

## Where's the Encouragement?

January 28, 2018

Job 16-17

We come this morning to Job's second response to his friends in this, the second round of speeches, Job 16-17. We are half way through. By now, this dialogue feels familiar. We are perhaps so used to it that we wish we could skip right through it and get to the next stage. We instinctively want resolution. Let's get this over with! And yet, as we know all too well, this process is barely half way through. And my perspective is that the dialogue is the core of the book.

And yet, it seems to me that this is precisely the point. The problem with suffering is that it is not over in an instant. By definition, suffering lasts, it lasts too long, longer than we expect. That is why we call it suffering. And the point here is that while we are suffering, what we want, what we need and yearn for is comfort. Job wishes his friends would be more comforting. They came to comfort, but he is experiencing anything but comfort from them. In the words of Job in this text, they are miserable comforters. Comforters who do not comfort are not comforters. Or, helpers who do not help are not helpers, or wise men who are not wise are not wise men. I think you get the point.

In his suffering, what Job really longs for is comfort, both from his friends and from God. He yearns for compassion, for understanding for love. Instead, his friends add to his distress and God seems to only double up the intensity of His death grip on Job. Such is the plight of the man enduring unjust suffering.

And yet, the interesting and intriguing aspect of this passage is that Job's perspective goes beyond all of this. You see, as one who is suffering, he sees the value of comfort, and he wishes he were in the position to offer it to others. I have seen such a thing in others. Out of the midst of their despair, they reach out to help others in their despair. It is quite the remarkable thing. And then, added to that, Job gives us another brief glimpse into his theology of the need for a mediator. We first had this back in chapter 9, there as a lament over the lack of such a mediator. But here, there is a confidence that his mediator is at

work, pleading as for his friend with God in the heavenly places. In his next speech in ch.19, He will triumphantly declare that he KNOWS that his Redeemer lives! Are you catching this? Job has a growing faith in his mediator, his advocate, his redeemer. Job is a believer, Job is a Christ follower!

Notice how this all develops in the midst of Job's all too familiar words of sorrow filled lament as we read together, Job 16-17. READ.

Main point: What a good man needs when he is down is not someone else to kick him, but someone who will be his friend.

He doesn't need a preacher, or a philosopher, or another person to kick him when he is down, he simply needs a friend, and a friend in high places would be even better. The truth is we all need a friend in high places. Right? (3 parts)

I. It is natural to kick those who are down. vv. 16:1-14.

There is no shortage of people who will kick a man when he is down. It goes against our senses, but it is true. We would think that people naturally would be compassionate. We are appalled at the thought of kicking the down person. And yet we do it all the time. In fact, it is particularly common for people who view themselves as religious. Think of Jesus' teaching in the parable of the good Samaritan. All of the "good people" walk around the hurting man. It is the one who himself is viewed as an outcast, as a down man, who has compassion. Job is living out the life of the hurting man of Jesus' parable.

The natural instincts of those who buy into the religious world view is to kick those who are down. After all, according to this view, they deserve to be down, the fact that they are down means they are being kicked by God for their sin. They deserve to be there. Therefore, it is not only okay to kick them, but might even be the noble thing to do. You might even be able to justify your behavior by quoting God in doing so. After all, if HE kicks him then you can join him. Right? This is Job's view of his friends. And sadly, it is also his view of God. God too seems to kick those who are down.

16:1 Then Job replied: 2 "I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all!

"miserable comforters", isn't that a great contradiction in terms? You are a comforter who brings misery. Instead of helping, you are adding to the hurt. Job has heard the perspective of his friends, and it sounds just like that of his enemies. With friends like these, who needs enemies, enemies!

3 Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?

What makes you feel the need to pile on? Are you sick? Do you not think I heard you the first time? Do you think if you just say it another time, in greater detail, more passionately perhaps, the outcome will be different? In other words, I have heard what you have to say, and you don't need to keep saying it. Enough of the arguing!

4 I also could speak like you, if you were in my place; I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you. 5 But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief.

I find this interesting, but instructive and true to my experience. Those who understand what it is like to be down, to endure suffering, to feel kicked around, naturally want to be put in a position where they can minister. Those who have been through a storm want to go and help those who are in the midst of one. Those who come out of jail have a passion to minister to those in jail. In this case, Job's desire is while he is still suffering. He has experienced the pain of miserable comforters, he longs to be different from that. I think this is what we call the "golden rule."

