

September 14

Job 22, 23, 24, 25

Hello again CCC family. This is Pastor Mike Goett
Today is September 14th and we will discuss Job 22 - 25

We have begun the third and final cycle of speeches in this perplexing book. This time Eliphaz will speak and he has moved from inference to open, blatant accusation, laying charge after brutal charge at the feet of his poor suffering friend. After Job's response, which, almost completely ignores Eliphaz's outrageous charges to focus instead on the thing that was really troubling him - the silence and hiddenness of God - Bildad makes a very brief speech which basically makes just 2 non-debatable points: (1) God is omnipotent and (2) man cannot be holy before God.

Before we talk about anything else, I want to point out that what began as an attempt to comfort a friend, and secondarily to help him understand what God's purpose in his life might be, had turned into a very "uncomforting" argument, filled with real bitterness and anger. Problem solving instead of being a good listener. In doing, so, I've recognized that I too can do the same thing. I've never sat with someone for a week in silence. But looking at that cycle, I see that I have done that over and over and over. Many times I will stop before moving into complete frustration and accusation and just remain a friend who hears and listens and tries to comfort and help. But many times I have failed to do that, in particular in my marriage.

Sometimes my wife will come to me and say "can we talk?", but I will hear with husband ears or at least immature husband ears, and what I hear is "I have a problem, I haven't been able to solve it and I need your help". As a result I will blow right past the "bearing with" phase and silence and move directly into problem solving, trying to help my wife "fix" her own problems. Then when it doesn't seem to be going very well because I am delivering something that hasn't been requested, I can become very frustrated then can actually move into accusation, where I lay sin at the feet of those I love, not because the evidences is actually there, but really it's more of a reflection of what is going on internally.

Granted that is not a daily experience for us but this is something we have been through. In true confessions, I've done this. I've been Bildad, I've been Zophar. I wonder if anyone else can identify with that. I know we can all identify with Job, but I wonder if we

I wonder if anyone can identify with that. It is at least possible that in some circumstances - in my great desire to defend God's honor by explaining (or trying to explain) His actions I, like them, have missed the opportunity to be a compassionate friend who can help a suffering person hold on to God and instead have become just another voice of judgment!

Well, at the beginning of his first speech, all the way back in Chapter 4, Eliphaz had been quite gentle with Job - almost deferential. He, at that point, had begun by noting that Job had often comforted others and credited him with his righteous reputation. But now, in his exasperation, trying hard to drive Job away from his profession of innocence, Eliphaz, still assuming that Job's suffering must be the result of God's judgment of his hidden sinfulness, trots out practically every accusation that would typically be associated with rich and powerful people. Job is accused of "loan sharking" - demanding unreasonable security and interest from people seeking loans - of miserliness in withholding food and water from travelers, of mistreating widows and orphans. There is no evidence - no proof -

for these harsh accusations - just that nagging assumption: if you are suffering, it was to be because God is angry with you!

And the brief argument with which Eliphaz prefaces his charges is ironic in the extreme! Eliphaz seems to be saying, 'Job, stop protesting your vaunted righteousness! God doesn't care about your protestations of innocence. Even if you were righteous what difference would that make to God? What would He gain if your ways were blameless?' Now that is ironic because what we know (from chapters 1 and 2) that neither Eliphaz nor Job knew, is that God had plenty to gain from Job's righteousness. It was God's honor that was on the line here in the "tests" that He allowed Satan to throw at Job!

But there is a sense in which God's reputation among other people is effected by how we who are His children act. God's glory, in Himself, would be unchanged whether or not Job passed the test. But the way that other people view and perceive God could be effected - by what Job did, and by what you and I do. That is why Paul said, "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

So, what's it all about and more importantly, when will it end?' Once again, Job's agonized words sound a lot like some of David's Psalms. Job was thinking out loud and David was mostly talking directly to God, but the subject was the same. 'O God, why have you hidden your face from me and how long will it last and God, why do the wicked seem to fare so much better than I do, when I have tried so hard to honor and please you in everything I do?'

Now, what Job is experiencing what some of the great Christians of old have called "the dark night of the soul" - the time, and for some it can be a very protracted time, when for unknown reasons God seems to have withdrawn Himself from His child, when for no apparent reason - at least no reason that we as creatures can determine - He hides Himself from us and we cannot find Him or sense His presence with us. He is there but we can't feel Him and it seems as though we have been deserted.

Have you ever gone through a period like that? Where is God then? He's hidden. What is God doing? We do not know. Why is He allowing this "dark night of the soul" to encompass us? Again, we do not know. Has He abandoned us? No - but it feels that way.

When we encounter our own "dark night of the soul", all we can do is to hang on by faith to what we know about God and continue to obey His Word, and in spite of everything, believe His Word. It will not feel very satisfying but it is the way through the dark valley. Job walked that way; so did Martin Luther and a host of others. Jesus walked that valley, too! And perhaps, in His infinite wisdom, God will require it of us as well.

I want to finish today by reminding you of some words from I Peter 1 - addressed to first century Christians about to also walk through their own dark night of the soul: "In this" ("this" is what Peter has just told them about their salvation and the inheritance that awaits them) - "In this you greatly rejoice even though now, for a little while, you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine, and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (I Peter 1:6,7).