

Speaking Out of Anguish

October 22, 2017

Job 6-7

To begin today, let me acknowledge that studying the dialogues in Job is tough work, it is tedious work. I know they will stretch our patience just getting through them. But I want you to know that the more I look at them, the more I appreciate them. They are literal gold mines of truth and wisdom. But, they have to be mined. You have to dig. You have to pause and ponder. You have to recognize the richness and depth of the poetry and not get caught up in images that you cannot understand. And trust me, there are images that we don't understand. You'll see them in just a few minutes.

Here, in Job's first response to his friends, he reacts to their criticism of him, pleads with them to love him and listen rather than to lecture him. But then his attention turns to God. Most of chapter 7 is Job pouring out his heart to God, pleading with God to remember him in his suffering. But what intrigues me about Job's response is his perspective on his suffering, God's role, and what he simply will not do...give up on his God. Added to this, we see still more foreshadowing of One who later would truly die painfully, publicly, unjustly. Here we are in chapter 6-7 and we already have several mentions of details of Job's suffering and Jesus' time on the cross. As I read the entire text of Job 6-7, I urge you to listen for references that fit Job's situation to be sure, but fit Jesus' situation even more so. READ Job 6-7.

Main point: It is not the mark of a fool to grieve, even loudly, unjust suffering.

Job was accused of acting like a fool by Eliphaz. And here with his response, he defends his right to cry out in his despair. Now, before we get to the text, I remind you that simply the term "unjust suffering," ought to cause us to pause and ponder. As I suggested last week, that really is not a significant part of Eliphaz's philosophy. To him, you suffer because you have done wrong: sin/consequences. But the point Job makes here is that there is unjust suffering and it is acceptable to cry out in the midst of it. In fact, it might be the only thing you can do. (2 parts)

I Dependable friends will listen to and lament with, not lecture at. vv. 6:1-30

Job here expresses that his friends have disappointed him. He had hoped they would bring with them comfort and sympathy. Instead, they lecture him. They don't understand what he has been going through, and so they pepper him with simplistic religious platitudes.

v.1- Then Job replied: [2](#) “If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! [3](#) It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas— no wonder my words have been impetuous.

Job begins by defending his outburst. Yes, it was loud, strong, deep, disturbing. But it was not foolish! He has been treated by Eliphaz as if he was a fool, “Only fools say what you say.” Instead, he invites them to weigh out his sorrow. His burden is heavier than anyone can imagine. Crying out is a natural response to pain, and it ought to be completely understandable that pain as heavy as Job's would bring out such anguish. It is not foolish to cry out in such a way from deep, painful despair. That is NOT foolish. It is natural. (Again, did Jesus cry out from the cross? Was He under a heavy load of anguish? Hmmm...)

[4](#) The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me.

Here we have the expressed reason for his despair: he has been wounded by God Almighty. Now, we can debate terminology whether the wounds were caused by God directly or by satan directly and God permissively. But to Job, they come from the hand of God. He is God Almighty. If it has happened, it has happened under His authority. So, from his perspective the wounds have come from God. Notice the terms here: arrows, poisonous drink, terrifying actions. This is what Job has experienced. He is sitting there as a deeply wounded man, arrows still sticking out of his side, body reacting to the poisons

within him, shaking from the sheer terror of it all. (Again, does this fit Jesus? Of course it does.)

From here, Job gives word pictures of his experience.

5 Does a wild donkey bray when it has grass, or an ox bellow when it has fodder? 6 Is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg? 7 I refuse to touch it; such food makes me ill.

Job equates what he has just experienced to being given inedible food. He could be referring to the suffering from the hand of God, but it makes better sense to see this as directed to Job's friends. What they have brought to Job is inedible. It is tasteless, disgusting, slimy. The comment about the white of an egg is really a guess, perhaps your Bible has something different. The specific food and taste is unknown, but the texture and taste are clear. It is something slimy, with no taste. Job refuses to eat the comfort food brought by his friends.

8 "Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, 9 that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! 10 Then I would still have this consolation— my joy in unrelenting pain— that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.

Did you catch that? What he hopes for is that God will complete the job and finishing "crushing" him. And he wants it to happen before he breaks under the pressure and curses God. His one remaining possession is his integrity. This is his joy in the midst of his pain: he has not cursed God.

How powerful is this perspective? He has been tortured, shot with arrows, drunk poison, endured night terrors, but he has not yet given in to the temptation to curse God. That is amazing!

Now, it still disturbs him that he is alive. He would rather be dead, but there is no thought to taking his own life. God was wounding, God would have to finish the job. He was not going to deny his God. Then notice the precise word used, "crushed." Sound familiar? Isaiah 53:5 "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." Who is this about? Jesus. Same topic? Precisely. Giving a defense of unjust suffering? Nailed

it! Thank you Jesus that not all suffering is deserved! It is to our benefit that Jesus' suffering was a crushing, it was finished, it ended in His death. His death had purpose!

11 "What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? 12 Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? 13 Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? 14 "A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.

He's crying out for help, for hope. He is looking toward his friends. And what does he have in his friends? Disappointment. No devotion, no love. His "wise" friends, who know him and have come from far away to comfort him, have instead lectured him as if he was a fool. Ouch!

