

Enduring False Charges

General Topic: Justice and Adversity

Sunday, February 20, 2022

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Lesson Text: Job 8:1-10, 20-22

Background Scripture: Job 8

Job 8:1 Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said,

2 How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?

3 Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?

4 If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression.

5 If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes and make thy supplication to the Almighty.

6 If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.

7 Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

8 For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers:

9 (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)

10 Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?

Job8:20 Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers:

21 Till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing.

22 They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.

Lesson Objective(s):

This week we will observe how others will try to assign shame based on public suffering and find that ultimately God's restorative justice will prevail.

Teaching Tools:

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: www.puzzlemaker.com. Also, www.dtlk.com has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as www.kidssundayschool.com which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

The Lesson:

speaking to God insists that the integrity of this upright man had never been tested.

Human analysis of circumstantial suffering often falls to a natural inclination to adopt Sir Isaac Newton's third law of physics. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This tunnel vision mindedness dismisses the fact that God does not have human inclinations. He operates from a perspective that surpasses far beyond the bounds of mortal imagination.

When one decides to align themselves with God's will, the assumption is often made that physics law three should automatically apply. You live a Godly life, you have abundance. Comparitively, you live a wicked life, suffering should ensue. However, the Bible tells us that God rains on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). The difference is that he equips those who follow him with an umbrella. He gives them the strength and fortitude to overcome all trials and tribulations.

Perhaps no Bible figure is a more shining example of that ideal than Job. Job was a man of great wealth who suddenly found himself losing everything, even his children. This sudden loss was perplexing to Job because he had always been upright and blameless, a God-fearing man (Job 1:1). He continued to worship and praise God even after such a great loss (Job 1:20-22). Rather than blame God for his suffering, Job simply mourns and seeks the counsel of friends. But his friends just couldn't figure out what Job might have done that was so terrible that God had brought all this suffering down on him. In this lesson we will explore the view of Job's friend Bildad versus the reality of Job's situation.

Background

The book of Job opens with a brief description of the man, his possessions, and his family. He was described as blameless and upright. Job owned thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. In simple terms, Job was considered a wealthy man in the tribal culture of the ancient world. As all was well with Job, then enters Satan who

He accuses Job of serving God only because God had protected him and made him wealthy. God, who knows everything and how every human being will respond in every situation, gave Satan permission to test Job in any way, except he was not to put his hands on Job. As a means prove to God that Job only served Him because of his blessings, Satan began testing Job. In rapid fashion, Job's sons and daughters were killed and all his flocks were driven away by his enemies. Still after all of this Job held on to his integrity and trust in God.

Finally, Satan suggested to God that if He would touch Job's body, with disease, Job would curse Him to His face to which God replied, "*Behold, his body is in your hands, but don't touch his life*" (Job 2:4-6). With God's permission Satan struck Job with a terrible skin disease. In his sorrow, he sat on an ash heap mourning, scraping his sores with a piece of pottery. Job was even confronted by his wife who urged him to end his suffering by cursing God. (Job 2:9-10).

When Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar heard about everything that had happened to Job, they came to mourn with him and to offer their comfort (Job 2:11-13). They found him sitting in the ash heap lamenting his sudden misfortune. But instead of comforting Job, these three friends gave him long lectures and philosophical debates to show Job the reason for his suffering. Their line of reasoning followed the generally accepted view of their time that misfortune is always sent by God as punishment for sin. Eliphaz spoke first making the charge that the innocent do not suffer (Job chapter 4). Then in chapter 5, Eliphaz continues to talk about the evil God brings upon sinners. Furthermore, if one goes to God, He is faithful to listen.

In chapter 6, Job replies to Eliphaz, first by admitting to his suffering and points out that he has good reason to complain (Job 6:1-7). He admits that he has no more strength and wonders why God will not take his life. In

verses 14-23, Job's sadness is increased because he feels that his friends have no pity and lack kindness to him.

In verses 24-30, in sincerity, Job cannot confess to any specific sin. In that context, He sincerely states that he is righteous, that he is an upright man who has done nothing to deserve such treatment at the hands of God.

Job continues his conversation with Eliphaz, but now in chapter 7, he directs his words toward God. This is a prayer in the form of a complaint like the psalmists often used. In Job 7:1-5, Job speaks of the tormenting times he faces every day. He can't help but speak and complain from his bitterness. To Job his life is loathsome and seems to be a meaningless mess. In verses 17-21, Job finally replies to Eliphaz's first speech when Eliphaz said that the innocent don't suffer. Job suggested that if sin has caused his suffering, why doesn't God simply pardon it, and take away his iniquity?

We know that his sin did not cause his suffering, but his friends believed otherwise. In essence, the book of Job is the back and forth between Job and his friends concerning the age-old problem of the suffering of a righteous man. Throughout most of the book, Job friends go back and forth trying to convince him why he was suffering because he had sinned; while Job tried to convince them that he knew of nothing that he had done wrong that deserved the suffering and loss he was experiencing. This back and forth continued until God intervened to set the record straight (Job chapters 38-41:34). Our printed text comes from chapter 8 where Bildad first speaks giving his point of view regarding Job's suffering.

Bildad's Condemnation (Job 8:1-4)

Speaking the truth is important but saying it in love is paramount. Criticism should always be given to help the other person, not harm them. In this chapter, Job's friend Bildad, a traditionalist, did not understand that. Not only did he offer lousy advice to his suffering companion, but he did it in the most unloving way possible. He reacts in

anger to what he considers complete irreverence on Job's part. He takes hold of the general trend of Job's arguments and attempts to contradict the conclusions to which Job had come.

