

An Imbalanced View o God

Job

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Bible Text: Job 25

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Job chapter 25.

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, "Dominion and awe belong to Him
Who establishes peace in His heights. Is there any number to His troops?
And upon whom does His light not rise? How then can a man be just with
God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? If even the moon
has no brightness And the stars are not pure in His sight, How much less
man, that maggot, And the son of man, that worm!"¹

Thus far God's holy Word. Please be seated.

All of us have seen pictorial caricatures. The caricature, you know, is an artistic piece that sketches somebody, often by accentuating certain aspects of their physical character for a humorous effect. And most often caricatures are done out of affection and they are greatly appreciated. I have one that Mr. Vega did for me at my birthday a year ago.

And, of course, there is the political cartoonists that often use the character represented, representation of a certain political figure that, again, accentuates certain physical characteristics. I understand that Mr. Obama is very sensitive about his ears.

Well, he should never let that be known because that will become just a real hey day for the caricaturists.

But sometimes caricatures are done out of malice where they are really done to hurt, to insult, to attack. And they can be quite detrimental, then, when they are done in that manner.

There is also caricatures of God. If we think about the representations of our God's character as caricatures or that they can be caricatures, we recognize that often times people give us a sketch of God that blows him all out of proportion. Now they are not doing it for humor, nor are they doing it out of malice. They are doing it out of misguided perceptions, imbalances in their own theology. And this is a very dangerous thing.

¹ Job 25:1-6.

I can remember in the hey day of Campus Crusade, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” which is, in itself, a caricature. There were sincere reformed people that considered the gospel presentation ought to be God hates you and has an awful plan for your life.

Now the second, in a sense, is no more true than the first. Both have an element of truth, but both have blown that element so far out of proportion and have sketched it in such an imbalanced manner that it becomes a caricature that does great injustice to God.

And you and I can be guilty of that same thing. Often when men first come to the doctrines of grace they over emphasize the five points of Calvinism to such a degree that those points can become a caricature of God’s character rather than a balanced representation of who our God is.

Now, caricaturing is the problem with Bildad’s speech in Job chapter 25. As we read it, there is not a thing in it that is wrong. Everything he says is true, but it is the way he says it and what his purposes are that caused his presentation to be imbalanced.

This is the last recorded speech of Job’s friends. Zophar gives up. He doesn’t even try to say anything. It is Bildad’s third speech. By this time it is obvious—as I said last week—they can’t answer Job’s arguments about the condition of the wicked. He has proven beyond the shadow of doubt that the wicked prosper in this life, that God doesn’t always punish the wicked in this life. Although, as we saw last week, the wicked do live under God’s curse in this life. That curse is activated, so to speak, in death and they will receive no pit from God in the administration of his judgment.

But the men really have lost the argument with respect to Job must be suffering because he is wicked.

And so the focus now changes to the fact that Job is wrong because he is trying to justify himself with God. In fact, in chapter 32 when we read the formal conclusion of the dialog between Job and his friends we read that, “Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.”²

Now, it is a bit unfair. They are the ones that have pushed him to the self vindication that he has been having to make and the pleas that he has made to God by their unjust accusations about his character, about his supposed gross sin and hypocrisy.

But this seems to be the last argument that the friends offer against Job’s self justification. That seems to be what Bildad is doing here. This isn’t simply a little piece on the character of God and the consequence of that and why [?] just suspended in the midst of this book. You have got to realize this is part of a dialogue. And before Job chapter 24 exposed the deferred justice of God, in chapter 23 he made a very passionate

² Job 32:1.

appeal that he want to present his case to God. And he has consistently said that if he can present his case to God that God would vindicate him.

So you have to understand that is what Bildad is now trying to answer in these verses. But he does so in such a way that he paint a caricature of God.

So we see, as we examine these verses that an imbalanced presentation of God's attributes will lead to an ugly caricature of God and no hope for man. And imbalanced portraiture of God's attributes will lead to an ugly caricature of God and a hopelessness for man.

