

The Test

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Job is, perhaps, the oldest book in the Bible. No one knows who wrote it. Some scholars think it may have been written by Moses, and perhaps it could have been, while some date it as late as the time of Solomon. But one thing is certain: this book was given to us by the Holy Spirit. It is a very profound book and in many ways it touches upon certain themes more deeply than any other book of the Bible. It is also a very beautiful book and it is written in majestic, glorious language.

Job was a real man, not a mythological figure. He is mentioned by Ezekiel and he is classified as one of the three great men of the Old Testament, along with Noah and Daniel {cf, Ezek 14:14, 14:20}. He is mentioned also in the New Testament by James, who refers to Job's patience and steadfast endurance {cf, Jas 5:11}. According to the opening part of the book Job lived in the land of Uz, and he was probably one of the most prominent citizens of that land. He was a contemporary of Abraham, most likely, so this book goes back to the very beginnings of biblical history.

As we will see, the book is a kind of epic poem, very much like *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, by Homer. Some think it was presented at times as a drama in which actors recited the parts of the different characters in the book. Most of the book is poetry but it begins and ends with a prose prologue and epilogue, which are like program notes that are given to the audience in this drama.

Chapter 1 gives us the setting, and introduces **the main character, Job**, and we are told first of his piety, Verse 1:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil. {Job 1:1 RSV}

The most noteworthy thing about Job, evidently, was his godliness. He feared God, and everyone knew him because of that. The Revised Standard Version says he was *blameless*, and many who have read that thought it meant that Job was sinless. But it is not the same thing. You can be sinful and still be blameless if you have learned how to handle your sin the way God tells you to. Evidently Job had learned how to handle sin, so, in that sense, he was blameless. I do not think, however, that this is the best translation of the Hebrew word that appears here. It is really a word that means "a complete man." Job was well balanced and the reason he was well balanced was that he feared God. He was not a materialist, he did not just look on life as a means of getting ahead in the world. Job also was aware of God, and he saw God's hand in everything he did and that made him a complete man.

Job was not a theologian either. He was a practical, down-to-earth man. I think these terms are best explained by the last part of Verse 1: "He feared God, and turned away from evil." That is,

he was complete because he feared God; he was upright because he turned away from evil.

The second thing we are told about Job is that he was very prosperous, Verse 3:

He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. {Job 1:3 RSV}

Job was well known for his prosperity. (He sounds like a rich Texas cattleman!) God gives riches at times, and riches are not necessarily wrong, by any means, although we are warned about the danger and deceitfulness of them. But here was a man whom God made rich.

The last thing we are told about Job personally is his love, his fatherly concern for his children, Verse 4:

His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day [on his birthday] and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. {Job 1:4-5 RSV}

Now that little phrase, "cursed God in their hearts," becomes a kind of theme to the book of Job. Ultimately, that is the test to which Job himself is put: Will he curse God in his heart? This was a matter of great concern to Job about his children. He had seven sons, and as each had a birthday, that meant seven times a year they had a feast to which they invited their sisters. What Job did, according to the record, was the equivalent of our holding a special time of prayer for someone we have a concern about. Job offered burnt offerings, because he recognized that his children needed spiritual help most when things were going well, not during times of stress. I think this indicates a great deal of spiritual insight on the part of Job. He knew that the pressure to deny God, to forsake

God, comes most strongly when things are going well.

Job did not offer a sin offering, because that was something only the sinner himself could do. (Sin offerings are of no value if you do not repent of the sin.) So Job offered a burnt offering which, in the Scriptures, is always a symbol of total dedication to God, an awareness of God's rightful ownership of us. When Job made this offering he was expressing the burden of his heart for his children, that they might be wholly God's. He was praying for them by means of this burnt offering. So we have this picture of Job: a godly man, a great landowner, and a good father.

In Verse 6 the scene suddenly shifts to that **world of invisible realities** which, in the New Testament – especially in the epistle to the Ephesians – is called *the heavenlies*. It is not off in space somewhere, it is right around us, but it is invisible to us. We are separated from it by an invisible barrier so that we cannot see what is going on in that invisible world where God and Satan, angels and demons, function. Suddenly the curtain is lifted. Just as the servant of Elisha, whose eyes were opened at the prophet's prayer so that he saw the mountain ringed about with the chariots of God, our eyes are now suddenly opened to this drama, and we see what is going on behind the scenes. We see what Job himself could not see, Verses 6-12:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has

is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand.” So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. {Job 1:6-12 RSV}

This is surely a most impressive scene, very similar to what John describes in the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation, where he sees tens of thousands and thousands upon thousands of angels gathered in the great audience chamber of heaven, in the very presence of God himself. These angels were called the sons of God because, like Adam, they were a direct creation of God’s hand. But, unlike Adam, they were not given the authority nor the command to multiply and produce others like themselves. No one knows how many angels there are. There seems to be countless numbers of them, but all of them were created by God, directly, and, in this instance, were present before God to give a report of their activities.

I think we need to fling back the borders of our imagination in a scene like this, and realize that God is interested in far more than this little dark planet of ours. In the whole of the universe, as scientists are looking at it today, there are many guesses as to how many other planetary systems there are like ours, and how many other inhabitable worlds are out there in the millions of galaxies that span the heavens. No matter how many there are one thing is clear, both from science and Scripture: it all adds up to a universe, one place, and God is in control of it all.

These ministering angels, then, came to report, and in the midst of them is Satan. Satan means “the Adversary,” and that is how he first appears in the book of Job. You can see him there with all the angels and obviously he has already fallen. In the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel we are told how he fell. Once the greatest of the angels, now lifted up by pride, Satan has become the enemy of God, the rebel within the kingdom of God. You can see him sauntering about among the angels, hands in his pockets, or picking his teeth, disdainful of all the rest, looking for an opportunity to accuse.

I think the significant fact in this account is that though he clearly is fallen, he still has access to God. That is what we must yet recognize about Satan: he has not been excluded from God’s presence. There are books you can pick up that suggest that he is bound in hell, or that he is committed to a

kind of furnace room in the universe, but these are distortions and far from the actual truth. Satan is granted access to heaven, and, in that fact, we have the first hint of the reason for the book of Job: This book has tremendous things to say to us about *the reasons for suffering*.

Why do innocent, righteous people sometimes undergo terrible episodes of tragic injustice and suffering? This book will help us greatly with the answer to that question.

But there is still a deeper level of truth behind the book of Job. Basically, it is given to us to reveal *the relationship of Satan and God*, so that we are not confused about the power of this vicious enemy against whom we all wrestle. Satan is not the equivalent of God. We do not have two gods, a good god and a bad god, struggling against each other. This book helps us to understand right from the start that God is in control of all things. All forces are at his command, and nothing ever takes him by surprise – nothing goes beyond his word and his will, including Satan.

This book, I think, will help us more than any other book in the Bible to catch a glimpse of the greatness and the majesty of God. We will see what we desperately need to see – that God is not just another man, great in power and authority, whom we call, influence, and command. God is not a heavenly bellboy, ready to run at our command. No, God is in charge, and he will always be in charge. If we are going to deal realistically with life, this is the way we must see him.

We sometimes hear that this book of Job is the record of a great battleground between God and Satan, and that Job is caught in between. Now, though there are aspects of this in the book; is this not a strange war, in which one side must get permission from the other before it attacks? What kind of battle is that?

Can you imagine a German commander during World War II stepping up to General Patton, saluting him and saying, “Herr General, we would like permission to bomb your troops, to destroy your tanks, and to wreck all your plans!” I’m sure General Patton’s reply would have been unprintable, and unrepeatable from this pulpit!

And yet that is the situation you have in this book of Job. Satan comes to God and asks permission to do something against Job. Now that is

not a battle; it is not warfare; it is a test. That is what we need to see. Job's faith is the subject of a very rigorous test. Satan is the one who brings it about, but God permits it.

I think the striking thing about this account is that it is God that challenges Satan, not the other way around. God says, "Satan, where have you been?" "Oh," says Satan, "I've been here and there, looking over the earth, trying to find somebody." And God says, "Have you taken a look at Job? There's a man that I'm proud of!" God's own assessment of Job is that there is none like him in all the earth. Job is blameless and upright, i.e., he is complete and balanced, and he turns from evil as soon as he recognizes it. So God asks Satan, "Have you tried Job?" Satan says, "Well, I certainly have tried. I've looked that man over very carefully, and examined how to get at him, but I can't get near. You've got him hedged in, surrounded by protection. I've tried every way I can to get at Job, but you've got him so protected there's no way I can get through."

Two things in particular emerge from this account – the satanic activity and the satanic philosophy:

1. *Satan's activity* is going up and down looking for somebody he can get at. This is in line with what Peter tells us. "Your adversary [and here Peter uses the same term, the meaning of the name *Satan*] the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour," {1 Pet 5:8 RSV}. He goes about seeking those he can get at, to twist and distort and ruin, if he can. Now there is a tremendous helpful picture of some of the forces at work in every one of our lives. There is a vicious, malicious enemy looking for a chink in our armor.

Remember how, in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of giving the devil an opportunity. In Chapter 4, Verse 26, Paul says, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and [therefore] give no opportunity to the devil."

When do you give the devil an opportunity to get at you? –

- when you hold a grudge,
- when you get mad at somebody and refuse to forgive him,

- when you keep nursing your anger and wrath, feeding it all the time.

the devil is watching and saying, "Ah, I've got a chance! I'll get him!" The suggestion here is that whoever reflects to some degree the devil's philosophy is available to his attack.

2. The devil's answer to God is, "You've protected Job, and that's why he serves you. But if you take away your protection, he'll curse you right to your face." In other words, *Satan's philosophy* says that self-serving is the fundamental law of life. "What's in it for me?" is the ultimate question for every human being," Satan says, "and nobody will ever deny that." "Put them in the right circumstances, where they have to choose between what is best for them and something else, and they will choose for themselves every time," he challenges.

Now whoever begins to reflect that philosophy to any degree becomes open to the devil's activity. So the LORD says to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand."

3. The third fact that emerges in this account is *satanic limitation*. God has set the boundaries to Satan's activities. But the impressive thing is that although Satan is a rebel, and he would break the rules if he could, there is no suggestion that he even attempts to break forth from this limitation. There is no possible way by which even Satan can violate God's restriction. He has no power to do it and so he abides by the rules. God is totally in control.

Now the rules of the test are clear. Job is going to be stripped of his possessions because Satan's argument is that when they are taken away, Job will deny God right to his face. So God says to Satan, "All right, we'll see. Go at it. He's in your power, but don't touch his body."

The last part of chapter one gives us **the terrible results**, Verses 13-15:

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and there

came a messenger to Job, and said, “The oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them; and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.” {Job 1:13-15 RSV}

Here came the first messenger of doom saying, “Your oxen and asses are all gone. You know the Sabeans, living over the hill? They came in a raid and took them all, and slew the servants, and I am the only one left, and have come to tell you.”

Verse 16:

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you.” {Job 1:16 RSV}

Perhaps this fire was some kind of lightning storm. More likely it was a volcanic eruption, in which brimstone and noxious gases sprayed the countryside, and the sheep and all the servants except this one were killed.

Verse 17:

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, “The Chaldeans formed three companies, and made a raid upon the camels and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.” {Job 1:17 RSV}

There went Job’s camels, the most prized possessions of the Arab world in terms of animal servitude, taken in a raid by the Chaldeans.

Verse 18:

While he was yet speaking, there came another, and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house; and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you.” {Job 1:18 RSV}

What a terrible day!

The next time you get bad news, I hope you will read through this chapter. If you think you have been mistreated, look at this.

The malignancy of Satan is revealed in that he struck to the full extent of his permission. He went right to the boundaries that God permitted him, and took away everything Job had. Satan did not ease the load, he did not stretch it out, he gave no time for preparation of heart and mind. One after the other, four times, the hammer fell, and every time Job’s heart was crushed. Finally, he lost all his sons and daughters.

In this account we see that Satan is given power over natural forces. Some have misinterpreted this, saying that this is always true of the devil, that he is the one who runs the wind and the waves. But I do not think that is necessarily true. Many of the Psalms speak of God’s control and power in the natural world. But I think we must remember here that Satan must always obtain divine permission to use these natural forces for his own ends.

When Jesus stilled the wind on the Sea of Galilee, he rebuked the wind and the waves. Now, Jesus was not talking to air and water – he was talking to the forces that were behind them, the satanic power that was using these forces to stir up a storm. Evidently, judging from this account in the book of Job, Satan had to receive permission from God the Father to bring that storm into being.

Right now we are reading of the terrible destruction of hurricane Anita in the Gulf of Mexico, and we must read of those events in the light of a revelation like this, that Satan, the god of this world, is at times given permission to bring these things about. I know that atheists often use that fact to present Christian teaching about the character of God in the worst possible light. They say, “Your Bible says that your God allows that to happen. What kind of a God have you got?”

I remember years ago reading a parody of the doxology:

Blame God from whom all cyclones blow,
Blame him, all creatures here below.
Blame him, who knocks down church and steeple,
Who sends the floods, and drowns the people.

The trouble with that is that there is a modicum of truth in it. It is God who has allowed it to hap-

pen. This is what makes our faith tremble and quail, and we come up with superficial answers to what is happening.

One Christian defense of this is to say, “Well, Satan is a kind of independent agent, and he does what he likes. God has given him areas in which he can operate, and has no control over him.” But when you read an account of some public disaster, a great earthquake, a volcanic explosion, or even, as in this case, a raid by one enemy upon another, you must always read it with a realization that though Satan has been the instrument by which that was done, the will of God is also involved in it. Satan has demanded and obtained from God the power to bring that to pass. This is why the book of Job is given to us, to show that there is a far deeper reason why God permits tragedy than the superficial answers that we often give.

This reason will be unfolded as we go on in this book, and we will see that God is not, as Satan would love to have him painted, a cold impersonal God who does not really care for us, and who does not mind submitting us to tortures and indecencies and injustices like this. Rather, as James tells us, God is merciful and compassionate, and out of this book emerges the revelation of the mercy and compassion of God.

Now we see **Job’s reaction**, Verse 20:

Then Job arose, and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshipped. {Job 1:20 RSV}

Job did not complain, he did not blame God, he did not get all angry and upset and say, “Why should this happen to me? What have I done that all these things should suddenly come upon me?” As C. S. Lewis once remarked when asked the question, “Why should the righteous suffer?” “Why not?” he replied; “they’re the only ones that can handle it.”

So Job’s response is, Verse 21:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” {Job 1:21b RSV}

That is, “Thank God for the times when I did have these things, and the enjoyment they gave me; the times with my children, and the blessings they brought into my life. Rather than complain about the loss, I recognize God’s sovereign right to do with me as he will. If he gives me things, he has the right to take them away. All I can do is say ‘Thank you’ for having had them as long as I did.”

Verse 22:

In all this Job did not in or charge God with wrong. {Job 1:22 RSV}

He has won the first round. It is clear that Satan’s argument has been answered. Take away the possessions of a man like Job, and he still will not curse God to his face. He still loves God and follows him and serves him, and recognizes God’s right. It is a severe test and I wonder how many of us would have passed it? But the test is not over – there is much worse yet to come. Before this book is through we will see levels of pride in Job of which he was totally unaware. We will begin to see what God is after in Job’s life, and in ours, by this kind of testing.

Now you may be saying, “I wonder what’s going on behind the scenes about me? I wonder what Satan is saying about me now, and if he’s asking permission to get me!” If that is what you are thinking, all I can say is, “Do not worry, live one day at a time.” For the thing this book tells us is that, if Satan had his way, every one of us would always be in this kind of difficulty. Satan would wreck us, and hurt us, and tear us apart all the time if he could – not because he is angry at us, but because he wants to get at God, whom we serve. But God’s protecting hand has been over us. If we can sit here in any degree of peace and enjoyment, it is because the hand of God has been like a hedge about us, protecting us and giving us great and wonderful things. Therefore, the attitude of every human heart ought to be, “Thank God for what I’ve got! Thank God for where I am now. What the future may hold, only he knows.”

And if it holds some kind of testing like this, it is only because, as Paul has reminded us in First Corinthians, “God will not test you above what you are able to bear,” {cf, 1 Cor 10:13}. He knows what you can bear, and he will not put you to the

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test so severe it must destroy your faith. But there are implications in every test that go far beyond the superficial aspects of the situation.

That is what we need to remember. And as this remarkable book unfolds we will see some of the things that God brought to the attention of Job.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, we are grateful that we have so much blessing in our lives. How much your hand has given! How

much it has poured into our life already, in terms of joy, pleasure, peace, relationship, warmth and love. We can only give thanks, Lord. And rather than complain about what we do not have, Lord, help our hearts to be filled with gratitude for what we have. Help us to know that your heart of love is watching over us, and protecting us from a vicious and evil being who would destroy us in a second if he could. Make us grateful for that. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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The Pressure of Pain

by Ray C. Stedman

Dr. Francis Schaeffer has said that the first argument of the gospel is not, as we often think, that Jesus died for our sins. Nor is it, as we are sometimes told, "God loves us, and has a wonderful plan for our lives." Dr. Schaeffer says that the first argument of the gospel is, "God is there." There is a God, and he is in control of life.

This is the great lesson of the book of Job, which we are confronted with right from the very beginning, the presence of God in the life of a man, even though he is going through very severe trials. The trial itself proves the existence of God and his presence with him.

As we have already seen in the opening chapter of this book, Job is being subjected to a very severe test. Satan has been permitted by God to take away all Job's possessions in an attempt to prove that if a man's possessions are taken away, he will curse God to his face. But Job has survived that first cycle of tests – tests that took away all his wealth, all his possessions, even his children. Job is left crushed and broken, but, nevertheless, full of faith. When we reached the end of Chapter 1 last week, we saw that the score was 1 - 0 in favor of Job against Satan.

Chapter 2 opens with another round in the test, and the first three verses tell us that God again initiates action against Job:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the

LORD said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause." {Job 2:1-3 RSV}

This reads much like the first chapter, where we have the same glimpse behind the scenes into the heavenlies, where God and Satan are holding a conversation about Job. (I hope that, as we move on in the book of Job, we will not forget these opening chapters, for they give us a heavenly view of earthly trials.)

Viewpoint makes a tremendous difference. I was at a church yesterday, listening to a young man leading us in songs and playing his guitar. He told us about a meeting he had recently where he was to sing for some high school students. His four-year-old daughter asked, "Daddy, where are you going?" He replied, "I'm going to go sing for the kids." She asked could she come so he took her along. When they got to the meeting, he was surrounded by all the high school kids and his little girl looked up at him and said, "Well, Daddy, where are all the kids?" He said, "Well, there they are, out there." She looked at him and said, "Daddy, those aren't kids – those are baby sitters!"

So you see what a difference viewpoint makes. Here in this chapter we are given a viewpoint of

Job and his suffering, one that Job himself is not permitted to have. We are given this because we too are not permitted this viewpoint in times of trial. We do not know what is going on behind the scenes in our lives, with our pressures and trials. We do not know what has transpired between Satan and God about us, but we are given this reassurance that something does happen, and that we are being subjected to a test. This is very revealing and very important.

The thing that I think is important here is to see that God initiates further testing of Job. God challenges Satan, and says, “Well, what do you think of Job now? You moved me against him without a cause, and I allowed it to happen. But now what do you think? There is none like him on the earth. He is blameless and upright, and he turns away from evil. You haven’t moved him an inch. What do you think now?” And Satan replies by asking for a change in the rules, Verses 4-6:

Then Satan answered the LORD, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life.” {Job 2:4-6 RSV}

When Satan says “Skin for skin!” he is using basically the same argument that he used in the first chapter. His philosophy was (and is) that men are basically self-centered creatures. When you attack them directly, they will give way, and they will give up their faith, their religion, anything, to save their own possessions. Now that argument has been fully answered. God has allowed Satan to test Job, and, though he lost his family and all his wealth, Job remains steadfast in his integrity, refusing to charge God with wrong.

It is really a very sobering thing to realize that the tests that come into our life are aimed at getting us to curse God to his face, to tell him that he is wrong, that he does not keep his promises, that he is not the kind of a God that we have been told he is. If you take note of your own life you will recognize that, when under pressure, the thing you want more than anything else is to cry out in protest to God that he is not keeping his promises. That is where Satan always aims. He has the same

philosophy and the same objective today: he wants us to curse God, as he wanted Job to curse God.

But Satan asks for a change in the rules because, in effect, he says to God, “You didn’t go far enough. You put a boundary about Job and said I couldn’t touch his body. That’s the problem. It’s true that a man may give up his possessions, but one thing he will never give up is his health. You let me get at him, let me destroy his health, and he will give up his integrity and his faith.”

“But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life.” {Job 2:5 RSV}

Once again there is a divine limitation to the power of Satan, but this time God moves the boundaries closer. He says, “You can touch him.” In fact, when Satan uses the phrase, “touch his bone and his flesh,” he asks for access to the total humanity of Job. We still use that phrase today, flesh and bone, to speak of the totality of our humanity – not only our physical body, but our emotional life as well, our conscious and subconscious thinking and reacting. And not only our soul, but our spirit as well. Satan is asking for access to this man Job, to touch him body, soul and spirit – and he proceeds in that order. That constitutes the argument and basic assault recorded in the rest of the book of Job. Satan knows what he is after. He knows that if he can get at Job in every part of his being, he thinks that he can shake Job’s faith and cause him to turn from his trust and confidence in God, and curse him to his face.

Last week when I finished my message on the first chapter of Job, two young Englishmen came up and challenged me. They would not accept the story of Job as an historical event, and they could not believe there ever was a man named Job who went through those things. I asked them why not. Their reply was, “If that story is true, then God is unconcerned about human life. It pictures God as ruthless. Job’s whole family was taken from him. We can’t accept this as an historical record.” In talking with them, I realized that they were struggling with the same feelings that many people struggle with today. They see God as nothing more than a man, who thinks and acts and has no more

rights than a man. It was obvious that they thought that if a man took life like this, he would be justifiably charged with murder and cruelty. It did not occur to them that God could not be charged with these things because in his hand is all of life. He determines the length of life for everyone. I tried to point out to these young men that if Job's children had died from sickness, they would not be as free in charging God with ruthlessness and cruelty, but because they were taken suddenly, it seemed unfair.

This very morning my wife and I were subjected to something that gave us a taste of the atmosphere of this book of Job. We received a phone call informing us that a beautiful young woman whom we met recently had been found dead. She and her husband, both Christians, were operating a Christian retreat at Lake Tahoe, and they had befriended our daughters, Susan and Linda, who are living up there. The young woman and her husband were out for a walk beside a mountain stream and she sat down for a rest, while he went ahead to climb a rock. When he came back, he found the body of his wife floating in the stream, drowned, leaving five children motherless. Because they were such beautiful young people, and she was a very unusual mother, it hit us hard. We felt our hearts protest, "Why should this happen? What is God doing, taking a mother away from five children who need her desperately?"

That is why we have the book of Job, to show us that there are reasons and purposes in these trials and sufferings that we do not see. Job could not see what was going on behind the scenes, and neither can we. And yet God knows, and God is working out an object. He has a purpose for it, and it is a proper and right purpose that will end up manifesting more fully the love and compassion of his heart. The test of every trial is always to this end.

So Satan is given access to Job, and in the next section we see **the physical test that comes, Verses 7-9:**

So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die." {Job 2:7-9 RSV}

Here is the first attack on the body of Job. Some think it was leprosy; other scholars think it was a form of elephantiasis which not only covered the body with running, putrefying sores, but also caused the members to swell up and become bloated and distorted. Whatever it was, it rendered Job a pitiful spectacle, a repulsive hulk of a man, swollen and disfigured, and hurting with these running sores.

In my early twenties I went through a siege of boils that lasted about two years. They came mostly one at a time, for which I was grateful, although once I had two or three. Nothing is more painful, I think, than a boil, and it is the kind of pain that cannot easily be relieved. It throbs away day and night, and it was a severe test to my faith to have even that limited trial.

But here is Job totally covered with these agonizing sores. He was not only physically afflicted, but he was also painfully humiliated. He ends up sitting in the ashes, scraping the pus from his sores with a broken piece of pottery. To cap it all, the one to whom he ought to have been able to turn for emotional support turned against him. His wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity?" I can see that her faith has crumbled under this attack. She no longer believes that God is loving, thoughtful, and just. She sees this as proof, as many of us have done in times of trial, that God has forsaken his promises, that the Bible is not true.

How many times I have come to comfort people going through trials, and had them say to me, "I tried these promises, I tried believing God, but it doesn't work."

Have you ever said that?

That is getting very close to what Satan was trying to get Job to say: "Curse God, and die." He used Job's wife as his instrument, and, just as Eve became the instrument to get at Adam in the Garden of Eden, the assault upon Job's emotional life comes through his wife. She advises him to do two things: "Give up your faith, apostatize. Curse God." (Actually, in the Hebrew, the word is "bless" God, but it is properly translated "curse" because the word "bless" is dripping with sarcasm.) "Bless God, and die." She is clearly sug-

gesting suicide: “It would be better for you to take your life than to go on like this.” So poor Job, bound by physical pain, sits in humility with a disfigured body, and suffers from a sense of emotional abandonment by his mate.

I do not know if women fully understand how much their husbands depend on them. I think husbands often draw emotional strength from their wives far more than either they or their wives realize. Here was a severe attack addressed to the very soul of Job, in which he felt his wife abandoning him, advocating that he turn from his faith and renounce his God.

But now, in Verse 10, we get **the results** of this second round of tests:

But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips. {Job 2:10 RSV}

Job’s rebuke is a very gentle one. He did not say, “You foolish woman!” He said, “You speak as one of the foolish women.” He is not attacking her, rather, he is suggesting that this is a temporary lapse of faith on her part, and that, for the moment, she has begun to repeat the words of stupid, foolish women who have no knowledge of the grace and glory of God. In that gentle rebuke you can see something of the sturdiness and tenderness of Job’s faith. In this great sentence he again reasserts the sovereignty of God: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” Job’s wife had the philosophy that life ought to be pleasant and if it was not, there was no use living it.

That philosophy is widespread in our own day, and a mounting suicide rate testifies to the universal acceptance of it. But this book is given to show us that life is not to be lived on those terms. The reason we are here is not necessarily to have a good time. There are meaningful objectives to be attained in life, even when it all turns sour. When the pressure comes, when living is no longer fun, life is still worth living. A philosophy that wants to abandon everything as soon as things become unpleasant is a shallow, mistaken, distorted view of life.

Job reaffirms that. “Shall we not take both good and evil from the hand of God?” We take his joy and his pleasure, the pleasant things of life with gladness and gratitude. If he chooses to send something that is difficult, shall we then abandon that gratitude and begin to curse him in protest, because life is suddenly different than we thought it would be? The reason we are here is not merely that we might have a good time, and this is taught everywhere in the Scriptures. God, in his grace and glory, does give us many, many hours of joy and gladness and pleasure and delight, and it is right for us to give thanks. But do not abandon that when the time of pressure comes for that is what Satan wants us to do. He wants us to begin to complain and to protest to God; to get upset and angry and resentful; to stop going to church, or to stop reading the Bible. That is what Satan’s whole attack in our lives is aimed at doing.

Well, Job has won. The score is now 2 - 0, in favor of Job. But Satan is not through. Remember that he obtained permission from God to assault this man in every area of his being:

- He not only has taken Job’s children and all his possessions, but he has also taken away his health, and all the pleasure of his physical life.
- And Satan has also assaulted Job’s soul, and made him feel abandoned by his wife.
- Satan now proceeds to assault the final stronghold of all: the spirit of Job, the ultimate reality of his life.

In the closing verses of this chapter we see him beginning to **move up his heavy artillery** to assault the citadel of Job’s faith. You notice that the big guns that he seeks to employ are rather unusual, Verse 11:

Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to condole with him and comfort him. {Job 2:11 RSV}

Now we are set for the major argument of this book, and the major attack on the faith of Job comes not through his physical trials, but through

an attack on his spiritual relationship with God himself. And it comes through the hands of well-meaning friends. That is the irony of this. Here are misguided but sincere friends who want to help, and hope they are helping, but actually they are an instrument of Satan to assault the castle of Job's faith, and almost cause it to collapse.

We will learn more about these men as we go through the arguments that they bring forth. It is obvious that they had to come from distant places, and that a good deal of time has elapsed while Job has been suffering physically. Word had to come to his friends about Job's disaster and they had to agree together by sending messengers to one another to come together at an appointed time and visit Job. So weeks, if not months, have probably gone by while Job is subjected to this severe pressure upon his faith. And when the friends arrive, they are utterly shocked at what they see; Verses 12-13:

And when they saw him from afar, they did not recognize him; and they raised their voices and wept; and they rent their robes and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. {Job 2:12-13 RSV}

They can hardly believe their eyes! This monstrous, repulsive hulk of a man – could he really be their dear old friend Job? Was this Job, sitting huddled in a heap of ashes, scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery, swollen and disfigured, utterly repulsive to look at? Could this be the man they had known and loved? They are so shocked by this that their actions strongly suggest that they think Job is on his deathbed. They held, in effect, a funeral service for him. They did what was customarily done at funerals – they raised their voices, they mourned and wept. They tore their coats, sprinkled dust on their heads, and finally ended up sitting on the ground around Job, observing him in silence for seven days.

Now while they were sitting there, they were thinking, and what they thought is going to come out in the arguments they give in the next section of the book. (We will take these rather rapidly.) It is

enough for us to see, at this point, that while they were waiting in silence around Job, they came to the conclusion that he was suffering under the hand of God for some terrible sin he must have committed, and that it was right for God to make him suffer this way. Their hearts, therefore, were hardening against Job. They had come to comfort him, but they are confronted with the feeling that many of us have had, that there is not much they can say because in their heart of hearts, they believe that Job deserves what he is getting. So the silence probably means that they are wondering how to say this, how to begin, how to put it in terms that Job will listen to.

In our next study we will hear Job's own plaintive cry of protest against God, and we will begin to read what these friends have to say as they try to explain to Job what he is going through. We will find out that much of our philosophy will be reflected in what they say.

But let us never forget what we have been shown at the beginning of this book: it is God who is doing this, ultimately, and he has an aim in view. And because he does not tell us at this point what it is, we, too, must suffer through this with Job. We must feel to some degree with him what he is feeling, and sense the protest, the anguish, the emptiness of his life. Nevertheless, we must remember that there is an answer, God does have a reason, and it will be made clear as the book unfolds.

I do not know whether this catches you where Job is or not. Sooner or later we all come to these times of trial and testing, for in some degree God visits them upon us. If you are going through such a time, I think this book will be of great help. But if you are not, just be thankful that God has given us this book, and be thankful that, for the moment at least, he has chosen to maintain his protection, his loving care over us.

For, as we have seen, if Satan had his way, we would all perish. But God has guarded us and kept us. If he temporarily lifts his hand, we have assurances everywhere in the Word of God that it will never be more than we can handle. Job proved that. It never was more than he could stand, although he thought it was. Sometimes this is the way we feel. We think God is going too far, that he is pushing us too hard, but he never does. He is

teaching us our limits. This is what the book of Job will do for us as we go through it.

