence, then I heard a voice:  
<sup>17</sup> ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God?  
Can a man be pure before his Maker?  
(Job 4:12-17)

Eliphaz seems to think this vision came as a revelation from God, but I agree with many commentators that this vision does not bear the marks of divine revelation. God is light, and there is no darkness with Him. Is it characteristic of God to appear in a dark form in the deep of night in such a way as to terrify us? Does he glide past our face in deep darkness and make the hair of our flesh stand up. This seems more like the stuff of a horror movie than of the way our Father in heaven speaks to us.

So, I believe this vision upon which Eliphaz builds his theology was likely brought to him by the enemy, and not from the Lord. Think about this. Satan is described as our accuser and adversary. God is described as our justifier and friend. God’s desire for us is that we would be just and righteous so that we could have fellowship with Him. He so yearns for us to be justified that He sent His only-begotten Son to become sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. It is true that God’s Word reveals that every human being is mortal on account of sin. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous, not even one. It is true that there is nothing we can do to be pure before our Maker. But that is only half of the truth. It is also true, that God has provided for our justification. The just shall live by faith. That means, by falling upon the mercy and grace of the God who is both just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus we shall live, and live eternally.

The question this spirit asks is really a question at the heart of the entire book of Job, not only that, but at the center of the whole biblical narrative. As we’ve already seen in the first two chapters of Job, the true dispute is between God and Satan. God presented Job to Satan as a blameless man. Satan, the accuser, sought to prove God wrong. Satan’s work is to accuse us before God, that’s why his name means accuser or adversary. He brings our sins to God with boastful arrogance and makes his claim upon us. Our sin is Satan’s boast. Just think about that for a moment. Satan gloats to God about your sin. He brought about our fall, so he proudly presents us as sinful before the throne of God.

But God's greatest boast, so to speak, is our righteousness! He is the one who makes sinners righteous, which is something Satan can never overcome. The righteousness of God that is by faith is a power that silences the enemy. He can never undo the verdict of the cross. "It is finished!" One of the reasons I love the book of Job so much is that it comes to us from the earliest days of recorded history with hope that a mortal man who suffers the worst things imaginable can be in the right before God. Well over a millennium before Christ came into this world, long before the blood of Christ was shed, there was a suffering man in Uz who was righteous on account of his faith. God has never left himself without witness. We have Job's story so that we can trust that nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If Job's sufferings could not separate him from God, then what could possibly separate us from Him? Isn't this exactly what Paul argues in Romans 8?

<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37)

That is the theodicy. That is the answer to why bad things happen to good people. Because in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. We don't need to question or doubt His goodness or sovereignty, because we already know that we win. We already know how this thing ends. Job didn't have the benefit of the full counsel of God in the Scriptures that we do. Praise the Lord, we can bring these New Testament texts to bear upon what we read in Job. We can see the whole story. This is the grand cosmic drama of redemption of which we are each a small part. We are so blessed to know what we know. What's amazing to me is that Job did it without knowing all that we know, but as we'll see, God was gracious enough to give Job some glimpses of the hope that awaited him.

Eliphaz takes the revelation given to him by this ghostly apparition, and applies it to Job in this way at the start of chapter 5.

5 "Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?  
To which of the holy ones will you turn?  
(Job 5:1)

Eliphaz is implying that there is no one who can help Job. What Job needs to do is turn to God and repent. He just needs to turn back to God and serve God, and things will go better for him. Eliphaz thinks Job just needs to settle accounts with his Maker. Again, one problem. His account is settled. He is a righteous man. Eliphaz makes many beautiful and true statements about God in chapter 5. Just listen to some of these great descriptions.

