

For the next few weeks, we'll be hearing the wisdom debate between Job and his friends.

The elders will read the parts of the friends –
and then I'll comment briefly on the friend's speech,
and then read Job's reply after the NT lesson.

Job's friends are trying to bring comfort:

they are trying to figure out what is happening to Job –
and how it fits into what they know about God's dealings with man.

Eliphaz had offered two options:

first, perhaps this is just “common wrath” –
maybe you are innocent – but bad things happen to everyone!
Second, perhaps God is disciplining you –
if you are patient, God will restore you.

Job replied, That's all very good – but my calamities are worse than I deserve.

You cannot say the destruction of all my children and all my possessions in a single day
was a coincidence!

God is attacking me directly. (7:11ff)

God is attacking the innocent.

There is no resolution for my troubles except death.

Eliphaz had only hinted that maybe Job had sinned.

After hearing Job's reply, Bildad is becoming convinced that this is the only explanation.

After all, if Job is right, if God is attacking the innocent,
then the justice of God will be called into question.

Job had asked God, “how long will you not look away from me?”

Now Bildad is concerned that his friend is slandering God.

How dare Job say that God is doing this on purpose!

The God I serve would never do a thing like that!

Introduction: Bildad's First Speech – “Does God Pervert Justice?” (8:1-22)

a. If You Seek God and Plead for Mercy, then He Will Restore You (v1-7)

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

² *“How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great wind?*

³ *Does God pervert justice?*

Or does the Almighty pervert the right?

⁴ *If your children have sinned against him,
he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.*

⁵ *If you will seek God
and plead with the Almighty for mercy,
⁶ if you are pure and upright,
surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore your rightful habitation.
⁷ And though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.*

Bildad will speak boldly what Eliphaz had only hinted:
if your children sinned, they merely got what they deserved!
After all, everyone is a sinner – so everyone deserves death, right?

God does *not* pervert justice!
You are not speaking to God correctly!

b. The Wisdom of the Ages: “The Hope of the Godless Shall Perish” (v8-19)

⁸ *“For inquire, please, of bygone ages,
and consider what the fathers have searched out.
⁹ For we are but of yesterday and know nothing,
for our days on earth are a shadow.
¹⁰ Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?
¹¹ “Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
¹² While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.
¹³ Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish.
¹⁴ His confidence is severed,
and his trust is a spider's web.^[a]
¹⁵ He leans against his house, but it does not stand;
he lays hold of it, but it does not endure.
¹⁶ He is a lush plant before the sun,
and his shoots spread over his garden.
¹⁷ His roots entwine the stone heap;
he looks upon a house of stones.
¹⁸ If he is destroyed from his place,
then it will deny him, saying, ‘I have never seen you.’
¹⁹ Behold, this is the joy of his way,
and out of the soil others will spring.*

Bildad draws on all sorts of biblical themes and proverbs
and says lots of wise things!

The wisdom of the fathers says that “the hope of the godless shall perish.”
If you forget God, then you have no future.

c. The Wisdom of the Ages: “God Will Not Reject a Blameless Man” (v20-22)

²⁰ “Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,
nor take the hand of evildoers.

²¹ He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouting.

²² Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.”

Likewise, the wisdom of the ages says that “God will not reject a blameless man.”

If you are blameless,

then God will restore you.

“He will yet fill your mouth with laughter” –

he will restore you and in the end, all will be made right.

Bildad is right!

And in fact, that *is* what happens in the end!

God restores Job and fills his mouth with laughter.

And in the end, God does clothe those who hate Job with shame –
namely, Bildad and the rest of Job’s friends!

If Bildad is right,

then why does God say that Job’s friends have *not* spoken rightly of him?

Does God pervert justice?

No.

But there came a day when it was not the *hope of the godless* that perished –

but the hope of the *godly* was hung upon the tree –

and there came a day when God *did* reject a blameless man –

and abandoned him to torment and death on a cross.

If God is just,

then is not the cross of Christ a perversion of justice?

How can an innocent man suffer for the sins of others?

If Bildad is right, then the cross is wrong.