Prayer:

Our Father, we are sobered by this book. We see something of the blood and tears that life can confront us with, and of the ruthless pressures to which we can sometimes be subjected, and still be in your will

and in your hand, guarded and guided by your love. Lord, we do not understand that, but that is because our understanding is so limited. We pray that as we go through this book we will have our eyes opened to the kind of a God we deal with, and to the ways you work, and what the ultimate meaning will be in our own lives. Teach us now by your Spirit, in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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Is it Better to Die?

by Ray C. Stedman

Job is the story of a man undergoing a very severe testing of his faith. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, Job was unaware that he was the subject of a test between God and Satan, and he experienced a tremendous series of calamities that wiped out all that he held of value. In one tragic day he lost all his possessions, and his seven children. Subsequently, he lost his health, and was afflicted with a loathsome disease that left him covered with boils from head to foot, disfiguring his countenance, and turning him into a very repulsive looking man. To top it all off, his wife turned against him, and she suggested that he curse God and commit suicide. And yet, despite all these pressures, Job is still trusting in the mercy and love and grace of God and he still refuses to do what Satan is trying to get him to do: curse God and die.

The book has already proven a rebuke to many of us who have been confronted with far less provocation, but have done what Job refused to do. We have cursed God, taken him to task, resented what he is doing, and refused to acknowledge him as a just and good and loving God.

At this point in the book of Job, Satan moves up his big guns. He leads three of Job's friends to come and comfort him, and when these friends arrive they are shocked at what they see. Here is their dear friend Job, respected, admired, a most attractive man, now an empty hulk, sitting on an ash heap, scraping the pus from his sores with a piece of broken pottery. They sit in silence for seven days before they can muster up enough courage to speak to Job about his troubles. But it is also apparent, as we get into this story, that while they have waited in silence they have begun to suspect that perhaps Job is going through something he really deserves, and we will see how Satan uses this to increase his torment and anguish.

Chapter 3 begins around a dialogue between Job and his friends, and this dialogue constitutes a major part of the book. (The reason why it is given to us will be revealed in this discussion between

Job and his three friends.) The chapter opens with a bitter lament from Job. Weeks have gone by since he was first afflicted with this painful disease, and God does not seem to explain what he is doing. Job knows nothing of what we have been informed of in the opening chapters, so, baffled and buffeted and tormented with physical misery, he now opens his mouth with a tremendous cry in which he longs for death.

I do not know if you have ever felt that way, but I think there have been times when I wished I could have dropped out of the scene entirely and gone home to heaven. This week we received a card from a friend that referred to a trial we were going through. She said, "You may feel so very helpless now, which indeed you are for the most part. But I know when you are out there, and the crutches one by one are stripped from you, his words and his love stand before you so irresistibly, so constant – until Jesus becomes your only alternative. Otherwise, death would be the only seemingly logical relief." That is where Job is found in the opening part of this book, crying out for death, cursing the day on which he was born.

In this chapter we will find that he asks **three very poignant questions:**

The first one is, "*Why was I ever born?*" Listen to the beautiful, eloquent way he expresses that, Verse 1:

**After this Job opened his mouth and
cursed the day of his birth. And Job said:
"Let the day perish wherein I was born,
and the night which said,
'A man-child is conceived.'
Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.
Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.
That night – let thick darkness seize it!**

let it not rejoice among the days of the
year,
let it not come into the number of the
months.
Yea, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry be heard in it.
Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.
Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none,
nor see the eyelids of the morning;
because it did not shut the doors of my
mother's womb,
nor hide trouble from my eyes."
{Job 3:1-10 RSV}

This book is written in marvelous poetry and I am going to try to read as much of it as I can so that we do not miss the wonderful eloquence of it. Here Job is saying that he hopes his birthday will be forgotten. He is looking back to the day of his birth and, although he cannot change that, he is saying, "May the anniversary of it be ignored. Let it be a day that is darkened, let no one rejoice in it. Let it be a day of cursing instead of blessing." The reason Job gives for this outcry is in Verse 10, "because I was born on that day; it produced me." You can see at this point how his life has become so miserable that he longs for death. Even all that he has enjoyed in the past seems of no value in the face of this tremendous anguish that he must endure.

Now this is given to us in order that we might understand that others have gone through trials far worse than we have. Although Job comes very close to cursing God, he never does. He does curse the day of his birth, and he curses what God has allowed to happen. You can see how the pressure is increasing, and Job is beginning to break and crumble under it, as this unceasing, unexplained anguish goes on.

I do not think anything is harder for us to bear than unexplained trouble. If we could see some reason for what we have to go through, we could endure it much more easily. But when trouble seems to be pointless, and nothing is accomplished by it, it is a terrible strain upon the soul. This is what Job is experiencing, so he cries out, "Why was I ever born?"

In Verses 11-19, his second question is, "*Having been born, why didn't I die at birth?*"

**"Why did I not die at birth,
come forth from the womb and expire?
Why did the knees receive me?
Or why the breasts, that I should suck?"**
{Job 3:11-12 RSV}

"My life has been totally meaningless," Job says. "It would have been better to have died when I was born." Then he goes on to give us his view of death. Now this is revealing, because, as we will see, this is a view of death that is much more primitive than what we have in the New Testament. It is a much more natural view, one that many people have who do not know anything about the Bible at all. Verse 13:

**"For then I should have lain down and been
quiet;
I should have slept; then I should have
been at rest,
with kings and counselors of the earth
who rebuilt ruins for themselves,
or with princes who had gold,
who filled their houses with silver.
Or why was I not as a hidden untimely
birth, [an abortion]
as infants that never see the light?
There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at rest.
There the prisoners are at ease together;
they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
The small and the great are there,
and the slave is free from his master."**
{Job 3:13-19 RSV}

Job views death as a time of rest, a period of solitude and quiet after the tumult and trouble of life. I think many people see death that way. In the play *Our Town*, there is a very vivid segment that describes a visit to the cemetery where the dead are talking among themselves. This is their view of death: the absence of all opportunity to fellowship with others; all is quiet and peaceful. These verses indicate that Job's understanding of life after death needs to be enlightened a great deal, and that is one of the reasons why this suffering came into his life. At the end of the book, Job's view of death is quite different than it was at the beginning.

Job's third question is, "*Why can't I die now?*" "Why was I born? But, having been born, why didn't I die when I came out of the womb?"

And since that didn't happen, why can't I die now?" Verse 20:

**“Why is light given to him that is in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
who long for death, but it comes not,
and dig for it more than for hid treasures;
who rejoice exceedingly,
and are glad, when they find the grave?
Why is light given to a man whose way is hid,
whom God has hedged in?
For my sighing comes as my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.
I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest; but trouble comes.”** [keeps coming] {Job 3:20-26 RSV}

Job's argument is, "What's the purpose of my life? Of what use is a life that is so filled with misery that you can do nothing but suffer and feel anguish? My life produces only fear and trouble, so it would be better to end it now." Many people feel that way. I do not think Job is thinking of suicide – he is asking God to take him home. There is no purpose to life, he says, when it is not enjoyable. That is a very common argument, and one of the reasons we have been given this book is to help us understand that life can still have a great deal of meaning even when it looks absolutely useless.

At this point we get **the first of the replies of the three friends of Job**. One was named Eliphaz, one was Bildad, and the third was Zophar. These friends all come with the same solution to the problem, but they approach it in three distinct ways, according to their personalities. As I read through this, I tried to dub them in terms that describe the approach each takes: "Eliphaz the Elegant," "Bildad the Brutal," and "Zophar the Zealous."

Eliphaz is the first speaker, evidently the oldest, for there is a smoothness about him, and a courtesy (at least at the beginning) that indicates that he has learned to say not very pleasant things in gracious ways. Bildad is brutal and plainspoken. He just lays it out on Job and does not care what the effect is. Zophar is compassionate and

emotional, and he speaks with a great deal of impact, trying to move Job.

Eliphaz's argument breaks down into six main points, and when you hear what he has to say, you will know what these three friends will be saying all through the rest of the book.

He starts out first by saying to Job, in effect, "*Follow your own advice,*" Chapter 4:

**“If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended? [Notice the courtesy with which he starts!]
Yet who can keep from speaking?
Behold, you have instructed many,
and you have strengthened the weak hands.
Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees,
But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
it touches you, and you are dismayed.
Is not your fear of God your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?”** {Job 4:2-6 RSV}

Basically Eliphaz is saying, "Job, you have been a counselor to many people, and you have been able to put your finger on their problem and help them to deal with it. You delivered them, you found the key to what was troubling them and helped them to face up to it. Now follow your own advice. Your turn has come. You've been caught in the same kind of problem you have helped others with, so now follow your own advice and you will be relieved."

Then Eliphaz goes on to put very plainly just what that problem is, as he sees it, and, in Verses 7-11, you have his basic principle of life:

**“Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?
As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.
By the breath of God they perish,
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.
The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,
the teeth of the young lions, are broken.
The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,**

and the whelps of the lioness are scattered.” {Job 4:7-11 RSV}

Eliphaz uses a pride of lions to describe the natural strength of human beings – it appears to be strong, but in God’s judging hands it is broken. His argument is: the righteous are never punished; only the unrighteous suffer. “Where did you ever see an innocent man perish?” he asks Job. “Where did you ever see an unrighteous man succeed?” His argument is, clearly, that Job’s problem is caused by his own willful sin, something that Job is hiding. And this will be the basic argument all through the book: “There is something wrong, Job. If you will only admit it you’ll be all right.”

I remember years ago, picking up a Christian magazine that specialized in attacking men in public ministry, such as Billy Graham. The editor of the magazine said of Dr. Graham, who had just had a certain illness, that it was a judgment of God on him because he associated with the wrong kinds of people. But what fascinated me was that in the next issue the editor announced that he himself had fallen down a stairs and broken his leg! His explanation was that Satan was attacking him, trying to stop his God-given ministry! This is so characteristic of humanity. We all see clearly that the suffering of others is caused by their sin, while our suffering is always caused by something else.

Eliphaz goes on to tell Job that if he will fear God and admit his sin, things will be all right. He breaks it down into two parts. First, he says, *he learned this truth in a vision* that came to him at night. It is a spooky kind of passage, Verses 12-21:

**“Now a word was brought to me stealthily,
my ear received the whisper of it.
Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep fails on men,
dread came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.
A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh stood up.
It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.
A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:
‘Can mortal man be righteous before God?
can a man be pure before his Maker?
Even in his servants he puts no trust,**

**and his angels he charges with error;
how much more those who dwell in houses
of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed before the moth.
Between morning and evening they are destroyed;
they perish for ever without any regarding it.
If their tent-cord is plucked up within them,
do they not die, and that without wisdom?’” {Job 4:12-21 RSV}**

That is an argument based upon the fact that infinite justice rules the universe. Eliphaz sees God as a God of holiness and purity so spotless that even the angels of God stand defiled before him. What chance would a man have to stand and claim to be sinless? In a sense, that is good theology. And as we will see before the end of the book, it really was a problem that Job was facing. He did not understand all his own heart, and at the end he confesses that fact. But the trouble with Eliphaz’s argument was that he thought it had to be based on some known but hidden sin that Job was unwilling to confess. Eliphaz sees God only as a God of justice. He sees nothing of love and compassion and forgiveness or of discipline and training or the Father’s heart of God. So because of his unbalanced theology even though what he says is true, it becomes false in its application.

That is where a lot of error creeps into Scripture. We can quote a lot of good factual truths about the Bible, but, when we try to apply them out of a false premise, we end up wrong. That is why people who make a habit of going around with a Bible, quoting verses to others, end up beating them over the head with these verses, and being very wrong in the process.

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, used to speak about “preachers who went around with a theological revolver in their ecclesiastical trousers,” ready to blast anybody who got in the way.

Now in Chapter 5, Verses 1-7, Eliphaz argues that *trouble comes only from sin*.

**“Call now; is there any one who will answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?**

**Surely vexation kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the simple.”
{Job 5:1-2 RSV}**

That is what is wrong. You are vexed and jealous, and that is why you have trouble.

**“I have seen the fool taking root [apparently prospering],
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling [it all fell apart].
His sons are far from safety,
they are crushed in the gate,
and there is no one to deliver them.”
{Job 5:3-4 RSV}**

What a low blow! That is a hidden reference to the calamity that befell all Job’s children in one day. Eliphaz is suggesting that such things happen only because there is something wrong in Job’s life:

**“His harvest the hungry eat, and he takes it even out of thorns;
and the thirsty pant after his wealth.
For affliction does not come from the dust,
nor does trouble sprout from the ground;
but man is born to trouble
as the sparks fly upward.”
{Job 5:5-7 RSV}**

“Trouble comes from sin,” says Eliphaz. “That’s the whole thing Job. If you’ve got trouble, that has to be the reason.”

In the next division, Verses 8-16, he suggests to Job that *there is no use playing games with God* because God knows too much.

**“As for me, I would seek God,
and to God would I commit my cause;
who does great things and unsearchable,
marvelous things without number:
he gives rain upon the earth
and sends waters upon the fields;
he sets on high those who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
He frustrates the devices of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.
He takes the wise in their own craftiness;
and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.
They meet with darkness in the daytime,
and grope at noonday as in the night.**

**But he saves the fatherless from their mouth,
the needy from the hand of the mighty.
So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts her mouth.”
{Job 5:8-16 RSV}**

God is in control Eliphaz argues, and he is so clever and so wise that you cannot deceive him. “You can’t hide from him Job. He’ll trap you, he’ll uncover your sin. You might as well get it out in the open!” Eliphaz closes with a section which says, in effect, “just give up and God will bless you.” Verses 17-27:

**“Behold, happy is the man whom God re- proves;
therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty.
For he wounds, but he binds up;
he smites, but his hands heal.
He will deliver you from six troubles;
in seven there shall no evil touch you.
In famine he will redeem you from death,
and in war from the power of the sword.
You shall be hid from the scourge of the tongue,
and shall not fear destruction when it comes.
At destruction and famine you shall laugh,
and shall not fear the beasts of the earth.
For you shall be in league with the stones of the field,
and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.
You shall know that your tent is safe,
and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing.
You shall know also that your descendants shall be many,
and your offspring as the grass of the earth.
You shall come to your grave in ripe old age,
as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season.
Lo, this we have searched out; it is true.
Hear, and know it for your good.”
{Job 5:17-27 RSV}**

Eliphaz argues that if you just cast yourself on God’s mercy he will forgive you and restore you and everything will be fine. You can be confident

that you will be protected and kept, even to a ripe old age. Now of course the truth is, that is not what happens. Anyone who has lived a few years at all knows that you can find godly people who are not protected, and who still go through times of trial and peril and suffering. Though this sounds like good theology it does not take in all the facts. That is why Job is given to us, that we might learn to correct our theology, and to understand that there are deeper reasons for suffering than just sin – the argument of Eliphaz here.

We will just take Job's reply to this Chapters 6 and 7. It is divided into two sections. In Chapter 6 Job rebukes his friends, speaking to all three of them. (Probably there were others present listening to all this, a silent audience, except for a certain young man who comes in at the end of the book.) And, in Chapter 7, Job addresses his complaint to God. There are three parts to each chapter.

First, Job says **he has a right to complain.**

Then Job answered:

**“O that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!
For then it would be heavier than the sand
of the sea;
therefore my words have been rash.”
{Job 6:1-3 RSV}**

He admits he has been speaking very strongly but he says, “If you were where I am, you'd understand. My sorrow is so terrible it gives me a good reason to complain.”

**“For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.
Does the wild ass bray when he has grass,
or the ox low over his fodder?
Can that which is tasteless be eaten without
salt,
or is there any taste in the slime of the
purslane?
My appetite refuses to touch them;
they are as food that is loathsome to me.”
{Job 6:4-7 RSV}**

“You never hear an animal complain,” Job says, “when he is well fed and taken care of. That's why I am complaining. You cannot take that which is tasteless and loathsome without trying

to improve it with salt, or something. So I have a right to complain. It helps me to bear my troubles.”

Many people talk that way. I know a lot of people who feel that if God sends them tribulation they have a right to tribulate! And most of them do.

Job felt that way: “What I am going through is so bad I have to complain!”

**Then he speaks of his inability to bear more,
Verse 8:**

**“O that I might have my request,
and that God would grant my desire;
that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut
me off!
This would be my consolation;
I would even exult in pain unsparing;
for I have not denied the words of the
Holy One.
What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should be pa-
tient?
Is my strength the strength of stones,
or is my flesh bronze?
In truth I have no help in me,
and any resource is driven from me.”
{Job 6:8-13 RSV}**

“I have no strength to handle this. What does God think I am made of, stone or bronze, that he subjects me to all this?” Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever said, “Lord, you promised that you would not tempt me above that which I'm able to bear and Lord we went by that point weeks ago!” But God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how much we can take. He knew how much Job could take, and he has a reason for all this. So Job's cry goes unanswered.

Then Job turns to his friends and rebukes them, expressing his irritation at their misunderstanding, (Verses 14-21):

**“He who withholds kindness from a friend
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.
My brethren are treacherous as a torrent-
bed,
as freshets that pass away,
which are dark with ice,
and where the snow hides itself.
In time of heat they disappear;**

**when it is hot, they vanish from their place.
The caravans turn aside from their course;
they go up into the waste, and perish.
The caravans of Tema look,
the travelers of Sheba hope.
They are disappointed because they were confident;
they come thither and are confounded.
Such you have now become to me,”**
{Job 6:14-21a RSV}

Job says, “You friends are like a mountain brook that is full of water in the wintertime when nobody needs it. But when the hot summer sun comes out, and you long for the refreshing of the water, it is nothing but a dry, gravel-filled stream bed. Even the caravans of camels looking for water for refreshment find nothing there. You said you came to comfort me, and all you’ve given me is trouble. You rebuke me.” Job is obviously irritated at these friends.

**“Have I said, ‘Make me a gift’?
Or, ‘From your wealth offer a bribe for me’?
Or, ‘Deliver me from the adversary’s hand’?
Or, ‘Ransom me from the hand of oppressors’?”** {Job 6:22-23 RSV}

“Did I ask you to help me? I didn’t send for you. You came to comfort me and instead you rebuke me. I didn’t ask for it!”

**“Teach me, and I will be silent;
make me understand how I have erred.
How forceful are honest words!
But what does reproof from you reprove?
Do you think that you can reprove words,
when the speech of a despairing man is wind?
You would even cast lots over the fatherless,
and bargain over your friend. [You’d even beat your grandmother!]
But now, be pleased to look at me;
for I will not lie to your face.
Turn, I pray, let no wrong be done.
Turn now, my vindication is at stake.
Is there any wrong on my tongue?
Cannot my taste discern calamity?”**
{Job 6:24-30 RSV}

Job is simply saying, “If there is something wrong then tell me, for I don’t know what it is.” His dilemma is that he knows God is doing this to him, but he cannot find a reason. He knows there is nothing in his life that he has not already confessed and dealt with. He is not claiming to be sinless; he is saying that he has handled whatever sin he has been aware of, so what else is there? Why is this going on?

Then he turns to God, and **complains about the hardness of his present experience.** Chapter 7:

**“Has not man a hard service upon earth,
and are not his days like the days of a hireling?
Like a slave who longs for the shadow,
and like a hireling who looks for his wages,
so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.
When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’
But the night is long,
and I am full of tossing till the dawn.
My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;
my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh.
My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,
and come to their end without hope.”**
{Job 7:1-6 RSV}

We get concerned when we get a pimple on our face, but Job was covered with boils!

Then he complains about the hopelessness of the future, Verse 7:

**“Remember that my life is a breath;
my eye will never again see good.
The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more;
when thy eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.
As the cloud fades and vanishes,
so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up;
he returns no more to his house,
nor does his place know him any more.”**
{Job 7:7-10 RSV}

He has given up. He thinks he will never see any relief that he will go on like this to the end. And out of that meaningless suffering and hopeless

darkness he cries out in honest despair, Verses 11-21:

**“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my
soul.**

**Am I the sea, or a sea monster,
that thou settest a guard over me?
When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint,’
then thou dost scare me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,
so that I would choose strangling
and death rather than my bones.
I loathe my life; I would not live for ever.
Let me alone, for my days are a breath.
What is man, that thou dost make so much
of him,
and that thou dost set thy mind upon him,
dost visit him every morning,
and test him every moment?
How long wilt thou not look away from me,
nor let me alone till I swallow my spittle?
If I sin, what do I do to thee, thou watcher
of men?
Why hast thou made me thy mark?
Why have I become a burden to thee?
Why dost thou not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?
For now I shall lie in the earth;
thou wilt seek me, but I shall not be.”**

{Job 7:11-21 RSV}

Have you ever felt that way? “Lord, leave me alone, I’ve had enough! Why are you so intent on making life miserable for me? Why don’t you just let me go?” So Job cries out in baffled bewilderment. Now, even at this point in the book, there are some things that we must constantly remember. One is, we know something about this scene that Job does not know. We see some purpose in this that he has not yet seen what is also true about the sufferings we go through. In every time of trial

there are two purposes in view: Satan has his purpose, and God has his.

Satan’s purpose here was to use the pain of Job’s illness to afflict his body; to use the priggish, well-intentioned comfort of his friends to irritate his soul; and to use the silence of God to assault his spirit and to break his faith. But God’s purpose is to teach Job some truths that he never knew before, to deepen his theology, and help him understand God much better. God’s truth was to answer Satan in the eyes of all the principalities and powers of the whole universe, and to prove him wrong in his philosophy of life. God’s purpose was also to provide a demonstration for all the sufferers in all the ages that would follow that God knows what he is doing. As the book of Job unfolds, we will see how this is gradually brought to light.

What an encouragement to those of us who must go through some times of suffering, to understand that it is not always because we are sinful. Sometimes it is, and we will know it when it is. But if, like Job, you know of nothing you have done that you have not dealt with, and still the suffering goes on, look behind the curtain of God’s purposes and you will see that great and eternal events are hanging upon the outcome of the struggle.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for the sufferings of Job. What marvelous lessons they teach us about our own lives and our own sufferings. Help us to view them in the light of the revelation of this book, and to know that we know more truth than Job knew, and we have far less reason to give up than he did. Grant to us, Lord, strength to stand in the midst of pressure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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The Folly of Platitudes

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week we left our hero, Job, surrounded by do-gooders who were intent on forcing him to confess sin he was not aware he had committed. I do not suppose anything is more difficult for the human spirit to bear than misunderstanding, and to be accused of having done something that you have no awareness of having done. So these three men who came to comfort Job prove to be the severest trial he has yet to bear. Eliphaz, the oldest, spoke first, but his eloquent and lofty arguments only leave Job angry and irritated, crying out for enlightenment from his friends, and relief from his pain.

In Chapter 8, **the second of these friends takes up the attack.** His name is Bildad the Shuhite, but we call him "Bildad the Brutal." His discourse is rather short, and he opens by attempting logic with Job:

**Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
"How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great
wind?
Does God pervert justice?
Or does the Almighty pervert the right?
If your children have sinned against him,
he has delivered them into the power of
their transgression." {Job 8:1-4 RSV}**

Bildad's style is to ask questions to try to focus everything onto the logic of what is being discussed. He is the cold, intellectual thinker who is debating the issue at the level of the mind. His first question, basically, is "Can God do wrong?" Now that is a good question to ask. It is the basis of much philosophy, of course, from the point of logic, the answer is "No, God cannot do wrong." After all, ideas of what is wrong and what is right

are based upon the very nature and character of God himself. Rightness is being like God; wrongness is being unlike God. So to ask this question is to ask, "Can God be unlike himself?" The answer is, "No." God cannot be unlike himself; God cannot do wrong. So Bildad moves on from that basic premise to draw a logical conclusion for Job: "If your children have sinned against him he has delivered them into the power of their transgression. When your children died, Job, on that tragic day when the tornado blew down the house and killed them all, you can only conclude it was because they did something terribly wrong." Bildad is following through the line of argument that all three of these friends pursue, that God punishes all wrong; therefore any tragedy is the result of some definite and perhaps hidden sin.

Bildad goes on, in Verses 8-9, to argue that God will respond to repentance, and he summons the past experience of the fathers to confirm this:

**"For inquire, I pray you, of bygone ages,
and consider what the fathers have found;
For we are but of yesterday, and know
nothing,
for our days on earth are a shadow."
{Job 8:8-9 RSV}**

There is much truth in what these men say to Job. In fact, it would be very difficult to find anything wrong, specifically, in what they say. Bildad is simply reminding Job that the experience of the past confirms the fact that God blesses those who turn to him, and that he rebukes and punishes those who turn away.

Then Bildad supports his argument further with various common sayings of the day, Verses 11-13:

**“Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.
Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless man shall perish.”
{Job 8:11-13 RSV}**

His argument is clearly that man, by nature, must have God’s blessing in order to prosper. If he does not have it, if he has done something to cut himself off from the blessing of God, then he will simply wither like a reed without water. Bildad supports this by referring to these common platitudes of the day. Then he enlarges this in the verses that follow by pointing out how God always cuts off those who seem to prosper because of evil in their midst, and he closes with an exhortation to Job to repent, Verses 20-22:

**“Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,
nor take the hand of evildoers.
He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouting.
Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.” {Job 8:20-22 RSV}**

This is a heartfelt and earnest exhortation to Job to own up to whatever it is he is hiding from them and from God, and perhaps from himself.

When you read the arguments of a man like this, you have to ask, “What is wrong with this? It sounds so true and right.” It is an argument you hear repeated many times today. (The book of Job is very up-to-date.) What Bildad says is true and logical, and supported by plausible argument both from the experience of the past, and from the testimony of much of Scripture, as well. What, then, is wrong?

When you get to the end of the book, God appears and says that Job has been saying the right things, and that the friends are wrong in what they say. But at this point we have to ask, “What is wrong with this?” The answer, of course, is that there is nothing wrong with what they say; it is just

that it is said in the wrong spirit, and what they leave out makes it wrong.

I see three things wrong with their approaches:

1. First, they answer Job’s words without trying to find out what produces those words. They are zeroing in on what he says, without understanding his agony. Job himself has admitted previous to this that he speaks rashly, but he said it was because of the unceasing torment he is going through. Any of us who have gone through deep, unrelenting pain knows how this can try the spirit to the utmost, and we become testy and sharp. And because Job says certain things that sound extreme, his friends leap upon his words and try to analyze them. There is no identification with the hurt of Job in their approaches to him.

I find this is a very common problem today. It is a very common problem in marriage. Husbands often try to be coldly analytical when their wives are pressured, or weary, or frightened about something. Husbands hear only the words and try to analyze them, and nothing can destroy a woman faster than that. The problem is that there is no identification with the hurt. We simply deal with what people say and take no note of what lies behind the words. There is no attempt at understanding or sympathy. We become like Bildad the Shuhite – coldly analytical about what is said, with no understanding of the hurt.

2. The second thing is that these friends’ theology was right as far as it went, but it was very incomplete. They never seemed to be aware of that. They always spoke with the utmost confidence that what they were saying was the final word on the subject. There was no apparent understanding that perhaps there were aspects of God and dimensions to his Word that they had not yet seen. (This is certainly true of Bildad at this point, and of the next speaker, Zophar.) Their narrow, limited vision said that difficulties in a person’s life were always caused by sin. Now many of the problems of life are caused by sin, therefore, it is impossible to say to these men that they are wrong. Nevertheless, they do not see that there are other reasons why God brings us into suffering. Like

many of us today, they judge only on the basis of a very rigid theology that takes note of certain aspects of truth, but ignores others.

Like the famous story of the blind men and the elephant. They gather around this huge animal and by feeling it, try to identify what an elephant is like. One, grabbing the trunk, said an elephant is like a snake. Another, feeling the leg, said an elephant is like a tree. Still another, feeling the side of the animal, said that an elephant is like a wall. A fourth, grabbing the tail, said an elephant is like a rope. Thus they argued back and forth. All of them were right, and all of them were wrong, because they did not see the whole picture.

I think one of the most helpful things about the book of Job is that it teaches us the danger of speaking from an incomplete theology, of trying to analyze God's workings with only a narrow understanding of how he works, and what are the causes behind his actions in human life. This produces many of the problems we suffer with one another. We have all suffered from Job's comforters who come around positive they know what the problem is. They have a very rigid, theological explanation of our difficulty. And it is right, as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough.

3. The third thing that is wrong with these friends is that they never seem to refer to God for help for themselves in understanding Job's problem. They never pray with Job. They never ask God for help to open their minds and to illuminate their understanding so that they can help their friend. The book is filled with prayers, but they are all the prayers of Job, crying out to God in the midst of his sufferings. His friends never seem to feel the need for further illumination on the subject. Yet you cannot find much wrong with their arguments. What a testimony to us for the need to speak cautiously when we deal with the deep hurts and problems of life.

In Chapters 9 and 10 we have **Job's reply to Bildad**. In Chapter 9 he sets forth the difficulty he has with God, and he opens with *a statement of his dilemma* in Verses 1-3:

Then Job answered:

"Truly I know that it is so:

But how can a man be just before God?

If one wished to contend with him,

one could not answer him once in a thousand times." {Job 9:1-3 RSV}

We must carefully understand what Job is saying here. His problem is, basically, that he, as well as his friends, has an inadequate theology. All four of them come at life with the same basic outlook, and Job accepts the principle that these friends believe, that trouble comes only because of sin. He would have analyzed another's problems along the same line before his trials.

But his dilemma is caused by the fact that in the long dark hours of searching his own heart, he has not been able to put his finger upon any sin that he has not already dealt with. He was a righteous and a blameless man, which means that when he was aware of evil in his life, he did not try to deny it, but brought the offerings, and accepted God's forgiveness. He has done that, and still the torment goes on. So his dilemma is, "I'm not aware of sin in myself, yet the trouble is there, therefore, the problem must lie in God."

But his problem is that he has no way to examine God, and that is what he goes on to state in very eloquent terms. In Verse 4, he says that *God's wisdom is beyond man*:

**"He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength
– who has hardened himself against him,
and succeeded? –**

**he who removes mountains, and they know
it not,**

when he overturns them in his anger;

**who shakes the earth out of its place,
and its pillars tremble;**

**who commands the sun, and it does not rise;
who seals up the stars;**

**who alone stretched out the heavens,
and trampled the waves of the sea;**

**who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the
south;**

**who does great things beyond understand-
ing,**

and marvelous things without number."

{Job 9:4-10 RSV}

“How can you get hold of a God like that to debate with him the issues that are causing the hurt of life?” Job asks.

In Verses 11-12 he recognizes **God’s invisibility**:

**“Lo, he passes by me, and I see him not;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.
Behold, he snatches away; who can hinder him?
Who will say to him, ‘What doest thou?’
{Job 9:11-12 RSV}**

In Verses 13-21 you have a marvelous statement of **the sovereign movings of God in history**:

**“God will not turn back his anger [he does
not change his mind];
beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab
[Egypt].
How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?
Though I am innocent, I cannot answer
him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.
If I summoned him and he answered me,
I would not believe that he was listening to
my voice.
For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
If it is a contest of strength, behold him
[obviously the winner]:
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon
him?” [Who can judge the judge?]
{Job 9:13-19 RSV}**

That is, “Do you get some kind of pleasure out of this? Is that why you put me through this? Does it give you some kind of delight?” I do not think Job is being sarcastic. I think he is really asking, “Is God that kind of a being, that this pleases him? If that is the explanation, at least I am contributing to the pleasure of God by going through something like this!” He is looking for meaning in his suffering. Then he asks, Verses 4-7:

**“Hast thou eyes of flesh?
Dost thou see as a man sees?
Are thy days as the days of man,
or thy years as man’s years,**

**that thou dost seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,
although thou knowest that I am not guilty,
and there is none to deliver out of thy
hand?” {Job 10:4-7 RSV}**

He is asking, “Do you somehow limit yourself to man’s circumstances and capabilities? Is that why you put me through this? Somehow, despite your wisdom and knowledge and might far beyond men, do you limit yourself, put yourself where we are, and let yourself act and think like a man? Is that what is behind this?” I think here we have some implications of the incarnation, the great underlying truth of the whole New Testament, that God somehow did limit himself, and became a man, and put himself in our place. Job is asking, “Is that why we go through suffering?” In Verses 8-13, he argues, “Can it be reasonable? You made me, you formed me, and now you tear me apart. Is that a reasonable thing to do? You who put me together are now destroying me. Is that logical, is that right?” Then in Verses 14-17 he asks the question, “What can I do? What recourse do I have? How can I please you or change in such a way as to alleviate this suffering?”