<sup>8</sup> “As for me, I would seek God,  
and to God would I commit my cause,  
<sup>9</sup> who does great things and unsearchable,  
marvelous things without number:  
<sup>10</sup> he gives rain on the earth  
and sends waters on the fields;  
<sup>11</sup> he sets on high those who are lowly,  
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.  
<sup>12</sup> He frustrates the devices of the crafty,  
so that their hands achieve no success.  
<sup>13</sup> He catches the wise in their own craftiness,  
and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.  
<sup>14</sup> They meet with darkness in the daytime  
and grope at noonday as in the night.  
<sup>15</sup> But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth  
and from the hand of the mighty.  
<sup>16</sup> So the poor have hope,  
and injustice shuts her mouth.  
<sup>17</sup> “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproveth;  
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.  
<sup>18</sup> For he wounds, but he binds up;  
he shatters, but his hands heal.  
(Job 5:8-18)

All of these statements are true. It is a blessing to be reprovved by God. We shouldn't despise the discipline of the Almighty. Yet Job was not being reprovved by God. Job was suffering because he was blameless, something for which there was no room in Eliphaz's neat and tidy system.

Eliphaz then closes his statement with an assurance that God will restore him if he just commits his cause to God. Everything will be turned around and he will have peace again and live to a ripe old age in prosperity and blessing. Sounds a lot like the prosperity gospel, doesn't it? Just bless God and God will bless you with a wonderful life. You'll have riches and never have to fear any problems or hardships. Empty promises. God doesn't promise an easy, comfortable life this side of glory. Job is proof of that.

In chapters 6-7, Job answers Eliphaz. He wishes that his friends could see the full balance of his vexation and calamity. He wants them to consider for a moment what it would be like to be him. He speaks rash words because of the heaviness of his pain and agony. Who can blame Job for despairing and speaking the words he is speaking? They are reprovving his windy words, but not understanding why he is speaking them. He asks, “What does reproof from you reprove?” I didn't ask you to help me. I didn't ask for you to make all this right. He asks, “Cannot my palate discern the cause of my calamity?” In essence, “Do you not think that I might have a little more

insight into the cause of all this than you do? If it is my own sin, do you not think I might be a little more aware of that than you are?"

Job is ready to face death. He has abandoned all hope of restoration. He has no taste for it anyway. What Eliphaz is offering Job is not even palatable to him. The only thing Job wants at this point is God. Yet he feels like God is far from him and has turned against him, though he does not know why.

So, in chapter 7, he turns to the One he truly desires. Job is the only one in any of this conversation who speaks directly to God. He prays. His friends talk about God, Job talks to God. That is an important distinction, don't you think? Job prays out of his own ignorance in chapter 7, but the fact that he prays tells us a great deal about his faith. He prays to God thinking that God has turned against him, but he still prays.

<sup>11</sup> "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;  
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;  
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

<sup>12</sup> Am I the sea, or a sea monster,  
that you set a guard over me?

(Job 7:11-12)

<sup>16</sup> I loathe my life; I would not live forever.  
Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.

<sup>17</sup> What is man, that you make so much of him,  
and that you set your heart on him,

<sup>18</sup> visit him every morning  
and test him every moment?

<sup>19</sup> How long will you not look away from me,  
nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit?

(Job 7:16-19)

I think we can all relate to Job's prayer here. We have all felt at some point that God has turned his bow down upon us, so to speak. We forget the promise of the rainbow, that He will aim His divine justice upward, toward the heart of heaven, rather than at the hearts of men. Job did not have the whole counsel of God that we are blessed to have, though he did have that promise of the Noahic covenant. Our prayers may not always be well-informed concerning what God is actually doing in our lives, but I think God delights nonetheless in the prayers of His saints. He loves it when we come to him in our ignorance and seek Him for answers.

There is one element of truth in Job's prayer. God does make much of man. God does set His heart on man. He does not look away from us or leave us alone, even in the midst of our deepest despair. Job felt like God had abandoned him and turned against him, but God was never against Job. He was for Job from the beginning. Even as Satan unleashed all these



assaults upon Job, God remained faithfully committed to Job. This just goes to show us that we don't always have the full picture.

You matter deeply to God. It is an amazing thought, that the God of the universe makes much of you and me. He has crowned us with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5). The greatest proof of this is the Man of Sorrows.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces<sup>[f]</sup>  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.  
<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:3-6)

God did that because you matter so much to Him. Trust the One who suffered and died in your place. Look to the Man of Sorrows, believe on Him, and you shall live.