We will look at these few verses under two headings, two caricatures that I set before you. And the first is the caricature that because of God's sovereign dominion, man is guilty and condemned. Now that is a truth as it is stated. I will explain the caricature.

And then, second, because of God's transcendent majesty, man has no significance in the eyes of God.

Now, Bildad's first argument, then, is that because of God's sovereign dominion, man is guilty and condemned. We could say, "has, then, no right of approach to God," for that is the caricature.

Notice that Bildad states really four things here about God's character. Dominion and awe belong to him. He establishes peace in the heights of heaven. There is no number, there is no counting of his army, of his troops and his light rises over all. Four beautiful statements about God, four things in which you and I revel. The first is the awesome dominion of God. Our God is a sovereign God who rules over all.

Perhaps you remember that the word dominion comes from the Latin title Lord. Our God is Lord. He is the true *domine*. He has a dominion that is sovereign over all creatures.

Nebuchadnezzar reflects on that sovereign dominion after he is restored from beasthood. He says in chapter four:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'³

Beautiful description of the sovereignty of our God, of the government that he exercises over all of the creation, all of its creatures, yes, all of its volitional creatures.

It is a dominion that should excite and incite fear and dread. A dread should grip any natural man or woman when they begin to understand that in a very really sense, our God

³ Daniel 4:34-35.

is a despot. He answers to no one else. He does with all people as he pleases. And he is absolute in his dominion.

But for you and me, it is a dominion that should excite and incite true reverence and fear coupled in with love and faith that this is my God and what a glorious God so that our confession is the confession of Nebuchadnezzar, is a confession that he does what is right. He is sovereign in his rule, but that he is absolutely sovereign and none can stay his hand.

The second aspect of God that Bildad sets before us in verse two is that he governs with perfect peace and harmony.

“Who establishes peace in His heights.”⁴

“Heights” here refers to the heights of heaven. There might be a reference here to the fact that once there was a rebellion and immediately God put it down, immediately Lucifer and all of the minions who followed him were squelched by God’s sovereign dominion and peace was restored to heaven itself.

But more importantly we pray, are taught to pray the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,”⁵ a reminder that in heaven is the perfect manifestation of God’s will. As he rules in the midst of his angels there is harmony and wholeness and prosperity, that, indeed, whatever he does is right and there is a glorious peace and harmony and wholeness to the entire angelic host and the souls of just men made perfect as they surround the throne of God and labor in his presence.

Coupled with that is the extraordinary immensity of his army.

Bildad says, with a rhetorical question, “Is there any number to His troops?”⁶

Now, you know that still today when earthly kings or presidents and prime ministers or dictators want to put on a public display of their majesty and authority, what do they do? They have a military parade. They review the troops. And every one of us has seen these things on the television where some dictator has troop after troop and tank after tank parading before him.

And what Bildad is saying is that our God’s army is beyond number. Now, it is amazing that the Ethiopians had an army of a million people, but the army of God is thousands upon thousands, ten thousands upon ten thousands and innumerable hosts of an angelic host, an army that does perfectly God’s will and is undefeated.

The psalmist picture a military parade for us with this army in Psalm 68. I often think of this psalm at the ascension of our Savior. I call it a victory parade. And just as the

⁴ Job 25:2.

⁵ Matthew 6:10.

⁶ Job 25:3.

Caesars would march into Rome with their armies and their captains and the spoils of war, that is the description of our Savior in Psalm 68 verse 17.

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captive Thy captives; Thou hast received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there.⁷

What a parade. That is the parade that occurred on the day that our Savior ascended up into heaven. What a great military review.

But this is the army of the Lord that is ever active, a standing army of ten thousands upon ten thousands moving as quick as the wind itself, faster than light to accomplish the purposes of God throughout his created sphere. That's his glorious display of dominion and power.

And then the fourth thing he tells us about God is that his light shine on all.

“And upon whom does His light not rise?”⁸

The light of God's governance, the fact that by his providence he rules over all things and in that rule is a manifestation of his character, his glory, his power. As the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter one. And all who have observed the order of the creation have seen its majestic splendor, have seen something of our God. For he is the one who shines his light on all.