Job may not fully understand that our salvation is at stake here –

but he *does* understand that Bildad’s position leaves *him* with no hope!

We’ve been singing Psalm 89 this morning.

Psalm 89 starts by speaking of the LORD’s steadfast love [*hesed*] to David –

weaving together images from the Creation and the Exodus

into a tapestry telling the story of David and his heirs.

We have sung of God’s promises to David,

how God said that he would discipline David's sons,
but he would never remove from him "my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness."

"His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me."

The final section of Psalm 89 raises the problem:

in spite of God's promises, God has now renounced the covenant with his servant.

If you read the book of Kings, you will find that David's sons *deserved* judgment.

But Psalm 89 does not say that.

Psalm 89 does not ask "why are you doing this?"

Psalm 89 asks "how long until you restore us?"

Indeed, Psalm 89 is not focused on the problem of *sin* –
but on the problem of *death*.

There are lots of echoes of Job in Psalm 89

(or perhaps there are echoes of Psalm 89 in Job!).

Just as the Davidic king is the servant of the LORD

to whom God's steadfast love and faithfulness has been promised,

so also Job must pass through exile – forsaken by God.

Sing Psalm 89:37-52

Read Romans 4

What do we make of Job's protestations of innocence?

Paul said in Romans 3 that there is none righteous –

that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Many in the Jewish tradition believed that Abraham was sinless.

So you can hear in Romans 4:1 the question, "what about Abraham?"

What's interesting is that Paul does not say, "Oh, Abraham was a sinner, too."

In order to convict Abraham of sin,

you would need to show from the text of Genesis where Abraham sinned.

So instead of arguing, "Abraham was a sinner,"

Paul argues *If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about –
but not before God!*

No one can be righteous before God by works!

Not even Abraham!

After all, the scripture says, *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*

*Scripture says, that even Abraham – the most upright and blameless man who ever lived –
was justified by faith, not by works!*

How do you compare to Abraham?
How do you compare to Job?
Are you more upright and blameless than they were?

Now I'm not saying that Abraham and Job never sinned.

What I'm saying is that scripture gives us no evidence to convict them of sin!

It's valid to argue that

- 1) "all men [descended from Adam by ordinary generation] have sinned" –
- 2) Abraham and Job were men, descended from Adam by ordinary generation –
- 3) Therefore Abraham and Job sinned.

That's a valid argument.

But it's not Paul's argument.

Paul's argument in Romans 4 is that even the most righteous man who ever lived was justified by faith – not by works.

How can a man be in the right before God?

By works of the law?

Never.

Only by faith in the mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has united God and man in one person through his incarnation –
and who has borne our infirmity and taken away our sin
through his death and resurrection!

Why do I start a sermon on three chapters of Job with a lengthy comment on Romans 4?

Because what Paul is saying in Romans 4 is *precisely* what Job is aiming towards in Job 9-10.

And when you see what Paul is doing in Romans 4,
you can get Job's point a lot quicker!

Job starts by agreeing with Bildad.

"Truly I know that it is so."

I agree: God does not pervert justice.

The wisdom of the ages is exactly right:

God will restore the innocent;

He will not reject a blameless man.

But when judgment day comes,
how can a man be in the right before God?

When you hear this word "right" you need to hear the whole complex of ideas
"righteousness" "vindication" "justification"

How can a man be justified before God?

How can a man be vindicated before God?

How can a man be “in the right” before God?

Do you see why I said that Romans 4 is the key to understanding this?

Bildad thinks that “God will not reject a blameless man.”

Bildad thinks that if Abraham is justified by works,
then he has reason to boast *before God*.

Job says, I agree that God does not pervert justice.

But how can I be right before God?

1. Job’s Answer to Bildad – I Agree with Your Central Point (9:1-24)

a. But How Can a Man Be in the Right Before God? (v2-12)

⁹ Then Job answered and said:

² “Truly I know that it is so:

But how can a man be in the right before God?

³ If one wished to contend with him,

one could not answer him once in a thousand times.

