

Miserable Comforters
Job 15-17

On October 16, 1555, on the north side of Oxford, two Bishops of the newly-budding Anglican Church were fastened to the same stake and lit ablaze.



Their names were Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, and they were sent to the stake by the cruel and tyrannical hand of the recently coronated Queen, Mary I (later to become known as “Bloody Mary”). She put them to death for their denial of Roman Catholic doctrine, particularly because they refused to confess that the body of Christ was physically present in the Eucharist. We remember their deaths today in large part because of the famous words which they both spoke as they fearlessly laid their lives down for their Protestant convictions.

It is told that, on the way to the stake, Ridley encouraged Latimer with these words, “Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it.” More famous are the words with which Latimer encouraged Ridley.



Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Those dying words proved to be quite prophetic. It was their comfort and confidence in death that inspired a man by the name of Thomas Cranmer to recant his denial of Protestant Doctrines and go to the stake. Cranmer had, out of cowardice, signed a denial of Protestant Doctrines in order to save his own skin, but he came under strong conviction when his friends Latimer and Ridley courageously went to their deaths holding on to their faith. He recanted his denial, and he also was burned at the stake.

But within a matter of years, Bloody Mary would die for unknown medical causes, possibly ovarian cysts or uterine cancer, and her half-sister, Elizabeth would take the throne and officially establish the Anglican Church upon the Protestant doctrines for which these men died. These men were willing to suffer for their faith. Sadly, we have very little room in our theology today for suffering, even though we follow a suffering Savior. Rod Dreher said it this way,



“Relatively few contemporary Christians are prepared to suffer for the faith, because the therapeutic society that has formed them denies the purpose of suffering in the first place, and the idea of bearing pain for the sake of truth seems ridiculous.”

I must confess, I am the chief of sinners in this regard. I love worldly comfort. I run to worldly comfort. I have so often run away from suffering rather than willingly embracing the call to suffer for Christ. The enemy loves it when Christians refuse to risk suffering for Jesus. He wants us to run and hide in the face of the scorn and hatred of the world. But Jesus said,

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)

John also said,

¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:13)

And Peter said,

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

And, of course, Paul famously told Timothy,

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

We can't say the Lord hasn't warned us. He has warned us so that we will not flee when faced with the inevitable. The test of a Christian's conviction is the measure of his or her willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake. (Repeat) Could it be that we are failing the test in our therapeutic, self-obsessed, entertainment-driven, pursuit-of-happiness-crazed age? Should the fact that the church is not suffering perhaps raise a blaring alarm to us that our faith is not quite what it should be? Could it be that we are lukewarm, trying to straddle the fence between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God?

It is with these questions that we turn in our Bibles to consider Job once again. Job, the prototypical Christian, enduring by faith an extreme measure of suffering, yet nothing compared with what his coming Savior would suffer for all of us. As we have seen, on top of his pain and loss, Job had to endure the scorn and hostility of his so-called friends.

We have now heard from each of his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Each friend successively became sharper and more forthright in their criticism of Job. At the start, Eliphaz

was tactful, Bildad gave a God-centered view of retributive justice, and then Zophar just unleashed a cruel and open assault on Job's character and integrity. They were the judges; Job the defendant had been found guilty. In fact, he was guilty in their eyes before they even arrived. Why? Because he suffered.

Now that each had spoken, you would think they might be willing to let the matter stand. It was clear that there was no common ground between them and Job at this point. Why continue to debate when they had each failed to talk any sense into Job? Well, it is human nature not to let someone with whom we disagree have the last word. Eliphaz could not let Job's prayer for vindication from God and his hope of pardon beyond the grave stand unchallenged. So, here we go again! Like a good boxing match, it's time for round 2! Ladies and Gentlemen, let's get ready to rumble! They've got Job cornered, and they're ready to deliver the knockout blow.

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

² "Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,
and fill his belly with the east wind?

³ Should he argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which he can do no good?

⁴ But you are doing away with the fear of God
and hindering meditation before God.

⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.

⁶ Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.