**“If I sin, thou dost mark me, ... {Job 10:14a
RSV}
If I am wicked, woe to me!
If I am righteous. I cannot lift up my
head, {Job 10:15a RSV}
And if I lift myself up, thou dost hunt me
like a lion,” {Job 10:16a RSV}**

And he closes, Verse 17:

**“Thou dost renew thy witnesses against me,
and increase thy vexation toward me;
thou dost bring fresh hosts against me.”
{Job 10:17 RSV}**

“What can I do? Where can I turn?” As you go through that kind of a list you see that every argument that has ever occurred to a suffering saint is brought out here in the book of Job. Every nuance of suffering, whether mental or physical, is explored to its utmost limit throughout this book. All the tormenting questions are asked, all the haunting dilemmas are faced, so that anyone going through suffering will find that Job has felt what-

ever he has, and has articulated it eloquently. The questions are not answered at this point. They will be answered before we are through, but in a way you would never anticipate in the reading of the story.

So, because of the silence of God, Job closes this chapter by crying out in Verses 18-22, “Let me alone! Life is useless; death is but darkness. Whatever it is, anything is better than this. Let me alone.”

Now, in Chapter 11, **Zophar the Naamathite** comes onto the scene. (I call him “Zophar the Zealous.”) He moves up to bat, and he opens with *a scorching rebuke to Job’s sinful folly*, as he sees it:

**Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:
“Should a multitude of words go unanswered,
and a man full of talk be vindicated?
Should your babble silence men,
and when you mock, shall no one shame you?
For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure,
and I am clean in God’s eyes.’
But oh, that God would speak,
and open his lips to you,
and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For he is manifold in understanding.
Know then that God exacts of you less than
your guilt deserves.” {Job 11:1-6 RSV}**

You can almost see Zophar shaking his fist in righteous indignation in Job’s face. He accuses Job of wordiness, of foolishness, of mockery, of self-righteous smugness. He says that Job’s punishment is richly deserved; that he is only getting what is coming to him, and not even all of that. What a sweetheart this man is!

He goes on, in Verses 7-12, to describe *Job’s stupid ignorance*, in contrast to God’s deep wisdom and inscrutable ways:

**“Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
It is higher than heaven – what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol – what can you know?
Its measure is longer than the earth,
and broader than the sea.**

**If he passes through, and imprisons,
and calls to judgment, who can hinder him?
For he knows worthless men [guess who
Zophar has in mind!];
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?
But a stupid man will get understanding
when a wild ass’s colt is born a man.”
{Job 11:7-12 RSV}**

That is, it will never happen. “Anybody as stupid as you, Job, will never get any help.” He lays it on, heavy and hard. Then he closes with a vivid description of the shining possibilities that were ahead, *if Job will only repent*:

**“If you set your heart aright, {Job 11:13a RSV}
If iniquity is in your hand, {Job 11:14a RSV}
Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish;
you will be secure, {Job 11:15a RSV}
You will forget your misery; {Job 11:16a RSV}
And your life will be brighter than the noonday; {Job 11:17a RSV}
And you will have confidence, {Job 11:18a RSV}
you will be protected {Job 11:18c RSV}
You will lie down, and none will make you afraid;” {Job 11:19a RSV}**

Then *a sharp word of warning* at the end,

**“But the eyes of the wicked will fall;
all ways of escape will be lost to them,
and their hope is to breathe their last.”
{Job 11:20 RSV}**

Once again there is no identifying with Job’s hurt. There is no sense of empathy, of trying to feel with him the awful torment of mind and spirit that presses him, squeezes him, and drags from him these agonizing cries into the darkness around. These men just lay it on him. They see only the cold, analytical logic of it. Zophar, of course, speaks with a great deal of passion and force, but there is no sense of offering understanding help, simply the laying on of passionate invective. Once

again these men seem to approach this whole problem from a purely theological point of view.

This is the difference between theology and the experience of a man taught by the Spirit. Theology can be very clear and right, but it is all in the head. When you are dealing with the hurting problems of life, you must add a deeper dimension – that compassion that Jesus manifested, that sympathy of touch that identified with the hurt and opened the door of the spirit to receiving what light might be given through the words.

The first round ends with **Job's sarcastic defiance**, Chapters 12-14. The first part is Job's answers to his friends; the second is his prayer before God. (We will leave that prayer for next week.)

Then Job answered:

**“No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.”**

{Job 12:1-2 RSV}

We know exactly how he felt! These men had all the answers; they knew all the problems. Job says, “When you pass from the scene, there will be nothing left. You know it all.” From Verse 3 on to the end of the chapter, he points out that they deal with elementary truths, things that anybody could know:

**“But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?”**
{Job 12:3 RSV}

“You haven't helped me. Anyone knows this, You haven't added anything to me.” Then he begins to detail it.

**“I am a laughingstock to my friends;
I, who called upon God and he answered
me,
a just and blameless man, am a laughing-
stock.” {Job 12:4 RSV}**

Why? Because,

**“In the thought of one who is at ease there
is contempt for misfortune;”**
{Job 12:5a RSV}

“You don't understand because you've never been here. You haven't felt what I feel.” (You know how familiar that argument is!) And then Job says, “You haven't faced all the facts,” Verse 6:

**“The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hand.”**
{Job 12:6 RSV}

**“Though I am innocent, my own mouth
would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me
perverse.**

**I am blameless; I regard not myself;
I loathe my life.” {Job 9:20-22 RSV}**

“What can I do? How can I get at this whole problem?” Job asks. In {Chapter 9,} Verses 22-24, he goes on to describe how life becomes incomprehensible where there is no understanding God. The reference point is gone, or uncertain, or vague; you cannot make sense of anything in life. And in {Chapter 9,} Verses 25-31 you get the effect this has on Job. Because of this he is filled with bewilderment, fear, and despair. But then in {Chapter 9,} Verses 32-35, out of the deep darkness that surrounds this suffering saint, a ray of light breaks through. It is the first break in Job's gloom. He says of God:

**“For he is not a man, as I am, that I might
answer him,
that we should come to trial together.”**
{Job 9:32 RSV}

Then comes the awareness of what is missing:

**“There is no umpire between us,
who might lay his hand upon us both.
Let him take his rod away from me,
and let not dread of him terrify me.
Then I would speak without fear of him,
for I am not so in myself.”**
{Job 9:33-35 RSV}

“What is needed is a mediator, an arbitrator who can come between us who understands us both, and brings us together,” Job says. For the first time in this book we begin to see what God is after with this man, why he is putting him through this protracted trial. For now Job begins to feel, deep in his bones, the nature of reality: the terrible

gulf between man and God that must be bridged by another party. We who live in the full light of the New Testament know that he is crying out, and feeling deep within, the need for just such a mediator as Jesus himself. Job is laying the foundation here in his own understanding for that tremendous revelation that comes in the New Testament that God becomes man. God takes our place, lives as we live, and feels as we feel, and solves the great problem between us and God, and brings the two – God and man – together. For the first time in Job we begin to sense what God is driving at. There is a verse in Psalm 119, Verse 71, that says: “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” You can learn theology out of a book, and you can study it and get it clear in your mind, but until you go through the hurts and difficulties and trials of life, you never really understand what the truth is. It takes suffering to get a clear vision of what God is saying to us, and that is what the book of Job is all about.

In Chapter 10, the darkness closes in again around Job. Once again his torment drives him to prayer, and this chapter is breathed out before God, and in the presence of his friends. There are two things Job asks in this prayer. In Verse 2, he says,

“let me know why thou dost contend against me.” {Job 10:2b RSV}

That is the heart of his cry in the first part of this chapter. “Let me know what is wrong.” Then, in Verse 20 he cries to God,

“Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort ...” {Job 10:20b RSV}

So his prayer consists of these two cries, “Let me know, or else let me alone; one or the other!” Anyone who has gone through suffering knows that this is often our feeling. “Explain this to me, Lord. Or, if you choose to let it go on, leave me alone!”

I was talking to a man this week who, in the midst of protracted suffering, said, “Does God want me to endure any more?” This is Job’s cry.

In the first seventeen verses of Chapter 10, he is searching for answers, examining all the possibilities that might explain why he is going through this torment. As you look at these, you see that they reflect the questions that every sufferer feels

when he is going through a difficult time. In {Chapter 10,} Verse 3, Job says:

**“Does it seem good to thee to oppress, to despise the work of thy hands and favor the designs of the wicked?”
{Job 10:3 RSV}**

“You tell me God always punishes unrighteousness, but look around you. There are open idolaters who bring their idols in their hands. There are robbers living at peace, who dwell secure. God is not punishing them. Life itself testifies that you are wrong.”

In {Chapter 12,} Verses 7-12, he says that nature confirms it. God deals as he pleases; there is no way of predicting his actions:

**“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.”
{Job 12:7-8 RSV}**

**“In his hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.”
{Job 12:10 RSV}**

Finally, in a moving and beautiful passage filled with great passion and force, Job shows, in {Chapter 12,} Verses 13-25, that he understands God just as well as they do. I will not take time to read this passage, but I hope you will do so, because it is a beautiful, glowing tribute to the majesty, the might, and the wisdom of God.

In Chapter 13, *Job continues his defense before these men.* He says their words have not helped; their silence would help more:

**“Lo, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.
What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
But I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to argue my case with God.
As for you, you whitewash with lies;
worthless physicians are you all.
Oh that you would keep silent,
and it would be your wisdom!”
{Job 13:1-5 RSV}**

In Verses 6-12, he tells them that if God judges him, he will judge them; if he overwhelms him, he will overwhelm them also. They are in exactly the same boat. So his final plea is to *let him alone*, that he might come before God himself and debate this whole matter (Verses 13-19):

**“Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.
I will take my flesh in my teeth,
and put my life in my hand.
Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope;
yet I will defend my ways to his face.”**
{Job 13:13-15 RSV}

Verse 15 is translated quite differently in the Authorized Version. This is the famous passage often quoted from Job: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” This is a great cry of hope and trust, but it is not really what Job said. What he said, I think, is best translated in the Revised Standard Version: “Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope; yet I will defend my ways to his face.” He is determined, Job says, to defend himself.

He expresses *one bit of hope* in Verse 16:

**“This will be my salvation,
that a godless man will not come before
him.”** {Job 13:16 RSV}

“If I am really godless, I will not get a chance to come before him. But if he will give me a chance, I have my case all prepared. And the very fact that he will listen to me indicates that at least I have a chance.” So he concludes, Verses 17-19:

**“Listen carefully to my words,
and let my declaration be in your ears.
Behold, I have prepared my case;**

**I know that I shall be vindicated.
Who is there that will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.”** {Job
13:17-19 RSV}

Beginning at Verse 20 on through the rest of the chapter and through Chapter 14, Job presents the case that he has prepared before God, and he tells us what he would say if he could talk to God. (We will leave that for our next study.) But here he simply makes a plea that they stop arguing and listen to him, and help him by their silence if not by any other way.

Surely, if nothing else, this book of Job should help us to be careful in our approach to the suffering of others, so that we do not add to it. These friends of Job are so rigid in their theology, and so blind to the great dimensions of God that neither they nor Job yet understand that they are only increasing the torment of this poor man.

This is why Scripture exhorts us to “Weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice,” {cf, Rom 12:15}.

Prayer:

Our Father, we ask you to teach us from this great book. Help us to understand more of your great nature, the majesty and glory of your Being, the compassion of your heart, and the wisdom that prompts you to put us through times of difficulty and yet offers to support us through them, without fail. Lord, help us to be understanding about the nature of life, and learn from this book, that we might better handle that which comes to us. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Help from On High

by Ray C. Stedman

In our last study we left Job like a man in prison, planning his case for his appearance before God. Anyone who has anything to do with prisoners knows that you soon develop “prison attorneys” – men waiting for trial who haunt the prison libraries to study law books to get their case all together. Sometimes they become such experts in law that they actually assume the presentation of their own case before the jury.

Job is like that, and Chapter 13 describes how, through the long hours of anguish, he is planning what he would say if God ever gave him a chance. We will open by looking at **the case he has prepared before God**. He has divided it into four major points that he wants to make.

The first one is a *plea for certain conditions* that he feels he needs before he is able to stand and talk to God, Verses 19-21:

**“Who is there that will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.
Only grant two things to me,
then I will not hide myself from thy face:
withdraw thy hand far from me,
and let not dread of thee terrify me.
Then call, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and do thou reply to me.”**
{Job 13:19-21 RSV}

C. S. Lewis has well said that to argue with God is to argue with the very power that makes it possible to argue at all. And Job senses that. He knows that he must have mercy from God before he can even stand before him, so he asks that two conditions be granted him: one, that God will lift the pain and anguish that he is going through so

that he does not have to speak out of this constant torment of body; and second, that God would so veil his presence that Job will not be terrified by the awesomeness of a mighty God. It is a vivid description of the sense of God that this man has, even in his hour of anguish.

One thing you never find Job doing is forsaking his consciousness of the character of God. Even though he wonders at what God is doing, and feels that he is being mistreated in many ways, he always has the sense of the majesty of God. Here he asks that he be delivered from that fear so that he might present his case.

Then the next division is *Job’s cry for knowledge*. He needs some information before he can go on, Verse 23:

**“How many are my iniquities and my sins?
Make me know my transgression and my
sin.”** {Job 13:23 RSV}

It is universally recognized in any court of law that a prisoner has the right to know what the charges are against him. This is Job’s dilemma. He does not really know what is the trouble, although he has searched his heart. His theology – along with that of his friends – tells him that punishment and suffering come because of sin. But what sin? That is what he cannot answer. And so he cries out, “What have I done? How have I offended?” This is the instinctive cry of a suffering heart: “What have I done? Why is this happening to me?” Job eloquently expresses that.

Then *he protests the silence of God*, and his apparent anger against him, Verses 24-27:

**“Why dost thou hide thy face,
and count me as thy enemy?
Wilt thou frighten a driven leaf
and pursue dry chaff?
For thou writest bitter things against me,
and makest me inherit the iniquities of my
youth.
Thou puttest my feet in the stocks,
and watchest all my paths;
thou settest a bound to the soles of my
feet.” {Job 13:24-27 RSV}**

The only thing that occurs to Job that may be the answer to this unrelenting pain is that God is going back and *picking up the sins of his past* – even the sins of his youth – despite the fact that he had offered sacrifices to be delivered of them, according to God’s program.

Then in Chapter 14, in two beautifully expressed, marvelously moving passages, Job brings out **the helplessness and the hopelessness of man before God**. First, he is helpless to control his affairs, Verses 1-2:

**“Man that is born of a woman is of few
days,
and full of trouble.
He comes forth like a flower, and withers;
he flees like a shadow, and continues not.”
{Job 14:1-2 RSV}**

And yet God brings this limited, helpless man who is a victim of circumstances and judges him for things that he cannot help. This is Job’s feeling, Verses 5-6:

**“Since his days are determined,
and the number of his months is with thee,
and thou hast appointed his bounds ...”
{Job 14:5a RSV}**

“What can man do? He is a victim of what happens to him.” This is the expression of Job’s heart, and many have felt this way. “I can’t help it that I was born into this situation, subjected to these pressures, and these circumstances. What can I do?” This is the basis of Job’s plea.

The latter part, in Verses 7-12, expresses very eloquently man’s sense of hopelessness – there is no way to go back and do it over again. Who of us

has not said, “Oh, I wish I could go back and live it through again – at least some aspects of it. If I could go back, knowing what I know now, I think I could make a much better record. I could clear up so many of the mistakes that I made. Give me another chance, God, now that I have learned what I need to know.” That is a universal feeling, and Job feels that. Yet he expresses his consciousness that this is impossible, Verses 7, 10-12:

**“For there is hope for a tree,
if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease. {Job
14:7 RSV}
“But a man dies, and is laid low;
man breathes his last, and where is he?
As waters fall from a lake,
and a river wastes away and dries up,
So a man lies down and rises not again;
till the heavens are no more ...” {Job
14:10-12a RSV}**

That is Job’s pessimistic view of life. I think here we are dealing with a great problem that everyone faces. We have a distorted view of this present life, which Job expresses in these eloquent terms.

He goes on in the next passage, Verses 13-17, to *cry out for a kind of purgatory after life*:

**“Oh that thou wouldst hide me in Sheol,
that thou wouldst conceal me until thy
wrath be past,
that thou wouldst appoint me a set time,
and remember me!” {Job 14:13 RSV}**

And then he asks again:

**“If a man die, shall he live again?” {Job
14:14a RSV}**

And the hope that something could be worked out causes him to say,

**“All the days of my service I would wait,
till my release should come.” {Job 14:14b
RSV}**

That vividly describes what a joy it would be to stand before God with God’s wrath already past. Now Job is not describing this because he thinks it is possible for him. He is trying to voice the inar-

ticulate longings of the human heart to be freed from guilt – guilt that you do not always feel you can help – and somehow having some kind of a condition that would set you free. This is what has given rise to the hope among mankind for a purgatory after death, where you can pay for some of your sins, but the rest of them are set aside, so that at last you can stand before God, accepted of him.

Chapter 14 closes with a *vivid description of the hopelessness of man*, nevertheless, Verses 18-22:

**“But the mountain falls and crumbles away,
and the rock is removed from its place;
the waters wear away the stones;
the torrents wash away the soil of the
earth;
so thou destroyest the hope of man.
Thou prevailest for ever against him, and
he passes;
thou changest his countenance, and
sendest him away.
His sons come to honor, and he does not
know it;
they are brought low, and he perceives it
not.
He feels only the pain of his own body,
and he mourns only for himself.” {Job
14:18-22 RSV}**

Here we have in Job a vivid and beautiful expression of what is wrong with our view of life. Job is looking at life as a natural man, and he sees it as the world sees it, that everything is for now. This life is the wholly important thing, and the reason you were brought into existence is to make something out of this present experience – you never get another chance. We are reminded of that on television: “You only go around once! If you are going to live, live with gusto.” We are constantly exhorted by the world, with its distorted understanding of life, to seize the present moment – you will never get another one. “If you don’t make it now, it will be too late.” This is one of the major reasons why even Christian couples are breaking up, sometimes after 25 or 30 years of marriage. People begin to feel the force of this argument and they believe it. They think the only thing left, if there is to be any pleasure and enjoyment in life, is to seize the present moment. “I have not been able to put it all together in all this time, so I’m going to

leave and start over.” Many a marriage is broken on that rock.

Now, that is a faulty view of life, and that is what God is teaching Job in this book. This is not what it is all about. This is not why human existence is given to us; this is but the school time, a time of preparation to get ready for the real life that lies ahead. Compare Job’s view of life with the revelation of the New Testament, and the view of New Testament writers, as to what lies beyond death and you see a stark and vivid contrast. They look forward to something so beautiful and grand and glorious breaking upon them that they could hardly wait to seize it! But here you get only the idea that everything must be done now.

I think this is why we get upset with ourselves and with life, at times. We feel life has been put together backwards. You have to make all the major decisions right at the time when you know practically nothing, when you are so callow and uninformed that you can hardly even see things right. You have to choose the wife of your youth at a time when you are not able to judge yourself, let alone anyone else. This is what Job is feeling here; there is no way back.

Round one is complete; they have all had a chance at Job. Now his **friends gird up their loins, sharpen their spears, and come at him again.**

In the first six verses, Eliphaz the Temanite charges Job with *presumptuous words*:

**“Should a wise man answer with windy
knowledge,
and fill himself with the east wind?
Should he argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which he can do no good?
But you are doing away with the fear of
God,
and hindering meditation before God.
For your own iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
and your own lips testify against you.”
{Job 15:2-6 RSV}**

Eliphaz started out very courteously, but now he has dropped his courtesy, and he is thrusting deeply. Then he charges Job with *pretentious claims*, Verses 7-9:

**“Are you the first man that was born?
Or were you brought forth before the
hills?
Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?
What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear
to us?” {Job 15:7-9 RSV}**

“We have the same sources of knowledge as you, Job. Why do you put us down, and think yourself so smart?”

Then he returns, as all the friends do, to their *narrow and worn-out theology*, Verses 14-16:

**“What is man, that he can be clean?
Or he that is born of a woman, that he can
be righteous?
Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;
How much less one who is abominable and
corrupt,
a man who drinks iniquity like water!”
{Job 15:14-16 RSV}**

Of course, Eliphaz has Job in mind here, “a man abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks iniquity like water.” I hope you have seen the fault in this line of argument. It is not that their theology is wrong, it is right. Eliphaz is pointing out the general nature of the depravity of man, the Fall, and its effects upon human life. And he says rightly that there is nobody who is clean, nobody who is righteous before God. But what he fails to do is to point out to Job specifically what it is that he has done. How can you deal with evil if you do not know what it is? The great revelation that God is seeking to help Job to understand is the nature of the corruptness of his heart. But God never charges him with fault until Job begins to see what is wrong, while these men come ready to charge him with every ugly thing in the book though they had no proof whatsoever, and Job’s life gives the lie to all their charges. As a matter of fact, they themselves are guilty of the very things that they set before Job because they too are part of the human race. Eliphaz is a man born of woman, so he is guilty with Job under this, but you never hear a word of self-condemnation from him.

This is the terrible fault of these friends, and I hope it teaches us a very needed lesson. When we go to talk with somebody who is in trouble, or in pain, or suffering, or even sinful – obviously so – we must never take the position of priggish smugness, or a complacency that pictures us as being right and true, and the other one as wrong.

Eliphaz goes on in a long passage to argue again from experience. He goes back over all the past and says, “My thesis is true, everything proves it: God will not let a man get by with wickedness. The wicked are going to be punished. Therefore, **if you are being punished you must be wicked!**” He says in Verse 34:

**“The company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tent of bribery.
They conceive mischief and bring forth evil
and their heart prepares deceit.” {Job
15:34-35 RSV}**

It is the same old tired thrust at Job: he must be guilty of some terrible sin.

In Chapters 16 and 17 Job answers. He does not know what to say, but he is trying to be honest. The great thing about Job is that he is no hypocrite; he never tries to cover over or set his case in a better light – he simply **blurts out all the hurt and anguish of his heart** as best he can.

He also *rebukes these men for their misunderstanding*, Chapter 16, Verses 1-5:

**Then Job answered:
“I have heard many such things;
miserable comforters are you all.
Shall windy words have an end?
Or what provokes you that you answer?
I also could speak as you do,
if you were in my place;
I could join words together against you,
and shake my head at you.
I could strengthen you with my mouth,
and the solace of my lips would assuage
your pain.” {Job 16:1-5 RSV}**

Sarcastic words, coming from a man who is tortured. You can see from this that Satan, though he has faded from the scene, is still there in the background using these friends as channels for what the apostle Paul calls “the fiery darts of the

wicked one; the accusations of the accuser against the brethren.” Let us beware lest we become a channel for Satan’s accusations against someone who is suffering as Job is suffering here.

Then Job goes on to state the facts as he understands them. First he says, “All I can conclude from what I am suffering is that *God must hate me.*” Verses 7 and 9:

**“Surely now God has worn me out;
he has made desolate all my company.
And he has shriveled me up ...”**
{Job 16:7-8a RSV}
**“He has torn me in his wrath, and hated
me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;”**
{Job 16:9a RSV}

Job goes on to show how even the people around him have rejected him, and how God is behind that, Verses 10-13:

**“Men have gaped at me with their mouth,
they have struck me insolently upon the
cheek,
they mass themselves together against me.
God gives me up to the ungodly,
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.
I was at ease, and he broke me asunder;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to
pieces;
He set me up as his target,
his archers surround me.”**
{Job 16:10-13a RSV}

Here Job charges God with all that is wrong in his life. Yet God is wonderfully patient. He does not reply against Job, nor does he strike him down in anger. Job is certainly not the highest example of faith in the scriptures. Men like Paul suffered extremely, as did Job. We think of that silent sufferer in the Garden of Gethsemane, who, “when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself unto Him who judges righteously,” {cf, 1 Pet 2:23 KJV}. How much higher is that level of response than what we see in the book of Job. But Job is the example for us of how our natural view of life must be broken through, so that we begin to see things in a different light. This book is here to teach us that God sometimes has to translate theol-

ogy into painful experience before we really begin to grasp what he is trying to say to us.

Job ends by **protesting his innocence** again, Verses 16-17:

**“My face is red with weeping,
and on my eyelids is deep darkness;
although there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.”**
{Job 16:16-17 RSV}

Then once again, as we have seen already, breaking through into Job’s consciousness is a *dim reflection of what God is trying to show him*, Verses 18-19:

**“O earth, cover not my blood,
and let my cry find no resting place.
Even now, behold, my witness is in
heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.”**
{Job 16:18-19 RSV}

Despite the charge that Job makes against God (that this is all coming from his hand), faith breaks through at this point to say that God must also supply the answer – God alone can explain what is happening to him. And Job’s faith lays hold of that great fact.

Every now and then I talk to someone who is going through a time of struggle and trial, and he asks the same question Job asks, “Why is it?” The answer given most often in Scripture is that God has sent it to wean us from dependence on people to find our resources in God himself. God has to separate us from these supports that sustain us in hours of crisis, in order that we may learn how fully able he is to sustain us. The truth is gradually breaking upon Job that God himself can answer these searching questions of his heart.

In Chapter 17 we find **Job’s prayer that God will set him free**. He prays for relief, largely from his friends! He has had enough of them. He expresses his need for defense, in Verses 3-6; he describes the effects of his suffering upon others, especially these men; and then he challenges them in Verse 10:

**“But you, come on again, all of you,
and I shall not find a wise man among
you.” {Job 17:10 RSV}**

He has heard all their arguments, and he knows they do not help, so in the final part of the chapter he sinks back again into the darkness of despair, Verse 11:

**“My days are past, my plans are broken
off,
the desires of my heart.” {Job 17:11 RSV}**

In Chapter 18 you have **Bildad’s defensive re-tort**, and it reflects the same line of argument as before. Bildad is the logician, the coldly analytical intellectual. He is angry and upset that Job does not answer him in kindly fashion, and that Job has accused him of being unkind in his approach, so he gets angry, Verses 1-3:

**“How long will you hunt for words?
Consider, and then we will speak.
Why are we counted as cattle?
Why are we stupid in your sight?”
{Job 18:2-3 RSV}**

Bildad goes on from Verse 5 to the end of the chapter to set forth again the narrow, rigid dogma of his theology: If you are suffering, you must have sinned. I once heard a man described as “an evangelical crab.” That is what I think of when I read these words of Bildad the Shuhite. He gets angry when his words do not get attention.

Chapter 19 gives us **the piteous plea of Job**: First, he describes *his feelings about his friends*, Verses 1-3:

**“How long will you torment me,
and break me in pieces with words?
These ten times you have cast reproach
upon me;
are you not ashamed to wrong me?”
{Job 19:2-3 RSV}**

Then, in Verses 7-12, he describes *his bafflement at what is happening to him*:

**“Behold, I cry out ‘Violence!’ but I am not
answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.**

**He has walled up my ways,
so that I cannot pass...” {Job 19:7-8a RSV}**

**“He has stripped from me my glory,” {Job
19:9a RSV}**

**“He breaks me down on every side,” {Job
19:10a RSV}**

In Verses 13-20 we have *a vivid description of the isolation he feels*:

**“He has put my brethren far from me,
and my acquaintances are wholly es-
tranged from me.
My kinsfolk and my close friends have
failed me;
the guests in my house have forgotten me;
my maidservants count me as a stranger;
I have become an alien in their eyes.
I call to my servant, but he gives me no an-
swer;
I must beseech him with my mouth.
I am repulsive to my wife,
loathsome to the sons of my own mother.
Even young children despise me;
when I rise they talk against me.
All my intimate friends abhor me...” {Job
19:13-19a RSV}**

Surely nothing is harder to bear than rejection by all who should understand. Job is feeling the terrible pain of this, as well as the physical pain. But in the midst of the darkness, when it is blackest and gloomiest, one of those amazing rays of light breaks through again. Elisabeth Elliot has written a book called *The Slowly Growing Light*, and I think that is descriptive of what Job is going through here, for he cries in Verse 23:

**“Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were graven in the rock for ever!”
{Job 19:23-24 RSV}**

And then suddenly he sees *a ray of hope*,

**“For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,**

whom I shall see on my side [i.e., for myself],
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.” {Job 19:25-27a RSV}

And in response to that vision of faith, he cries,

“My heart faints within me!” {Job 19:27b RSV}

This is one of the great words of faith in the Old Testament, one of the earliest intimations of the resurrection of the body that you find in the Word of God. Slowly, through the anguish and gloom of this man’s heart, born out of the passion and the pathos that he feels, comes the dawning realization that God is working out a great and mighty purpose, and that one of these days God himself (whom Job has never failed to see is a God of great majesty and power), shall be visibly present before men. God shall come himself, and shall vindicate all that he does. This is a marvelous glance ahead by faith to the incarnation of the Lord. Job calls him “My Redeemer, my vindicator, the one who is related to me, who nevertheless will defend me and vindicate all that has happened to me.”

I think there is nothing that the study of this book of Job does for us more than to understand that life is basically a mystery. We are surrounded with mystery. We cannot comprehend it all; it is painted on too large a canvas; it is too great and involved for us to grasp it all. The ways of God are beyond us many, many times, and yet. Job is gradually learning in the midst of his pain to trust the God who is there; so trust that he will come up with answers, and that he is working out a purpose in line with his love. That is what life gradually teaches us.

At a recent seminar, Elisabeth Elliot described briefly her first widowhood. Her husband was slain along with four companions in the jungles of Ecuador at the hands of savages. She spent 13 years as a widow, and then she married a gracious and wonderful man with whom she was very happy for just a few more years. Then he died, taken by cancer. She said, “I have spent six-sevenths of my life single, though I have been married twice. I did not choose the gift of widowhood,

but I accepted it as the sphere in which I am to live to the glory of God.”

That is what Job is gradually learning. God is working out a purpose. It is not related to specific sin although, as we will see before the book is over, Job learns much more about the depravity of his own nature.

But now he ends by *warning his friends* to be careful about judging him, Verses 28-29:

**“If you say, ‘How we will pursue him!’
and, ‘The root of the matter is found in him’:
be afraid of the sword,
for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
that you may know that there is a judgment.”** {Job 19:28-29 RSV}

Some time ago I ran across these words by an unknown poet that I think wraps up in a beautiful fashion the lesson of the book of Job to this point:

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man;
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part,
When he yearns with all his heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch his methods, watch his ways –

How he ruthlessly perfects
Whom he royally elects.
How he hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows, converts him
Into trial shapes of clay
Which only God understands,

While his tortured heart is crying,
And he lifts beseeching hands.
How he bends but never breaks
When his good he undertakes.
How he uses whom he chooses,
And with every purpose, fuses him,
By every act, induces him
To try his splendor out.
God knows what he’s about.

That is the message of Job to us.

Some of you may be going through pain, suffering, disappointment and anguish, and you are crying out, as Job did, “Why? What have I done? Where does it all fit together?”