In the previous chapter, Job has just finished responding to the rebuke of Eliphaz. Job had asserted that right was on his side. He suggested that the life of man is cruelly shaped by the unbearable pressures brought upon him by an unrelenting and inescapable God (Job 7:1-7, 17-18). In verse of our passage, Bildad confronts Job for his denunciation of Eliphaz. Whereas Eliphaz had shown a little kindness in his remarks, Bildad was not afraid to be blunt. He dismisses Job's defense as a "strong wind" that is, only noise and empty content. We might say Bildad thinks Job is just full of hot air. The tactlessness of Bildad is astounding. With none of the courtliness characteristic of Eliphaz, Bildad leaps into the fray. He has been driven into a fury by Job's denial of God's justice. There is not a word of apology or any touch of friendly sympathy. He does not attempt to soothe and calm a suffering friend.

Bildad's argument proceeds from the result to the cause: if there was premature death, there must have been prior sin. So wedded is he to the sufficiency of the doctrine of retribution as an explanation for all human fortune or misfortune that he even states the result in terms of the cause. Bildad reasoned, God has "cast away," or abandoned Job's children to the power of their guilt. If that is the result, the cause is already apparent, they have sinned against God.

The doctrine of retribution is so fundamental to Bildad's worldview that he has perceived the death of Job's sons and daughters as God's punishment. Bildad assumes or expects Job himself to have drawn the same conclusion. He feels that Job should have seen the death of his children as further proof of the reliability of the doctrine of retribution. Bildad brings up the matter of Job's children simply to remind him of the contrast between their fate and his. Although Bildad nowhere in this speech expressly says that Job is a sinner, the inference is clear.

A consequence of Bildad's equation of justice with divine power is that he can tell Job in complete seriousness and with absolute certainty that even though Job is suffering, he is experiencing divine mercy: he is still alive. He must therefore have sinned less than his children, who are dead. It is difficult to imagine a less comforting or more insensitive response to Job's plight.

Bildad's Recommendation (Job 8:5-10)

In verses 5-10 Bildad continues his punitive soliloquy with unwarranted suggestions on what Job should do now. Bildad reminds Job that God will restore Job to his former blessed state if he will return to his life of integrity and purity. This retributive theology that Bildad is subscribing to says that God's justice is immediate and goes both ways. If you are suffering, you must have sinned. If you stop sinning and return to God, you will be blessed again. For Bildad, the explanation of Job's suffering was simple, and the solution was just as simple. Job must have sinned, and Job needed to turn away from his sin and turn back to God.

Bildad argues that all hope is not lost for Job if he does two things. First, he must seek the face of God and call unto the Almighty (Job 8:5). Although Job had spoken of God seeking him, Bildad says it would be more fitting if Job would seek God. Job should go early to pursue God with earnestness. If Job were to rise up early and plead for mercy, God "would awake" and restore Job to his former condition.

Second, he must be pure and upright (Job 8:6). Bildad seems to be asking Job to demonstrate virtues that God already affirmed back in Job 1:8 and Job 2:3. While Bildad does not explicitly deny that Job possesses these qualities, he seems far less certain than God was about Job. If Job meets this double condition, linking devoutness and moral purity, Bildad's dogma of

reckoning, in the positive sense now, assures him that God cannot fail to respond to Job's behavior with signs of favor.

Bildad contends that a sinner is the victim of his or her guilt which then chains God and compels Him to respond with favor to any human merit. We must learn a lesson from the utterances of Bildad. This rigid application of a truth excludes of any possible exceptions or broader analysis. It's a dangerous and cruel line to take, and what is meant as an outward judgment can quickly be applied to the one assigning the accusations.

God's Restoration (Job 8:20-22)

Bildad continues his argument that Job just needs to repent and return to God, and God will immediately restore his good fortunes. By reading the rest of the book of Job, we find that this is exactly what happened! Even though Job's initial suffering is not from sin, Job does eventually sin by haughtily demanding an explanation from God. When he repents of this and submits himself to God's wisdom, he is blessed.

Does this story teach us that God is truly a God of retributive and immediate justice? This is the challenge of Job. From Job we learn that God means what He says that the wage of sin is death, but obedience leads to blessings. But it does not explain all suffering. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, and we never learn why. God never told Job why He had allowed the man to suffer.

It is easy to fall into thinking that God blesses us because we're good and punishment comes for some specific sin. However, this understanding does not allow for God's grace. Because of Jesus' completed work of redemption, namely His paying the price for our sins, we now live in the age of grace. The wages of sin is still

death, but by grace through faith, we can all receive the gift of eternal life.

Final Thoughts

While reading the book of Job, we immediately feel empathy for Job. When we see someone sick or hurting, as Christians we want to comfort them and help them. But we don't always know what to say or do. We can learn a lot from Job's three friends. They started out doing the thing that is often needed most. They spent seven days with him, not saying a word (Job 2:11-13). This may be the greatest lesson we can learn from this wisdom book of Job. Often this is what is needed most by those who are suffering. They just need a friend who will sit with them, mourn with them, comfort them.

On the other hand, when we are the ones who are suffering, we can be encouraged. If we can remain as faithful and patient as Job, in due time, God will reestablish us in a greater condition than where we started. But, even if God chooses not to remove our thorns, his grace is sufficient enough to help us make it through! (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!