(Job 15:1-6)

This is deeply ironic. Job is accused of doing away with the fear of God by the very men who proudly have God under a microscope, as Matthew displayed last week. Job is accused of hindering meditation before God. Hmm...The only one who seems to have any personal acquaintance with God is accused of keeping others from having personal acquaintance with God. Why does Eliphaz feel this way about Job? Because he perceives Job's clear conscience, which leads him right into the presence of God, as brazen arrogance.

⁷ "Are you the first man who was born?
Or were you brought forth before the hills?

⁸ Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?

⁹ What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?

¹⁰ Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
older than your father.

Come on, Job. Are you really going to call our counsel into question? Do you dare question our authority? We are much older and wiser than you, and you are acting arrogantly and

disrespectfully towards your elders. Don't compound your already obvious sin by sinning against us, the authorities, with your words.

¹¹ Are the comforts of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?
¹² Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,
¹³ that you turn your spirit against God
and bring such words out of your mouth?
¹⁴ What is man, that he can be pure?
Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?
¹⁵ Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not pure in his sight;
¹⁶ how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a man who drinks injustice like water!
(Job 15:11-16)

Job, listen, we are offering you the comfort of the wisdom of God. In questioning us, you are questioning God and refusing His comfort. He recalls once again the message he received in the night from some fearful and ghostly apparition, which he described back in chapter 4 during his first speech. No one can be pure, he says. You are a mortal man, and you need to stop holding so tightly to your integrity and just admit that you are a sinner.

Next, Eliphaz provides a detailed portrait of the wicked man according to his theological system. Again, it is neat and tidy.

"I will show you; hear me,
and what I have seen I will declare
¹⁸ (what wise men have told,
without hiding it from their fathers,
¹⁹ to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them).
²⁰ The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.
²¹ Dreadful sounds are in his ears;
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.
(Job 15:17-21)

He goes on for several more verses, describing the terrifying and miserable life that all the wicked are bound to live in this world. This is his wisdom. God punishes the wicked, so no one who is wicked will ever enjoy the comforts of this world, which he equates with the comforts of God. The wicked will only encounter trouble and misery in this life, for God is just and does not allow the wicked to prosper. This is such empty wisdom because it never rises above this world. Everything is here-and-now, there is no such thing as eternal rewards and punishments.

What's more, Eliphaz is saying that it is arrogant and unrealistic, even blasphemous, to claim that one can suffer innocently in this world. Here's the thing, those who refuse to believe in underserved sufferings are very often the same ones who will refuse undeserved grace. They are the ones who will say it is arrogant and dangerous to offer free grace because it will undermine the incentive for good behavior. Paul was often accused of this very thing because he preached the grace of God. Quoting the words of his opponents in Romans 3, Paul said,

⁸And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8)

It is a sad reality that the religious person, the moralist, the Pharisee is often the furthest away from faith in Christ. The cross is an offense to such a person. It is the cross, the undeserved sufferings of Christ purchasing the undeserved grace that saves us, which is the wisdom of God. It is the key that unlocks an understanding of why this world as it is. Without the cross, Job makes no sense. Without the cross, our lives make no sense. Without the cross, we have no comfort from God, nor any comfort to offer one another. Job is on the receiving end of the comfort this world offers, and it is not pleasant. It is harsh and biting. It is critical and cold. Listen to his response.

Then Job answered and said:

²"I have heard many such things;

miserable comforters are you all.

³Shall windy words have an end?

Or what provokes you that you answer?

⁴I also could speak as you do,

if you were in my place;

I could join words together against you

and shake my head at you.

⁵I could strengthen you with my mouth,

and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.

(Job 16:1-5)

The back-and-forth continues. Bildad had called Job's words windy. Now, Job returns the favor. Who is right? They cannot both be right. At the heart of this dispute is the question of where wisdom is to be found. Is there any true wisdom to be found in this world? Paul answers this question for us in 1 Corinthians 1.