Job’s answer to us (as all of Scripture’s answer) is, “God knows what he is about. One of these days all the answers will come in. In the meantime, rest in confidence that he knows what he is doing with you.”

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this reassurance to us who are going through far less than even Job went through, with much greater light. Help us to cling to that light, and not charge you with injustice, as Job did, for we have no excuse, such as he had. Help us to accept, Lord, what is happening to us as your hand works out vast and wonderful patterns in our lives. We ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Why doesn't God Intervene?

by Ray C. Stedman

One of the great benefits of the book of Job to us is not only the discussion of its great central theme, but also the glimpses we get in these three friends of Job of various types of what I would call Pharisaism. I know that the pharisaical party did not surface until many centuries after Job was written, but in the New Testament the Pharisees were one of the great enemies of our Lord. Pharisaism is always orthodoxy without true godliness. It is an appearance of being orthodox, correct in theology, and even righteous in outward behavior, but actually it represents a distortion of Christian truth.

Here we have three Pharisees who are assaulting Job. They represent to us three styles of Pharisaism, and I think as we read them we can see how often they represent what our attitudes have been. This is one of the reasons why this book was written, to show us how wrong these friends were. At the end of the book, God plainly says that these men did not treat Job in the right way, that they are wrong.

This is a revelation to us that Pharisaism is one of the most deadly enemies of the truth today. In many ways the church has fallen into Pharisaism, a kind of outward rightness with an inward wrongness. So as we look at these men we can perhaps recognize some features about ourselves and some things we need to correct.

Zophar is the one whom we call “**Zophar the Zealous.**” He tends to be hotheaded and impassioned in his addresses. He represents the type of Pharisaism that comes on heavy with impassioned words and strong outbursts of feeling. He tries to carry the argument by the force of its eloquence and delivery in his every appearance, and especially in this, his last appearance in the book. Chapter 20:

**Then Zophar the Naamathite answered:
“Therefore my thoughts answer me,
because of my haste within me.
I hear censure which insults me,
and out of my understanding a spirit answers me.” {Job 20:1-3 RSV}**

This man (I think he was the youngest of the three friends although we do not know how old he was) seems to be greatly insulted by the fact that Job does not give way to their argument that sin is always judged by God and that suffering is a sign that you have sinned. This is the continual argument of these friends of Job, and Zophar is very upset at Job's resistance to this, so he confesses in these words that he is impatient in his speech and insulted in his spirit. It is out of this that he speaks with a great deal of passion to Job.

Beginning with Verse 4 through the rest of the chapter, you get his final argument which is nothing but repetition of what he has said over and over again: the wicked are always punished.

In Verses 4-11, Zophar's argument is: the prosperity of the wicked is always short. As he says in Verse 5, "the joy of the godless [is] but for a moment."

Then in Verses 12-18 he describes the punishment of the wicked as being very certain – there is no way to avoid it, though the wicked seek to do so, and though they revel in their prosperity, God will certainly bring judgment upon them. Now Zophar means in this present life the wicked, the unrighteous, the ungodly, those who ignore God cannot escape his judgment. God will get them sooner or later.

Then in Verses 19-22 Zophar describes the wicked as doing things that are clearly apparent; the evil comes out in the open. Obviously he is suggesting that because Job has gone through this time of torment, with these awful boils breaking out upon him, it is evident that his evil too is coming into the open.

Then he describes the terrible fate of the wicked, Verses 23-29:

**"To fill his belly to the full God will send
his fierce anger into him,
and rain it upon him as his food.
He will flee from an iron weapon;
a bronze arrow will strike him through."
{Job 20:23-24 RSV}**

**"Utter darkness is hid up for his treasures;
..." {Job 20:26 RSV}**

**"The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
and the earth will rise up against him."
{Job 20:27 RSV}**

He closes with these words, Verse 29:

**"This is the wicked man's portion from
God,
the heritage decreed for him by God."
{Job 20:29 RSV}**

In Chapter 21 we get Job's very reasoned reply. There are times when Job speaks rather testily, rather sharply, to his friends, and other times, perhaps when the pain is not as intense, he is

able to speak more calmly and dispassionately. And here, in Chapter 21, you see a careful attempt on his part to answer these arguments.

He begins with his *appeal for a hearing*:

**Then Job answered:
"Listen carefully to my words,
and let this be your consolation.
Bear with me, and I will speak,
and after I have spoken, mock on.
As for me, is my complaint against man?
Why should I not be impatient?
Look at me, and be appalled,
and lay your hand upon your mouth [i.e.,
with astonishment].
When I think of it I am dismayed,
and shuddering seizes my flesh."
{Job 21:1-6 RSV}**

Basically he is saying here, "If you can't help me, at least listen to me; that can be your consolation. You're trying to console me, and that's not helping a bit, but if you would listen to what I have to say, that would be some help from you. You are not a problem; it is God who is my problem," he suggests. "Not man, but God. I don't understand him." Then he says, "It is my condition, my pain and anguish, that forces me so to search and try to come to answers." With that as an introduction, he now examines the argument of these friends, that punishment is always the result of sin.

In Verses 7-13 he says that the facts contradict what these friends say. In fact, he says, *the whole lives of the wicked are often untroubled*.

**"Why do the wicked live,
reach old age, and grow mighty in power?
Their children are established in their
presence,
and their offspring before their eyes.
Their houses are safe from fear,
and no rod of God is upon them.
Their bull breeds without fail;
their cow calves, and does not cast her
calf.
They send forth their little ones like a flock,
and their children dance.
They sing to the tambourine and the lyre,
and rejoice to the sound of the pipe.
They spend their days in prosperity
and in peace they go down to Sheol."
{Job 21:7-13 RSV}**

Their whole life is lived, Job argues, and nothing ever seems to trouble them. They are outwardly and openly wicked, and yet they are happy, their families grow up well, and they seem to be free from difficulty.

Many of us have felt this way. We see those we think ought to be under the judgment of God, but they are not; they seem to be untroubled. We are faced with this question of the fairness of God.

His second argument is that *they even defy God, and they prosper*, Verses 14-16:

**“They say to God, ‘Depart from us!
We do not desire the knowledge of thy
ways.
What is the Almighty, that we should serve
him?
And what profit do we get if we pray to
him?’
Behold, is not their prosperity in their
hand?
The counsel of the wicked is far from me.”
{Job 21:14-16}**

“I do not agree with this,” he says, “but that is what they actually say. They defy God; they ask him to get out of their lives; they resist him, and God lets it be. Nothing ever happens to them, they seem to live untroubled lives, and God does not strike them down.”

He goes on to point out that *God's judgment is very infrequent*, Verses 17-18:

**“How often is it that the lamp of the wicked
is put out?
That their calamity comes upon them?
That God distributes pains in his anger?
That they are like straw before the wind,
and like chaff that the storm carries
away?” {Job 21:17-18 RSV}**

Many people who deserve punishment from God's hand seem to live without ever being touched, he says. Then he argues, *God's judgment is delayed* (Verses 19-21), and, finally, *God's judgment is very uneven*, Verses 22-26:

**“Will any teach God knowledge,
seeing that he judges those that are on
high?**

**One dies in full prosperity being wholly at
ease and secure,
his body full of fat and the marrow of his
bones moist.
Another dies in bitterness of soul,
never having tasted of good.
They lie down alike in the dust,
and the worms cover them.”
{Job 21:22-26}**

Life seems to be unfair. There is a basic unfairness at the root of things, and this is what causes many people to be troubled by the claims of Christians about a loving, faithful, just, and holy God. You often hear the question raised, “If there is a good God why does he let this kind of thing happen?” Job is raising the same question. He says to these pious, respectable friends, “Your arguments do not square with the facts. You say God always visits wrath upon the wicked. What about these wicked people who live without a touch? God never does a thing to them. What about the fact that he seems to treat people very unfairly? Folks who seem to deserve nothing but the grace of God, who are loving, gentle, kind people, have endless problems, and die forsaken. And some who are selfish and cruel and self centered are the ones who seem to be able to live without struggle. What about this?”

Then he turns to examine his friends themselves, and points out *the falseness of their friendship*, Verses 27-28:

**“Behold, I know your thoughts,
and your schemes to wrong me.
For you say, ‘Where is the house of the
prince?
Where is the tent in which the wicked
dwelt?’” {Job 21:27-28 RSV}**

They were referring, of course, to Job. He says, “I know you're thinking that I am a good example of the truth of your argument because God has taken away my wealth, my family. my possessions, and you're saying to yourself, ‘Ah! Where is all the wealth of this man? Here is proof right here that what we say is true.’” And, though they were not saying it quite as baldly, Job says, “I know what you are thinking, your hidden surmisings. I know also your *unsupported convictions* here.” Verses 29-33:

**“Have you not asked those who travel the roads,
and do you not accept their testimony
that the wicked man is spared in the day of calamity,
that he is rescued in the day of wrath?
Who declares his way to his face,
and who requites him for what he has done?
When he is borne to the grave,
watch is kept over his tomb.
The clods of the valley are sweet to him;
all men follow after him,
and those who go before him are innumerable.” {Job 21:29-33 RSV}**

He tells his friends, “If you’ll just inquire around among the traveling salesmen, the people who get around and see life, you’ll find that they support what I’m saying. The wicked often escape the day of calamity. It’s not just true around here, this is true everywhere. The wicked live above the law, and nobody says to them that they’re doing wrong. They get by with it. They die highly honored in their death and their graves are adorned and guarded and God does nothing about that.” So he says at last, Verse 34:

**“How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?
There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.” {Job 21:34 RSV}**

If you intend to argue with Job you had better get your arguments well in hand. This man is able to see through the error of logic in these people’s position. They have a theology that does not square with experience, and that is where the problem lies.

These friends represent people – and there are many around today – who have God in a box. They have what they think is a clear understanding of all the ways of God and they can predict how he is going to act, but when he acts in a way that they do not understand and do not expect, they have no way of handling it because it is their creed they have faith in and not in God himself.

This is what Job is learning. His creed has been demolished by his experiences. He has had to

file his theology in the wastebasket because it did not fit what he was going through.

Someone has well said that a man with a true experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument. These men are unable to answer Job because his experience rings true.

That concludes the second round of addresses, and in Chapter 22 we begin the third and final round where only two of these friends speak.

This brings us back to Eliphaz the Temanite, whom we have called **“Eliphaz the Elegant”** because he appears always to be calm, speaking very smoothly, with plausible sentences, and obvious courtesy in the way he says things. But by now he is beginning to get very upset and angry, and, as often happens with someone like that, he loses his cool entirely and begins to pour out invective and accusation upon poor Job. Through this chapter we will see that he accuses Job of imaginary motives; he invents false charges against him; he assumes rather insulting concepts that Job holds, and he ends with some very inappropriate exhortations.

First, the imagined motives, Chapter 22:

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:

“Can a man be profitable to God?

Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself.

**Is it any pleasure [literally, profit] to the Almighty if you are righteous,
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?” {Job 22:1-3 RSV}**

He is inferring that Job thinks he is defending himself to the glory and honor of God, that God’s integrity is at stake, and if Job confesses anything wrong God will falter and fail thereby, and that God’s image in the eyes of men hangs on Job’s ability to appear righteous. Now Job never thought that at all. Throughout this account Job’s view of God is that, though he does not understand what God is doing, he sees him as a God of justice and righteousness. Though he is puzzled and uncertain and has no way of applying that to his own situation at the moment, he never thinks of God as being anything other than the God of holiness. So it is an entirely false charge.

Eliphaz goes on in Verse 4:

**“Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you,
and enters into judgment with you?” {Job 22:4 RSV}**

Here Eliphaz is suggesting that Job feels that God is unfairly punishing him, but once again, Job never said that. If he did he would be doing what Satan wanted him to do – he would be accusing and blaspheming God. It is true that Job asks God questions about his motives, but never once does he say “You’re at fault” and charge God with unrighteousness, as Eliphaz suggests. I think this is one of the most helpful things we can learn from the book of Job, because, in our testings, in our pressures, in our times of torment, Satan is trying to get us to do the very thing he tried to get Job to do – he is trying to get us to blame God and accuse him of being an unfair and unjust God. If that is where he brings us to, we have fallen, we have gone over the brink and become guilty of an accusation against the God of righteousness. Job never does that. He comes very close, but he refuses to do that. And so, upset and angry at Job’s resistance against his charges, Eliphaz goes on to invent, out of the blue, unsupported charges against him, Verses 5-11:

**“Is not your wickedness great?
There is no end to your iniquities.
For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing,
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.
The man with power possessed the land,
and the favored man dwelt in it.
You have sent widows away empty,
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.
Therefore snares are round about you,
and sudden terror overwhelms you;
your light is darkened, so that you cannot see,
and a flood of water covers you.” {Job 22:5-11 RSV}**

Not one of these things was true; he simply begins to invent things.

Today there is a kind of Pharisaism that seeks to get you to agree with its limited theology and if

you refuse to do so you begin to have invective and charges poured out against you. In my wife’s early Christian life she began listening to a radio broadcast that taught her the truth from the Scriptures, and the pastor of her church became very angry and upset at her, and brought her before him and tried to straighten her out, using invective instead of the Scriptures. When she would not be persuaded, because she was learning the truth from the Word of God, he did this very thing that Eliphaz did. He railed against her, and charged her with all kinds of things that she had not done, threatening to expose her to the church as a heretic. She endured a great deal of mental torment and suffering through that time.

There is nothing worse than this kind of unfounded, murderous, slanderous attack that Job has to face here from his so-called friends. Eliphaz goes on, in Verses 12-14, to assume rather insulting concepts that he thinks Job held:

**“Is not God high in the heavens?
See the highest stars, how lofty they are!
Therefore you say, ‘What does God know?
Can he judge through the deep darkness?
Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see,
and he walks on the vault of heaven.’“
{Job 22:12-14 RSV}**

This is a childish charge against Job. “The trouble with you, Job, is you think God is such a limited being that he can’t even see what you’re doing. He’s up high in heaven and the clouds come in between and shut you off, and you think you’re getting by with hiding your sin because God can’t see through the clouds!” That is ridiculous, for Job has already demonstrated that he has the consciousness of the mightiness, the greatness, the majesty and the mystery of God far beyond what these friends hold. But they cannot live with that, they will not accept it, so they charge him with these childish concepts.

Eliphaz goes on to charge him with only pretending to hate iniquity. In Verses 15-20 Eliphaz suggests that Job is saying that he rejects the wicked and their way of life when actually he holds to it. In Verse 17 Eliphaz mimics Job when he says of the wicked:

**“They said to God, ‘Depart from us,’
and ‘What can the Almighty do to us?’
Yet he filled their houses with good things
but the counsel of the wicked is far from
me.” {Job 22:17-18 RSV}**

You notice that Job said those very things back in the last chapter in Verse 16. Eliphaz is mimicking him, “That is what you say, ‘The counsel of the wicked is far from me’ but you don’t mean it at all. You’re just as wicked as the rest of them.” So with this mockery and scorn he tries to break through Job’s argument. Then he ends with beautifully phrased language. This man has a mighty command of the language, but he ends with very inappropriate exhortations to Job to confess his sin and return to God, and God will pour out blessing upon him. All of which certainly is true, if Job could find the sin that they claim he is guilty of, but as he examines his life he knows there is nothing he has not dealt with, and though he does not claim sinlessness, he does say that he cannot find what the trouble is.

That brings us then to Chapters 23 and 24, where you have **Job’s expression of his deepest problem**. At this point he does not even attempt to answer the arguments anymore. He simply cries out of a troubled heart in the presence of these friends, expressing halfway to God and halfway to them how he feels. He asks two questions, one in Chapter 23 and one in Chapter 24, and these are the great unanswered questions that men continually ask today that lie at the root of much doubt and much unwillingness to accept the presence of God.

In Chapter 23 Job is asking, “*Why is God so seemingly absent from human affairs?*” He begins with expressing his own longing for God:

**“Today also my complaint is bitter,
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.”
{Job 23:2 RSV}**

He is having a bad day physically, but he cries,

**“Oh that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his seat!
I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would learn what he would answer me,**

**and understand what he would say to me.”
{Job 23:3-5 RSV}**

Though his pain increases his frustration grows because he cannot find any way to get into contact and argue the point with God and get some answers to his problem.

And yet, in the midst of the darkness, there is *an unshaken confidence in God*. He says in Verse 6:

**“Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; he would give heed to me.
There an upright man could reason with him,
and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge.” {Job 23:6-7 RSV}**

Many times we have seen this. Job feels that if he could get a chance to lay out before God the situation as he sees it, God himself, in his basic justice, would admit that he was right. So *he describes his search*, Verses 8-9:

**“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there;
and backward, but I cannot perceive him;
on the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him.” {Job 23:8-9 RSV}**

Have you ever felt that way, abandoned, you cannot find God, cannot find any answers, wanting some relief from the mental torture that increases your doubt and troubles you?

At this point Job again declares his own righteousness and *his faith that God will see him through* at last, Verse 10:

**“But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” {Job 23:10 RSV}**

That expresses a great deal of confidence that God is a God of justice. Job says “I don’t understand what I am going through. I felt I’ve been doing the right thing and still this torment goes on, but I know that God will explain it to me some day.” That is as high as his faith can rise at the moment.

Why doesn't God Intervene?

Then he goes on to restate his sense of righteousness. (We will not read it all, we will come to it again later.)

But in Chapter 24 he raises the second question that many people have asked: "*Why is God silent? Why doesn't he judge evil?*"

"Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days?" {Job 24:1 RSV}

He goes on to describe vividly the conditions of life. Thieves and scoundrels flourish (Verses 2-3); poor people suffer terribly, they are mistreated, they have to scratch for a living, and they are exposed to the elements (Verses 4-12). Verses 7-8:

"They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter." {Job 24:7-8 RSV}

He says that they are exploited by the rich; they work for nothing in their fields and fruit-groves. Finally they die or are wounded and cry out to God, Verse 12:

"From out of the city the dying groan, and the soul of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer." {Job 24:12 RSV}

A lady said to me the other day, "I don't know what's wrong with me, but God won't answer my prayers. I cry out for help, I ask him for wisdom, and nothing ever happens. He just ignores me." Many have felt this way.

Job goes on to describe how the criminals strike in the darkness, and God does nothing about it, Verses 14-15:

"The murderer rises in the dark, that he may kill the poor and needy; and in the night he is as a thief. The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, ..." {Job 24:14-15a RSV}

These adulterers slink around in the darkness, lurking there to do their evil deeds.

Then he faces the question, "*Why does God delay justice?*" Job says his friends argue that God invariably punishes the wicked (he sums up their argument in Verses 18-20), but he says the facts are quite different, Verses 21-22:

"They feed on the barren childless woman, and do no good to the widow. Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power; they rise up when they despair of life." {Job 24:21-22 RSV}

There are the two great questions that hang unanswered in life:

- Why is God so absent when he is so needed?
- Why is he so silent when he should speak?

It is only when we get into the New Testament that we get any direct revelation to help us with this. Both Paul and Peter tell us that these are but evidences of God's patience and long-suffering with men. As Paul tells us in Romans, "His goodness is meant to lead us to repentance," {cf, Rom 2:4}. So if we are getting by with things now, it is only because God is withholding his hand, that he might give us a chance to learn the truth about ourselves. Peter says, "Don't accuse God of slowness in fulfilling his promises, as men count slowness, because God is long-suffering to us, not willing that any should perish but wanting to give all a chance to come to repentance," {cf, 2 Pet 3:9}. That is why God lets these things go on sometimes. For if he started judging, he would have to include us, as well as everyone else. Job has not come to that answer yet. That question remains.

So the final speaker comes in, Bildad the Shuhite. "**Bildad the Brutal**" we call him, a cold intellectual, the theorist who always has everything worked out carefully in his theology and who is absolutely unmoved by any appeal to his emotions. He has a very short address here consisting of the same two old arguments, worn out by now. First, God is all-powerful, Verse 2:

"Dominion and fear are with God; he makes peace in his high heaven." {Job 25:2 RSV}

There is no way of combating the greatness, the power, the wisdom and the insight of God. This is true, as is his second point:

**“How then can man be righteous before God?
How can he who is born of woman be clean?
Behold, even the moon is not bright,
and the stars are not clean in his sight;
how much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!” {Job 25:4-6 RSV}**

It is interesting to see that the Scriptures never treat man like a worm. God's view of man is that though he is in deep trouble, and though he has turned his back upon light and plunged himself into darkness and is reaping the result of his own iniquity, God never treats him as a worm. He treats him as a very deeply loved individual and a very valuable commodity whom he is ready to give tremendous commitment to in order that he might redeem him. It is true that only when a man admits that he cannot help himself, that he is indeed a wretched person, that he can be helped. But God never sees him as worm. Bildad reflects a narrow theology that does not fit the facts.

In Chapter 26 **Job hangs up the phone**, in a sense. He says there is no use talking to them anymore. His answer to Bildad is one of rather deep and rich irony, Verses 2-4:

**“How you have helped him who has no power!
How you have saved the arm that has no strength!
How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!
With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose spirit has come forth from you?” {Job 26:2-4 RSV}**

Sarcastic praise, in which he is suggesting that they have been of no help at all to him. I think, however, that Job needs to learn something from this, and we will see in the next chapters that he does. Oswald Chambers reminds us that God can

never make us into wine if we object to the fingers that he uses to crush us with; or if we do, it will be at great pain to ourselves. Job does not see here that God also is using these friends in his life. Satan has sent them; God is using them; and we will soon see the result in Job's life.

Once again he goes on to state the majesty of God in a brilliant and moving passage, and he closes with this word in Verse 14:

**“Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways;
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?” {Job 26:14 RSV}**

What he says is simply that there is a mystery in God that no man can plumb. Even when we have understood something of the greatness of his wisdom and majesty in nature, when we have learned of his omnipresence, his omnipotence, and his omniscience, and we know that as part of our theology, it still does not explain all of his ways. God is in a much bigger box than any of us can build.

I always think of that verse from one of Robert Browning's great poems where he describes how a young man, in the arrogance of his youth, has worked out all his theology so that God is carefully boxed in. He knows the answers to all the theological riddles of life; there is no place for God in it; he can handle it all himself. He comes to an old bishop and tells him he does not need God any longer. Then the old bishop says to him,

“Just when we're safest
There's a sunset touch;
A fancy from a flower bell;
Someone's death;
A chorus – ending from Euripides,
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
The Grand Perhaps.”

Oswald Chambers says this of Job:

“We must get hold of the great souls, the men who have been hard hit – hit and have gone to the basis of things and whose experiences have been preserved for us by God, that we may know where we stand.”

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for Job, and for the encouragement we receive from this book, to know that other men and women in the past have faced the same difficult questions that we have faced, and it has not shaken their faith, it has not overwhelmed

them, and knocked them off their feet, and caused them to curse you, and rebel against you. Help us to take heart in what trials we may be going through, and know that you will bring us through. Help us also to cry, with Job, "You know the way that we take; and when you have tried us, we shall come forth as gold." We pray in his name, Amen.

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The Wrong of Self-Defense

by Ray C. Stedman

Someone has said that there are only two kinds of speakers: those who have something to say, and those who have to say something. Job's three friends are the latter kind, and they have kept a dialogue going until it has finally ground to a halt.

In Chapter 26 we read Job's final response to his friends, and now, in Chapters 27-31, he begins **his last defense of himself**. He opens with a firm statement of his resolve to stand fast to the end:

**And Job again took up his discourse,
and said,
"As God lives, who has taken away my
right,
and the Almighty, who has made my soul
bitter;
as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;
my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.
Far be it from me to say that you are right;
till I die I will not put away my integrity
from me.
I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let
it go;
my heart does not reproach me for any of
my days." {Job 27:1-6 RSV}**

This is his sturdy answer to these friends who tried desperately to probe in every way they could to uncover some evil that Job is guilty of. He says, "I am not going to say you are right." You cannot help but love the spirit of this man in that he is determined to tell the truth, whatever it may cost him. Even at the price of peace he is not going to admit something he did not do. He reminds me in some ways of that famous historic scene in the great cathedral at Worms, Germany, when Martin Luther was called before the head of the Holy Roman Empire. All the assembled dignitaries, the nobles

of the empire, and the princes of the Catholic Church were there to hear him charged with heresy, on trial for his life. Many of us have thrilled at his words as he closed his answer by saying,

Unless I am shown by the testimony of Scripture and by evident reasoning, unless I am overcome by means of the scriptural passages that I have cited, and unless my conscience is taken captive by the words of God, I am neither able nor willing to revoke anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor honest. Here I stand; God help me, I cannot do otherwise, Amen!

Now, the only difference between Luther and Job is that Luther was defending the Word of God, and Job is defending himself, and, as we will see in Job's final monologue, that becomes a very crucial point. But he is willing to stand firm on what he has said; he will not give in.

In Verses 7-11 he warns these friends that, if they are not careful, they may be guilty of malicious accusation that will merit the punishment from God that they thought he deserved. In the law of Israel, it was well known that if someone falsely charged someone else with a crime that they were not guilty of, the one who made the charge would ultimately be punished for that crime. In Verse 7 he says:

**"Let my enemy be as the wicked,
and let him that rises up against me be as
the unrighteous." {Job 27:7 RSV}**

The enemy he refers to here is these so-called friends. Now, in Verses 13 through to the end of the chapter, Job repeats the arguments these friends have used. (They have been telling him that the wicked are always punished.) Job is saying, in effect, "Your own words will condemn you. If you

really have been falsely accusing me, you will be the ones who are going to be punished.” Verse 13:

**“This is the portion of a wicked man with God,
and the heritage which oppressors receive from the Almighty.” {Job 27:13 RSV}**

Then he describes how their children will ultimately be killed by the sword; how they will heap up wealth and it will disappear in a day; how the wicked man goes to bed rich but wakes up poor; how terrors overtake him in a flood, and the east wind destroys him, and so on. He is warning these friends that if they continue with this, such will be their fate.

Chapter 28 is one of the most beautiful chapters in this book. It is a meditation that Job gives us on his endless search for an explanation of what he is going through, and he puts it under the guise of **a search for wisdom**, for understanding. The first eleven verses are a very vivid description of the way men search in the earth for hidden treasure, for gold and precious stones. Remember, Job is the oldest book in the Bible, it comes from the very dawn of civilization. But here we have a description of mining practices that sound almost as though they were taken right out of contemporary life:

**“Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold which they refine.
Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore.” {Job 28:1-2 RSV}**

Then he describes how the miners work:

**“Men put an end to darkness,
and search out to the farthest bound
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.
[That describes the little lamps that
miners use as they go into the dark
shafts of the earth.]
They open shafts in a valley away from
where men live;
they are forgotten by travelers,
they hang afar from men, they swing to
and fro.” {Job 28:3-4 RSV}**

He is referring to scaffolding that is erected on the side of a mountain so that miners can get up into the mines and find the treasures that are there.

In Verses 7-8 Job says there is nothing in nature like a man’s desperate search for gold:

**“That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon’s eye has not seen it.
The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.” {Job 28:7-8 RSV}**

Animals pay no attention to gold and jewels; it is men who seek after these things. And they will go to any limits to find them, he says.

Verse 9:

**“Man puts his hand to the flinty rock,
and overturns mountains by the roots.
He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.
He binds up the streams so that they do not
trickle,
and the thing that is hid he brings forth to
light.” {Job 28:9-11 RSV}**

Miners often have to dam up water that seeps into their mines in order to work them. Job shows how man gives up almost anything and goes to any lengths to find gold.

Then he comes to his point in Verse 12:

**“But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’” {Job 28:12-14 RSV}**

Here we see the reason for his analogy of the search of men for gold and silver and treasures. He says men will go to any lengths to find that treasure, and likewise they look for the answers to the riddles of life. They can find the gold, but they cannot find wisdom. This is what he points out: the elusiveness of wisdom. Now what is this wisdom Job is talking about? All through this book we have been confronted with the question, “Why does God treat Job this way?” But we have information that Job does not have. He has no knowledge of the challenge that Satan has made to God about him,

and so his questioning is even deeper than ours. But we often feel this way ourselves.

Last week my wife and I were in San Diego and we were invited to dinner by a naval officer. We noticed as he led us into the officer's club that he walked with a cane. Inquiring of some other friends, we learned that he is suffering from melanoma, a cancer that is threatening his life. The friend who told us this said that this man had lost two sons at the age of 19 from cancer, and just that week he had received word that his 14 year-old son also had cancer. Our hearts went out to him, but his spirit was strong and triumphant. He was gracious, saying no word of this himself, and he appeared to be a man utterly free from care. But our hearts cried out, "Why? Why do these kinds of things happen?" Life presents these riddles to us. Now wisdom is the answer to that question, "Why?" Wisdom is the knowledge of the nature of things, the reasons behind what happens. Someone has described wisdom as the right use of knowledge, and that is a good description. It is how to use things in such a way as to make things work out rightly. That is what we lack. We can do all kinds of things with knowledge but we do not do the right things with it. That is why knowledge of nuclear physics ends up with atom bombs and hydrogen bombs that destroy and become malicious instruments of warfare and widespread destruction. Man lacks wisdom. He has lots of knowledge but he has no wisdom on how to use it. This is what Job in his long hours of torment is searching for: what is the reason behind these things?

We love to boast about our technological ability. I read the other day that a distinguished astrophysicist in Sweden has stated that the book of Genesis ought to start this way: "In the beginning there was an original cloud, magnetized, and perhaps a light-year [6 trillion miles] in diameter." That sounds very impressive. These scientists have discovered that was what was in the beginning. And yet there are two questions of supreme importance that the learned professor needs to answer:

- First, where did the original cloud come from, and
- Second, who put it there?

Someone has said, "Any man can tell how many seeds there are in an apple, but only God knows how many apples there are in a seed."

I shared the platform last week with Dr. Henry Brandt and he told of an incident in his ministry as a Christian psychologist when a man and his wife came to see him about marital problems. He discovered that this man was a professional negotiator who made his money mediating difficulties, working out solutions in a peaceful way. But he and his wife drove to see Dr. Brandt in separate cars and sat on opposite sides of the room, unable to communicate with each other! The whole problem was that they could not decide what to do with their cat!

Isn't it amazing, that a man who makes his living putting divergent views together could not get together with his wife on what to do with their cat? Now that is why Job says man does not know the way to wisdom. It is not found in the land of the living.

In Verses 15-19 he vividly describes how wisdom cannot be bought – it cannot be found and it cannot be bought:

**"It cannot be gotten for gold,
and silver cannot be weighted as its price.
It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.
Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine
gold.
No mention shall be made of coral or of
crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
The topaz of Ethiopia cannot compare with
it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold." {Job
28:15-19 RSV}**

If wisdom could be bought the rich would be the happiest people on earth. But as many of us know, oftentimes they are the most miserable and have lost even the simplest enjoyments of life. Well, where does wisdom come from? How do you find answers? Job tells us, Verse 23:

**"God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth,**

and sees everything under the heavens.
[God knows where it is, and God knows what it is.]
**When he gave to the wind its weight,
and meted out the waters by measure;
when he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the lightning of the thunder;
then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.”**
{Job 28:23-27 RSV}

There is a wonderful scientific accuracy running through the analogies that Job uses in that passage. For many centuries men did not know that wind had weight, but Job knew that. “God measures out the waters, and makes a decree for the rain; he makes a special way for the lightning.” These have counterparts in the scientific discoveries of our day, but Job seemed to understand these things. He said, in effect, that when God created the universe, that is when he made wisdom. He understood what he was doing and he understood how it would work and all the problems that would be involved. Then in Verse 28 he tells us the only way to find it:

**“And he said to man,
‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.”** {Job 28:28 RSV}

“The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.” That is, when a person stands before God in respectful, loving trust of him, understanding the kind of a God he is and that he is a God who knows what he is doing, that is the beginning of wisdom. That is where the book of Proverbs starts. You will never be able to answer the riddles of your life until you come to that place. And if you want to discover it then begin to obey do what God says. How many can give testimony to the fact that this is what began to unravel the riddles of life? This is what Job came to understand.