Now in light of these four attributes or aspects of God's character, Bildad reaches this conclusion, again, with rhetorical questions.

“How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?”⁹

Start with the second question. He is simply asserting total depravity. He is clearly saying that any human being, any descendant of Adam by ordinary generation is born impure, guilty and corrupt, dead in sins and trespasses with the guilt of Adam's first transgression, the want of original righteousness and the corruption of his whole nature.

So it is of everyone who is born. And the other question then [?] the inability of a sinner to justify himself in the sight of such a holy God, this one who is all powerful whose dominion is absolute and sovereign over all things.

Well, of course the question: “How then can a man be just or right or how can he justify himself before God?”

⁷ Psalm 68:17-18.

⁸ Job 25:3.

⁹ Job 25:4.

And that is a great question. It is very good for you and me to realize when we consider the power, the awful sovereignty and dominion of God that there is none righteous in his sight, none by nature, none able to justify himself.

But, you see, that is not speaking to Job, is it? Job has asserted the same thing. Eliphaz says in chapter four that no man can be right with God. And Job turns around in chapter nine and verse two and reiterates exactly the same truth.

“In truth I know that this is so; But how can a man be in the right [or just] before God?”¹⁰

You see, the implied conclusion of Bildad’s argument is not dealing with the justification of a guilty sinner. No, he is applying this to Job. Job had said, “I want to plead my case.” He is not talking about justification of his person. He is talking about a justification of his cause. He has been reviled and slandered, he who God has testified to be blameless and upright. And he has asked for a day in court with God. He has been quite clear throughout all of his speeches that he is not self righteous. He knows he is a sinner saved by grace. But what he is asking for is vindication. He is asking for an opportunity to come boldly before God. And, you see, the implied premise of Bildad’s argument is there is no way. He doesn’t distinguish between a justified sinner and a non justified sinner. He simply said that there is no one that can come before God in the way you want to.

There is no hope, you see, in what Bildad has to say. There is no open access. There is no bold entrance to the throne of grace. He has not begun to fathom what the psalmist says that there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared, that there is a genuine pardon with God and we approach him, then, in fear and reverence.

So, you see the caricature. The caricature is a presentation of sovereignty and depravity with no gospel, with no hope for a justified sinner having an appeal to God and a hope to come into God’s presence.

But blessed be our God because we know that, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.”¹¹ We have open access. We may come boldly before his throne. We recognize that he is sovereign in his dominion. He rules in peace in heaven. He has this great majestic army that, in fact, is now at our disposal to serve and care and minister to the elect.

And we see his ways in creation, but we know his ways even more clearly in his revelation and this God is our God. And this God is our Father. And we come to him not as distant rebels, but as justified sons and daughters.

Now the second caricature that we see here, having looked at the first that because of God’s absolute sovereign dominion man is guilty and condemned in his sight and, thus,

¹⁰ Job 9:2.

¹¹ Romans 8:1.

there is no hope for access or vindication before God. The second is even worse, in a sense, because God's transcendent majesty man is insignificant in the eyes of God.

It is very brief. He begins with, again, a contrast.

“If even the moon has no brightness And the stars are not pure in His sight...”¹²

He is contrasting here the transcendent majesty and glory of God that is so infinitely wonderful that the moon and all of the splendor of her full glory is nothing in comparison to that splendor.

And the stars on a crisp winter night that bejewel the heavens, they are nothing. They have no purity in his sight.

This is mindful of what one of Job's friends says in chapter 15 verse 15. Elihpaz says, “Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, And the heavens are not pure in His sight.”¹³

Though relatively speaking, not even angels appear in the sight of God. And the stars are nothing in the sight of God. What a transcendent majesty, what glory. Look at the stars and imagine the one who made them is so more glorious that they are nothing. Look at the full moon and imagine that the one who shapes it and sustains it is so glorious that it is eclipsed.

These are the figures that set God before us in such unimaginable glory and splendor.