6 "Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away. 7 Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household.

Notice how God immediately gets lumped into this same category. God is the One kicking him while he is down. God has worn him out. God has wiped out his whole household. God is just like his friends.

8 You have bound me—and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me. 9 God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes.

God has treated me just like my enemies.

10 Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. 11 God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.

Notice how he flips back and forth between his tormenters here on earth, and how God is doing the same thing. They jeer, God jeers. They strike me again and again, God strikes me again and again. In fact, it seems as though God and the wicked are working in tandem.

Pause: is Job right here? Is he speaking truth? Of course not...but it sure does feel like it! By definition, this is what enduring unjust suffering looks like. By definition, if you did nothing to deserve the suffering, then it must be that God is piling on, kicking you while you are down. This is what it feels like. As we have seen elsewhere in Job, I see this as a description of what Jesus went through from His perspective. This is what carrying the weight of mankind's sin on your back feels like. This is what it is like to endure the wrath of God. Job is giving voice to the experience of Jesus. Jesus endured it all. Jesus did not open His mouth. Jesus was kicked while He was down, spit upon, mocked. He took it all without objection. Job is here giving voice to what it must have been like. He deserved none of it, so each new blow hurts all the more. Resume.

12 All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; 13 his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. 14 Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior.

This is what it is like to endure God's wrath: shattering, choking, crushing, targeted, surrounded, without pity, pierced, blood and guts, again and again being beaten, again and again being charged as a bull in the ring. This is what it is like to suffer unjustly. Job is simply giving voice to the experience. It feels like the whole world is kicking you while you are down. It seems like there

is no one there to pick you up, to bind up your wounds, to take you to a place where you can rest, to stand between you and your enemies. It just feels like wave after wave after wave. Job has painted the picture well.

II. My only hope is that I have an advocate in high places. vv. 16:15-21

And yet, at this precise point in the dialogue, Job says the most remarkable thing. Job gives a perspective way beyond what we have just read. Job has hope in his friend in high places.

15 “I have sewed sackcloth over my skin and buried my brow in the dust. 16 My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes;

Job has done all he can to deal with his situation, but it has done him no good. He has tried to bind up his wounds, he has been as low as low can be. You can't get lower than burying your brow in the dust. Job is at the very bottom of the pit. He has weeped all that he can weep, his face shows the fruit of that.

17 yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure.

Once more, Job asserts his blamelessness. He knows he is not being punished for wrong he has done. His ways are pure and his relationship with God has been solid from his end. And yet. . .he is being treated as if he had sinned, as if he was the worst of the worst, as if he had sinned in the most grievous of ways. He is being treated as the worst of sinners, even though he knows that is not the case. Yes, he is a sinner, yes he knows that, but he has done what was required by God to deal with that sin. His conscience is clear.

But he is being treated as one who without remorse has broken every law of God.

18 “O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest!

Job’s petition is that like the blood of Abel, which cried out from the ground when he was undeservedly murdered by his brother, Job hopes that this same crying out of his innocent blood would go out. Then we get to the interesting part.

19 Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. 20 My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God;

Where did this come from? Who is this “witness,” this “advocate,” this “intercessor,” this “friend?” Once more, we read this, not just as students of the book of Job, but as students of the whole of Scripture. We know precisely who this advocate is, this friend in high places. We know the name of this one, seated at the right hand of the Father, pleading on our behalf, who is not another accuser but a real friend, a friend in high places. He is none other than Jesus, our Savior who Himself suffered on our behalf, who has endured all that we have and infinitely more, to the point of death, even death on a cross. He is the One who suffered unjustly and now ministers to those who are suffering. He is their witness, their advocate, their intercessor, their friend. We know the One in whom Job here places his hope. Some 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, Job is expressing his hope in Him. Job is a Christ follower. He may not have known his name, but he is every bit the believer as any one of us. Can you see that here? There is no reasonable alternative for the identity of this friend.

[21](#) on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.

Job repeats it just to make sure we are clear. His friend in high places, his advocate, intercessor and friend is pleading with God as a man would plead for a friend. Job may have all kinds of enemies. He may even see God as working together with his enemies. But Job has one friend who is pleading with God on his behalf. This friend pleads with God Almighty, but does so just as a man would for his friend. What a testimonial of the work of Christ! This is solid New Testament theology, right in the middle of perhaps the oldest book in the Old Testament. Amazing!