In the next three chapters he reviews for us all that has happened in this book. In Chapter 29 he is **looking back at the good old days**. First he tells us of his blessings:

**And Job again took up his discourse, and said,
“Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me;
when his lamp shone upon my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness;
as I was in my autumn days,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent;
when the Almighty was yet with me,
when my children were about me;
when my steps were washed with milk,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!”** {Job 29:1-6 RSV}

Beautiful poetry describing those halcyon days when God’s smile was upon him, and all the blessing of life was his. Then he describes the honor that he experienced, Verse 7:

**“When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
the princes refrained from talking,
and laid their hand on their mouth;
the voice of the nobles was hushed,
and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth.”** {Job 29:7-9 RSV}

Then he speaks of the good deeds he delighted in doing:

**“... I delivered the poor who cried,
and the fatherless who had none to help him.”** {Job 29:12 RSV}
“... I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.” {Job 29:13b RSV}
**“I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.”** {Job 29:15 RSV}
“I was a father to the poor,” {Job 29:16a RSV}
**“I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.”** {Job 29:17 RSV}

And in Verses 18-20 he tells us what his hopes were:

**“Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my bed,
and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
my roots spread out to the waters,**

**with the dew all night on my branches,
my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.” {Job
29:18-20 RSV}**

In other words this ought to go on to the end – the man who serves God will be taken care of by God and will never be put to any trouble or problem. Many Christians I know have this is the limit of their theology: “If I obey God, and serve God, and do what I know to be right, God will prosper me bless me and take care of me, and I will never be exposed to any evil or pressure.” Now Job’s experience has blown that philosophy to bits and he does not understand it.

He concludes that section by describing his influence, and how men listened to him. They waited for him as for the rain and he smiled on them. In fact, he says, Verse 25:

**“I chose their way, and sat as chief,
and I dwelt like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners.” {Job
29:25 RSV}**

“How I wish the good old days would return,” Job says.

Now in Chapter 30 we get the other side – **the painful present**. He begins in the first fifteen verses by describing how men mock him:

**“But now they make sport of me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.” {Job
30:1 RSV}**

Job goes on to describe their character, how they are evil, narrow, rigid, unpleasant people. And yet, Verses 9-10:

**“And now I have become their song,
I am a byword to them.
They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of
me.” {Job 30:9-10 RSV}**

In Verses 11-15 he describes their insults and their attacks, and then in Verses 16-19 the anguish of his physical pain:

**“And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
The night racks my bones,
and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
With violence it seizes my garment;
it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.
God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.”
{Job 30:16-19 RSV}**

Then the worst thing of all for him to bear, the silence of God, is described in Verses 20-26:

**“I cry to thee and thou dost not answer me;
I stand, and thou dost not heed me.
Thou hast turned cruel to me; ...” {Job
30:20-21a RSV}**

He goes on to describe how he feels persecuted by God. Yet he cries out to him “as one who in a heap of ruins stretches out his hand, “ but God does not listen. This is the problem that most of us have in times of pressure and pain: unanswered prayer, unexplained violence, and unfulfilled hopes. That, Job says, is what hurts the worst in the midst of his pain and anguish.

So he concludes the chapter with a description of the misery of living, Verses 27-31:

**“My heart is in turmoil, and is never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.
I go about blackened, but not by the sun;
I stand up in the assembly, and cry for help.
I am a brother of jackals,
and a companion of ostriches.
My skin turns black and falls from me,
and my bones burn with heat.
My lyre is turned to mourning,
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.” {Job 30:27-31 RSV}**

Now, in Chapter 31 we get **Job’s last search for a reason for all this**. He is going back now and trying to find the answer; he is still searching for wisdom. His theology has not yet stretched beyond the explanation that there may be some sin that is causing this, so he reviews his life from that point.

First, he says, there have been no sexual misdeeds in his life:

**“I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I look upon a virgin?”
{Job 31:1 RSV}**

This book comes from the dawn of civilization, and yet Job in the world of his day knows that in order to keep clean before God he has to be careful about what he sees. He makes a covenant with his eyes. In order to properly handle his sexual drives he has to watch his thought life, and he goes on to tell us he realizes that if he does not, “Calamity will befall the unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity.” And he invites people to investigate and see if he is not truthful in this.

If anyone has found him to be a liar, he says, Verse 8:

**“then let me sow, and another eat;
and let what grows for me be rooted out.”
{Job 31:8 RSV}**

He has been clean from the sin of fornication. He says there has been no adultery either, Verses 9-12:

**“If my heart has been enticed to a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor’s
door,
then let my wife grind for another,
and let others bow down upon her.” {Job
31:9-10 RSV}**

Why? Because to commit adultery with another man’s wife,

**“... would be a heinous crime;
that would be an iniquity to be punished
by the judges;
for that would be a fire which consumes
unto Abaddon [destruction],
and it would burn to the root of all my in-
crease.” {Job 31:11b-12 RSV}**

Then in the next verses he points out there has been no injustice in his deeds. He has been just with his servants; he has been just toward the poor and the defenseless; there has been no trust in wealth (Verses 24-25); no secret idolatry (Verses 26, 28); there is no gloating over the misfortune of others (Verses 29-30); he has not been stingy with his wealth (Verses 31-32); there is no hypocrisy, he has not been hiding anything and keeping things

secret (Verses 33, 37); and finally, he has not abused the land, there has been no pollution of the environment. He has been free even from this. How relevant this book is!

**“If my land has cried out against me,
and its furrows have wept together;
if I have eaten its yield without payment,
and caused the death of its owners;
let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and foul weeds instead of barley.” {Job
31:38-40 RSV}**

And with this, the words of Job are ended; he has nothing more to say. Baffled, questioning, tormented, yet unwilling to forsake God, he falls silent.

Now at this point comes a very noticeable break in the book. Another voice comes in, a young man’s voice, but here it would be helpful if we just gather up briefly what we have learned from this book. Job’s questions become our questions:

- What can we say about the trials, the pressures and the riddles of our own life?

Well, remember that Job at this point has learned that his theology is too small for his God. That is true of many of us. We think we know the Bible, we think we have got God boxed in and we understand how he is going to act. And just as surely as we do, God is going to do something that will not fit our theology. He is greater than any study of man’s about him. He is not going to be inconsistent with himself; he never is. He is not capricious, he is not angry and upset and acting out of malice. He is a loving God, but his love will take forms of expression that we do not understand, and we must face that fact. Up to this point Job has had his faith in the rule of God, but now at last he has begun to reach out tremblingly to exercise faith in the God who rules. That is a transfer that many of us need to come to.

- The second thing that we can see at this point in the book is that Job’s view of himself is woefully inadequate. He has been defending himself, he has been going back and thinking of all his good deeds.

We all do this, don't we? When trouble strikes we all tend to think to ourselves, "Why should this happen to me?" By that, we mean "I haven't done anything wrong. I've been perfectly well-behaved. Why should I be subjected to this kind of torment?" All this makes us realize, as we see Job, that he and we also have little understanding of the depths of sin's attack upon us, and the depravity of our hearts. Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things [We do not believe that, do we?], and desperately wicked: who can know it?" {Jer 17:9 KJV}. The one thing God teaches us by these pressures and problems of life is to understand that there are depths of sin within us that we are not yet aware of. We need Paul's words in Chapter 4 of First Corinthians where he says, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself [i.e., that he had not dealt with], but I am not thereby acquitted," {1 Cor 4:3-4 RSV}. Paul says that God knows more about him than he knows about himself.

- The third thing that we need to see in Job is that his self-vindication explains the silence of God. Why does God not help this man? The answer is because he has not yet come to the place where he is willing to listen. As long as a man is defending himself, God will not defend him.

There is a theme that runs all through the Bible from beginning to end that says, "As long as you justify yourself, God will never justify you." And as long as Job thinks he has some righteous ground on which to stand, God's silence remains. This is true in our lives as well.

That is why Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed is the man who is poor in spirit" {cf, Matt 5:3}, who is bankrupt in himself, who has come to the end. When we shut up and stop defending and justifying ourselves, God will rise to take up our cause. That is what we will see in the book of Job; God will begin to speak on Job's behalf.

In the little book of First John we read, "if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," {1 Jn 2:1 RSV}. He is our lawyer, our defense counselor. But as long as we keep trying to justify and explain everything on the basis of our goodness, he has nothing to say. When we quit, then he rises up to take our case before God the Father. This is probably the greatest lesson of the book of Job – the one that is hardest for us to learn.

May God help us to understand that as long as we insist on trying our own case, God will fold his arms and let us go ahead. But when we stop, then he will begin to defend us.

Prayer:

Our Father, this marvelous book has taken us through deep waters indeed, and has deepened our understanding and our knowledge of you. We pray that, like Job, we will realize that there is no solution to the riddles and mysteries of life apart from a trust in your wisdom and your grace, and an obedience to your Word. Help us then to lay aside all our flaunting schemes for self-improvement and defense of ourselves, and stand naked before you, Lord, trusting your loving grace to give us all we need. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Youth answers Age

by Ray C. Stedman

In Chapter 32 we come to a rather sudden and unexpected turn in the development of the book of Job. A new voice is heard, a new name appears without much introduction, but the program notes of this cosmic drama let us in on some further information in the opening verses of the chapter:

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he became angry. {Job 32:1-5 RSV}

Some of you who remember the days of the radio broadcast called *The Lone Ranger*, remember the question that was asked so many times on that program, "Who is this masked man?" One is tempted to ask that about this young man, Elihu. Who is this fellow? Where did he come from, and why does he speak at this moment? We learn from this account, of course, that there were others who were listening to this dialogue between Job and his three friends, and among them is Elihu, which means "My God is he." He is also identified as the son of Barachel (that means "God blesses"), the Buzite. In the opening of the book we saw that Job

lived in the land of Uz, but there was also another land nearby called Buz (these lands were named for two brothers back in the days following Noah and the flood), and Elihu came from the land of Buz; we know nothing more about him. In Chapter 32 we get, basically, the introduction to his message, and he opens it with a word of courteous explanation for his silence:

And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered:

**"I am young in years,
and you are aged;
therefore I was timid and afraid
to declare my opinion to you.
I said, 'Let days speak,
and many years teach wisdom.'**

**But it is the spirit in a man,
the breath of the Almighty, that makes
him understand.**

**It is not the old that are wise,
nor the aged that understand what is
right.**

**Therefore I say, 'Listen to me;
let me also declare my opinion.'" {Job
32:6-10 RSV}**

Commentators seem to differ very widely as to what to do with Elihu. Some regard him as a rather brash young man with the cocksure arrogance of youth who speaks up to tell the older men what they were doing that was wrong, while others seem to see him as merely repeating in other words the arguments of these friends, without adding much. And still other commentators view this as a

kind of meaningless interruption in this dialogue, of which God takes no notice at all.

But I would like to differ somewhat with these and agree with those commentators who see Elihu as a very important part in this book. Let me point out certain things about this young man as we are introduced to him:

- First, when you come to the end of the book and you read the rebuke that God gives to the three friends of Job, you will note that Elihu is not included. He is not rebuked for what he says, and he does not have to ask Job to pray for him, as they have to do.
- The second thing is that he is given an obvious, prominent part in this drama. His message occupies the next five chapters, and he is allowed to give one of the major discourses of this book.
- And third, he always speaks with courtesy and sensitiveness to Job, despite the strong feelings which he admits he has. The other friends were caustic and sarcastic in their approach to Job but this young man is very courteous when he addresses him. He recognizes the depth of Job's suffering, and he always speaks with understanding.
- The fourth, and probably most important, thing is that Elihu claims to speak not as the other men did from their experience, but he claims to speak from revelation. That is what we read in Verses 8-9. Elihu says, "It is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand." This is in line with what we have seen previously in Job, that
 - knowledge is something you gain by the years as they go by, but
 - understanding and wisdom is something only God can give, and
 - he can give it to the young as well as the old.

It is not the accumulation of the years of experience that makes people wise; it is what God has taught them through the years. And this is a very important point. God can teach a young

man or woman as much as an older man or woman. And when we speak from the wisdom of God then we can truly be wise, regardless of what our calendar age may be.

I know we who have been young a long time tend to think it is the years that have made us wise! If we are wise at all, it is not.

I am reminded of a schoolteacher who applied for a job and was turned down in preference to another younger teacher who only had three years of experience. The first teacher protested to the principal, "I've had 25 years' experience and why was I passed over in favor of this younger one?" And the principal said, "Well, I have to disagree with you. You haven't had 25 years' experience. You've had one year's experience 25 times."

It is quite possible to go through life repeating the same way of thinking over and over again, and never learn wisdom. So Elihu is right here. It is not the old that are wise, nor the aged that understand what is right; it is the spirit of the Almighty that teaches us wisdom.

Now I believe that Elihu therefore comes into the book as the answer to Job's cry for an explanation. God has been silent, it seems, and though Job is suffering and cries out for help, no answer is given. But, in God's wonderful way of answering, I think this is his reply to Job, and he replies in a way that Job did not expect. This young man who has been listening all along suddenly speaks up, and he appears as a witness to a mediator for whom Job has been crying out all through the book. I see Elihu as a kind of John the Baptist of the Old Testament, if you like, in the book of Job. He gives witness to the Mediator who is God himself, and, just as John said, he was a voice crying in the wilderness, pointing to one who would make a ransom between man and God. So Elihu appears as the one who gives a witness to what Job is crying out for, an umpire who can lay his hand upon both man and God. This is the part he plays in the book. He begins where the friends began, and he ends with words very similar to the voice of God when God appears on the scene.

So now in this introduction, in Verses 11 and on, *he speaks of his patience* that is now rather exhausted:

**“Behold, I waited for your words,
I listened for your wise sayings,
while you searched out what to say.
I gave you my attention,
and, behold, there was none that confuted
Job,
or that answered his words, among you.
Beware lest you say, ‘We have found wisdom;
God may vanquish him, not man.’
He has not directed his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your
speeches.” {Job 32:11-14 RSV}**

Then speaking of the friends, he says,

**“They are discomfited, they answer no
more;
they have not a word to say.
And shall I wait, because they do not speak,
because they stand there, and answer no
more?” {Job 32:15-16 RSV}**

So, with that courteous word of explanation, he begins to speak. He says he has to say something; he feels the pressure within:

**“I also will give my answer;
I also will declare my opinion.
For I am full of words,
the spirit within me constrains me.
Behold, my heart is like wine that has no
vent;
like new wineskins, it is ready to burst.”
{Job 32:17-19 RSV}**

Have you ever felt that way listening to an argument? You just had to say something because you see it is going astray, or it is illogical, and you can hardly restrain yourself from speaking. Elihu says “I must speak, that I may find relief.” Then he reassures Job and the friends, Verse 21:

**“I will not show partiality to any person
or use flattery toward any man.
For I do not know how to flatter,
else would my Maker soon put an end to
me.” {Job 32:21-22 RSV}**

Chapter 33 is **Elihu’s address to Job**. It opens with *an invitation to dialogue*:

**“But now, hear my speech, O Job,
and listen to all my words.
Behold, I open my mouth;
the tongue in my mouth speaks.
My words declare the uprightness of my
heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.” {Job 33:1-3 RSV}**

Here is his promise that he is going to give honest words. He is not going to flatter and he is not going to speak out of experience; he is going to speak from what he has been taught. His words will be honest and without partiality.

And further, he goes on to say they will come *from a humble heart*, Verse 4:

**“The spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me
life.
Answer me, if you can;
set your words in order before me; take
your stand.
Behold, I am toward God as you are;
I too was formed from a piece of clay.
Behold, no fear of me need terrify you;
my pressure will not be heavy upon you.”
{Job 33:4-7 RSV}**

What a difference that is from the way the friends came on Job! This young man says “No, I’m just a man like you. What I may say to help has come from what God has taught me. But I’m just like you are, and I’m not going to accuse you or come on heavy against you. I’m speaking merely as God has taught me as the spirit of God has given me life.”

Then, beginning with Verse 8, he begins to analyze *Job’s view of God*. That is the problem all through this book. Job, like the friends, had a narrow, limited theology which did not include room for God’s way beyond the normal thinking of men. This is what often happens with our theology. We try to narrow God down to our way of thinking and what this book teaches us, more than anything else, is to see that God is always beyond man.

Now, Job’s first view of God, according to Elihu, is that he saw God as capricious, i.e., he acted without any good reason, he acted just out of his feelings (like people do), according to his mood. Many people see God this way. I think they project

their view of themselves into infinity and they say, “God acts the way we do. He can get up in the morning and be grouchy and hard to live with and you have to live with that kind of a God all day.” And Job felt that way about him. Elihu points this out. He says, Verse 8:

**“Surely, you have spoken in my hearing,
and I have heard the sound of your words.
You say, ‘I am clean, without transgression;
I am pure, and there is no iniquity in me.
Behold, he [God] finds occasions against
me,
he counts me as his enemy;
he puts my feet in the stocks,
and watches all my paths.’” {Job 33:8-11
RSV}**

Here he summarizes all that Job has been saying – that God mistreats him without a reason; that he is doing these things without justification in a capricious way. Now Elihu’s answer is in one short word, Verse 12:

**“Behold, in this you are not right. I will
answer you.” {Job 33:12a RSV}**

And here is his answer.

**“God is greater than man.” {Job 33:12b
RSV}**

That is what we must always remember about God:

- He is beyond us.
- His range of understanding is so much greater than ours.
- Man is too ignorant, too limited, too easily deceived (his history proves it), to ever lay a charge of capriciousness against God.
- God always acts in accordance with his nature of love.
- Behind every act of God is a loving heart. And when we do not think so,
 - it is we who are deceived,
 - it is we who are misjudging;
 - we do not see what he is after.

This is the continual argument of the Bible from beginning to end. In the ninth chapter of Romans Paul says the same thing. He says, “Who are you O man, that replies against God? Why, you’re nothing but a creature with a very limited experience with very limited understanding. You don’t even know all the facts involved. How then can you raise a challenge against the Creator who sees so much more?” God is greater than man. So with that brief word Elihu puts that to rest.

Then he moves to *the second thing Job saw about God* and that was his problem with the silence of God, Verse 13:

**“Why do you contend against him,
saying, ‘He will answer none of my
words’?
For God speaks in one way,
and in two, though man does not perceive
it.” {Job 33:13-14 RSV}**

Once again, one of the major problems we have is the silence of God – unanswered prayer, as we see it. We say our prayers are not answered because we prayed ten minutes ago and the answer has not come yet. We think God is responsible to come back with an immediate answer. But Elihu helps us here with this. He says God does speak, but in ways sometimes we do not understand. There are two ways, Elihu suggests.

1. First, God speaks in dreams, Verse 15:

**“In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls upon men,
while they slumber on their beds,
then he opens the ears of men,
and terrifies them with warnings,
that he may turn man aside from his
deed,
and cut off pride from man;
he keeps back his soul from the Pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.”
{Job 33:15-18 RSV}**

Notice how clearly he states that God’s objective with man is always to stop him from destroying himself. It is man who is bent upon destruction, and God’s efforts that cause distress and pain and warning are designed to keep us from hurting ourselves and each other – “to keep back his soul from the Pit, his life

from perishing by the sword.” One of the ways God does that is to speak in dreams.

Now, you say, “Surely you’re not going to tell us we have to start analyzing all our dreams.”

And it is true that not all dreams represent God speaking to us. (Some of them come from eating pizza too late at night, indigestion, or other causes!) But psychologists tell us, as one voice, that dreams are a way by which reality suppressed comes into our consciousness, whether we like it or not.

We all tend to deceive ourselves. Things that we do not like we put away, we shove down into the subconscious, and so they appear in our dreams. Oftentimes they do take the form of warnings in which we see ourselves doing things that we are ashamed of or horrified by, and it is a warning that the tendency, the possibility of doing that, is deep within us all. Watch out what you are thinking; it is beginning to show up in your dreams! And though I am not trying to lay a case for interpreting dreams, the Scriptures are full of instances where God does speak to men in dreams. Daniel, and Ezekiel, and others of the prophets, understood much from God by means of dreams. And I believe that this is indicating that God does speak to us sometimes, not so much in predicting the future, but in showing us what we are trying to hide from ourselves in the present.

2. Then the second thing Elihu says is that God also speaks through pain, Verse 19:

**“Man is also chastened with pain upon
his bed,
and with continual strife in his bones,
so that his life loathes bread,
and his appetite dainty food.
His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot
be seen;
and his bones which were not seen
stick out.
His soul draws near the Pit,
and his life to those who bring death.”
{Job 33:19-22 RSV}**

Here Elihu’s argument almost seems to describe all that Job has gone through. The

young man is saying, “God is speaking to you, Job. You think he is not saying anything? He is! Your very sufferings are speaking to you; but not so much, as the friends were arguing, to punish you for something you did that you’re trying to hide, because that isn’t true. God is helping you to understand something that you don’t understand, and pain is what makes it possible.”

I think many of us have had the experience of feeling a threat to our life from some illness, and it tends to do marvelous things to our view of life; our value system changes instantly. We begin to think of certain things as far more important than we had ever thought before. C. S. Lewis says this about pain:

We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities, and anyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Have you ever had God shout at you through pain? A man said to me the other day, “I lived for a long time thinking that business was the most important thing in life, but then I had a heart attack and, believe me, God got my attention.” Why do we have to wait until after our second heart attack before God gets our attention? God in love brings these things upon us that he might speak to us, that we will hear what he has to say.

Now Elihu goes on to bring out *a second thing*, Verse 23:

**“If there be for him an angel,
a mediator, one of the thousand,
to declare to man what is right for him;
and he is gracious to him, and says,
‘Deliver him from going down into the Pit,
I have found a ransom;
let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful
vigor.’” {Job 33:23-25 RSV}**

Those last words seem to describe the experience that we would call today *being born again*, a return to the freshness and vitality of youth. And what brings it about?

Well, as Elihu says, it is the presence in our pains of a mediator, one of the thousand, who declares to man what is right and provides a ransom for him. What an amazing fore-view this is of the gospel of the grace of God! Remember Paul argues this in Romans 5. He says, “We rejoice in our sufferings,” {Rom 5:3 RSV}. Why? “Because in our sufferings we’re being taught by God that he is working out purposes that we do not understand but are for our good. And through the love of God shed abroad in our hearts we can realize that God’s love is training us, steadying us, and teaching us through the time of stress,” {cf, Rom 5:3-4}. That is why suffering, when it is interpreted by the mediator that God provides, is a blessing to us. But suffering without that mediation produces bitterness, resentment, anger, frustration, revolt and rebellion against God’s will. Therefore there must be a mediator, Elihu says.

Now I think this is a reference to the slow and certain light that has been growing in Job’s heart all through this time of suffering. He is beginning to understand something about life that he never knew before, and there are references to it we have seen all along. Remember,

- In Chapter 9 he cried out, “There is no umpire between us that may lay his hand upon us both, man and God.”
- Then, in Chapter 16 he said, “Even now, behold my witness is in heaven, and he who vouches for me is on high.” God is going to be the mediator.
- In Chapter 19 he comes out clearly and cries, “I know that my redeemer lives, and on the earth shall stand. And though the skin worms destroy (my body), yet in my flesh shall I see God face to face.”
- And then in Chapter 23 he has learned, as he cries, “He knows the way that I take. When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

Now here Elihu reminds him of that ministry of the mediator and tells him that

- if he allows that mediator’s work to guide him through this time,
- he shall be restored,
- his flesh will come fresh with youth, and
- he will return to the days of his youthful vigor.

And then he gives him *the means of doing it*, Verse 26:

**“Then man prays to God, and he accepts him,
he comes into his presence with joy.
He recounts to men his salvation,
and he sings before men, and says,
‘I sinned, and perverted what was right,
and it was not requited to me. [God did not punish me for what I did.]
He has redeemed my soul from going down into the Pit,
and my life shall see the light.’” {Job 33:26-28 RSV}**

Now pain did that, and so Elihu exhorts Job, Verse 29:

**“Behold, God does all these things,
twice, three times, with a man.” {Job 33:29 RSV}**

How patient God is! How long he waits, and allows us to meditate on, and struggle with these things. And he will sometimes bring us back to them again and again – till we understand. So Elihu cries, Verse 31:

**“Give heed, O Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak, for I desire to justify you.
If not, listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”
{Job 33:31-33 RSV}**

And the silence of Job at this point seems to indicate that at last he is ready to listen. God is able to teach him what the heart and the meaning of all his suffering has been in his life.

When Elihu finishes, God himself begins to speak, as we shall see.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your loving care of us. We thank you for the ministry that has mediated on our behalf before you. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who came as the great Mediator, who found a ransom for us in his own life's blood poured out on our behalf; who has found a way to set aside the daily contami-

nation of our sins and helps us to face every day fresh and vital, forgiven, alive, without guilt, without a sense of rejection, having found an adequate power by which to live, by which to do the things we ought to do. Lord, we thank you for him, for this marvelous ministry, for the peace, the joy, the hope and the love that he has brought into our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Your God is Too Small

by Ray C. Stedman

We have watched Job as his three friends have tried to help him, but they have only made matters worse. Finally he has come to the place where he cries out in the midst of his torment for an explanation, for some word from God, for some way out of this terrible distress. Suddenly, without any introduction, a young man named Elihu, who has been standing by, addresses Job and his friends. We are not told anything about him; he suddenly appears in that unique way God has of speaking in ways that we could not imagine. But he begins to examine the problems and the thinking of Job and the friends.

The unique thing about Elihu's presentation is that he does not attempt to speak out of his experience. He is not an old man who has been taught certain lessons by life. His claim is that he is speaking out of what God has taught him by the Spirit, and, therefore, that he is sharing the insights and wisdom of God. And as we unfold what Elihu says we can see that is true. It is in accord with the revelation of God elsewhere in Scripture, so that God is speaking and answering some of the cries of Job's tormented heart through this young man.

In Chapters 32 and 33, we saw Elihu's general examination of the problem, but in Chapter 34 he

takes up Job's argument and Job's view of God in some detail. He opens with **an invitation to all who are listening to join in the judgment:**

**Then Elihu said,
“Hear my words, you wise men,
and give ear to me, you who know;
for the ear tests words as the palate tastes
food. [He is actually quoting the words
of Job here.]
Let us choose what is right;
let us determine among ourselves what is
good.” {Job 34:1-4 RSV}**

Very frequently you find in the pages of Scripture this invitation by the Spirit of God to reason with him, to let our minds follow after the paths that God's great mind has already trod. Isaiah said, “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD: ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool,’” {Isa 1:18 RSV}. In First Corinthians the Apostle Paul says, “I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say,” {1 Cor 10:15 RSV}. So here is the invitation to all of us to join in judging the truth of what Elihu is about to say about God. He be-

gins by examining once again Job's view of God, Job's problem with God, and this is the way he puts it, Verse 5:

“For Job has said, ‘I am innocent, and God has taken away my right.’” {Job 34:5 RSV}

That is Job's first problem with God. He says, “I haven't done anything wrong,” and he infers from that that God should bless him. Instead of blessing him, God has denied him that right to blessing. This was the type of theology Job had.

I do not think there is anything more subtle in our lives than this instinctive feeling we all have that if we behave ourselves, God ought to give us blessing and prosperity. You think through your own motives right now and see if that is not underlying much of what you are thinking about God. “If I straighten out my life and watch myself so that I don't get into trouble, and vote right in the election, God is going to take care of me and everything will be all right.” If he does not, if we go through trial, we immediately show how we reflect this view because we say, “What's wrong? Why should this happen to me?” That is one of the most frequent charges against God, and this was Job's charge.

“and God has taken away my right; in spite of my right I am counted a liar;”
{Job 34:5b-6a RSV}

That is what the friends had called him. They had said he was a liar, a hypocrite, that he actually had done some terrible thing that he was not telling them about. So he said, “In spite of my right, I am counted a liar, that is man's treatment of me. And God likewise is unjust.”

“my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.” {Job 34:6b RSV}

Now that is Job's problem. He sees God as both unjust and unfair, unwilling to explain what is going on, and so Elihu says, Verse 7:

**“What man is like Job,
who drinks up scoffing like water,
who goes in company with evildoers
and walks with wicked men?
For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing**

that he should take delight in God.’” {Job 34:7-9 RSV}

What a strange argument to hear from a man who had begun with that great cry, “Blessed be the name of the LORD. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed is his name,” {cf, Job 1:21b}. Now his position is, as Elihu says, he is like the ungodly. He has the same attitude they have. He says, “What advantage is it to me to behave myself? I might just as well have sinned.” That is the argument that is going to be examined in detail in this passage.

How many of us have talked the same way? We must remember that at the beginning of this book Satan declared that he was going to bring Job to a place where he would curse God to his face. There are two things Satan must do in order to make Job curse God. He must make Job distrust God and feel that God has treated him unfairly (that is the first step), and then there will come a time when, in the conviction that he has been unfairly treated, he will actually curse God, shake his fist in God's face, and turn his back upon him. That is what Satan is after. Now you see how close Job has come to this. He has not done it yet and he does not do it. God intervenes by the wise words of this Spirit-filled young man to keep Job from that final step.

Now in Verses 10-30, Elihu takes up the truth about God, **what God is really like.**

First, in Verses 10-12, he says *God cannot be unjust:*

**“Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding,
far be it from God that he should do wickedness,
and from the Almighty
that he should do wrong.
For according to the work of a man he will requite him,
and according to his ways he will make it befall him.
Of a truth, God will not do wickedly,
and the Almighty will not pervert justice.”**
{Job 34:10-12 RSV}

He says that no matter how long it may take, God is going to treat the wicked with judgment and

bless the righteous. Now he may not do it right away but he will do it. For, Elihu declares, God cannot deny himself he cannot be unjust. When we say that God treats us unfairly or does something that is wrong we are really saying God is denying his own nature and character. Earlier in the book, several of the friends of Job had argued that God is so mighty that no matter what he says, man has to take it. But Elihu is not saying that. He is saying God is mighty, it is true, but when he does something it is always in accordance with his nature. Scripture teaches us that. In James we learn that God is called the Father of lights with whom is no variation or shadow due to change. There is no changeability in God; he is always true to his character of love and we are invited to believe that no matter what it looks like at the moment. That is where faith will rescue us from the kind of temptation that Job is confronted with now.

Elihu's next point is that *God is beyond accountability to man*, Verse 13:

**“Who gave him charge over the earth
and who laid on him the whole world?
If he should take back his spirit to himself,
and gather to himself his breath,
all flesh would perish together,
and man would return to dust.” {Job
34:13-15 RSV}**

Godless men are always saying to God, in effect, “Leave me alone. I don't need you. I don't want you in my life.” Now what if God did that? What if he actually removed every bit of himself from them? Why they would collapse instantly. God gives them the very breath that they breathe. Their very ability to function comes from the hand of God and the man or woman who speaks out against the Creator and challenges God is doing so by the very power that God himself supplies.

Well then, as Elihu says, “Who gave him charge over the earth? Well, no man did. God is sovereign. He is the originator of all things. He is not accountable to us.

