

September 15

Job 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

Today we read Job chapters 26-31 and become reimmersed in the tragedies that have befallen Job. We read Job's rather lengthy answer to Bildad's third and final speech in Chapter 26.

In Job's reply to Bildad there is no attempt to disguise his disdain for the apparent ease with which his so-called friend has leaped to the conclusion that Job is suffering because of evil that he has done and refused to repent of. Job is openly sarcastic.

'I know at least as much as you do,' he says, 'about the power and greatness of God. Of all the things that we are wrestling with as we read through this book of the Bible, this much is very clear - any attempt to neatly package up the ways and works of God is going to be frustrated. It is far better to simply say, 'I don't understand' than to pretend to explain the things that defy explanation!

Chapter 27 is Job's final response to all 3 of his friends' explanations. Throughout the entirety of his misfortunes, he has steadfastly maintained his innocence. About that, Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are never going to agree. As long as he has breath, Job is not going to concede that point.

Nevertheless, there are 2 things they do agree upon.

1. The mighty power of God (that was the point of Chapter 26)
2. The fate of the wicked. 'I agree with you,' Job says, 'that there is not any future for the evildoer - no matter how much wealth he accumulates, it will not do him any good in the long run. 'God is all-powerful - we agree on that. And God will ultimately punish the wicked - we even agree on that but the mistake you have made,' Job says, 'is in assuming that adversity is automatically a sign that God is punishing the person in trouble.

As Christians, we need a sound theology of adversity. Let me enumerate several reasons the Bible gives for bad things happening to good people:

#1 It can be because God is punishing sin in us. Job never denies that. He only seeks to say that this is not the reason in his case. Corinthian believers were sick and some died because of sin (I Corinthians 11).

#2 Misfortune sometimes comes by God allowing Satan to test us. That is the truth in Job's case.

#3 Adversity comes at times to equip us for ministry. The Book of Hebrews will later say that Christ can be counted upon to understand and to help us in our adversity because He completely understands - He had experienced it all Himself. II Corinthians 1 tells us to comfort others with the comfort that we ourselves have received. This is a foundational principle in Renewal Ministry

#4 Adversity can be training in righteousness - faith building - that was what the Red Sea was all about for Israel.

#5 Adversity can be the best way to teach what we would not otherwise learn. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh and God's reason for not removing it? "My grace is sufficient for you."

#6 Adversity can be God's tool to transition us to new and better things. Final illnesses are often God's gracious way of helping us to let go of that which is inferior so that He can give to us that which is far better. Certainly such illnesses assist the families of those afflicted to let go and not begrudge the passing of their loved ones into better phase of life.

Chapter 29 is Job's summary defense. Here for the first time we hear specific refutation of the charges that Job's 3 friends have made. Job never turned away the needy. He helped them. He rescued the poor. He helped the orphans. He befriended the bereaved. He was kind to beggars. He helped the strangers. He stood up to the wicked. Job was not a loan shark. Of all the things of which he has been accused, he really is innocent.

He was widely respected, greatly honored - a leader of men.

In Chapters 30 & 31 we find him bitterly reflecting not upon life as it was, but as it now is. The sons of the men that Job would not even consider for employment now mock him - "They spit in my face." Job directs his laments directly toward God, but he never gives up his protestations of innocence. He claims for himself moral purity, honesty, justice, and mercy toward the poor and oppressed. He has not been greedy, nor has he gloated over defeated enemies. He pleads his case, but there is no one to hear the plea. "Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense - let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing." There is no one to be Job's advocate. He is in God's hand with no one to help him.

Chapter 31 ends with the simple statement that "the words of Job are ended."

Now before we go on, I want you to stop and ask a simple question. Who won the argument? For nearly 30 chapters, the war of words has been waged back and forth, the 3 friends accusing and Job refuting. Who won? The answer, of course, is no one. It's a stale mate. About 15 chapters ago that is how I began to feel about this debate. No one wins. The accusing friends are just reaching for the air with their insinuations. They can't prove anything. Job has held his own against them but in his protestations he has left us with a sense of uneasiness about his so-called righteousness.

If the Book of Job ended with Chapter 31, we would have a big-time problem on our hands. We would be left with Job's innocence and with his integrity still intact. But the price tag would be too high because the justice of God would have been called into question. At the end of Chapter 31 we might say Job is innocent, but God is guilty! This is the point at which Elihu begins to speak.

Now, he has been there all along, or at least for some time biting his tongue, listening in silent respect because of his youth, but now he can restrain himself no longer. His frustration level is just too high. He is angry with Job for defending himself at the expense of God's honor. He is angry with the 3 friends for their inability to answer Job's refutations and for their unwillingness to listen. Elihu will look higher. His voice will not be the final voice, but he will point us in a different direction and will help us to redeem the honor of God. It will be for us to look at the substance of Elihu's speech tomorrow, but for now

suffice it to say that having proclaimed the bankruptcy of the arguments of Job's 3 friends, Elihu promises a new and different argument.