Now, Bildad reasons, then, by analogy that if, in fact, the moon is nothing, it is darkened and the stars are not pure, “How much less man, that maggot, And the son of man, that worm!”¹⁴

Now, in a sense, this is the question put rhetorically by the psalmist in Psalm eight when he says in verse three:

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?¹⁵

In comparison to these most splendid and majestic parts of creation, what are we, these little tents of clay that an invisible germ can lay us flat on our bed for five or six, 10 days, a mutant gene can give us cancer that can kill us in one or two days? What are we?

We are but dust and ashes and when we are compared to these splendid parts of God's creation. And so Bildad says that we are but maggots, worms that fly eggs hatch into, that

¹² Job 25:5.

¹³ Job 15:15.

¹⁴ Job 25:6.

¹⁵ Psalm 8:3.

live off raw flesh and garbage and the son of man, mankind in our mortality, why we are but worms.

Now, again, there is an element of truth here, that in comparison to God particularly in our sinful defilement, we are in one sense no better than worms. God himself says this in respect to the covenant people through Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah chapter 41 verse 14.

“Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel.”¹⁶

God addresses them as a worm. And there is such a depth, a chasm naturally between God and finite sinful men and women that a worm is closer to us in our human nature than we are to God. That is all true.

But my conclusion is that man just is insignificant. And this is where the psalmist in Psalm eight keeps going, one of those great adversative connectors in the Bible.

So he says, “Yes, we consider everything. What is man?” But then he says:

Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, And dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.¹⁷

And in Isaiah 41 when God addresses Israel as a worm in order to remind them of their low condition, he does so in a context of hope. For he says, “‘I will help you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.’”¹⁸

You are a worm, thus, you need help. You are despicable and you help and where does that help come from? It comes from the one who testifies to himself as he hanged on Calvary’s cross that he was a worm.

In Psalm 22, that is part of the confession of our Savior as David wonderfully depicts for us the interior life of our Savior as he hangs on the cross.

Isaiah 53 shows us the crucifixion from the perspective of the physical acts, what God did to the Savior. But Psalm 22 is the entire process through the eyes of the Savior as he hangs on the cross.

And so he says as he is hanging there, “I am a worm, and not a man, A reproach of men, and despised by the people.”¹⁹

But why? Because man is significant. In our wormness we are significant. For we are image bearers of God. And he has placed a love upon a great host of us. And our dear

¹⁶ Isaiah 41:14.

¹⁷ Psalm 8:5-6.

¹⁸ Isaiah 41:14.

¹⁹ Psalm 22:6.

Savior took our nature in order to save us, but has retained our nature to show us what glory it shall have.

He became a worm, despised, rejected of men and of God that we might be lifted out of wormness to be the heirs of heaven.

It is not bad for you and me to be reminded of our insignificance, that we are nothing but worms if we were left to ourselves, that God because he loves his image bearer, did not leave us to ourselves, did he? He gave us a Savior which shows that we are significant.

Yes, and even those people who still deny him and lift their fist in rebellion against him. They are significant. They are worms in one sense, but they are significant. They are image bearers of God and they are to be treated with dignity and respect.

So you see that caricatures that lead to wrong application, they give us an ugly picture of God and they lead to hopelessness, don't they? You see the hopelessness that is here, that because God is great and powerful in his dominion that men are sinners and there [?] be a period there. There is no room for bold pleas brought to God.

And because of his transcendent purity and majesty there is an insignificance that leads to such despair and hope. But, you see, that is not the case. It is not the case at all.

What Bildad has done is given us imbalanced presentations of the character of God and, thus, he gives us in his theology a caricature and not a balanced theology. You see, our God known in the beauty, the panoply, the uniformity of his holy attributes, is the most lovely and adorable being imaginable. Every attribute fits together, defines all the others as it is defined by them, held in perfect harmony.