Now, Elihu's third point is that *we get our sense of justice from God himself*; he teaches us justice, Verse 16:

**“If you have understanding, hear this;
listen to what I say.**

**Shall one who hates justice govern?
Will you condemn him who is righteous
and mighty,
who says to a king, ‘Worthless one,’
and to nobles, ‘Wicked man’;
who shows no partiality to princes,
nor regards the rich no more than the
poor,
for they are all the work of his hands?
In a moment they die;
at midnight the people are shaken and
pass away,
and the mighty are taken away by no hu-
man hand.” {Job 34:16-20 RSV}**

We men who prate so loudly about justice who always want God to treat us with justice are the very ones who respond with flattery to rulers or show partiality to people who are in authority. But God does not do that. Elihu argues here that God governs without partiality, and how can you do that without justice? How can man be more just than God?

His fourth point is that *God does not even require an investigation*. It is very easy to see these days that if man wants to inquire into the justice of something, the first thing he has to do is appoint an investigating committee. Then he has to get funds for the committee and set up their offices and hire the secretaries and after a couple of years labor they finally come up with a conclusion. But by that time somebody has found that they have been bribed or corrupted in some way so we have to appoint another committee to investigate the investigating committee. But Elihu argues that God does not do that. Verse 21:

**“For his eyes are upon the ways of a man,
and he sees all his steps.
There is no gloom or deep darkness
where evildoers may hide themselves.
For he has not appointed a time
for any man to go before God in judgment.
He shatters the mighty without investiga-
tion,
and sets others in their place.” {Job
34:21-24 RSV}**

God does not need to hold a trial in order to condemn us or set us aside if we are misbehaving. He knows what is going on; he sees the depths of the heart; he understands the thoughts of the mind.

Read Psalm 139 and see how the psalmist cries out in marvel at God's ability to understand his thoughts from afar, even before they take shape in his mind and heart, God knows them all. Elihu goes on, Verse 25:

**“Thus, knowing their works,
he overturns them in the night, and they
are crushed.
He strikes them for their wickedness
in the sight of men,
because they turned aside from following
him,” {Job 34:25-27a RSV}**

That is the issue isn't it? That is the standard of performance which God righteously expects of men. How hard it is for us to learn that the only way we can properly relate to life is to include God and begin with him. He holds the world in his grasp. Anything else is totally unrealistic living. Those who turn aside from him,

**“and had no regard for any of his ways,
so that they caused the cry of the poor to
come to him,
and he heard the cry of the afflicted –”
{Job 34:27b-28 RSV}**

simply are showing they do not want God, and God judges on that basis. There is no other standard acceptable to him.

Verses 29-30:

**“When he is quiet, who can condemn?
When he hides his face, who can behold
him, [How are you going to summon
God to a trial and make him speak?]
whether it be a nation or a man? –
that a godless man should not reign,
that he should not ensnare the people.”
{Job 34:29-30 RSV}**

In other words, who can call God to account or appeal his decision? There is no way we can do this and no need to do it because God is always consistent with himself. And so Elihu concludes (Verses 31-33), with the statement, in effect, that God accepts no substitutes for righteousness. These words are somewhat confused in the Hebrew text and therefore the English is not very clear so I am going to read this section from the New English

Bible which I think puts it a little clearer, Verses 31-33:

**“But suppose you will say to God,
‘I have overstepped the mark, I will do no
more mischief.
Vile wretch that I am, be thou my guide;
whatever wrong I have done, I will do no
more.’
Will he, at those words, condone your re-
jection of him?
It is for you to decide, not me:
but what can you answer?” {Job 34:31-33
NEB}**

Good question, isn't it? What he is saying is that somebody may say, “Well, all right, I got into trouble, I did something that was wrong but I won't do it anymore. I'll reform my life and watch in that area but I'm still going to run my life myself.” Elihu says, “Can you say that to God? He will not accept that.” Reform is not what he is after – it is repentance and relationship that God desires. Surrender of the right to run your life, that is what he is after, and he will accept no other basis of relationship with him.

Now Elihu closes with *God's problem with Job*, Verse 34 and on:

**“Men of understanding will say to me,
and the wise man who hears me will say:
‘Job speaks without knowledge,
his words are without insight.’
Would that Job were tried to the end,
because he answers like wicked men.
For he adds his rebellion to his sin;
he claps his hands among us,
and multiples his words against God.”
{Job 34:34-37 RSV}**

What Elihu is saying here is that Job is obviously speaking out of ignorance of the nature and the true character of God, and therefore he needs further treatment. “Would that Job were tried to the end,” he says. Not because this young man wants to increase his agony but because only that will bring Job to the truth so he asks that it go on until Job sees what he is doing.

Job is a righteous man, his heart is right, he wants to serve God, but he thinks that he can do it by his own just efforts. The toughest lesson God

has to teach human beings is the lesson of seeing the evil in what we think is nothing but good. We always think that our efforts to try to behave ourselves by obeying the truth as we understand it is acceptable to God. The hardest lesson of life is to learn that our righteousness is filthy rags in his sight. It is only dependence upon his gift of righteousness that will ever be acceptable in his sight. That is what Job is finally learning. It is the struggle of Romans 7 way back here in the Old Testament. Paul, whose heart was right, wanted to do what God wanted and was trying his best to do it, but instead it all fell apart, and he cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?" {Rom 7:24a RSV}. And the word of faith comes in "It is the gift of God," {Eph 2:8}. You are righteous, not by trying, but by accepting what God has said by his gift of righteousness.

Now that is what we have here. Remember that God initiated this contest not Satan. God said to Satan, "Notice my friend Job here? See what you can do with him."

God had something to teach this man, and maybe that is what God is saying to many of us. When we think our heart is absolutely right before him, we have failed to grasp the one basis upon which we can be right before him and that is why trouble often comes.

We will move through these next three chapters very quickly: Elihu now answers in detail **Job's ignorant argument**: First, he states it, Chapter 35:

And Elihu said:

**"Do you think this to be just?
Do you say, 'It is my right before God,'
that you ask, 'What advantage have I?'
How am I better off than if I had
sinned?'" {Job 35:1-3 RSV}**

That is what Job is saying. "God is unjust, I might as well have gone out and lived like the rest of them. Why should I have kept myself clean? I might as well have been as mean and dirty and vicious and self-centered as anybody else." I have had people say this to me. I have felt it myself. This is a common argument with us, as though the purpose of being righteous is to minister to ourselves.

But now Elihu examines that. First, he says, "*You're very inconsistent.*" Verse 5:

**"Look at the heavens, and see;
and behold the clouds, which are higher
than you." {Job 35:5 RSV}**

That is, you cannot do anything to them. They are up there floating along, and you cannot even reach them. And so, he says, it is like that with God, Verse 6:

**"If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him?
and if your transgressions are multiplied,
what do you do to him?
If you are righteous, what do you give to him;
or what does he receive from your hand?
Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself,
and your righteousness a son of man."
{Job 35:6-8 RSV}**

In other words, "God is unaffected. He is not acting toward you out of spite, out of personal anger at you. What you do or do not do does not change God or affect him in any way. Therefore, how can he be unjust to you if he is not affected by anything that you do?" And he points out that Job's argument, therefore, is totally inconsistent.

But then Elihu goes on in a most helpful passage to show us *why God does appear to be indifferent to us*, and why he does appear to be unaffected by what happens to us. Verse 9:

**"Because of the multitude of oppressions
people cry out;
they call for help because of the arm of the
mighty.
But none says, 'Where is God my Maker,
who gives songs in the night,
who teaches us more than the beasts of the
earth,
and makes us wiser than the birds of the
air?'
There they cry out, but he does not answer,
because of the pride of evil men." {Job
35:9-12 RSV}**

Why is God silent? Men cry for help, but God knows that what they are crying for is merely relief,

that is all. They want to be taken out of the harmful, painful effects of their selfish ways and then allowed to go right back to being selfish. Nobody is concerned about God's glory and about being taught by God and learning at his hand and at his feet. Rather, they are simply crying out for deliverance, they want to use God, and to that kind of an appeal God is silent. I think this is why our prayers are often unanswered. Our selfishness has produced agony in our life and all we want is to escape the penalty; we are not at all concerned about God himself. And that is one reason for God's silence.

Then Elihu points out there is another reason in Job's conduct, Verse 13:

**“Surely God does not hear an empty cry,
nor does the Almighty regard it.
How much less when you say that you do
not see him,
that the case is before him, and you are
waiting for him!” {Job 35:13-14 RSV}**

This is a reference to Job's words about wanting to have a trial before God, how he would be his own defense attorney, and how he would prove that he was in the right and God's treatment of him was unjust. Elihu says, How can you say that to God? Do you think God is really waiting for you to prove him wrong?" Verse 15:

**“And now, because his anger does not punish,
and he does not greatly heed transgression,
Job opens his mouth in empty talk,
and he multiplies words without knowledge.” {Job 35:15-16 RSV}**

How faithful this young man is to put it as gently as he can; he speaks the truth in love. He says, “Job, the problem is you're going to prove God is wrong and you are right. How then can God respond to that? He doesn't punish you for it, he is patient with you, he doesn't strike you down when you talk that way, but you have utilized his patience to speak words that are without knowledge; you speak out of ignorance.”

Then in Chapters 36 and 37 we have a **great revelation of the glory of God**. Notice how it be-

gins, with a claim on Elihu's part to speak with *divine authority*, Chapter 36:

**And Elihu continued, and said:
“Bear with me a little, and I will show you,
for I have yet something to say on God's
behalf.
I will fetch my knowledge from afar [i.e., it
is not coming from me],
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.”
{Job 36:1-3 RSV}**

That is the place to start in all human reasoning. God is right, and therefore anything that deviates from what he says is wrong. That is the way you can tell the difference. Do not start with, “I'm right because I feel this way.” That is what gets us into trouble. Start with, “God is right, and I must agree with him.” And this is where he starts, Verse 4:

**“For truly my words are not false;
one who is perfect in knowledge is with
you.” {Job 36:4 RSV}**

Now some of the commentators have thought that by that he means himself, and that would be a brash and arrogant statement. But that is not what he means. If you turn over to Chapter 37, Verse 16, you will notice who he refers to when he says, “*one who is perfect in knowledge*.” He asks Job,

**“Do you know the balancings of the clouds,
the wondrous works of him who is perfect
in knowledge?” {Job 37:16 RSV}**

Obviously he means God. Therefore, his claim here in Chapter 36 is that he is speaking with the wisdom and the authority and the knowledge of God.

In Verses 5-15 he declares that *God is both merciful and just*:

**“Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any;
he is mighty in strength of understanding.
He does not keep the wicked alive,
but gives the afflicted their right.” {Job
36:5-6 RSV}**

God is merciful and he is just. And this he demonstrates, first by his treatment of kings, Verses 9-12:

“then he declares to them their work and their transgressions,” {Job 36:9a RSV}
“He opens their ears to instruction,” {Job 36:10a RSV}
“If they hearken and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity,” {Job 36:11a RSV}
“But if they do not hearken, they perish by the sword.” {Job 36:12a RSV}

And then God demonstrates his justice by his treatment of the proud. Once again we have a passage (Verses 13-14) that is rather confused in the English. Let me read what it says in the New English Bible:

“Proud men rage against him and do not cry to him for help when caught in his toils; So they die in their prime, like male prostitutes, worn-out.” {Job 36:13-14 NEB}

Surely there is nothing more pathetic than a middle-aged fairy! That is what Elihu says here. Proud men wear themselves out against the greatness and the power of God, and die in their prime, like male prostitutes, worn-out.

That leads Elihu then to show *how God uses affliction*, Verse 15:

“He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity.” {Job 36:15 RSV}

Is God trying to get your attention by some pain or adverse circumstance, some pressure that you are going through? He is opening your ear. He wants you to listen to what he is saying to you and to me.

And that brings us then to a very vivid description of *Job’s perilous position* which this young man points out in faithfulness, Verse 16:

“He also allured you out of distress into a broad place where there was no cramping,

and what was set on your table was full of fatness. [God had blessed you, Job, in the past]

But you are full of the judgment on the wicked;

judgment and justice seize you. [You’re preoccupied with justice, here, as though that were the ground on which you could stand before God.]

“Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing; and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.” {Job 36:16-18 RSV}

That is another confused verse in the Hebrew. The Authorized Version is better here:

“Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.” {Job 36:18 KJV}

Then he concludes that section *by warning Job*, Verse 19:

“Will your cry avail to keep you from distress, or all the force of your strength? Do not long for the night, when peoples are cut off in their place. Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction.” {Job 36:19-21 RSV}

His final word to Job is a great and beautiful passage in which he sets forth in marvelous language **the glory of God**. It runs from Verse 22 through Chapter 37. Let me just give you the highlights of it:

First, *God is beyond men’s instruction* (Verses 22-25). Notice how he begins:

“Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?” {Job 36:22 RSV}

Then another “behold” in Verse 26: *God is beyond men’s understanding*:

“Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable.” {Job 36:26 RSV}

Then another “behold” in Verse 30: *God acts beyond men’s rigid categories and reasons:*

**“Behold, he scatters his lightning about him,
and covers the roots of the sea.
For by these [by storm and lightnings] he judges peoples;
he gives food in abundance.” {Job 36:30-31 RSV}**

God uses his natural powers for both blessing and judgment alike.

And then, beginning with Chapter 37, we have such a marvelous description of *a great electric storm* that many of the commentators feel that this was an actual occurrence, that a storm began to break out at this moment and Elihu used it as a vivid example of what he had been saying about God. If any of you have ever been out on the prairies and seen an electric storm break out (as we North Dakotans have), you will know what a terrifying and awe-inspiring experience it is – with the lightning crackling and splitting the sky and the roaring of the thunder. It is an awesome experience, and this is what Elihu begins to describe, Chapter 37:

**“At this also my heart trembles,
and leaps out of its place.
Hearken to the thunder of his voice
and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.
Under the whole heaven he lets it go,
and his lightning to the corners of the earth.
After it his voice roars;
he thunders with his majestic voice
and he does not restrain the lightnings
when his voice is heard.” {Job 37:1-4 RSV}**

Then he goes on to speak of how God sends the snow and the rain; he sends tornadoes, the whirlwinds and the frost; he controls the cycles of the weather. (Next time you are listening to a weather report on television, and they show you the satellite picture, notice how it appears in spirals. The weather comes in cycles, and this is what he refers to in Verse 12):

**“They turn round and round by his guidance
to accomplish all that he commands them
on the face of the habitable world.” {Job 37:12 RSV}**

And then he tells us why, Verse 13:

**“Whether for correction, or for his land,
or for love, he causes it to happen.” {Job 37:13 RSV}**

God has many reasons for doing things; we are not always certain what they are.

And then *God’s wisdom is inscrutable*. He goes on,

**“Do you know how God lays his command upon them ...?” {Job 37:15a RSV}
“Do you know the balancings of the clouds,
...?” {Job 37:16a RSV}
“Can you, like him, spread out the skies,
...?” {Job 37:18a RSV}**

Job can do none of these things: Job cannot explain them (Verses 14-16); Job cannot duplicate them (Verses 17-18); Job cannot command them (Verses 19-20). He closes with a beautiful picture of *the matchless majesty of God*, Verse 22:

**“Out of the north comes golden splendor;
God is clothed with terrible majesty.
The Almighty – we cannot find him;
he is great in power and justice,
and abundant righteousness he will not violate.
Therefore men fear him;
he does not regard any who are wise in
their own conceit.” {Job 37:22-24 RSV}**

All the way through the Bible, from beginning to end, the only man or woman who ever receives anything from God is the one who comes with a humble and contrite heart. If you think you have got something to offer him, or that you have made achievements that nobody else can equal, you cut yourself off from the wisdom and knowledge of God. But the man who comes humble, contrite, waiting upon God, asking him to teach him, will find that God will pick him up in grace and power and glory and restore him.

That is what is going to happen to Job. The very next voice you hear will be the voice of God himself speaking directly to Job, as the 38th chapter opens.

Prayer:

Father, our hearts are humble as we see how mighty are your ways. We pray that, if nothing else, this great book will teach us the majesty and the glory and the wonder

of our God. What a marvelous Being you are, Lord. Help us to take the place of the learner and be taught out of humility and weakness, that we might be strong, because of the grace of our loving God. Teach us, Lord, to accept what comes from your hand, knowing that you will take us through the struggles and bring us out into a broad and wonderful place, as you did Job. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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The God of Nature

by Ray C. Stedman

Surely Chapters 38-41 are the climax of this great book of Job. Here the voice of Jehovah himself is heard, speaking out of the whirlwind. There are many places in the Scriptures where God symbolizes his presence by a wind.

- Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The Spirit of God is like the wind. It is sovereign, it blows where it will, and except a man be born of wind and water he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” {cf, John 3:8}. Jesus used two symbols – the wind for the Spirit of God, and the water for the Word of God. We are born again by the Word and by the Spirit of God.
- On the day of Pentecost God turned on a mighty, rushing wind, like a great siren, that brought the whole city down to the temple courts to see the strange phenomenon that was taking place there: the speaking in other tongues and the dancing flames of fire upon the heads of the disciples.

So this is a frequent symbol in Scripture for God. Out of this whirling wind the voice of God comes.

Chapter 38:

**Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.” {Job 38:1-3 RSV}**

Some of the commentators have thought that perhaps those words were addressed to Elihu, that God is saying to the young man, “Who is this that darkens counsel with words without knowledge?” But, at the end of the book, Job applies these words to himself, and therefore it is clear that it is not Elihu but Job that God is speaking to. God challenges Job and says that Job, by the ignorant words that he uttered, has been darkening the light that could have come to him.

I wonder how many times we have done that same thing? God is trying to speak to us but we have darkened the light by ignorant words of complaint, rebuke, and rebellion against his will.

So Jehovah challenges Job, “Gird up your loins like a man and let me ask you some questions. You have claimed that you want a trial before me. Well, let me examine your competence to see if you can answer some simple questions first.” He indicates that the questions will be those that a man can answer, and, in the account that follows, God’s great discourse to Job, which runs through Chapters 38 to 41, you have the voice of Jehovah subjecting Job to a series of very penetrating questions in three different areas:

- First, he examines his creative wisdom in the world around and in the heavens.
- Then, second, God turns to the theme of his providential care of the animal creation, and what he does in that area.
- And finally, he turns to his restraint of the forces of evil at work in the world.

We are only going to take the first two of these, covering Chapters 38 and 39. Jehovah introduces this with a series of questions about *the foundations of the earth*, Verse 4:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

**Tell me, if you have understanding,
Who determined its measurements – surely
you know!**

**Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
when the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”
{Job 38:4-7 RSV}**

There is no more magnificent poetry in all the world than in this section of the book of Job. It is put in marvelous language. Here God is calling Job’s attention to some of the bases upon which the earth itself rests. He calls them “the foundations of the earth,” and challenges Job to explain them. Notice how simply he puts the questions. These are just kindergarten questions. They come in terms of “Where?” and “Who?” and “What?” and “When?” did these things happen.

First, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” Where was man? He was not even in existence yet. That is why in all the centuries since this question was asked of Job, man has never been able to settle the question of origin. Where did the universe come from? How did it originate? Who brought it into being? What process was followed? The whole world is debating that question today, but man has never been able to answer the question of the origin of the earth because he was not there to observe it.

Then in Verse 5 the Almighty infers that someone helped him in this:

**“Who determined its measurements –
surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?” {Job
38:5 RSV}**

There is at least a hint there that someone assisted him in this work. You recall how the Gospel of John begins:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the
Word was with God, and the Word was
God... all things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made
that was made. {John 1:1, 1:3 RSV}**

There we learn that the Trinity was at work in creation.

In this question to Job there is a hint that God the Father was not alone in this work, that the other members of the Trinity were involved with it as well. Then Verse 6 is the question of what was the procedure. How did God hang the earth upon nothing, as Job himself put it earlier in this account?

Back in the days when the Scriptures were written down, the scientific world of that day believed that the earth was flat. There were strange, legendary accounts of how the earth came into being, that it floated on elephants’ backs, or rested on turtles swimming in the sea, this kind of thing. But in the book of Job you have the clear statement that God has hung the earth upon nothing.

Now God asks Job, “How did that happen?” The only answer that science can give today is gravity, but nobody knows what gravity is. It is just a word we use, but it does not tell us what it is. Here again is a question that we still cannot answer today. How is the earth suspended between the various heavenly bodies in such a way that it moves in such orderly procession through the illimitable reaches of space? How can it be? We still do not know. Finally, God says, “Were you there when it happened?” and he links it with a tremendous event when the whole creation seemed to break into harmony and melody, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”

Then, in the next section, God turns to the most prominent feature on the earth, *the sea*. If you look at the pictures of the earth as it is seen from space, you will see that three-quarters of the globe is covered with water. God employs a beautiful symbolism here, as though the oceans suddenly were born, like a baby springing forth from the womb, Verse 8:

**“Or who shut in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made clouds its garment,**

**and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no
farther,
and here shall your proud waves be
stayed?’” {Job 38:8-11 RSV}**

We know that water is made up of two invisible gases, hydrogen and oxygen, and when these two are combined, a visible substance, water, springs into being. What a dramatic moment when God caused these invisible gases to join together in such quantities that an ocean suddenly spread across this planet! God is asking Job about it, but Job knows nothing at all about it.

Yet the emphasis of this seems to be on how the ocean is controlled. God said he puts bounds to it and said to it, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.” It has always seemed to me symbolic of the ways of God that the substance he uses to keep the ocean in its bed, sand, is one of the most shifting, unreliable substances we know of. Beaches of sand hold the oceans in place and say, “Thus far shall you come.”

Then, in the next verses, Jehovah examines Job on some of the secret processes of earth. First, on *the matters of day and night*, Verse 12:

**“Have you commanded the morning since
your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
that it might take hold of the skirts of the
earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.
From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.” {Job
38:12-15 RSV}**

God describes here how the sun rises in a different place every morning, changing according to the seasons, moving from north to south. His question is, “Have you caused the dawn to know its place? Are you the one? Are you able to tell the sun just where to get up so that it marks the exact season of the year?” Then he says, “Are you able to control the effect of the light upon society?”

Light “takes hold of the skirts of the earth,” he says.

Have you ever seen the sun coming up and noticed how the fingers of light seemed to lay hold of the darkness and dissipated it? This imagery speaks of how the wicked are shaken out of it. They hide from the light and go back into their dens. Then as the day goes on the sun, rising and coursing across the heavens, changes the colors of things. Like clay under the seal it is dyed like a garment. We know how scenery is changed by the different positions of the sun through the day. In the evening hours when the redness spreads across it, what a different cast it puts upon things. God is asking Job, “Can you do this? Are you able to change it all like this?” Finally, “Can you govern how the light affects the night and controls the length of time that darkness prevails (when the wicked operate) and to stop them in their deeds (when the daylight comes again) – their uplifted arm is broken?”

Then he speaks of *the deep things of the earth*, Verse 16:

**“Have you entered into the springs of the
sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?”
{Job 38:16 RSV}**

It is remarkable that we are only now beginning to plumb and map some of the deep places of the sea. The secrets of the deep are still hidden to us, and we are just beginning to get into it.

Then God says, “How about beyond life, Job? Can you understand that?” Verse 17:

**“Have the gates of death been revealed to
you,
or have you seen the gates of deep dark-
ness?” {Job 38:17 RSV}**

This is still a mystery to us. Science is unable to help us here.

Verse 18 represents, perhaps, one question out of all this list that we can answer today:

**“Have you comprehended the expanse of
the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.” {Job 38:18
RSV}**

“Do you know what is on the surface of the globe?” Today, perhaps, we can say “Yes,” we pretty well know what is there. We have mapped most of the earth – not all of it – but it has almost all been explored. So thousands of years after Job we have come to an answer on that. We know that you can take a jet plane in London, have lunch in New York and dinner in San Francisco, and, of course, baggage in Buenos Aires! We have covered the expanse of the earth at last, even though there are still some areas we do not know much about. But how long it has taken to solve even one of these simple problems that Job was asked about.

God goes into other mysteries, *the common things of life*, Verse 19:

**“Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its
home?
You know, for you were born then
and the numbers of your days is great!”
{Job 38:19-21 RSV}**

God heaps irony on Job. What he is asking, basically, is, “Do you understand how light is produced?” Once again, the scientific world is baffled even today by that. Two conflicting theories exist that try to explain how light emerges, how it suddenly comes into being, but no one knows. We cannot yet “take it to its territory and discern the paths to its home.” We are unable to solve even that simple process.

Verse 22:

**“Have you entered the storehouses of the
snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the
hail,
which I have reserved for the time of trou-
ble,
for the day of battle and war?” {Job
38:22-23 RSV}**

That verse is to me one of the most intriguing verses in all of the Scriptures. For years I have wondered what that is talking about. It suggests that there is some hidden process in the formation of snow and hail – the process of vaporizing or freezing or whatever it may be – that will release

tremendous power which God says man will probably discover in the time when the whole of the earth is engaged in battle and war. Something is hidden there. I have asked scientists about that and they shake their heads and say they do not know what that means. But there must be something there.

God says, “I have reserved it for the time of trouble.” That is almost always in Scripture a reference to the last days, the terrible time of Jacob’s trouble, when the great tribulation bursts out upon the earth. God says “I have hidden something in the snow and the hail, Job, do you understand that?”

Can you imagine what Job must be looking like by now? – all these questions coming and he has not got one of them right yet!

Then God goes on, Verse 24:

**“What is the way to the place where the
light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon
the earth?**

**Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of
rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man;
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?
Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?”
{Job 38:24-28 RSV}**

Here Jehovah is examining the forces in the common phenomenon of a storm, and he says, “Can you understand this, Job?” Many of the scholars have been puzzled by the way this section begins. The question is, “What is the way to the place where the light is distributed?” For years many have wondered why God begins with light being distributed, but at last we have begun to get a little clue as to what this may mean, for now the scientific world knows that all energy comes to us from the sun. It is the rays of the sun, broken into various forms of ray activity – x-rays, actinic rays, rays of various forms – that activate processes in the world around us from which all functioning in the natural world comes. Energy comes from the sun and it produces various phenomena, including the evaporation of water, the formation of clouds; it

produces thunder and the release of great bolts of lightning. All this is coming, ultimately, from the rays of the sun as they strike the earth. It is amazing how much is revealed here that we have painfully worked out after thousands of years of scientific endeavor, but it all seems to fit into what God is saying to and asking of Job.

Then God speaks of the way he takes care of the desert. "Who cares for the desert?" Have you ever flown the entire distance of this country from coast to coast and noticed, as I have, that though we think of this as a populated country, there are hundreds of thousands of acres of desert? "Who cares for that," God says. Who brings the rain to cause the desert blossoms to come that no man ever sees, except God himself? As the poet says,

"Full many a rose is born
to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness
On the desert air."

The only answer, of course, is God does this. Man does not think of those things. He has a hard enough time handling his own problems, let alone taking care of the deserts of the earth.

Then God asks, "Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?" Science now knows that the rain does have a father. Before rain can form into drops, there must be dust in the air, and raindrops form around these little specks of dust. That is why we spray the clouds with certain substances to try to increase the rainfall – because we know the rain has a father.

Then in Verses 29-30 you have *Jehovah's questions about the frost*:

**"From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of
heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen." {Job
38:29-30 RSV}**

Who understands the processes by which ice is formed? We see it happen but nobody has ever been able to answer the question why water, when it freezes, does something that hardly any other substance on earth does. Instead of contracting like all normal substances, water expands when it freezes. That simple fact makes life possible on

earth. It would be impossible to have humanity here if water acted like everything else. But it does not. God is asking some very penetrating questions, and, for him, they are simple ABC's of life, but Job is unable to answer them.

In Verse 31 the Almighty turns to explore the heavens. First, *the stellar heavens*:

**"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?
Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their
season,
or can you guide the Bear with its chil-
dren?
Do you know the ordinances of the heav-
ens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?"
{Job 38:31-33 RSV}**

From the very beginning of time men have known that in some strange way the stars affect the earth. No one has ever been quite able to analyze it. Many wild guesses have been made, and many strange, so-called sciences have emerged from it, such as astrology, which insists that every human life is governed by what the stars do. Many people read their horoscopes every day to see what the stars have said they can do that day.

But that is not what God is asking about here. He is saying, "What about the influence the stars seem to have upon the seasons? The Pleiades, that little circle of stars high in the heavens appears in the springtime, it ushers forth the spring. What he is asking here is, "Can you bring the spring out in its season?" Orion is the mighty hunter who strides across the winter skies. You can see him this month of December. What God is asking Job is, "Can you produce winter, in its season?" "Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth?" It is a bit doubtful as to what that word means, but many of the scholars take it as referring to the constellations that make up the zodiac. He is asking, "Can you control the zodiac and its influence upon the affairs of men?" The Bear is what we call the "Great Dipper," and it points unerringly to the north. (If you stay up all night in the open and observe the stars, you will see them wheel in an endless circle around the north.) So the Great Bear points to the north, and in Scripture the north is always seen as the seat of God, so that the whole universe seems to revolve

around his throne. Job is being questioned here as to how much he understands about this.

Now, even astronomy today does not understand this. There are mysterious objects in space we know nothing about. These great “black holes” are to us a puzzling, mysterious phenomenon that we have not begun to understand. So we cannot go much further than Job in the answering of these questions.

Verses 34-38 cover *the atmospheric heavens*:

**“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?**

[How much would you give today to be able to do that? – to say to the clouds, “Come on, rain!”]

**Can you send forth lightnings,
that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we
are’?**

**Who has put wisdom in the clouds,
or given understanding to the mists?**

Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
[Here’s a tough one!]

**Or who can tilt the waterskins of the
heavens,
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cleave fast together?” {Job
38:34-38 RSV}**

When you have a drought and you desperately need rain, who can say to the heavens “Rain,” and it will come? God is teaching us some mighty lessons right now in this area. He is showing us the impotence of man and of science to solve some of the most fundamental problems of life.

Now in these last three verses, which really belong with Chapter 39, God turns to his providential care of *the animal world*. He begins by saying that he supplies food for them:

**“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?
Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?” {Job
38:39-41 RSV}**

What do you think we would do if God suddenly gave to mankind the responsibility to feed the animal world, as well as ourselves? When you

consider the mess we are making of welfare today, can you imagine how much worse it would be if all the animals had to stand in line for food stamps? Can you see them shivering and dying and starving to death waiting for the red tape of government to grind its eternal way before they get anything to eat? God is saying to Job, “Do you handle that sort of thing?” No, he does not. Yet the animals exist and have existed for centuries. They prosper and increase when man is out of the picture. God preserves the species; it is man who wipes them out.

So he goes on, “What about *obstetrical care for the animals*?”

**“Do you know when the mountain goats
bring forth?**

**Do you observe the calving of the hinds?
Can you number the months that they ful-
fill,**

**and do you know the time when they bring
forth,**

**when they crouch, bring forth their off-
spring,**

**and are delivered of their young?
Their young ones become strong, they grow
up in the open;**

**they go forth, and do not return to them.”
{Job 39:1-4 RSV}**

“Do you handle that? Have you got a big Blue Cross plan for the animal world to take care of them when they come to birth?” No, Job has to hang his head again. He does not know anything about it and neither do we.

So God goes on to examine the varied nature of the animal world. He examines *the wide-ranging freedom of the wild ass*, Verse 7:

**“He scorns the tumult of the city;
he hears not the shouts of the driver.
He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
and he searches after every green thing.”
{Job 39:7-8 RSV}**

“Who made animals to have these distinctive natures and to be driven by such powerful instincts that they will invariably do what they were made to do, and yet not be like other animals in this regard. Who gave them those instincts?” That is the question Job faces.

