

With Friends Like These...

Job 4:1–7:21

Studies in Job #3

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WITH friends like these, who needs enemies? It's a phrase that means your so-called friends are even worse than your enemies.

We begin to that with Job's friends. At this point, all his possessions were destroyed or taken away; all his family is dead except for his wife; and his body is wracked with painful sores; can it get any worse? Satan's next strategy to get Job to curse God to his face is to bring even more suffering by using Job's friends, unwittingly, beginning with Eliphaz.¹

Comforter Eliphaz (4:1–5:27)

Let's look first at the *comforter Eliphaz*, from **Teman** (v. 1), a land known for its wisdom (Jer. 49:7) He speaks first most likely because he was the eldest (15:10), which is evidenced by his speaking in the name of all three in 5:27, **this we have searched out**, and because the Lord rebukes the three friends in his name (42:7).² After Job could not hold back but cried out in chapter 3 Eliphaz asks if he speaks **will [Job] be impatient** because he, too, cannot **keep from speaking?** (4:2) These speeches are notoriously hard to

¹ Green, 112; Kline 464; Jones, 71–72.

² Kline, 465; Jones, 83.

organize but it seems Eliphaz's words are arranged in a chiasm that I've arranged for you to see on your outline.

Look at his *exhortation* in 4:3–6. He begins by praising Job. In the past he **instructed many, strengthened the weak hands, upheld him who was stumbling, and made firm the feeble knees** (4:3, 4). But sometimes we start with a praise to get someone's guard down only to segue into a punch! **But now** [the need for encouragement] **has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed** (4:5). Eliphaz is saying, like a doctor who doesn't take his own medicine Job, taught others, but won't be taught; Job counseled others to be patient, but he isn't! Aren't we the same, struggling to do what we say like Job? Eliphaz rubs salt in the wound by saying Job claims to fear God and be a man of integrity (4:6).

Now notice his *observation* of how God deals with humans that comes from his own personal experience in 4:7–11: **Remember: 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** (4:7–8).

This is a summary of what all Job's counselors say. "I've seen it to be a general rule of human experience: on the one hand, the innocent don't suffer like this; on the other, like a farmer, those who plant sin reap the whirlwind."

Eliphaz uses the dramatic language of **the breath of God** and **the blast** (*ruah*) **of his anger** to **consume**[...] evildoers (4:9). What's the implication? "Job, *you're* suffering, therefore, this must mean that you have done *something* to deserve it." So what's wrong with Eliphaz's counsel? As a general rule, nothing; what he says is true. The problem is not Eliphaz's doctrine but his unsympathetic application. If I can put it in terms we understand, Eliphaz is a cage-phase Calvinist who lacks compassion! He's theologically precise, but his timing is terrible!³ That's *our* problem, too!

After his exhortation and observation of personal experience, Eliphaz comes to the heart of his "comfort": a *revelation* based in his own spiritual experience. He describes an *event* when **a word was brought to me stealthily** and **my ear received the whisper of it** (4:12) while he was in **deep sleep** (4:13), which is the same word used of Adam in Genesis 2:21 and of the patriarch Abram in Genesis 15:12. Whenever someone tells you "God told me," go one to ask them if they also had the experience of **dread**, **trembling**, **shak[ing]**, and hair **st[anding] up!** (4:14, 15) Whatever it was, Eliphaz **could not discern its appearance** and lay in stunned **silence** (4:16).

This event was then filled with *content* as he heard these words: "**Can**

³ Green, 128–129.

mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" (5:17) What comfort to a sorrowing friend! Job will go on to say, in effect, "Tell something I don't know!" (9:2). Again, the application for us to draw is that Eliphaz applies a truth to Job's particular situation in an unloving way. We need to be more like Eliphaz the listener in chapter 2 and less Eliphaz the corrector here! He then drives home the point with a comparison: **Even in his servants God puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error** (4:18). If even the holy angels are charged by God with error, how much more **those who** are frail and **dwelt in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth, who are beaten to pieces, and perish forever** (4:19–20). Because of this there was no one who would **answer** Job and no **holy one**[...] to which to **turn** (5:1). Eliphaz drives home Satan's point: "There's no hope for hypocrites!"

So Eliphaz returns to his *observation* from his own personal experience in 5:2–16. He says **I have seen** that **vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple** (5:3). He goes on to again speak true words but at the wrong time to the wrong man, hitting a raw nerve: **His children are far from safety; they are crushed in the gate** (5:4). Job's intimate friend is here to comfort him and he speaks of the fool's children dying because of the

foolishness of the fool. What does that sound like to you from the story already? This is an allusion to Job's kids (1:19). Eliphaz makes it worse as he observes that affliction doesn't just come from nowhere: **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** (5:6-7). In other words, "This was no accident; your children's death is all your fault Job!" But there's a remedy: **I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause** (5:8). "Repent!"

