

READING

Job 2:11-13

SERMON

**Job's Misguided Friends** (Job 2:11-13; 4:1-21; 8:1-22; 11:1-20; 32:1-22; 16:2)

We continue our look at Job. Here is the man who had everything. A wife, a family who loved each other, possessions to make him wealthy and good health. But then he loses everything because of two conversations between God and Satan. Both are similar in chapters 1 and 2.

**“And the LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”**

**Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it.”**

**Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. ....”** (Job 2:2-3 NIV)

After the first conversation, Job loses his children and all his possessions. After the second conversation, Job loses his health. The only thing that remains from his former life is his wife.

So Job is in this state, no family, no money, not even his health and he and no-one else knows anything about the conversation between God and Satan. No-one knows that Satan is allowed to test Satan, but within limits that God puts there.

But the tremendous thing is that in all his adversities, Job never curses God. He remains blameless and upright, and who fears God and shuns evil. This was the description of Job at the beginning of his story; this is still the description of him now, even after all his calamities.

The events that have happened to Job have got out. Maybe even Job put the word round, and so three friends come to see him. Eliphaz the Temanite, Zophar the Naamathite and the shortest man in the Bible. Earlier in the year we looked at Ne-he-miah, the second shortest man in the Bible, but now we read of Bildad the Shuhite! I'm sorry for that one, but it is just a way of remembering, like Shadrach, Meshach and To be We-go which is how I was taught to remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

So now along come Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite. And initially, what do they do? Verse 13 of the passage we read from Job 2

**“Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No-one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.”** (Job 2:13 NIV)

They just sat there and said nothing. Job must have been a sight though. You know when you go and see someone who has been ill for a long time, there is that non-recognition at times because they have changed so much. They may have lost a lot of weight, or the illness has changed their appearance. Well for the three friends they had this experience – they could hardly recognise Job as they approached him, but we are told they just sit and say nothing, for seven days.

What do we often do? Well the first thing is the question that is asked when you see someone in the waiting room of the doctor's surgery. "Hello there, how are you?" You then realise where you are, a doctor's surgery and the question seems so silly, so banal. They are probably ill, that is why they are there and why you are there! So the next comment comes babbling out of the mouth, "You are looking well at the moment." Because you realise that you cannot say, 'You look absolutely terrible. You must be so ill!' Or should we perhaps be like the doctor in this picture?

At times, and quite often it is harder, but better to say as little as possible and let the other person talk. This can be true when a person is ill or bereaved. There is so much in saying as little as possible but getting the other person to tell their story, to talk about what they want to talk about and going with them. Most people want to tell you about their illness or about the one they have just lost through death, or the redundancy. It is a matter of listening and being there.

Job does finally speak and then from chapter 4, right up to chapter 38, there is this conversation back and forth between Job's three friends and Job with a fourth friend joining in later. There are times when the friends are great and say some things that are totally true, but beware the misguided, well-meaning friend.

They say that God is Precisely Just. – We know that we follow a God who is just. Eliphaz says this right near the start of his speech. Chapter 4, verse 7

**“Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.”** (Job 4:7-9 NIV)

God does not punish or inflict bad on the righteous – he cannot do that. Bildad says something similar in his speech, chapter 8:3

**“Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.”** (Job 8:3-4 NIV)

God is just and we know that. 'The problem when Job's children were destroyed by the tornado was that they must have sinned.' That is how Bildad understood it and explained the happenings.

The wicked will always perish and the friends assumed that meant then. Death or bad fortune meant that the justice of God had fallen on you.

We do not believe that now. We say the day of reckoning may not be in this life – it may be in the next. This was the problem of Karl Marx who called religion, the 'opiate of the people'. Religion, he surmised was being used by the unscrupulous to keep poor and oppressed people down, now because it promised them idyllic surrounds in the future.

We see the same in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

**“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”** (Luke 16:19-23 NIV)

So God is precisely just weighing out rewards and punishments for actions in one's life. However the friends were taking far too short a view of it. They assumed that Job had done something wrong. We do not believe that now – but sadly there are some that do. They see bad things happening as God's judgement on the person on which it falls – especially if it is not them! This then heaps that guilt on the person, along with the problems they already have.

Another things the friends say is that God is Absolutely Righteous. Zophar says in his speech to Job, chapter 11:13

**“Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, with no-one to make you afraid, and many will court your favour.”**

(Job 11:13-19 NIV)

God is absolutely righteous and therefore will automatically answer you appeal – be this verbally or by a change in lifestyle as Zophar says here. ‘Job, just ask God for forgiveness and confess your sin and he will forgive you.’ As Zophar says earlier in this speech

**“... Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.”** (Job 11:6 NIV)

But Job keeps protesting his innocence. He does not claim sinless perfection, but he knows that he has not anything to deserve what he is going through now.

- Does the Christian in the last few years of suffering from Multiple Sclerosis deserve the pain she was in every day, practically every moment of every day? No she did not because she was a wonderful example to all those around her as she was so sadly suffering.
- Does the Christian family deserve the fact that their junior school aged son has a reoccurrence of a brain tumour? Has the boy sinned so greatly? Has his parents?

We do not really know the answers to those questions, but we do know that God is precisely just absolutely righteous.

And lastly the three friends tell us that God is Supremely Wise. ‘Job, if only you confess, God will answer with blessing.’ Back to Eliphaz again, chapter 5:17

**“Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you. You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing. You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth. You will come to the grave in full vigour, like sheaves gathered in season.**

**"We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."**

(Job 5:11-27 NIV)

Notice the last line. We are right, you're wrong! If you follow God's correction, his disciple, then you will be safe. **You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth** (Job 5:22). We see this echoed in Hebrews we read

**"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."**

(Hebrews 12:4-11 NIV)

We accept the discipline of God and say that bad things are happening to us because of God's supreme wisdom in training us. Therefore we may have to go through a period of hardship to be better people – to be what God wants for us.

So God is Precisely Just, Absolutely Righteous and Supremely Wise and so Job must have done something against God and all he has to do is confess and all will be well. But that is a very facile argument. None of what we are saying about God is untrue, but to say

- God is Precisely Just, Absolutely Righteous and Supremely Wise
- I am going through an absolutely awful time, in whatever form that is taking, be it financial, health or family
- I must have sinned so need to confess that to God is not the necessary final conclusion to the previous two statements.

No-one knew of the conversation between God and Satan, they only saw the outcome. Also beware of spiritual sounding arguments. Job 4:10

**"A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice: 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?'"** (Job 4:11-17 NIV)

I had a vision; I had a dream about this. That is not to say that God does not speak in visions, in dreams, as we heard this morning concerning Isobel Kuhn. However we must make certain, we must make sure if we pass it on.

And Elihu the youngest and last friend who comes in later says, chapter 32:6-9

**“...”I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.”** (Job 32:6-9 NIV)

I am wise because I have God with me. The Spirit has told me this and his speech carries on in similar fashion berating the old men for their foolishness, and saying that he has the answers – from God.

People suffer, Christians suffer – it can be at their own hand because of wrong decisions. It can be because of sin, unconfessed sin in their lives. It may be because they are Christians in a hostile culture – is that not what the suffering church is all about. Take care not to condemn someone going through difficulties too quickly.

PRAYER