

September 11
Job 11-14

Yesterday, we watched Job examine 2 of the 3 possible 'solutions' to the problem of how a just man could be suffering at the hand of God. How can you say that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and full of goodness and still account for the presence of evil in the world and for the fact that bad things happen to good people?

We ruled two out. God is all powerful and suffering does exist - even for the righteous

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have all solved the problem by saying 'Job is not a good person. He is suffering because of the evil that he has done and hidden from the eyes of men but not from the eyes of an all-knowing God who is now punishing him. Job is getting just what he deserves.' The solution as far as they are concerned is simple. Zophar states it for the third time in verses 14-19 of Chapter 11. Just repent and stop covering up your sin.

Now that is excellent advice to the person who really is suffering because they have sinned, but it is terrible advice if the person to whom you are talking has been afflicted for some other reason. That is why Job in Chapter 13 gets angry with Zophar and his friends.

Job knows that his suffering is not because he has sinned and so he turns back to the 3 basic truths that are constantly challenged by the reality of evil in our world. He has already affirmed that God knows what is going on and that God is the all-powerful Creator of the universe - if God is strong enough to form the constellations and the galaxies, then he is certainly strong enough to prevent evil from striking down the righteous. At the end of his reply to Bildad, we can see Job carefully looking at the third possibility. Maybe God isn't really good - or at least maybe He is not totally committed to being good or fair to me.

If this is true, if God is all-knowing and all-powerful but not committed to justice - not totally good - not always good to the righteous - then according to Job it would truly be better never to have been born. This would be the most frightening thing of all - the worst-case scenario. And mark this, in the furnace of affliction Job is questioning this - he isn't sure - he thinks that maybe God doesn't love him anymore. Job is questioning God's love.

In times of severe suffering, people may say things that require a response of love and understanding. Job will eventually repent (of these words), and God will forgive (42:1-6).

One of the most important things I hope we take away from our reading of this Old Testament book is a spirit that is willing to listen to and empathize with people in great pain without condemning them. Job did not need to have his theology corrected - he needed to know that he was loved. And if, at that moment, he could not feel the love of God, it was even more important that he feel the love of God's people: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. But they were not willing to comfort. Instead they chose to correct and to condemn. Will you make a deal with me to try always to be a comforter before you become a corrector?

I want to close with two quotes that I just can't ignore...

One of the great verses of the book and indeed of the whole Bible is embedded in his angry response to Zophar: "Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him." Friends, when the world caves in around you and you cannot understand what is happening, that is the only possible position for the true believer to take. In the midst of the chaos I choose to trust God and to believe that His purpose is to bless and not to harm me!

Next Job says that when you die, that's it. But then something puzzling happens - Job asks a question: "If a man dies, will he live again?" On the basis of what he has just said, we expect it to be a rhetorical question with an answer of "certainly not!" It looks though, despite the inevitability of death, as if Job is expecting something more - something beyond death - perhaps a resurrection?

The idea is already there, and as he sits in the ash heap, agonizing from the physical pain of his affliction and from the emotional pain of his friends' assaults, Job is already grasping the kernel of truth about immortality that will blossom into the greatest comfort any suffering saint can know.