God speaks then of *the wild ox*,

**“Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will he spend the night at your crib?
Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
or will he harrow the valleys after you?
Will you depend on him because his
strength is great,
and will you leave to him your labor?
Do you have faith in him that he will re-
turn,
and bring your grain to your threshing
floor?” {Job 39:9-12 RSV}**

The untamable nature of certain animals is something that God alone has given them.

Then he speaks of *the stupidity of the ostrich*, and he himself takes the blame for it. This is, I think, one of the most humorous passages in Scripture:

**“The wings of the ostrich wave proudly;
but are they the pinions and plumage of
love?
For she leaves her eggs to the earth,
and lets them be warmed on the ground,
forgetting that a foot may crush them,
and that the wild beast may trample them.
She deals cruelly with her young, as if they
were not hers;
though her labor be in vain, yet she has no
fear;
because God has made her forget wisdom,
and given her no share in understanding.
When she rouses herself to flee,
she laughs at the horse and his rider.”
{Job 39:13-18 RSV}**

An ostrich can outrun a horse, and yet it is so stupid that it walks off and leaves its eggs right out in the open! It will not take care of its young. But God says, “I like it that way, I made her that way.” The ostrich, the camel and some of these other strange animals show that God has a sense of humor.

When I was in Australia I saw the duck-billed platypus, which looks like it was put together from all the left over spare parts of creation. Why does God make animals like that? Well, I think it is largely to show us certain characteristics of our humanity. That is what he is describing here.

In Verses 19-25 you have one of the most beautifully poetic descriptions of *the courage of the horse*:

**“Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with strength?
Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrible.
He paws in the valley, and exults in his
strength;
he goes out to meet the weapons.
He laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;
he does not turn back from the sword.
Upon him rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear and the javelin.
With fierceness and rage he swallows the
ground;
he cannot stand still at the sound of the
trumpet.
When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
He smells the battle from afar,
the thunder of the captains, and the
shouting.” {Job 39:19-25 RSV}**

From time immemorial man has used the horse in battle because the horse has a unique character – he loves conflict and competition.

When I was a boy in high school I had my own horse. He was a kind of maverick, a short animal (his name was Shorty), but he had an unconquerable spirit. He would never let another horse get ahead of him. I had all I could do to keep him under control when some other horse tried to pass him. He would burst himself to get out in front, because he had a competitive spirit. He loved a race, and wanted to be right in it. This is the nature of a horse.

Now who made him that way? That is God’s question.

Then he speaks of the hawk and the eagle, and of their strange ways, the keenness of their sight, and the fierceness of their character.

Finally, he concludes with this question, Chapter 40:

**And the LORD said to Job:
“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Al-
mighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer
it.” {Job 40:1-2 RSV}**

“Are you able, Job? How have you done in this examination? I have asked all these questions. How many have you got right? If you can’t handle these little things, how are you going to press me on these great questions of what lies behind the strange experiences of life?” Verse 3:

**Then Job answered the LORD:
“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I
answer thee?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.” {Job
40:3-5 RSV}**

Job is silenced by this display of God’s creative wisdom. What Job says is, basically, “I see that I am not in the same league as you are. I am of small account.” Remember, earlier he had said, “If I could just come before the Lord, like a prince would I come before him. I would present my case and prove myself right,” {cf, Job 31:37}. But now he says, “I’m not in the same league at all. I’m just small peanuts. I couldn’t handle this.” But notice, he has not gone deep enough yet. Job is silenced, but he is not convinced. He has not yet seen what the basic problem is. He has not learned what God had in mind when he invited Satan to try him in the first place.

So Jehovah picks it up again, and, in the next account, he produces by the use of symbols, a revelation of truth about what he is doing in the life of Job that leaves Job absolutely without an an-

swer, leaves him humbled before him, spread out on his face before God, waiting for God to deliver him and restore him – which he immediately does. But so far he has only been silenced.

This often happens to us. Sometimes our troubles bring us to a place where we shut up. We stop complaining, but that is not what God wants. What he wants is for us to trust him, to put the matter back into his hands and believe that he is working things out right.

God will show us in our next study why he has to do it this way.

Prayer:

Like Job, Father, we bow in silence before you. Who are we to accuse the Almighty? Who are we to charge you with injustice? Who are we to complain about our lot in life and say it is wrong, that we have been treated unfairly? Lord, we too have been silenced, but we pray that you will take us deeper even as you do Job, and in graciousness show to us mighty things that you are working out through the very circumstances of our lives that we never dreamed about. Help us to understand what is going on. We pray that we may bow before your majesty, and humbly and graciously and with sincerity ascribe to you the glory that is due your name. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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The Nature of God

by Ray C. Stedman

All through this book Job has been crying out of his pain, his bewilderment, and his tortured heart for an interview with God, asking God to explain what is happening to him, hoping that he could come before him and ask him some questions about what is going on. Suddenly, God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and grants him his desire. As Job viewed the situation, God in his judgment was unfair with him. He was a righteous man, and God was treating him as though he were unrighteous. Surely there is no more common complaint or experience in the world today than that very attitude. We feel we are being unjustly treated in what our lot in life is, that what is being handed to us is not fair. This is why this book of Job is so eternally relevant to us because it deals with the common problems that all of us face at one time or another. Now Job is going to be taught by God himself what the true situation is, and there is surely no tougher lesson to learn in life. There is nothing more difficult for us than to see where we have been wrong when we were sure we were dead right.

Life itself has a way of teaching this as we grow older. Many of us have had the experience of looking back at some of the convictions of our youth. What we stood for, and were absolutely certain was the right thing to do or the right attitude

to have, we now see to have been wrong. Carl Jung, the great Austrian psychologist, put it this way:

In the second half of life the necessity is imposed of recognizing no longer the validity of our former ideals but of their contraries; of perceiving the error in what was previously our conviction; of sensing the untruth in what was our truth, and of weighing the degree of opposition, and even of hostility, in what we took to be love.

How many of us have felt that way! Looking back, we have seen that what we thought was an action of love was really a self-centered exhibition of our own pride and desire. Life has a way of teaching us that, and that is what God is teaching Job now, helping him to see that his righteousness was an external matter only, and internally there was a deep and serious problem. This is the toughest lesson to learn.

In our last study we saw how God took Job on a great, extended tour of the universe and showed him the kind of a God he was up against, the Being Job was challenging and calling to account. God revealed his creative wisdom in all that he had made, in the manifold forces of nature, and he sub-

jected Job to a penetrating examination on natural subjects. Job was not able to answer a single question – not one! In our so-called days of advanced science, we found that we could only answer parts of two or three questions in that whole series. God also showed Job his providential care over the animal world, and asked him if he could handle that. Job ended that account with his hand on his mouth, silenced, but not convinced.

Now Jehovah takes up the argument again, and in Chapter 40, Verse 6, he brings up another matter with Job:

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

“Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you declare to me.

Will you even put me in the wrong?

Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” {Job 40:6-8 RSV}

God is still speaking out of the whirling wind before Job. What an amazing experience it must have been to have a voice coming out of a whirlwind! God is still employing the great symbol of the Spirit’s power, the mighty rushing wind. This time he brings before Job another issue: “Can you handle the moral government of earth?” Job has already admitted that he is not in God’s league when it comes to understanding the world of nature or caring for the animal creation. Now God says, “What about the moral realm? That is the realm you have been charging me with fault in. Can you handle that? Are you able to put me in the wrong in this area of morality and justice and fairness?”

Then in the next section he invites Job to *mount the throne of God*, as it were, to see what he would do with the problems God has to face. Verse 9,

“Have you an arm like God,

and can you thunder with a voice like his?

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;

clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

Pour forth the overflowings of your anger,

and look on every one that is proud, and abase him.

Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low;

and tread down the wicked where they stand.

**Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.
Then will I also acknowledge to you,
that your own right hand can give you victory.” {Job 40:9-14 RSV}**

This is God’s challenge now to Job: “Can you look and sound like God? Can you clothe yourself with majesty and dignity so that all the created universe is immediately aware that you are a being capable of handling them and all their problems? Can you appear like God, look like God, and especially, can you handle the problem of the proud?” Now God puts his finger on what has been the problem running all through the book of Job; the problem that is in Job’s heart, though he does not know it. “Can you handle the proud? Can you find a way to abase these proud, strutting creatures who think they have all that they need to handle life, and bring them low?”

We know how in our own day what a difficult problem this is. Here in our country we have an organization that everyone calls the “Mafia,” made up of proud men who think they have power to run life to please themselves. They are criminals, basically. They live for their own purposes and advance their own interests. They are parasites on the structure of society. They extract hundreds of thousands of dollars from innocent people. All the power of government and of our judicial system is unable to lay hold of these men and arrest them in their proud, selfish course and stop this kind of pride. We cannot do it. They remain untouched among us for the most part, and they still continue, decade after decade. It is not easy to run the earth. It is not easy to bring justice. God says, “Can you do that, Job? Can you handle proud men and abase them and bring them low and even, if necessary, consign them to the world below? (i.e., to Hades, to hell). Can you do that? If you can, Job, then I will be willing to grant that you are able to handle your own problem and give yourself victory, as you claim you can.”

Now God is moving right in on the problem with Job. In the next sections he brings before us two amazing animals, one called “Behemoth,” a land animal, for the most part, and one called “Leviathan,” a sea creature. Commentators have had a great deal of difficulty trying to determine just which animals in our natural world are referred

to here. Some think that Behemoth is either the hippopotamus, or the elephant, or perhaps the rhinoceros. Others say that Leviathan is the crocodile, though some think it could be the whale. Whatever version you read will present these animals in one form or another according to the interpretative conviction of the commentator, or the editors of the version.

For the most part I think it is a waste of time to argue which animals are here before us simply because the language employed here clearly goes beyond the actual realm. In the last section where God was taking Job through a tour of his created universe, all the animals were recognizable and were in line with what anyone can still observe in nature about these animals though they were described in poetic language. But here you have something that goes beyond the natural. Therefore, some of the commentators have felt these are mythical creatures, legendary creatures, like the unicorn and the dragon. But I think if we admit that this is mythical language, we can also see that it very likely is referring not to myth, but to supernatural beings. These beasts that appear here are symbolic beasts, tied to animals in the natural realm as symbols of that which is invisible and supernatural.

The reason I think that this is a warrantable conclusion is because this is what Scripture does in many places. In the books of Daniel, and Zechariah, and Revelation, forces on earth are symbolized by beasts – beasts that rise up out of the sea and beasts that come up on the land. They symbolize movements and individuals and leaders, and even invisible and supernatural powers. Here we have another example of that very kind of thing. In fact, we are given some help in some of the other Scriptures to recognize what some of these beasts are. Isaiah 27 tells us plainly what Leviathan represents. In the opening verse of Chapter 27, Isaiah says,

In that day [referring to the final day, the great day of the LORD] the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” {Isa 27:1 RSV}

It is very interesting that the names of these beasts in Hebrew mean something very significant. *Behemoth* is the Hebrew word for “beasts” (in the plural, not just a beast but all beasts seemingly lumped together are symbolized by Behemoth), while *Leviathan* means “the folded one.” You can see in that the description of a dragon with the elongated body that is always represented as folded up, like a snake with its loops. Here in Isaiah we are told very plainly that Leviathan is that twisting, folded serpent that is also called “the dragon that is in the sea.”

Now your mind, I am sure, has already run ahead to the great section of the book of Revelation where in Chapter 13 you have two beasts emerging that dominate the scene in the last days. One is a beast that comes up out of the sea, and that beast reigns over the waters which, we are told in Revelation, represent the multitudes of peoples of the earth. The other beast is a beast that comes up on the land. Behind both of these beasts is still a third incredible animal called the great dragon (of Chapter 12). There we are told plainly that that dragon is Satan, and he gives his power and authority to the beasts. Now tracing this symbolism through, and applying it here in the book of Job, I believe that it is warranted that we should say that these beasts represent a satanic power made visible in terms of our earthly existence.

The first of these beasts, Behemoth, represents the satanic twist that we all labor with and struggle against in our own lives which the Bible calls *the flesh*, the fallen nature within us, our humanity, with its continual desire to assert itself and live for itself.

The second beast represents *the world* in all its vast influence upon every one of us, pressuring us to conform, to reflect the values and attitudes of those around us, dominating all our thinking and all our life in every possible way.

Behind them both is *the devil*, with his malevolent, cunning wisdom and power, incredible in his might and his control of human events.

What God, then, is setting before Job is a very pertinent question for all of us: “Are you able to handle the enemy within, and the enemy without, especially that malicious being who is behind them all – the world, the flesh, and the devil?”

One biblical commentator, Mr. Wordsworth, puts it this way:

It seems probable that Behemoth represents the evil one acting in the animal and carnal elements of man's own constitution, and that Leviathan symbolizes the evil one energizing as his external enemy [i.e., man's external enemy]. Behemoth is the enemy within us; Leviathan is the enemy without us – the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, with that to guide us as we look at these two beings, let us see *how God sets them before Job*, Verse 15:

**“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you;
he eats grass like an ox.
Behold, his strength is in his loins,
and his power in the muscles of his belly.
He makes his tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are knit together.
His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like bars of iron.” {Job 40:15-18 RSV}**

Incredible strength! Total self-sufficiency! That is the picture here. An animal so well adapted to its environment that it is totally self-sufficient – the symbol of strength and sufficiency.

Verse 19 is very interesting:

**“He is the first of the works of God;
let him who made him bring near his sword!” {Job 40:19 RSV}**

That is another of those verses which in the original Hebrew language is difficult to understand. Perhaps another translation from the New English Bible would help us at this point. That version reads,

**He is the chief of God's works,
made to be a tyrant over his peers!” {Job 40:19 NEB}**

Here is an animal that stands for that sense of tyranny that wants to rule over everyone else. It is the picture of self-centeredness, that tyranny within us that wants to be in domination and in control of everything in our lives.

Jehovah goes on, Verse 20:

**“For the mountains yield food for him
where all the wild beasts play.
Under the lotus plants he lies,
in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.
For his shade the lotus trees cover him;
the willows of the brook surround him.
Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened;
he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.
Can one take him with hooks,
or pierce his nose with a snare?” {Job 40:20-24 RSV}**

The obvious answer to all those questions is “Here is a being that is so self-sufficient and so completely in control that he is filled with self-confidence no matter what happens to him.” So you have the qualities of self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, and self-confidence. What better description of this enemy within us, our inheritance from Adam, this independent spirit that says “I don't need God nor anyone else. I'm sufficient unto myself.”

I read four descriptions the other day concerning British people:

A Welshman prays on his knees and on his neighbors;
A Scotsman keeps Sunday and everything else he can lay his hands on;
An Irishman does not know what he believes but is ready to die for it; and,
An Englishman is a self-made man and worships his creator!

Though we may laugh at that application to British people, it applies to the whole human race. We are all like this. We uphold this independent spirit. We glorify it in our movies and television. We hold it up before our young people as something to be aped and followed. We acclaim it as “the American way of life”! It is all characterized by self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, and self-confidence. We take courses to increase this spirit within us. Yet God says that is the enemy; that is what we have to overcome.

Then in Chapter 41 we get this other animal, *Leviathan, coming before us*. The first was a land animal; this is a water animal, and we get a vivid, detailed description of it throughout this account.

First, his untamability:

**“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook,
or press down his tongue with a cord?
Can you put a rope in his nose,
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
Will he make many supplications to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?
Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant for ever?
Will you play with him as with a bird,
or will you put him on leash for your maidens?
Will traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him up among the merchants?”** {Job 41:1-6 RSV}

In all the course of human history, who has ever been able to reform the world and to make it serve the ends of humanity? The whole nature of the struggle of history is to take the world system, with all its many problems of relationships, its pride and all its self-sufficiency, and make it serve the ends of humanity. This is why every government, every administration, struggles with the same problems. It has been true all the way back through history to the earliest dawn of recorded events. No one has ever been able to master the problems of the world and its ways, because our system is wrong. Every generation of young people growing up senses it deep in its bones and somehow finds a means of expressing its revolt against “the system.” This is the system that is described to us here. It lays its heavy hand of control upon all of us and insists that we conform to its system of values, its illusions of what are important and profitable in life. We all find ourselves constantly living under this tremendous pressure and finding ourselves unable to resist it, just as it is described here. We cannot make it serve us, we cannot control it.

Then God goes on to describe how unconquerable it is, Verse 7:

**“Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
or his head with fishing spears?**

**Lay hands on him; think of the battle;
you will not do it again!
Behold, the hope of a man is disappointed;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.
No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.”** {Job 41:7-10a RSV}

Think back through history of all the proud conquerors with their fierce spirit that would not brook opposition. How many times we have been afraid to try to oppose them!

Then in the second half of Verse 10 and in Verse 11, God interjects a little parenthesis for Job to consider. “If you cannot handle this beast,” he says,

**“Who then is he that can stand before me?
Who has given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”** {Job 41:10b-11 RSV}

What God argues is, “Job, if you cannot handle the scrub team, what are you going to do when the varsity plays?” Or as Jeremiah puts it, “If you are faint and weary when you run with the footmen, what are you going to do against horses?” God says, “I handle Leviathan all the time. That is my problem, and I can handle it. But Job, what are you going to do? If you cannot handle him, how do you ever hope to challenge me?” It is a good question for Job to consider.

Then God goes on to describe Leviathan further. He speaks of his ability to defend himself, Verse 12:

**“I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.
Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who can penetrate his double coat of mail?
Who can open the doors of his face?
Round about his teeth is terror.
His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.
One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.”** {Job 41:11-17 RSV}

You can see why many have thought this was the crocodile because of the description of the overlapping shields on his back and sides. But the next section goes far beyond the crocodile. It is obviously a picture of a deeply-entrenched, well-defended system that cannot be overthrown. Here we read of his awesome fierceness and frightening power, Verse 18:

**“His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the
dawn.
Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.
Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.
In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.
The folds of his flesh cleave together,
firmly cast upon him and immovable.
His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the nether millstone.
When he raises himself up the mighty are
afraid;
at the crashing they are beside them-
selves.” {Job 41:18-25 RSV}**

What a picture of incredible strength and power – the great dragon breathing out flame from his nostrils and wiping out everything that comes against him!

Then we have a section again on his invulnerability, how irresistible he is, Verse 26:

**“Though the sword reaches him, it does not
avail;
nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
He counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
The arrow cannot make him flee;
for him slingstones are turned to stubble.
Clubs are counted as stubble;
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.
His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledges
on the mire.” {Job 41:30 RSV}**

Then his power:

“He makes the deep boil like a pot;

**he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be hoary.”
{Job 41:31-32 RSV}**

Finally, the secret of his life, his pride:

**“Upon earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.
He beholds everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.” {Job
41:33-34 RSV}**

What a creature! What a being! This incredible beast is king over all the sons of pride. He teaches men how to act in pride and independence and self-sufficiency. He works it into a vast system of control that lays over all industry, labor, government, art and music, social and economic intercourse of every kind, and works it all together so that it rises up against God and his power and his might. This is the beast that Job is up against.

Now God’s question is, “Job, are you able to handle this?” Of course, God has brought Job to an awareness that these are the very things Job has in his own heart and life, and they represent a power over which he has no control.

Now I think at this point (though it is not said in the account), God has made clear to Job what we were informed of at the very beginning of this book: that behind his sickness, his pain, and his protracted agony lies this intense struggle with the satanic power. We know that this is the way the book began, but Job did not know that until this point.

Now, at last, he is given a strong hint that the reason behind his illness is not his own failure or his own willful misdeeds, but a deep and serious problem so embedded in his nature that he is not even aware that it exists – yet it is destroying him. This is what God has to deal with, and this is what he still deals with, with us.

Now we get **Job’s reaction**, Chapter 42:

**Then Job answered the LORD:
“I know that thou canst do all things,
and that no purpose of thine can be
thwarted.” {Job 42:1-2 RSV}**

His first reaction is a new view of God himself. Notice the distinction he makes here, or the subjects he brings out: “I know that thou canst do all things.” God is omnipotent. Job knew that at the very beginning. Now he sees it expanded tremendously, but also he sees the sovereignty of God: “that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.” The amazing mystery is that nothing that God ever plans ever sets aside man’s responsibility. Yet nothing man ever chooses thwarts the purpose God intends to carry out.

Isn’t that amazing?

Job has now learned that God is a sovereign being, and that all he does is right. It is not only mighty, but it is right. It is in line with his character of love. He is consistent, ever, with himself. Then Job, when he sees God this way, sees himself rightly. This is always true. If we cannot understand ourselves it is because we do not know our God. When man loses God he always loses himself. When man discovers God he finds himself. This is what Job sees.

Now he has *a new view of himself*.

‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? [He is quoting God’s first address to him.]

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.

‘Hear, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you declare to me.’ [Here he is quoting God’s second address to him.]

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,

but now my eye sees thee;

therefore I despise myself,

and repent in dust and ashes.” {Job 42:3-6 RSV}

Notice the difference – “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.” The inner eye of the heart sees the nature of God. And the result? Job says, “I despise myself.”

Now that is repentance. What he is really doing is agreeing with what God says about him. He quotes what God says twice. He says, in effect, “Lord, you asked me, ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ You are right, Lord. It is

me. That is what I have been doing. I am an ignorant man. I do not know enough to begin to challenge the wisdom of the Almighty. I am an ignorant, limited man who speaks without even knowing what he is talking about. You are quite right, Lord, it is me.”

Then he quotes God again: “Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.” He is saying, “Lord, you are right about that, too. I have been an arrogant man. I have been thinking I could answer your questions, and that I would even ask you questions that you could not answer. Lord, I have been an arrogant man. I see it now. Something within me has been proud, lifted up, self-righteous, confident that I was right. I have been wrong all along.” So, he says, “Lord, I despise myself.”

Job has never been in this place before. He is learning at last the hardest lesson of life, what God seeks to teach us all: the problem is never in others, or in God, the problem is in us. And it is a problem that only God can handle. We are unable, unequipped to handle it ourselves. All we can do is put it back in his gracious hands.

Now it looks as though God has humiliated Job and brought this poor, broken-hearted man down into the dust almost cruelly. Yet it is not cruelty, it is love – because, at this point, when Job has finally given up trying to defend himself and justify himself, God begins to heal and to pour into this man’s life blessing he never dreamed of.

Now this is the story of the whole of Scripture, isn’t it? Everywhere the Scriptures seek to tell us this. Jesus said. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, the men and women who are bankrupt in themselves, who stop counting on what they’ve got to make it. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

God will begin to heal a life that repents before him and begin to fill it with blessing and honor and glory and power. None of these things will be worth one whit of the glory and joy we have discovered in coming into a relationship with God himself.

That is what we are going to see in the closing section of Job. Here he is, now, confessing his sin, but discovering the gift of forgiveness.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this searching and penetrating look at our own hearts and lives. How proud we have been, how filled with self-justification, with complaints before you, the living God. Lord, teach us to

put our hand upon our mouth, and to do more than that, to admit to you that the problem lies with us, and put it back into your loving hands that by your redemptive grace, you will heal us and restore us. We thank you for the glorious gift of forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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The New Beginning

by Ray C. Stedman

We last saw our friend Job flat on his face before God. He had been shown two unforgettable aspects of God's glory and character. You recall how God took him on a trip through the world of nature and showed him his creative power and wisdom, not in mysteries beyond men's ken, but in the simple things all around him. God asked him questions, but he could not answer. Neither can we, with our advanced science today. By means of this, God showed Job that he was entirely out of his league in trying to question God's ways and God's wisdom. What God did was so far beyond what man can even remotely dream, there is no comparison at all, and no possibility of challenge.

Then God took Job on a tour of the moral problems of the universe. Using the symbolism of two great beasts, Leviathan and Behemoth, God showed him the depth of evil in humanity, what the New Testament calls "the mystery of lawlessness," and why it is that every generation has to struggle with the same problems. We make no moral advance from century to century, but wrestle with the same difficulties that people wrestled with thousands of years ago, even at the dawn of history. There is some deep embodiment of evil in the human heart that God shows to Job through the symbolism of these two ferocious, unconquerable

beasts. As Job learns that these are the problems in his own heart, problems that God has to deal with, he bows before him. Before this breathtaking vision of God's power and might and glory and wisdom, Job repents in dust and ashes and cries out to God.

Now, in Chapter 42, beginning with Verse 7, we come to a new beginning, and this is a very appropriate section for this New Year's Sunday. Job has learned his lesson now. He saw that there were depths and degrees of pride and self-sufficiency in himself that he was not aware of. Surely there is nothing more difficult for us to learn than the fact that there are things in us that we are not conscious of. We think we are doing well. Our own view of ourselves is rather superficial, and we think everything is right. It is a shocking revelation to us to learn that what we thought to be love was really nothing but self-centeredness, playing the game by which we get something back in return. What we thought to be righteous behavior was really nothing but a manipulation of someone else.

This is what Job has learned. He thought he could trust God through any circumstance of life. He was confident in his own ability to serve God, like Peter saying to Jesus, "Everyone else will deny you but I will never do so; you can count on me,"

{cf, Matt 26:35, Mark 14:31, Luke 22:61}. So in a sense Job, quite honestly and earnestly from his heart, had been saying to God, "I'll stay with you no matter what." For a while he held in there, but now God has shown him that without divine help he is totally weak, thoroughly undependable. Job has seen his guilt and admitted it before God, and has repented.

Now it is the three friends' turn, and in Chapter 42, beginning with Verse 7, Jehovah summons Eliphaz, the leader of the three, before him. These friends dropped out of sight for a while when Elihu came on the scene, but now God calls them before him, Verse 7:

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." {Job 42:7-8 RSV}

That sentence from God must have had a stunning effect upon Eliphaz and his two friends, for the one thing they had been sure of all through this account was that they were defending the righteousness of God. They were zealous for God's honor, and they must have prided themselves on the fact that they were standing for God's righteousness. They were upholding his sovereignty among men, they were scathing in their denunciation of human pride and evil and now, to their startled amazement, they are charged by God himself with defaming him. That must have been a hard blow to their pride.

This chapter seems to us to be filled with surprises. One of the surprising things to these men was the discovery that all their vaunted concern and zeal for the honor of God was regarded as worthless in his sight. They are charged with defaming the name of God.

Well, what is it that they said that God took such offense to? You recall that they formulated a theory of suffering that made God out to be nothing but an arbitrator of justice, a great cosmic judge

who visited punishment upon those who did wrong, without exception and instantly, and he rewarded those who did right with prosperity and blessing. This was the kind of God they set before people, a great judge of all men, but not at all concerned with compassion, love, mercy, and patience. Thus the God they set before men was a God far from reality. They did indeed distort the Being of God.

Now I find a lot of Christians like this. The God they picture before people is one who is wholly concerned with truth, as though that is all there were; who is deeply offended by sin – and he is – but who instantly visits it with some kind of condemnation and judgment. They picture God as a very stern and harsh Being who is leaning over the battlements of heaven, ready to cry "Cut that out!" the minute anybody steps out of line. That is why the world gets very distorted views of what God is like. That is what these three friends were doing, though they did not mean to. They meant to uphold God's righteousness, but they said nothing about his mercy, his compassion, his patience, his willingness to reach out and wait for men and give them opportunity to repent.

The Bible says that God sends the rain upon the just and the unjust alike {cf, Matt 5:45}. God's blessings are not withheld from those who are wrong and who are rebellious. He gives them family life. He gives them joy, times of pleasure, and times of peace. As Romans puts it, it is the goodness of God that is designed to lead to repentance, that men may understand where their blessings are coming from {cf, Rom 2:4}.

That is why we in the West have been put through a school time recently as to who runs the weather. Some of us thought it was the Weather Bureau. Now we know better. We know they cannot do a thing. It is God who sends rain, who, as Job so beautifully puts it, "tilts the wineskins in the heavens," and lets the rain drop upon us. God allows these things to come in order that we might understand the basis of human blessing and repent of our wickedness and our rebellion and turn back to him. This is what these friends have failed to set before men. They set forth a distorted God.

Then, as you look back through the book, remember they charged Job with hypocrisy, and even with outright wickedness, without any basis in fact whatsoever. This man, who morally was perfect

and upright in his conduct – even God himself said so – they charged with being a hypocrite and with hiding some deep and terrible sin in his heart. All his troubles came from the fact that he was unwilling to admit some awful thing that he had done, they said, and they increased the torment of this poor man’s suffering by these false accusations. In doing so, they represented themselves as the mouthpiece of God; they were speaking as though God himself was charging Job with this. Now God takes offense at that. They were doing the devil’s work. The devil is the accuser of the brethren {cf, Rev 12:10}; is the accuser in heaven and the destroyer on earth. These men, unwittingly, find themselves victims of the devil’s lies, and they have become his instruments to torment Job. So God calls them to account. He says that his wrath is kindled against them because they have been guilty of these things.

Perhaps we are also surprised that twice in this account God says that Job said what was right about him. We have never seen any recognition up to this time that Job had said things right. In fact, the whole book is aimed at pointing out that Job was wrong in his attitude about God. Although both the friends and Job say some wonderfully true things about God, and there are great passages of brilliance and glory that depict something of the power and beauty and wisdom of God, nevertheless, Job himself had admitted now that he spoke in ignorance and folly, and he repents of this and puts his hand upon his mouth. So it is rather surprising that God twice admits that Job has said that which is right about him.

In what way did he say what was right?

- First, I think, if you look back through this you will see that when Job could see no sin in himself he did indeed charge God with unfairness, but the moment God showed him the sin that was still deeply embedded in his heart he immediately repents. There is no hesitation, there is no argument, there is no self-defense. He admits immediately that the problem was in him and not in God.
- Second, remember that Job was always true to the facts as he saw them. Now he did not see them very clearly, and there are things about himself and about God’s rule in the universe

that he did not understand, but to the point where he did see things, he was always honest. There was no distorting or twisting of the facts to fit an inadequate theology. He did not try to kid himself, and he did not try to admit to things that could not see were true. He was always brutally honest and forthright.

- Third, as you remember the account, he took his problem to God, even though God was his problem. That is an admirable thing in Job. You remember how all through the account he is breaking into prayer constantly. Out of the torment and anguish that he feels, he always ends up laying his complaint before God. Now the friends never pray for Job. They never ask God to relieve his suffering; they never ask for help or wisdom or understanding on their part. They simply ignore all contact with the living God themselves, but Job is forever crying out before God and bringing his problems, his bewilderment and his bafflement unto the Lord himself and asking for wisdom and help. Remember how Jesus said to the people in his day, “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” {cf, Matt 11:28}.
- Finally, when Job does repent, he declares without restraint and without reservation that God is God, that he is holy and wise and just and good, even when he seems to be different. Ultimately, that is the highest expression of faith – that we do not trust our human observations of what is happening. We understand the limitations to our humanity and we do not assume that we have all the facts by which we can condemn and judge a holy God. That is what Job does. He pronounces God as just and holy in all that he does.

Now, however, to the credit of these three friends, they too immediately obey God when he tells them what is wrong. Look at Verse 9,

So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamanite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer. {Job 42:9 RSV}

There is no resistance on their part either, no argument, even though it means they have to go with their hat in their hand to Job and ask him to pray for them. Can you imagine how humiliating that must have been, after all the proud things they had said against him, and how they had put him down and scorned him? Now they have to come and say, “Job, old friend, we’re sorry for all we said. God has asked us to ask you to pray for us.” But they do this. They bring the offering of seven bulls and seven rams. Now, seven is the number of perfection in Scripture, and the bull is always the picture of service, perfect service, even unto death. That is the meaning of the offering of seven bulls. The ram in the Bible is the picture of energy, and seven rams offered is the total commitment of their energies unto God, even unto death. In this burnt offering they are picturing the true basis of their acceptance before God – not their own service for him, but that which is represented by that great and all-sufficient substitute for man’s wrongdoing – Jesus himself.