III. It's time for friends to act, before it is too late, before my only friend left is death itself. Vv.16:22-17:16

Just as we have seen before, Job only stays at that peak spot for a moment. Then, the reality of his situation leads him to return to the lament. The pain of his condition rears its ugly head once more and he retreats to the familiar. Job is in pain, time is short, if only someone would take pity on him before it was too late.

[22](#) “Only a few years will pass before I go on the journey of no return. [17:1](#) My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me.

In spite of Job knowing the truth and trusting it to be true, he cannot avoid the despair. The reality of his situation looms large, and the clock is ticking.

2 Surely mockers surround me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility. 3 “Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?”

Everywhere I look, there is trouble, there are enemies. But Job also has great hope in the friend in high places, this God in whom he has placed his trust. What he needs right now is a pledge from God, some sort of marker, assuring him that this will all turn out okay. He cannot provide for himself such a pledge. It has to come from God. There is no one else who can do it. There is no one else who can speak authoritatively on God’s behalf that God will be true to His word. Or is there? It could only be this friend in high places. It could only be One who could speak on behalf of Job and on behalf of God. He is the One, only He can put up Job’s security.

I know this is a bit deep, but I think you understand the concept. Job’s dispute is with God. His trust is in God, but right now it feels like God has abandoned Him. He has endured beyond his ability to endure. The end seems near. He wants nothing greater than to know for sure that God will keep His promises. He needs a marker, a pledge, a security to hold in his hands that promises God will keep His word. Such a thing can only come from God. But God is the One with whom he is having the dispute! His only hope is his friend in high places. This One can make sure God keeps His word. “Trust Me! God will keep His Word. He will make good His promise to you.” That is what Job needs to hear. That is the assurance he seeks...and the clock is ticking.

4 You have closed their minds to understanding; therefore you will not let them triumph. 5 If a man denounces his friends for reward, the eyes of his children will fail. 6 “God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit. 7 My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow. 8 Upright men are appalled at this; the innocent are aroused against

the ungodly. [9](#) Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.

His friends are of no help. They are in no position to give such a pledge. They have proven not to be true friends...and the clock is ticking. Everyone else is against him. He has no family, no friends, no strength, no allies, no advocates. The good and the godly have abandoned him. Yet, he will not deviate from the plan. He is committed to the path set before him. He will stay the course, even if He slays him.

[10](#) “But come on, all of you, try again! I will not find a wise man among you. [11](#) My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart. [12](#) These men turn night into day; in the face of darkness they say, ‘Light is near.’

Come on, so called friends. Try again! Do the right thing. Speak truth. Don’t give me false hope. I don’t have much time. I am crushed, shattered, broken. Help me!

[13](#) If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, [14](#) if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister,’ [15](#) where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? [16](#) Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?”

Right now, it seems the only friend I have is death itself. When your best hope is death, where are you? Who will give me hope? This ship is going down. Who will rescue me? Such is the perspective of the despairing sufferer.

I find it fascinating that God is not afraid of this topic and that God offers a strange sense of hope in such situations. In our college study this past week, we were studying Luke 21, where Jesus describes life in the end times. It is a terrifying picture. If you haven't read it in a while, do so. There will be wars, famines, disasters, persecution, abandonment, torture, death and destruction. Believers will lose everything, betrayed by those closest to them. This is unjust suffering! Some will suffer death. But don't worry, none of you will perish. (Right, where is your pledge of that!) But then he gets to the end of this terrifying picture and what does Jesus say? When you see all of this happening, stand up, look up to the heavens, for your redemption is drawing near! So the worse things get, the closer I am to redemption. When it gets really, really, really bad, stand up and get ready to see the spectacular! Think of it: things are bad, no, things are really bad, no things are beyond belief bad. We are surrounded, there is death and destruction everywhere. How should we respond, react? Get up, look up, and watch as God does something beyond belief.

This is crazy hope. This is hope that makes no sense to the average man. But it would make perfect sense to Job. He lived it.

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

1) We will be true friends to the suffering.

2) We will not seek to explain, rationalize, sermonize, demonize, cover up, give false hope.

3) We will not be among the kickers of the downtrodden.

4) We will point sufferers to their friend in high places.

5) We will cherish our Savior, who suffered it all and now is passionate about being a true friend in high places.