But, you see, because of our sinful fallibility, we have a tendency to think caricatures. And so there are those in the man centered Arminian school of theology that emphasize God's love to such a degree that it becomes a weak, insipient helplessness, an unwillingness to judge, that God's love is so accentuated and there is no room for judgment. There is no room for hell sometimes. A man's will is lifted up so high that God becomes impotent. These are ugly pictures and they have no hope or comfort.

But then we know what Hypercalvinism has done, just the opposite, hasn't it? It has exalted God's dominion and sovereignty and absoluteness to such a degree there is no place for responsibility and for the free exercise of faith and repentance and there is no God that is close and tender. He becomes far away, impersonal.

But, as I said, you and I will always have to wrestle with this problem because of our own finite sinfulness, that we are going to get carried away with certain aspects of God's character and if we are not careful we will hold to those aspects in such a way that it becomes a caricature and not part of the balanced character of God.

That is why we must keep before us the whole picture as it is found in Scripture, summarized so beautifully in the Westminster standards. Revel in the attributes of God. Revel, as well, that our God himself emphasizes grace and mercy and compassion over against judgment and anger.

So when he comes and he reveals his glory to Moses in Exodus 34 verse six:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "[Jehovah, Jehovah] God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."²⁰

What is it that God emphasizes? Mercy, compassion, grace, loving kindness. That must be the emphasis of our ministry. We must preach the law. You can not do proper evangelism if you don't preach the law. We must preach the wrath of God and the realities of hell. But we do so because we have learned something of the heart of God.

We are not preaching these things to lock people up in hell. No, we are preaching these things that they might be delivered from that prison house. And if the doctrine of law and judgment important and must have their balanced place are but to awaken sinners. But when they are awakened, if they do not behold a God who is kind and compassionate and gracious and slow to anger and full of loving kindness, they will be repelled. They won't know where to go.

And so keep a balanced view of God. Keep a balanced view of him, then, in your preaching and pleading with sinners.

And then in your own character, you see, we by our behavior and by our words can also portray the caricatures and the imbalances. I know I have throughout my life been guilty of this. I still with shame remember we were in the hospital when our daughter was born in Jackson, Mississippi and a little nurse was in there jabbering on about soap operas and I just corrected her in a very harsh way. You know, we can do that because we get rightly incensed when the purity or glory of God or the Christian faith is under attack. But it is how we respond when we are incensed that we must reflect the character of God as patience and forbearance as we talked about them last week.

This morning in the locker room at the Y I heard a man talking about his troubles and the two guys were talking and pretty soon it was, you know, boy, when it rains it pours. And, of course, in my heart I am saying, "You know, you idiot. God is sovereign. And he has sent these things in your life."

Now how helpful would that have been?

²⁰ Exodus 34:6-7.

So I thought, “Now how do I... What do I say? I heard his conversation.”

So I am talking to the man and so I say, “You know, it is rough.” I said, “Isn’t it great to know when these things happen to us that God is a loving God?”

And the man said, “Yes, I wish I would see more of his love.”

And I said, “And that love is ours in Jesus Christ.”

Now, see, in two sentences I responded to him with sympathy and I got a bit of the gospel laid upon his heart.

We have to avoid the caricatures that happen in our own personalities because of our love with God’s greatness and sovereignty and majesty. We must be balanced. We want to reflect to others. Holiness is beautiful. You and I often make holiness ugly. We can caricature it by censoriousness or lack of apparent sympathy or by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. So may God help us to learn from Bildad’s error that our God is whole and beautiful. And as we have been redeemed reflect his image, may we be increasingly whole and beautiful as we pattern God’s beauty before men? And that includes social graces.

As we speak, then, as pastors and counselors let us seek to bring the apt word, the proper application of God’s character to the situation where we are found. Amen.

Our God in heaven, we thank you that we can confess all of these things about you as Bildad has done, but we also can see where he went wrong with them and we pray that you would keep us from doing so, you will cause us increasing, to know you and the balance of your duty and to be overwhelmed with your loveliness, to reflect that loveliness in our transformation into the image of our Savior. And may we preach and teach and live and pastor the picture of a beautiful and glorious God. Amen.