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:20-21)

No, the world's wisdom has been shown to be foolishness. Job tells his friends that their wisdom, not his, is wind. It is not difficult to join words together against a man who is suffering righteously. It is very easy to shake one's head at a man who is in such an ignominious condition. Isn't that exactly what men did to Christ on the cross? True wisdom is not shaking your head at such a one, but standing in awe of the fact that God would allow such a thing to happen. It is the easiest thing in the world to scoff at the cross. What is truly difficult is to stand before the cross with godly fear and to rejoice with trembling at the sight of it. To fall on your face before the cross and worship the One upon it, understanding that He is there because of the love of God—that is wisdom.

In verses 6-17, Job describes his condition with words that would not sound out of place on the lips of Jesus on the cross.

⁶ "If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?
⁷ Surely now God has worn me out;
he has made desolate all my company.
⁸ And he has shriveled me up,
which is a witness against me,
and my leanness has risen up against me;
it testifies to my face.
⁹ He has torn me in his wrath and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.
¹⁰ Men have gaped at me with their mouth;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.
¹¹ God gives me up to the ungodly
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.
(Job 16:6-11)

This description of his miserable condition goes on through verse 17. Is it merely coincidence that Job's words would fit perfectly in the mouth of Jesus when He went to the cross centuries later? I doubt it. Could it be that Job is meant to point us forward to the Savior who suffered though He was holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens?

Chapter 16 closes with an amazing request, followed by an incredible promise. It is the request of every man of faith who has ever suffered at the hands of wicked men in this world.

¹⁸ "O earth, cover not my blood,
and let my cry find no resting place.
(Job 16:18)

This reminds me of God's statement about righteous Abel's blood all the way back in Genesis 4.
¹⁰ And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. (Genesis 4:10)

Apparently, innocent blood speaks very loudly to the Lord. He will not let it go unanswered. This is why we are told to leave revenge in the hands of the Lord who judges justly.

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

The earth cannot cover the blood of the innocent. When you are reviled for Jesus' sake, you can continue entrusting your soul to the one who judges justly. All the blood of the martyrs cries out loudly in the ears of the Lord, and He will repay.

Next, something amazing happens in verse 19. Job's faith in the Lord is met with the Lord's comfort.

¹⁹ Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
and he who testifies for me is on high.
²⁰ My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
²¹ that he would argue the case of a man with God,
as a son of man does with his neighbor.
²² For when a few years have come
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.
(Job 16:19-22)

This is astounding spiritual insight, which Job could only have received as direct, special revelation from the Lord. Job is given a confidence not only that God hears him, but that God actually speaks for him. As his friends on earth turn against him, His Savior in heaven testifies for him. Job earnestly prays that God would argue his case for him with God. What is going on there? I believe this is the Holy Spirit revealing the Father and the Son to Job. Notice the Messianic name, son of man, contained in Job's longing. Is that just coincidence, or could it be that the Holy Spirit gave Job these words? Could it be that the Holy Spirit was pointing Job forward to the true hope that lay before him, when a Son of Man would be sent into this world by God in order to argue the case of men with God, to be the propitiation for our sins? His prayer and longing would find its yes and amen at the proper time, as is clearly revealed in the New Testament.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

It should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit would bear witness with Job's spirit about His heavenly Advocate. Jesus told his disciples this is what the Holy Spirit would do for them.

²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. (John 15:26)

That is the Holy Spirit's job description. He bears witness about Jesus Christ. It is no surprise, then, that the Holy Spirit would also bear witness to Old Testament saints about Jesus. It does not matter that they lived before Jesus was manifested in the flesh. The Holy Spirit has always had the same message for this world. From the very beginning, He has been predicting the sufferings of our Savior, who would advocate for all who trust in Him. Peter spoke in no uncertain terms about this very fact in his first epistle.

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully,¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. (1 Peter 1:10-11)

The Spirit of Christ predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. Job was one of the prophets who searched and inquired carefully about these things that the Spirit revealed to him. The same Comforter who comforts us gave Job just a small glimpse of the salvation that was to come. He got this glimmer of hope that, in spite of all he is suffering, and in spite of the fierce accusations of his friends, God will declare him innocent. God will vindicate him, and he will stand face-to-face with His God in the end. He is looking into the grave, not with fear, but with a God-given confidence. Only by faith can we gain such a confidence over the last enemy. Only by trusting in our Witness in heaven, the One who speaks for us and not against us, can death lose its sting, which is sin. Here at the end of chapter 16, Job has found true comfort. The Comforter has come to meet him and has set his mind on heavenly things.