All these offerings of the Old Testament picture Christ. They are the way the Old Testament saints looked to the work of Christ, just as we do in looking back to the cross. These offerings were a picture of the cross of Christ. As these men offered these bulls and rams, it was a way of indicating that they understood that before God, man’s honor is laid low and even his best efforts are shown to be folly. They turn from all this to that perfect substitute for man, the righteousness of Christ, and accept what God gives in man’s place.

All of us get angry with God because he has rejected our service, our efforts on his behalf. I would hardly dare ask you to raise your hands, those of you who have felt angry and upset with God because he did not, apparently, recognize all the good things you had done for him this last year. That is the way we feel. But the thing he labors to show us is that none of that can ever stand in his presence. The New Testament tells us that “No flesh shall glory in his presence,” {1 Cor 1:29 KJV}. We must rest only on that sacrifice made on our behalf, the righteousness of Christ himself.

Now, notice also God’s insistence on intercessory prayer here. What an interesting thing this is. God tells these friends, “There will be no pardon for you without Job’s petition on your behalf. If

you want to be received and forgiven you must not only bring the sacrifices, but my servant Job must pray for you.” What an instructive lesson this is on what prayer is. Many of us, I think, grow up with the idea that prayer is a kind of a way that has been given to us to manipulate God to do what we want, a kind of heavenly Aladdin’s lamp that we can rub, sometimes for a half-hour at a time, and feel God is going to suddenly appear as the genie and bow and say, “Master, what do you want me to do for you?” But prayer is not that. Prayer is not the way we get God to do what we want. Prayer is the way by which God enlists us in what he is doing. This is what is underscored in this passage, and it is so important that God says that without prayer he will not do it! Remember it is James in the New Testament who reminds us of Job. James tells us, “You have not because you ask not,” {cf, Jas 4:2b}. How impoverished our lives are, and the lives of our friends and loved ones, simply because we think prayer is unimportant and we do not bother to pray for one another. God underlines this here: “Your friends will not be accepted, Job, unless you pray for them.” When Job prayed, they were indeed forgiven and pardoned.

Now, what a beautiful picture of forgiveness here! I love to picture this scene in my imagination. Here is Job’s chance, if he ever wanted it, to get even with these friends. When God sent them to him with their hat in their hand asking for pardon and asking for his prayers, how easy it would have been for him to have said, “Aha! I thought you’d come around, you stinkers you! You were the ones who gave me all that trouble. You ran me down, you falsely accused me, you said all those evil things about me, and now I’ve got you where I want you. I’ll let you sweat a little bit. I’m going to get even with you!” That is what many of us would have said, but it is obvious that Job does not do that.

I wish we could have heard his prayer. I am sure it would have been something like this: “O Lord, here are these three friends of mine. They’ve been stubborn, hard-headed, foolish, ignorant men, just as I was, Lord. You forgave me, and now I ask you to forgive them as well.” What a beautiful spirit of forgiveness is exercised here. Job might have said, “I called them miserable comforters, and that’s what they were. I suggested that they were

so proud and cocky that they were the people, and wisdom would die with them. But Lord, I was just as proud and just as ignorant. You forgave me, and so, Lord, I ask you to forgive them as well.” It says that the Lord heard Job’s prayer and accepted it, and the friends were forgiven.

Doesn’t that remind you of Paul’s words in Ephesians 4, when he wrote to the Christians and said, “Be ye kind, tenderhearted, one to another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you,” {cf, Eph 4:32} I do not think there is anything more contrary to a Christian’s spirit than an unforgiving heart, a grudge against someone else, Christians refusing to talk to someone, or being cold and frosty in their relationships with each other. Nothing is more removed from the spirit of Christian forgiveness than that. What a beautiful thing, to see Job praying for his friends without a vestige of resentment or an attempt to get even on his part, but holding them up before God, and God honoring that prayer, forgiving these men and restoring them to his grace, withholding his punishment, and blessing their lives.

Now, in the next section, Verses 10-13, we get a picture of **the restoration** that God brought into Job’s life:

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house, and they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. He also had seven sons and three daughters. {Job 42:10-13 RSV}

This is what James calls “the end of the Lord,” or, in the Revised Version, “the purpose of the Lord” {Jas 5:11}, revealing him to be compassionate and merciful. Now, God did not suddenly become compassionate and merciful to Job; he has

been that way all along. God’s character, unchanging, is compassion and mercy. He is love. This is what we must remember. Though he puts us through times of trials and pressures and hardships, as he did Job, it is not because he is angry and upset, it is because he is compassionate and merciful. If we wait, he will bring us to the place where we will see that as plainly and clearly as Job did. So the end of the Lord, the purpose of the Lord, is to reveal his own heart of compassion and mercy to this dear old man.

There is a beautiful passage in Jeremiah’s Lamentations that I think we must always remember when we are going through trials and afflictions. I would urge you to memorize it as you face 1978. It is a great passage for a new year.

**For the LORD will not
cast off forever,
but, though he cause grief, he will have
compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast
love,
for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve the sons of men.**

{Lam 3:31-33 RSV}

Isn’t that encouraging? He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men. He will do it because he loves us and we need it, but he does not do it lightly. He feels with us in it. As a good parent with his children, he hurts worse than we do at times. He does not willingly do it. “Though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.” I think we need to recall that when we are put through times of pressure and danger.

Now God moves Job’s relatives and friends to *bring him gifts* of silver and gold. (I commented already on this last week in our Christmas meditation, which, by the way, is not intended to be a part of this series on Job – it was a meditation. The exposition of the passage is what I am attempting this morning.) But perhaps these gifts of silver and gold that these friends and relatives brought were God’s way of providing a foundation of the wealth that he is to bring Job. At any rate, as the text tells us, Job ended up with double everything that he had before:

- He started out with seven thousand sheep, and ended up with fourteen thousand.
- He had three thousand camels, and now he has six.
- He started out with five hundred yoke of oxen and now he has a thousand.
- He once had five hundred she-asses, but that is doubled now to one thousand.

“Well,” you say, “God doubled everything but his sons and daughters. He ended up with seven sons and three daughters, just like he had at the beginning.” No. You forget he has seven sons and three daughters in heaven, and seven sons and three daughters more on earth, so God indeed gave Job double everything that he had to start with. That is the mercy of God. He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men, but longs to give them blessing when they come to the place where they can handle the blessing that he wants to give.

Now, there is another surprise here, in Verse 14. The focus of the chapter now comes upon *the daughters of Job*:

And he called the name of the first Jemimah; and the name of the second Keziah; and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land there were no women so fair as Job’s daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. {Job 42:14-15 RSV}

Last night I was talking with a lady who is expecting a baby, and I asked her if she had picked any names yet. She said she had been working on some names for girls and boys. If any of you are looking for some girls names, here are some excellent suggestions: Jemimah (that is always connected with molasses); Keziah (that sounds like Kizzie in Alex Haley’s book, *Roots*), and Keren-happuch. We will look at these significant names in a moment.

The fascinating thing about this account is that the whole Scripture seems to focus now on the daughters of Job instead of the sons. In Chapter 1 it was the sons who were in the forefront. They had a birthday party every year and they invited their sisters to come and share with them, but here,

at the end of the book, it is the daughters of Job. Now, being the father of four beautiful daughters myself, I know how Job must have felt about them. (It would have been a mistake to ask Job about his children, because you would have had to wait as he drew out all the pictures and gone through them all with you!) He was proud of these daughters. In fact, he gave them an inheritance among their brothers, which was absolutely unheard of in the culture of that day.

If women’s lib were wanting a text from Scripture, I would think this would be an excellent one, for the whole point of the passage is that these daughters were made to share alike in the inheritance that they were given. I believe that is symbolic, for the story of this book is the story of a man who, as far as he knew himself, wanted to serve God, was upright and morally strong, and did his very best to do what God wanted, but was unconscious of the level of evil that was in his heart and life. On those terms he was living what we would call today the “natural life,” the life of those around. The best of men at times will live moral, clean, upright lives; Job was like that. I believe he was a true believer; I am not implying that he was not. But he was living as though he had not yet discovered truth about God that would take him to that deeper level of life called the spiritual life:

- By the end of the book he has learned not to trust himself for anything at all.
- By the end of the book he has learned that he cannot, in his own strength, do anything acceptable before God.
- By the end of the book he has come to the place where he has cast everything upon the grace of God and is taking his righteous standing before God totally from God’s gift to him.

He is taking his stand in the great mediator of whom he himself has spoken throughout this book. On those terms, as the New Testament tells us, if any man be in Christ there is neither male nor female, but all share alike in the glory of God and in the inheritance that is ours in Jesus Christ our Lord, {cf, Gal 3:28}. Spiritually, there are no distinctions. That is what is brought out so beautifully at the end of this book.

Now, I have suggested that the names are significant, and here are the meanings of them:

- *Jemimah* means “dove.” As you know, throughout the Scriptures, and even in our culture today, the dove is the symbol of peace.
- *Keziah* is another spelling of the word *cassia*, and, you recall, when the wise men brought their gifts to the infant Jesus, they brought gifts of cassia, aloes, and myrrh, all of which were fragrances, incenses, expensive, rare, beautiful. Cassia, therefore, is an incense, or a fragrance. That is the symbolism of it.
- *Keren-happuch* literally means “the horn of adornment,” and is a reference, therefore, to the outward beauty that comes from an inward character.

What you have here then is peace, fragrance, and beauty as the fruits of Job’s trials. Surely, as the text says, there were none so fair in all the land as these.

The New Testament, in Romans 5, tells us that suffering does this to those who learn to take it as the evidence of God’s love. “Suffering,” Paul says, “produces patience, and patience produces character, beauty, fragrance, peace.” “And character produces hope, hope that you are realizing the kind of person you want to be, and hope does not make us ashamed,” Paul says {cf, Rom 5:3-5}. It leaves us confident and sure of our God and of the power and resources of the spiritual life. That is what we have here at the close of this book. We are focused in on this in order to teach us what came out of Job’s trial.

Now the book ends on a note of **contentment and peace**:

And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days. {Job 42:16-17 RSV}

He was probably about seventy when the book opens, so he is a good old man, even older than me! What a picture of peace, a contented man. God had greatly blessed him.

Now, as we come to the beginning of 1978, before us stretches a new year, a new beginning. The old is past, put away for ever. God invites us always to forget about all the distrust and all the fears, all the anxieties of the past, all the resentments we have been holding against others, all the grudges, all the criticisms – to put them away and begin again. The question that is over us as we close this book (and I feel it deeply in my own heart), is, “On what basis am I going to live 1978. Will it be on the old basis of it-all-depends-on-me, do-it-yourself goodness before God, trying my best to be pleasing to God and meaning it with all my heart but never realizing the depths of evil with which I have to deal?” Or will it be accepting the gift of God which is waiting for me every day, fresh from his hand, a gift of forgiveness, of righteousness already mine, of a relationship in which he is my dear father and I am his cherished, beloved son, and that I have, therefore, provided to me all I need, all day long, to say “no” to evil and “yes” to truth and right?

Will it be on that basis?

- If it is, 1978 will be a year in which my life will be characterized by peace, fragrance, and beauty. And so will yours.
- Or, if we insist on living it on the same old basis, we will find ourselves like these friends of Job, arousing the anger and the wrath of God. Though he is patient and merciful, our only escape will be to repent of our evil and rest upon the righteousness of our perfect substitute, and return to God for the blessing that he is waiting to give.

That is the choice before us, every one of us. How are we going to live 1978?

Prayer:

Our hearts reflect these words, Lord Jesus. We sense the beauty of your life, the glory of your character. We know that it is your purpose to reproduce that in us, that we shall be like you. We thank you for what you are doing to bring it about. We thank you for the pressure, the pain, the trials, the disappointments, the afflictions that

come upon us, Lord, by which you produce your likeness in us. Forgive us for our rebellion, for our complaints, for our murmuring against you. Help us to accept your tender mercies, Lord, and to see be-

hind it your loving, compassionate heart, and out of it to bring praise, to the glory of our great God. We pray in your name, Amen.

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Lessons from Job

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Job is far too complex and far too profound to do a “once over lightly” treatment, so I would like to go back this morning and recall to us the great truths that it has brought before us. This is probably the very first book of the Bible that was ever written; it takes us back to the earliest days of man’s redemptive history. Job was probably a contemporary of Abraham. He did not live in the Promised Land; he lived in another country of which we know very little, the ancient land of Uz. Yet his faith reflects that heritage of revelation which had passed down to men and was widely scattered throughout the earth. It had come through the stories that men had told each other, beginning with Adam and Eve, and through their children; passed on down to the days of the Flood, and then carried on beyond that by the sons of Noah. So we have a very early faith represented in the book of Job. Yet, as we have seen in going through it, it is in line exactly with the greater revelation of Scripture which we come to in the Old and New Testaments.

There is a tremendous setting forth of great and marvelous truth in this amazing book. It does what every book of the Bible does to some degree: it strips away the illusions of life and permits us to see life as it really is. Now, in my judgment, there is nothing more valuable about Scripture than that, for we do not live very long without learning, often to our chagrin, that life is not what it really seems to be, that things that we think to be reality and truth turn out to be illusions – delusions if you like. We are surrounded by widely accepted philosophies and ideas that are not true. Men are exhorted to live on the basis of ideas that are false, and we have to learn that. It is very hard for us to do so.

It is very difficult to believe that what we think we see happening is not really what is happening. That is why we struggle so with believing the Bible because it is a book that corrects these false conclusions that our senses often bring us to, and challenges the phony thinking of the world around us. That is why it is so important to come together and let the Spirit of God take the Word of God and set us straight, to correct our thinking and renew our minds, as Paul says in Romans 12. So I would like to go back through the book of Job and pick up the great truths that it sets before us. This book is so complicated in its presentation that sometimes we have gotten lost and have missed or forgotten the truth that came before us earlier.

The first surprise that hit us in Job was in Chapter 1 where we were suddenly taken behind the scenes of this world and shown what goes on when a believer is being tried or tempted. Now, we are all tried and tempted, we are all presented with alluring invitations to get involved with deadly and destructive things, or we are pressured to lose our tempers, or lose our faith, and act in a different way than the Word of God says we should. We always see those temptations as coming to us from a combination of adverse circumstances, or perverse people, or both. We see that our trouble is that things are not working out the way we planned. If God would only straighten out these things and make them work according to our expectations, everything would be fine – or if he would just get rid of some of these troublesome people around us!

But here in the book of Job we see that is not the whole story. What is really happening is that we have suddenly become *the point* in God’s line of

scrimmage (if I may use a football analogy), through which the devil and his angels have decided to try to run the ball. All the pressure of that well-trained, powerful team of evil is directed at us, and we discover that we are the focus of his attack. That is what went on with Job, and that is what goes on in our life as well. We find we are no longer sitting safely on the bench, watching the game and enjoying it. Suddenly, we find ourselves thrust right out in the middle of it. And the most important thing is that we forget that is what is happening. We see it only in terms of what is visible to us.

In reading the book of Job we must never forget what we are introduced to in the first chapter. In facing the problems of our own lives, we must never forget that this book reveals what is happening to us in the midst of the troubles and temptations and pressures that we are being subjected to. That is why we must never forget that life is not a Sunday School picnic. The world around thinks it is, or that it ought to be, that somehow we deserve to have a good time and enjoy ourselves, that that is what we are here for. Now nothing is further from the Christian position:

We are not here to have a good time. God gives us good times, but every one of them comes as a gift of his love and grace; they are never something we deserve.

- We are not here to try to enjoy ourselves, to amass as many comforts we can, and retire to a happy life.
- We are here to fight a battle against the powers of darkness.
- We are here to be engaged in an unending combat with powerful forces that are seeking to control human history.
- We have been called into the battle; we must never forget that.

That is why the Christian cannot plan his life, plan his retirement, like a worldling can. We are living different lives. This is no picnic.

The older I grow the more I learn to see this present, earthly life of mine as I thought once of my time of service in the U. S. Navy during World

War II. I looked forward to the ending of that time of service. I enjoyed it, it was an exciting time, but I looked forward to the end of it. Though I wanted to do well during that time, it was only a temporary period, and the real life would begin when I got out.

We can think of our present life very much as a boy might who goes away to college. He is there to learn something, to get ready for something, not to enjoy himself. Now you can have a lot of fun in college; that is not wrong. But no one goes to school for that purpose – or at least they should not. College is not for spending money and having fun; college is for learning something. And so is life. That is why God has taught us what is going on behind the scenes right here at the beginning of the book of Job. That is reality.

Then this is all connected to that line of truth the book reveals about **the nature of human evil**. What is humanity like in its basic character? As we have gone through this book, we have seen how these friends speak to Job about various wicked people and almost always they speak in terms of murderers, thieves, rapists, fornicators, cruel tyrants, unjust, wretched people. These are the wicked, as these friends see them, but as we pursue the book and the argument of it, it becomes clear that these things that they point out as wickedness are really only the fruit of something deeper in human nature. They are coming from a deep-seated root of pride in fallen humanity, pride that expresses itself as independence, self-sufficiency, “I’ve got what it takes, I can run my own life, I don’t need help from anybody.”

We are determined to always have our own way and to manipulate things so that we get what we want. That is the root. Jesus said it: “Out of the heart of man proceed murders and adulteries and fornication and hostility and anger,” {cf, Matt 15:19, Mark 7:21}. All the evil things of life come from the root of pride. What we learned in this book is that that pride, in its terrible, vicious character, is equally expressed not only in terms of murder, thievery and robbery, but also it can come out, as we have seen in the three friends and even in Job himself, as bigotry and pompousness, as self-righteous legalism, as critical, judgmental attitudes and condemnation of others, as harsh, sarcastic words and vengeful, vindictive actions against

someone else. That is wickedness, just as much. So we learn that human evil is not something confined to the criminals of the land. It is present in every heart, without exception, and it takes various forms. We are only deceiving ourselves when we say that their form is wrong and ours is right. Pride is the root of all sin, and it can express itself in these various ways.

Now, coupled with this is what the book teaches us about **the nature of faith**. Job thought he was exercising faith when he obeyed God and did what was right when it was clearly to his best interest to do so. We find that many people think like that today. They think they are exercising great faith when they believe that God is there, that they are living their lives day by day with the recognition that God is watching and is present in their affairs, and they are doing the right thing because they know that if they do not, they will get into trouble. They call this *living the Christian life*, this is exercising faith. It is a form of exercising faith, I grant you that. It is believing, at least, in the invisible presence of God; but it is a weak faith. Those who live according to that are serving God only when it is in their best interest to do so.

This was the accusation that Satan hurled at God when Job was discussed before him. Satan said, "Job serves you only because you take care of him. If you remove your hand of blessing from him, he'll curse you to your face," {cf, Job 1:11}. Many people are living like this. They are really only serving God as long as he blesses them. The moment the blessing ceases, or difficulty or trial comes, they want to quit serving him. Every week I get evidence of this. Every week some report comes to me of how someone has gotten into some difficulty or some trouble has come, and they have turned their back on what they had professed about their Christian faith and thrown it all over and were living for themselves and for the world. It is weak faith that only serves God when he blesses. We learn from this book that great faith, the kind that makes the world sit up and take notice, is revealed only

- when we serve God when it is difficult to do so,
- when serving him is the hardest thing we can do.

That is what we have here in the book of Job.

Remember the picture the New Testament gives us of the sufferer of Gethsemane who faced that hour in the garden with the recognition that he was afraid of what was coming. He confessed to his own disciples that his heart was exceedingly sorrowful within him, even unto death, and he asked three of them to pray for him and uphold him through a time of deep and terrible pressure upon him. Yet, in that hour of anguish, though he prayed, "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me," reflecting his true humanity, how he shrank from the hour of anguish and pain, nevertheless, by faith, he added the words, "not my will but thine be done," {Matt 26:39}. Now that is great faith. That is what you finally see exhibited here in Job himself. Though he trembles, though he falters, though he fails, the last thing he does is cling in helplessness to God and asks him to do something to explain his perplexity. That is why Job becomes an example of faith. Great faith is being exercised probably when you feel like you are being the least faithful, when you are being so weak that you cannot do anything but cling. In that moment, heaven is looking over and wondering at the greatness of faith. That is what this book teaches us.

All this adds up to the true view, then, of **the nature of fallen man**. Man appears at his best in the person of Job. When this book opens, you have a very beautiful picture of a highly respected and greatly honored man, a sincere, moral, devoted, selfless, godly man who spends his time in deeds of good and help to many people, obviously intent upon doing what God wants. Therefore, we would call him a deserving man, infinitely deserving of God's blessing, because he so faithfully served and followed him. There are many people like that in the world who are not even Christian who live on those terms. They are, in a sense, godly people in that they recognize that there is a God and try to follow him. They are devoted and selfless people, and that is fallen man at his very best.

But what this book is designed to do is strip away all the outward appearances from that and show us Job as he really is. He finally came to see himself as he really was: a self-deceived man. He imagined he had resources in himself to handle life

and problems, resources that he really did not have. This is one of the tremendous lessons of this book.

We too imagine that we have power to stand and be true to what we believe, like boastful, blustering Peter, who said to the Lord Jesus, “I will never deny you. I will lay down my life for you,” {John 13:37}. And he meant every word of it. Yet, when the hour of temptation struck, he found himself as weak as putty, and so do we until we come to realize, as Job did, that he had no resources to stand in himself, that God had to hold him, or he would never be held. Out of his weakness came his strength.

This book shows us that Job discovered he was a lover of status and prestige. When God took away his position in the community, he began to harken back to it and to think longingly of those days when he had a position of high honor and dignity, when he could walk out into the community and people bowed before him and respected him. Job discovered that he liked that. It was what made him keep on serving God, because he had that kind of honor and prestige accorded to him. When all that disappeared, he found himself querulous and angry and upset because he had been denied what he thought was his right.

What this book teaches us is that our hearts, more than we understand, long to share the glory of God. We really do not want to serve God unless we get some glory for ourselves out of it. That is often the reason why we do things – because we are motivated by a desire for status and prestige in the eyes of others. All this is stripped away from Job.

As you read this book you discover that God seems to come across as someone somewhat smaller than Job himself does, that Job’s self-vindication and self-justification makes God look less than he is. That is the terrible evil of that attitude; it robs God of his glory. Remember, in Paul’s word in First Corinthians he says, “No flesh shall glory in God’s presence,” {cf, 1 Cor 1:29}. This is what we find in our own lives very frequently. How this book reveals this to us!

The great theme of the book – and the one for which it is world famous – is its treatment of **the reason for suffering in the Christian life**. None of us struggles when we are told that suffering is sent by God to punish wrongdoers. We have a long

list of names that we could present to God of people who deserve this kind of thing. It is eminently just for God to punish wrongdoers with suffering, we think. People who hurt others and are vicious, cruel, and wicked ought to be made to suffer for what they do. Our whole system of justice is built upon that principle. That is why we put people in jail and fine them, because we are trying to carry out justice through punishing wrongdoing. That satisfies our sense of justice – except when we happen to be the wrongdoers getting punished. Then, of course, it is all very unfair.

We can even handle what the Bible teaches about suffering, that it is sent to awaken us when we are tending to go astray. Even though we are saints, suffering is sometimes sent to wake us up and get our attention, and we can handle that too. We have all had experience of it when we were drifting away and thought everything was going fine. We are tooling along and doing OK, we think, when suddenly some catastrophe strikes, some terrible trouble comes. At first we resent it, and complain bitterly, and ask why should this happen. But it keeps on, and finally we begin to listen to what God is saying. When we listen, we see things that are wrong. Now this is happening in Job; we understand that.

But that is not all that the book of Job teaches us about suffering. There is something far greater than that. This book teaches us something that should have been obvious to us from our reading of the Gospels, and that is the fact that Jesus suffered. Now, obviously, Jesus did not suffer because he was a wrongdoer, nor did he suffer because he needed to have his attention captured by God. He was always sensitively responsive to the Father’s will, and always did that which was pleasing in his sight. Yet his life was filled with suffering from beginning to end – rejection, misunderstanding, disappointment, cruelty, harsh words, and unjust treatment – all the way through, so that he merited the description of the Old Testament, even before the cross, that he was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” {Isa 53:3}.

Why did he suffer? He suffered because suffering, in a Christian, is a way of allowing God to demonstrate that Satan is a liar and a cheat. That is what is going on in the book of Job. Satan had made proclamation before all the universe

- that men served God only because God blesses them, and
- that if you remove the blessing, men would curse God to his face;
- that man does not see any intrinsic value in God himself, but it is only his own self-interest that makes him serve God.

Now, far too often believers have confirmed that lie of Satan. But here in the case of Job, and, as frequently happens in our own experience, suffering is sent to prove

- that Satan is wrong,
- that God will be served even when he does not bless any longer,

because he is God, and he is worthy of the praise and the honor and service of men.

That is why Jesus suffered. He suffered as a demonstration to all mankind that God was still God and was worthy of service no matter what happened. That is why death meant nothing to the Lord. He despised the cross, we are told, "Having his eye fastened on the joy which was beyond, he despised the cross" {cf, Heb 12:2}, and went on to become the great sufferer of Calvary. Job teaches us that suffering is a means by which evil is answered, and God vindicated. Therefore, it is a high and holy and glorious privilege that is granted to some Christians, more than others, to uphold the glory of God in the midst of the accusations of the devil in this world. I hope we will learn to see suffering in that way.

- Sometimes we deserve it.
- Sometimes it comes because of our misdeeds; it comes to awaken us.
- But sometimes it is granted to us because it is a high and holy privilege we have of doing what Paul calls "sharing the sufferings of Christ, filling up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for his body's sake, which is the church," {cf, Col 1:24}.

Some years ago I was introduced to a woman who had just lost her husband and her son in an auto accident. Her heart was broken; she was devastated by this double loss that had suddenly come into her life. When I went to see her she was

weeping, torn-up, hardly even able to speak because she was so overcome by her grief. Somebody had asked me to try to comfort her, but I wondered what to say to her. Looking to God in prayer, I laid my hand on her shoulder and said, "You have been given a very high and holy honor." Glancing up through her tears, she said to me, "What do you mean?" I sat down with her and went through some of the Scriptures, pointing out to her that we are given the privilege of suffering for Christ. Paul puts it that way in Philippians. "It has been given on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his name's sake," {cf, Phil 1:29}. I pointed out to her that God had given her the privilege of bearing difficulty and trial, given her an opportunity to demonstrate that his strength and his love and his grace will continue, despite all the outward circumstances, even the worst of things that life can throw at us. As we talked together, a new look came on her face. She said to me, "I see what you mean." We prayed together and I left her. Later, I heard that her life was such a radiant testimony throughout all that time of struggle that hundreds of people were touched and saw their own sufferings in a different light as a result.

I once had to go see a Christian couple who had just had a Mongoloid baby. I said something very similar to them. I said, "God has called you into very high privilege in giving you this. You're being given a chance to demonstrate something that very few other Christians are asked to bear. If you will see it in that light, what a difference it will make." That couple did take it that way, and their dealings with that child as he has grown have been a constant testimony to scores and scores of people of the goodness and the greatness of God.

Now, this is what you get out of Job. Job is teaching us, by means of the symbolism of these two great beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, how God handles evil. What God is saying to Job is, "Look, you've had a part in this with me. Your suffering, your unexplained torment, the physical affliction that you've been going through, have been the means by which I have been able to lay hold of these two ferocious powers to control them, regulate them, and keep them in bounds in the world. You have been the instrument of it." Job,

therefore, was given a view of the tremendous glory of bearing suffering for the Lord's sake.

Then, of course, the greatest theme of all in this book of Job, and the one that I hope we will remember more than anything else, is that it reveals to us **the character of God himself**. God often appears to us as a cold, impersonal Being, distant from us, uncaring, even ruthless and vindictive, demanding many things from us; a powerful Being, but without compassion.

I am sure if you conducted a poll you would find that that is the most common view of God in the world today. Almost everyone out on the street, if he thinks of him at all, thinks of God as being a rather cold and distant Being, who is powerful and just, hard and demanding, an angry God. That is the common view of what is usually called the "Old Testament God," as though God were two kinds of Beings, one in the Old Testament and one in the New.

But what this book shows is that behind that appearance (and even Job saw him that way for a while), God is always exactly what he is, not ruthless and cold, but actually deeply aware of our problems. He is deeply concerned about us, carefully controlling everything that touches us, limiting the power of Satan and allowing certain expressions, according to his knowledge of how much we can bear. He is patient, forgiving, and ultimately responsible for everything that happens.

In the beginning of this book you have God and Satan and Job. By the end of the book, Satan has faded into the background, completely disappeared. All you have left is God standing before Job, with his arms akimbo, saying to him, "All right, Job, I'm responsible. Any questions?" When Job begins to see what God is working out in his vast, cosmic purposes, and what he is making possible by means of the sufferings of Job, he has no questions to ask whatsoever. The final view of God in this book is of a Being of incredible wisdom who puts things together far beyond the dreams and imaginations of man, who is working out incredible purposes of infinite delight and joy that he will give to us if we wait for his purposes to be worked out fully.

This book mentions a time when "the sons of God shouted with joy" {Job 38:7}, at the creation of the world, but other Scriptures tell us about a time that is coming when the sons of God will be revealed. Paul calls it "the manifestation of the sons of God" {Rom 8:19 KJV}, when all creation will shout in a greater glory than was ever hailed at creation, in the new creation, the new thing that God has brought into being by means of the sufferings, the trials, and the tribulations of this present scene. That is why Scripture speaks in numerous passages about "this slight momentary affliction preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" {2 Cor 4:17 RSV}, and of how "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us," {cf, Rom 8:18}. When that day breaks, the one thing for which we will be infinitely thankful, the one thing above all others that will thrill us and cheer us and cause us to glory, is the fact that out of all the created universe we were chosen to be the ones who bore the name of God in the hour of danger and affliction, problem and trial. There is no higher honor than that. That is what Jesus means when he says, "Blessed are you when men persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your honor before the Father. For so persecuted they the prophets who were before you," {cf, Matt 5:11-12 RSV}.

Now, the sufferings of Christ involve more than just reproach for his name's sake. They involve illness, affliction, accident, the so-called handicaps with which people are born – all this becomes part of sharing the sufferings of Christ if we take them as a privilege, and not as a reproach. If we view life as God sees it, seeing this as only a temporary time when we have a great opportunity to bear honor for Christ that we will never have again, never again in all our eternity of time will we ever have the privilege of bearing suffering for his name's sake in a day of reproach.

So, as we are called to that, I hope and pray that this book of Job will help us to understand the realities of life, the greatness of the privilege that has been accorded to us, and the richness of glory God heaps upon us when he allows us to suffer for his name's sake.

Prayer:

Our Father, words fail us to express what we feel in our hearts. We do count it indeed a mighty privilege to bear reproach for your name's sake. We know that the day is coming when that will be our chief joy, that will be the treasure that we have laid up in heaven. We hope, Lord, that it

will be a rich treasure indeed, that we will stop our complaining and stop our grieving and stop our griping about what you send, and count it a great joy and privilege to bear suffering and reproach for your name's sake, sharing the sufferings of Christ, that we may also share in the glory which is to follow. We ask in his name, Amen.

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