Finally, Eliphaz ends up where he began with *exhortation* in 5:17-26. The sum is if you seek God in repentance for your sin, you'll be blessed again! Eliphaz's gospel is of restoration. What's wrong with that? He's playing to exactly what Satan said Job served God for! "Does Job serve God for no reason?" (1:9) He's telling Job, "There is a precise ratio between God's righteousness and his blessings; your unrighteousness and your sufferings. But if you would just repent, this just God will accept you and you'll enjoy his blessings!" Again, the problem was not unsound doctrine but uncaring application. God has allowed Job to be given over to poverty and sickness. As he scratches himself on his ash-heap, how do these words console: **he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal?** (5:18). While

merciless men have run off with his possessions, what good is the promise of **the beasts of the field [being] at peace with you?** (5:24) As his children lie dead in the earth, how can the promise **your offspring shall be many and your descendants as the grass of the earth** do to help his heart? (5:25).⁴ For a man who desires death, what good is promising **ripe old age?** (5:26).

Uncomforted Job (6:1–7:21)

The *uncomforted Job* speaks. The contrast is while Eliphaz turned God into a formula to be calculated with predictable results, “Job...faces the agony of getting along with a God over whom he has absolutely no control.”⁵ And that’s what torments him. He knew life was God’s gift; that’s why he doesn’t complain when it’s all taken away. And he knew that getting back to “normal” was not about manipulating a sovereign God!

He begins his lament in 6:2–13. While Eliphaz warned “vexation kills the fool (5:2), Job says that if his **vexation were weighed and all my calamity laid in the balances...it would be heavier than the sand of the sea.** Job even concedes **my words *have been rash*** (6:2–3).

His calamity is heavy; it’s also painful: **For the arrows of the**

⁴ Anderson, 124.

⁵ Anderson, 124.

Almighty (Shaddai) are in me...the terrors of God are arrayed against me (6:4). Can you imagine feeling like God was using you for target practice? Can you imagine your suffering feeling like hunger pains? **Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder? (6:5)** He then mocks Eliphaz's comfort as being **tasteless** like food **without salt** such as **the juice of the mallow**, or the white of an egg (6:6).⁶

Therefore he states again his **request, hope**, and false **comfort** of dying; but again notice, he never entertains suicide. If he is going to die, it would be by the hands of God: **that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!** (6:8–10) He feels this way because he's not Superman: **What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze?** (6:11–12)

Then he rebukes his unsympathetic friends in 6:14–30 **who withhold[...] kindness from [their] friend [and thus] forsake[...] the fear of the Almighty (6:14).** Look at the image he uses of them: they are **treacherous as a torrent-bed, as torrential streams that pass away...When [the snow] melt[s], they disappear; when it is hot, they**

⁶ See discussion in Longman III, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), .132–133 n5.

vanish from their place (6:15, 17). Job imagines a rainstorm and snowmelt that has come into to a dry riverbed, only to disappear soon after. These are Job's friends. And Job is like nomadic **caravans** that **turn aside from their course** and **go up into the waste and perish** in their **look[ing]** and **hop[ing]** for water when the riverbeds are dried up (6:18–19). He wanted help like the caravans, but is now **ashamed...and disappointed** because like the riverbeds, his friends **have now become nothing** (6:20–21). In 6:24 and 28 Job asserts his innocence and claim that God is acting justly; while Eliphaz claim that Job must have sinned because God is justly punishing him.

In chapter 7 he returns to his lament and addresses God, using creational language as he did in chapter 3: **Has not man a hard service on earth** (7:1), echoing the words of the Lord God: “cursed is the ground...in pain you shall eat of it...by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen. 3:17, 19). Because of the Fall of Adam **are not his days like the days of a hired hand? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like a hired hand who looks for his wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me** (7:1–3) And after days of hardship he goes to sleep, only to find no rest: **But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn** (7:4). And when he rises again, he is

reminded that his **flesh is clothed with worms and dirt his skin hardens, then breaks out afresh** (7:5). And every day **come[s] to their end without [his] hope** of dying (7:6).

So he pleads with God to **remember that my life is a breath** (7:7). But God's **eyes are on him** (7:8) in cursing. All Job can do is lament: **I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul** (7:11). And this look of God on Job is on him as an enemy: **Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me?** Remember how Satan said Job was blessed because of the Lord's hedging him in but that Job said this was a curse. Job invokes the imagery of ancient creation myths again. **The sea** is *Yam*, the sea god, and **the sea monster** is *Tannin*, both of them are enemies of God. Job is saying, "Why are you treating me like an enemy?" Job tries to escape by going to sleep but **then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones** (7:13-15). His conclusion? **Leave me alone, for my days are a breath** (7:16).

Look at how he speaks in words that remind us of Psalm 8: **What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?** (7:17-18)

This visitation is not for good in Job's lament. God is looking at him, which is harsh to Job: **How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit? If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind? Why have you made me your mark? Why have I become a burden to you?** (7:19–20) Job ends with the question: **Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?** (7:20) He knows he needs forgiveness, it's why he's offered sacrifices; but what else has he done that's not covered? And if God won't forgive, then just let me die, as he quotes from the story of Genesis 3: **For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be** (7:21).

You see, Eliphaz says the source of Job's suffering is his sin, but Job recognizes that it has to be something else because his God is just and Job is suffering for nothing he's done. As I mentioned in my first sermon, Job is all about "who's wisdom do I trust when I suffer?" not, "why do I suffer?" We can now look back and say Job's search for wisdom is found in Jesus Christ, the most righteous man who ever lived yet the most cruelly punished man who ever lived. Why? Because the cross is the wisdom of God. It's foolishness to us, but it demonstrates God's hidden purpose revealed. So when I suffer, too, I can take comfort by embracing my crucified Lord.