⁴ He is wise in heart and mighty in strength

—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?—

⁵ he who removes mountains, and they know it not,

when he overturns them in his anger,

⁶ who shakes the earth out of its place,

and its pillars tremble;

⁷ who commands the sun, and it does not rise;

who seals up the stars;

⁸ who alone stretched out the heavens

and trampled the waves of the sea;

⁹ who made the Bear and Orion,

the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;

¹⁰ who does great things beyond searching out,

and marvelous things beyond number.

¹¹ Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not;

he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

¹² Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back?

Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’

Job has moved from the utter despair and wild curses of chapter 3

through the hopeless complaint of chapters 6-7

now to the question of the *justice* of what God is doing.

Okay – I’m going to need to explain this!

Nowadays, when you think about justice, you tend to think in terms of law –

maybe, at best, you also include the idea of ‘wisdom.’

But in the scriptures justice is not merely a matter of law – or even wisdom.

Justice is also a matter of strength.

It is not enough to *know* what is right.

You must also have the *power* to do what is right!

We saw last time that Job asked where he could find strength and wisdom (Job 6:11-13).
In 9:2-12, Job uses the same language to describe the strength and wisdom of God.
A good king is characterized by wisdom and strength.

If you have a good and wise king,
that does not mean that justice will prevail.
If your good and wise king is *weak*
then all his goodness and wisdom will do *you* no good!
And a foolish but strong king is a terror to the just,
precisely because he *can* accomplish his evil purposes!

You will only find true justice in a king who is both wise and strong.

Herein lies Job's problem!

God is both wise and strong – therefore who will say to him, “What are you doing?”

Job understands that his is a hopeless quest!

You – a mere man – are going to challenge the justice of God?

You are going to contend with one who removes mountains?
with one who trampled the waves of the sea – and they were still.

Incidentally, do you now see what Jesus was doing when he walked on the water?

He is the one who tramples the waves of the sea.

And he is the one who said:

“if you have faith and do not doubt, . . . even if you say to this mountain,
'be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.” (Matthew 21:21)

In Jesus, the justice of the kingdom has come – by faith.

Jesus does what only God can do.

Jesus has the *strength* to do justice –
and the *wisdom* to do what is right.

But in Job's day, Jesus hasn't come yet,

and so in verses 13-24 Job applies this to his situation:

b. Even Though I Am Right, I Cannot Answer Him! (v13-24)

¹³ “God will not turn back his anger;
beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab.

¹⁴ How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?

¹⁵ Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser [literally, “my judge”].^[b]

¹⁶ If I summoned him and he answered me,
I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.

¹⁷ For he crushes me with a tempest
and multiplies my wounds without cause;

¹⁸ *he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.*
¹⁹ *If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?^[c]*
²⁰ *Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.*
²¹ *I am blameless; I regard not myself;
I loathe my life.*
²² *It is all one; therefore I say,
‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’*
²³ *When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity^[d] of the innocent.*
²⁴ *The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges—
if it is not he, who then is it?*

The imagery of this passage is that of the courtroom –
but, we should hasten to add, the courtroom of the triumphant, victorious king!

And you see that in the reference to Rahab.

Rahab – like Leviathan – is another of the monsters of the ancient world.

God is the one who triumphed over Rahab –
he has proven himself as the mighty conqueror;
therefore he has the right to judge.

And so Job says, “even though I am in the right, I cannot answer him.”

What words could I choose in a verbal battle with the one who spoke and it came to be?

Perhaps verse 20 requires a little explanation:

“Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.”

If Job is blameless, then how could God prove him perverse?

Bildad is probably sitting there saying,

“Thanks, Job, you’re making my point for me!”

But Job has agreed with Bildad that God does *not* pervert justice.

So if Job tries to summon God to answer “What are you doing?”

and we’ve already agreed that God does *not* pervert justice,
then Job is perverting justice by demanding that God answer “what are you doing?”

He would prove me perverse, because there is no way that God could pervert justice.

And so Job concludes:

“It is all one; therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.” (v22)

This is Job's version of "common wrath."