At the start of chapter 17, however, he is brought back down to earth.

"My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;
the graveyard is ready for me.

² Surely there are mockers about me,
and my eye dwells on their provocation.
(Job 17:1-2)

This reminds us that the comfort of the Lord comes to us in the midst of grievous sorrows and trials. Remember when Paul experienced the comfort of the Lord?

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

It was as Paul and Timothy were utterly burdened and despaired of life itself (sounds a lot like Job) that God met them with His comfort. It was walking through such suffering that made it possible for Paul to say,

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

It is in the place of our greatest pain and struggle where the comfort of God becomes most real to us. That is where we are brought to rely not on ourselves but on God. We tend to run from mockery and provocation, understandably so, but God is able to comfort us in the midst of it. We don't need to run and hide, or cower in fear, when scoffers and mockers come against us. Job goes back and forth here between feeling the depth of his earthly agony and feeling the comfort of His God and Savior. In verse 3, he is brought right back to his comfort.

³ "Lay down a pledge for me with you;
who is there who will put up security for me?
(Job 17:3)

A pledge is basically someone who will put his life on the line for another. An illustration of this is what Judah did when Jacob didn't want to send his son Benjamin to Egypt for fear that Benjamin would never return to him. Do you remember that occasion? Joseph had demanded that his brothers bring Benjamin back to Egypt with them before he would help them in the famine? Jacob wouldn't have it. He had already lost Joseph. He couldn't bear to lose the other son whom Rachel bore to him. So, Judah finally had to tell his father, ⁹ **I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. (Genesis 43:9)** In essence, my life for his. I will bear the guilt and punishment if I don't bring Benjamin back to you. Job longs for someone to do the same for him with God. He longs for someone to be his surety, his guarantee, that God will declare him innocent of all these accusations and that he will arrive safely home at the end in the presence of His Maker.

Just a quick side note here. It's important not to miss the fact that Job goes back and forth between speaking to God and speaking to his friends. It's as if he's got an open line with God. Sometimes it's hard to tell that he's changed his audience. Without any notice, he seamlessly goes from addressing his friends to addressing God. That is a mark of faith. A man with faith is in an unceasing posture of prayer. He has an open line with His heavenly Father. He may seem crazy at times because he can't seem to remember who he's talking to, but that's just because he is so close to the Lord that he can't help but sometimes interject a prayer into a conversation. He prays without ceasing.

After asking God to lay down a pledge for him, Job again comes back down to bear the full weight of his sufferings. He can't get away from his condition. He is being comforted in the midst of the deepest pains imaginable. He again describes his condition in a way that is quite similar to the sufferings of our Savior. These miserable comforters have amplified his agony. He is a byword of the peoples. He is one before whom men spit. But Job makes another amazing statement in verse 9.

Yet the righteous holds to his way,
and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.
(Job 17:9)

In spite of all he is enduring, he holds to his way. He will not give up or turn away from God. He will continue to pursue the One in whom He trusts. He commits his spirit into the hands of God Almighty, and he grows stronger and stronger, even as his flesh and heart fail.

We must do the same. We must not look away from Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We must fix our eyes on Him. He has sent us the Comforter from heaven to bear witness to our spirit about Himself. The righteous will hold to his way. Take a look at this picture one more time.



Those two men, Latimer and Ridley, they held to their way. They did not lose hold of their faith even as they burned on that fiery stake. When the righteous hold to their way even in the face of suffering and persecution, a candle is lit that shall never be put out. The light of the world shines brightly as we endure suffering for Jesus' sake. Let us hold to our way today, Christians, no matter what comes. Be of good comfort and play the man. Let the world hate us. Let the fires consume us. We will hold to our way and grow stronger and stronger.