

September 9
Job 4-7

Job is in trouble. He has lost his property, his wealth, his ten children and his health. Not to mention his marriage! But at least he has some friends...

As we read yesterday. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were Job's friends. And their intentions were sterling! They came to comfort their suffering friend. However, they failed miserably in their stated goal. They did everything but comfort Job. They accused him of being a great sinner, of lying to them and to himself, in being in secret revolt against God. Everything they said sounded good, pious and logical, and much of what they said was even true!

We need to be careful because what they say often sounds very good and much of it is actually true! It's just not helpful!! Instead of comforting their friend, they wound him.

So when we are called to comfort, sometimes we can only say, "I don't understand either, but I care and I will just be here to love on you and cry with you. I do trust God - I just do not know what He is doing or how He is working - so I won't try to guess. I will just be here for you!!"

Now, did you notice the big flaw in Eliphaz's thinking? It is a very common one shared by a great many people then and now. In fact, some of the major religious systems in the world are based upon this idea. Eliphaz thought that all suffering was the direct result of some evil done by the person who was experiencing the suffering. The logic runs something like this:

Major premise: All suffering comes as a punishment for sin.
Minor premise: Job is suffering.
Conclusion: Therefore, Job has sinned.

Here are a couple of quotes from Eliphaz "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his maker?" His logic is flawless, but the implication is that Job is suffering because of his sin!

Sometimes suffering comes because of Sin or because of stupidity. Sometimes suffering does NOT come as a direct result of sin in our lives. Job's friends ended up persecuting him instead of comforting him, first because they had a flawed "theology of suffering." A lot of hurting people today are harmed by well-meaning "friends" in exactly the same way.

Friends, sometimes suffering strikes just because we live in a broken world. Sometimes righteous people are random victims. Sometimes there is a spiritual battle raging we know nothing about. Sometimes, God is doing a deeper work in us... and pain is a factor he redeems.

The next thing I want you to notice is that one error often leads to another because the idea that all suffering is the direct result of a person's sin leads directly to another equally false idea and that is the idea that you can judge a person's character by the circumstances in which you find them. How many times have you been tempted to believe that most poor people are also lazy people? Now, it is certainly true that some poor people never get out of poverty because they have little desire to work hard and better themselves. But to conclude that any person whose circumstances we do not personally know is lazy just because they are poor is no more true or noble than thinking that everyone who has liver cancer brought it on themselves by a life of intemperate drinking.

In the face of Eliphaz's misguided attempt at correction and comfort, Job is more miserable than ever. In Chapter 6, he pours out his heart again, directing his remarks first to God, and then in the latter part of the chapter to Eliphaz as well. In the midst of his pain, Job still professes his innocence: "I had not denied the words of the Holy One." "Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?" He is not saying he has never sinned, but he is denying what Eliphaz was clearly suggesting, and that is that Job must be hiding some terrible sin. 'I'm not hiding anything!' Job cries. 'But God, just let me die now - my strength is gone and I am all out of hope.'

As we move ahead in the book, I want you to continue to notice what we have seen before in God's interactions with David and Jeremiah and other "suffering servants". They complain to God; they ask hard questions of God; they plead with Him and they are brutally honest about their discouragement, their pain, their difficulty in trusting Him, and every once in a while, their belief that He is treating them badly. God sometimes corrects their wrong thinking, challenges and stretches their view of who He is, but God never gets angry with a struggling follower for being honest and telling Him exactly what they think and feel!