Just as there is "common grace" – where the rain falls upon the just and the unjust;
so also there is a common wrath:
destruction, disaster, calamity – come upon the blameless and the wicked.

In one sense, Job is here agreeing with Eliphaz.

It is *undoubtedly* God who gives the earth into the hand of the wicked.
"If it is not he, who then is it?" (v24)

God's attitude toward humanity is one of unrelenting hostility.

God destroys the wicked and the blameless together!

So what was the point of being blameless?

Notice that Job is asking Satan's question:

"Does Job fear God for nothing?"

It's okay to ask that question:

Do I fear God for no reason?

And particularly – if you ask this question of God!

As we saw last time,

you may not grumble against God –

because grumbling and murmuring starts from a standpoint of rebellion;

but you *may* complain to God!

because a complaint starts from a standpoint of faith:

You, O God, are wise and strong – you are just;

what I'm seeing around me is weak and foolish and unjust;

therefore, there is a problem here,

and you are the only one who can fix it!

"If it is not he, who then is it?"

2. Job's Answer to God: I Am Powerless before You (9:25-10:22)

And so Job turns away from his friends,

and addresses God with another complaint!

Job starts his second complaint with a statement about the swiftness of his passing days,
followed by two "if" clauses in verses 27-31.

a. I Cannot Win in Court Against You because There Is No Arbiter (v25-35)

²⁵ *"My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee away; they see no good.*

²⁶ *They go by like skiffs of reed,
like an eagle swooping on the prey.*

²⁷ *If I say, 'I will forget my complaint,
I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,'*

²⁸ *I become afraid of all my suffering,*

for I know you will not hold me innocent.
²⁹ *I shall be condemned;*
why then do I labor in vain?
³⁰ *If I wash myself with snow*
and cleanse my hands with lye,
³¹ *yet you will plunge me into a pit,*
and my own clothes will abhor me.

As Job speaks to God, he ponders two options:

- 1) I could abandon my complaint “and be of good cheer”;
(I could put on a smiley face, here in the ash heap!)
but as my “comforters” have pointed out,
my suffering demonstrates my condemnation;
So even though my quest for vindication is hopeless,
I must continue.
- 2) Alternately, “if I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye”
I could seek to purify myself –
as I purified my children by sacrifice day after day
(and you know how well that turned out – they’re all dead now!)

Psalm 73, “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.”
If this is what I get –
what is the point of fearing God and turning away from evil?

³² *For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,*
that we should come to trial together.
³³ *There is no^{el} arbiter between us,*
who might lay his hand on us both.
³⁴ *Let him take his rod away from me,*
and let not dread of him terrify me.
³⁵ *Then I would speak without fear of him,*
for I am not so in myself.

Job feels keenly the problem:

God is not a man – I have no standing in the divine council –
that we should come to trial together.
There is no arbiter – no mediator – no one to “stand in between” us.

God is God.
I am not.

Job has put his finger on the problem of justification in the Old Testament.
How can a man be right before God?
Job says, “I deserve to be vindicated by God –
but how can I compel him to vindicate me?”

Take the most blameless, upright man in the world.
If he is justified by works, he has reason to boast before man –
but not before God.

Job recognizes that “in myself” I have no standing here –
“in myself” I cannot speak without fear and terror of God!

How can you stand before the Almighty and All-Wise God?
The LXX translated “arbiter” as “mediator” – a word used in the NT a few times:

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all,
which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Job is crying out for Jesus!
And Jesus, as Gregory the Great points out,
both “rebuked the sin of man” –
and “moderated the wrath of the Judge by undergoing death” (9:61)
thereby becoming the mediator between God and men.

Notice that “the hopelessness of the quest for vindication
is not felt by Job so radically that he forthwith abandons the search”!
Rather he seems to recognize that the quest for vindication before God
“is a dangerous and futile enterprise” – but it is one that he must embark on anyway.
While outward restoration is the sign of what vindication looks like,
what Job really wants is “not his good health or possessions
but the...divine acceptance that is symbolized by them.” (Clines, 226)

And so Job will continue his complaint –
because he has no other place to go!