15 But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow 16 when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, 17 but that cease to flow in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels. 18 Caravans turn aside from their routes; they go up into the wasteland and perish. 19 The caravans of Tema look for water, the traveling merchants of Sheba look in hope. 20 They are distressed, because they had been confident; they arrive there, only to be disappointed.

He compares it to a wadi, an intermittent stream. At certain times of the year, it is full. But at other times of the year, it is just a dry creek bed. He imagines it like a caravan, traveling through, in search of water, leaving the path because they know there is this creek over there. But when they get there, nothing! This is what Job feels like with the arrival of his friends. He had high hopes that they would be a source of quenching of his thirst, a welcomed drink to his parched soul. But now they come and bring nothing with them. The spiritual food they bring is inedible. The promise of water from them is only a dry creek bed. They are a disappointment to him.

21 Now you too have proved to be of no help; you see something dreadful and are afraid. 22 Have I ever said, 'Give something on my behalf, pay

a ransom for me from your wealth, [23](#) deliver me from the hand of the enemy, ransom me from the clutches of the ruthless? [24](#) “Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong. [25](#) How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? [26](#) Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind? [27](#) You would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter away your friend. [28](#) “But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face? [29](#) Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake. [30](#) Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?

He didn't ask them to bring gifts. He is willing to listen to them if he is wrong. But they have not listened to him. They have proven themselves to not be true friends. He pleads his case to them and asks them to reconsider their harsh words toward him. Tell him where he has been wrong!

I trust that you can see the point of this section. This is how the words of “fixers and explainers” fall on the despairing. Their religious and pious platitudes are tasteless food and dry creek beds. They mistake cries of pain for complaining of fools. Oh, if only they would be more understanding! Is he right? Absolutely. Is this wisdom? No question. Should we take note of it? Surely.

II. A desperate, despairing man wants nothing more than to know he is valued by His God vv. 7:1-21.

As Job's attention turns toward God, we see what he wants most: to know that God cares about Him. Deep down, this is the true issue.

[7:1](#) “Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? [2](#) Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, [3](#) so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.

Again here in chapter 7, we see shades of Ecclesiastes. The lot in life of man can seem like futility, as: birth, hardship, death. What is the purpose of that? From this perspective, life makes no sense.

4 When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. 5 My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. 6 “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope.

Each night lasts forever, the pain never stops, the light of day is fleeting, and the hope for the future is gone. Again, life makes no sense. And we understand. Such intense suffering negates everything else.

7 Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. 8 The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more.

This is Job’s basic desire, that God will remember him. It is important to note that “remember” in Scripture means to give thought to with expectation that it will result in action. “Remember me” always includes a request for action. In this case, Job sees his life as almost at its end, that death will soon come...and then what? What if God delays too long and he dies? What then?

9 As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. 10 He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.

Approaching death from a hopeless state is no fun. Waiting for God to act when death seems just moments away would be the worst kind of despair. I think of Psalm 13 where David cries out, “How long?” In v.3 of that psalm, he says, “Look on me and answer, O LORD my God, give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death.” I see the same thing here. Waiting at death’s door for God to act could be easily the most terrifying thing in life. David understood. Job understands. Jesus’ words from the cross convey the same message, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” Even wise men, men of God have faced such a scenario. It is not inconsistent with godly character. We all really want to know that God values us and our lives. In fact, without that what meaning does life have? Without that, life is just birth, hardship, and death. Ouch!

11 “Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

I love his resolve here. He has heard the rebuke of Eliphaz and his counsel to quiet down, accept responsibility for his sin, endure God’s discipline, and watch as God restores. He has heard this supposed perspective from God. And Job responds, “Never!” I am not going to keep silent. I am going to speak out, cry out from my anguish. He declares to God that he is going to continue to cry out. Notice his boldness before God.

12 Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard? 13 When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, 14 even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions, 15 so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine.

He complains to God, wondering why God is treating him as a dangerous monster. Why is He giving him no rest, day or night? Why is God pushing him so hard that he prefers death over life? Why? Why? Why? Notice his request from God, “Just leave me alone!”

16 I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning. 17 “What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, 18 that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? 19 Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? 20 If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? 21 Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more.”

Let me go! Back off! Enough already! On one hand, he wants to know that God cares, and on the other hand, he wishes God would back off. It seems to me that he wants both ends. He wants God to notice, he wants God to quit noticing. He’s confused about what God is up to. He sees himself as being crushed by God, but not valued and loved by God.

He has wracked his brain thinking of possible sins. He has confessed every sin he knows. If this is about sin, then why won't God forgive him? Is he too much of a burden for God? His life is almost over. "God, let's settle this now! If You wait, it could be too late!"

I'm confident there are more than a few gathered here who understand these words from Job more than any of the rest will ever understand. Job understands the perspective of the despairing man of God. Well-meaning but ignorant friends simply spew out garbage. The silence of God drives him to the brink.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will listen, not lecture.
- 2) We will seek to be true friends, ones who can be counted on to "be there." The book of Job is a crying out for true friends in times of need.
- 3) We will look beyond this life to find the meaning of this life. We will trust that God's perspective would make sense.
- 4) We will be emboldened to express our frustrations with unjust suffering. God is not angered by such boldness. Job did it, David did it, Moses did it, Jesus did it. Let it out!
- 5) We will give thanks to the One who unjustly suffered on our behalf.