When you are at your wits end –
and you cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel,
(except what appears to be a train barreling down on you!)
then continue your complaint to God.

b. Whether I Am Right or Wrong Does Not Seem to Matter to You (10:1-17)

*10 “I loathe my life;
I will give free utterance to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
let me know why you contend against me.
3 Does it seem good to you to oppress,
to despise the work of your hands
and favor the designs of the wicked?
4 Have you eyes of flesh?
Do you see as man sees?”*

⁵ *Are your days as the days of man,
or your years as a man's years,
⁶ that you seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,
⁷ although you know that I am not guilty,
and there is none to deliver out of your hand?
⁸ Your hands fashioned and made me,
and now you have destroyed me altogether.
⁹ Remember that you have made me like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?
¹⁰ Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
¹¹ You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.
¹² You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.
¹³ Yet these things you hid in your heart;
I know that this was your purpose.
¹⁴ If I sin, you watch me
and do not acquit me of my iniquity.
¹⁵ If I am guilty, woe to me!
If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head,
for I am filled with disgrace
and look on my affliction.
¹⁶ And were my head lifted up, ^[L] you would hunt me like a lion
and again work wonders against me.
¹⁷ You renew your witnesses against me
and increase your vexation toward me;
you bring fresh troops against me.*

Job recites all that the wisdom tradition has said about God's creation of man.
There are echoes of Genesis 2, Psalms 90, 119, 138, and 139.
All these kind and gracious things that God has done for me!

And what is the point?

So that you can "hunt me like a lion and again work wonders against me!"

And so Job returns to his original point:

c. Leave Me Alone before I Go the Land of Gloom and Darkness (10:18-22)
¹⁸ *"Why did you bring me out from the womb?
Would that I had died before any eye had seen me
¹⁹ and were as though I had not been,
carried from the womb to the grave.
²⁰ Are not my days few?
Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer*

²¹ before I go—and I shall not return—
to the land of darkness and deep shadow,
²² the land of gloom like thick darkness,
like deep shadow without any order,
where light is as thick darkness.”

In Job’s lament and curse in chapter 3,
he had cursed the day of his birth – the night of his conception –
but such a curse has no hope of accomplishing anything!

But there is a big difference between what Job was doing in chapter 3 –
wailing and crying out in his anguish and pain –
and what Job is doing here.

Because in Job 3, he is railing at the day and at the night.
Here, Job turns his complaint to God.
And while Job has little hope –
at least he knows with whom he must deal!

It’s true, Bildad,
God is just.
And that is the problem!

Job is not saying he wants to be righteous before God –
he is already as righteous as a man can be!

Job wants to be *declared* righteous by God! (9:2)
He wants to be *justified* before God.

He wants to stand in the heavenly court, and be declared right by God.

It is an audacious claim!
But the irony is that God has *already* done this!
“Have you considered my servant Job,
that there is none like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (1:8)

God has already declared Job righteous.
And yet, as the sequel will show,
Job has no grounds for boasting *before God*.
By the works of the law, *no one* can be justified before God!

But because Job sees no possibility of being justified by God,
he pleads with God to leave him alone
so that he can go down into death.

Job would like an audience with God –

he wants to appear before the heavenly court –
but he sees no hope in that route;
death is the only solution;
going down into deep darkness – the land of gloom and deep shadow –
is the only way out.

He's right, by the way!

The only problem is that once *Job* succumbs to death,
there is no return!

He needs a mediator – one who can pass through the valley of deep darkness
and emerge again on the other side!

Another place where the NT uses *Job*'s word "mediator" (arbiter) is in Hebrews 9:

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

And as Paul says,

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, you will never face *Job*'s problem!

You will face all sorts of *other* problems –
but not *Job*'s problem!

You need not fear the grave – the "land of darkness and deep shadow"

because Jesus Christ has passed through the valley of the shadow of death
and he has been raised up into everlasting life;
and therefore,

"through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,
and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

and hope does not put us to shame,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
who has been given to us." (Romans 5:2-5)