

August 9, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

THE BITTER SOUL SPEAKS Job 6-7

In the second verse of our text (6:2), we find a Hebrew word translated *vexation* in the ESV or *grief* in the KJV. It is not a real common word in the Old Testament. But here it sets the tone for chapters six and seven, and also tempers most of the story of Job. He was a man familiar with provocation, or frustration, caused by the highly unusual circumstances of his life.

In fact, the word is often translated *provocation* or, in verb form, *to provoke*. Like when God's people in the wilderness provoked God (Deuteronomy 32:19). Or like Hannah's competing wife who provoked her to vexation (1 Samuel 1:6). Or like all the provocations of King Manasseh that stirred God to pour out His wrath on His people (2 Kings 23:26).

Provocation, or we might use the word affliction, can have a deleterious effect on people. On one hand, the Bible teaches that it is not uncommon for adversity to reveal the true character of the heart. We have often said that we are like sponges. Let the adversities of life squeeze us and our true character will come out. On the other hand, it is also clear that adversity can help shape the character of the heart – for good or bad. That is the process we observe in this story about Job beginning in chapter three.

From the outset this story informed us as to Job's character, the traits of his heart. The very first statement in the book reveals that this man in the land of Uz was named Job, and that this man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1). God reaffirmed that sterling character twice in His arguments with Satan. Job's character was rock solid.

However, beginning with chapter three we begin to see some evidence that maybe the incredible adversity into which Job was thrown caused him to respond contrary to the character by which he had been known. Maybe adversity was beginning to shape Job's character contrary to what it had been. Be that as it may, He will not lose his integrity, even as God promised would be the case in response to Satan's challenge.

This stress from affliction is also obvious in Job's response to Eliphaz's accusations. That response comprises chapters six and seven in the book. In these two chapters, we find twenty-three questions. Many of them are rhetorical, not expecting answers. But, in those twenty-three questions, fourteen of them fall within the context and/or are directed at his counselors (6:1-30). The remaining nine questions fall within the context and/or are directed at God (7:1-21).

While we have difficulty identifying with Job because his affliction was so intense, still we are able to identify with his vexation, his frustration at not getting answers. When the trials of life sweep over us and maybe even leave us nonplused, we would like to have friends, counselors, or the experts give us hope by explaining why things are the way they are and how we can find permanent relief. That dream and desire often does not come to fruition. Or we cry out to God asking for clear explanations about what He is doing and what He intends to accomplish through our trials. And sometimes we hear crickets in response. Observe Job. Hear his heart cry. Identify, sympathize, and learn important lessons.

Questions for Counselors (6:1-29).

Job expressed his frustration with circumstances, when he declared, "Oh that my vexation could be measured!" (6:1-13). That is the kind of question a sufferer might think or ask, "How heavy is the burden I bear?" In response to Eliphaz's invective, *Job answered and said: "Oh that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash" (6:1-3).*

In reality, we know that there is no way to measure, weigh, or determine the size or intensity of our affliction. Job could surmise

that his affliction would weigh more than all the sand of the sea. That is hyperbole, an incomprehensible weight. But Job felt it. The big question is, “What can we do about our trial?” What recourse is there against the Almighty Warrior? *For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me (6:4).*

Job felt like a citizen of Mansoul in Bunyan’s *The Holy War*. The city represents a person who has rebelled against Christ only to be surrounded by His army that is irresistible as they attack and bring the rebel into submission. What can you do when the invisible God aims His invisible arrows at you? The arrows are invisible, but when they hit their mark, they are painful emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically. Most discouraging is the reality that they are God’s arrows!

Setting up his argument, Job appealed to a couple of illustrations for the animal kingdom. Animals don’t make noise when they are satisfied with food. *Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder (6:5)?* Another illustration of the problem is that no one eats tasteless food if they don’t have to. *Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the juice of the mallow (6:6)?* Now the argument: In the same way Job had no appetite for the criticism (food) of his counselors. *My appetite refuses to touch them; they are as food that is loathsome to me (6:7).*

And the more Job talked, the worse things seemed to get. Since he cannot weigh His affliction, “Oh that God would kill me!” We know from our study so far that this is Job’s second death wish (cf. 3:1-19). *Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfill my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off (6:8-9)!* It is doubtful that these words indicate that Job was suicidal. Rather, his affliction was so unbearable that he longed to die. And more directly, he longed that God would quit putting the pressures of the trial on him.

If we truly trust God, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, we know that He controls our testing. Can a person who is confident in God’s control also be confident that death would be better than living without hope? *This would be my comfort; I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*

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? Have I any help in me, when resource is driven from me (6:10-13)?

How can we be confident in God’s control and yet have no hope? This is the end of the rope. When the sufferer wakes up every day knowing that the suffering has not gone away. What do you and I plan to say to Job-kind of people? What kind of advice or recommendations will you offer to such a sufferer? How can we sit by and watch our friends and loved ones suffer intensely and not want to do something to alleviate the pain?

But often words of advice or even sympathy come out all wrong and we sound like we are heartless. We are easily a bit like Eliphaz, whose words intensified Job’s frustration with his counselors (6:14-21). He finally concluded that his counselors failed to offer steadfast love. *He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers are treacherous as a torrent-bed, as torrential streams that pass away, which are dark with ice, and where the snow hides itself. When they melt, they disappear; when it is hot, they vanish from their place (6:14-17).*

In a hot, arid climate like Job’s residence, consistent streams of water were a staple of life. That is not the same as a raging, muddy torrent that briefly sped through a dry Wadi (river bed) during a rain storm and then dried up. Our counsel to the sufferer can be just that useful. They need long term, faithful, sympathetic, Bible wisdom. And yes, at times you will feel like you are being used.

Counseling the suffering requires a delicate balance where you are quietly but consistently leading the way to a foundation on the rock of God’s Word while being sensitive to how much the sufferer can handle and respond to at the moment. Moving too quickly, giving too much advice or moving too slowly and giving no advice can look like failure to the sufferer.

We have to admit that Job’s counselors didn’t exactly do it right. Therefore, Job concluded, “My counselors disappoint.” How the counselors disappointed is illustrated by a picture of caravans. *The caravans turn aside from their course; they go up into the waste and perish. The caravans of Tema look, the travelers of Sheba hope. They*

are ashamed because they were confident; they come there and are disappointed (6:18-20).

It is likely that Job and the counselors were well aware of caravans. Job was possibly involved in such ventures. Two cities, Tema, located in northwestern Arabia and, Sheba, in southwestern Arabia were on major trade routes. Sometimes the caravans came upon a well they expected would provide necessary, satisfying water — but to their shock it was dry. In response, they might move up out of the desert into the hills looking for water, but finding none perished. That is how Job saw his counselors. They had lots of words that were dry as dust, unable to satiate the turmoil in his soul.

So, too, the three friends showed up to help, but offered no satisfaction. *For you have now become nothing; you see my calamity and are afraid (6:21).* It is true that these men sacrificed their time. They came from a distance. They sat silently with Job for seven days (2:13). Then Eliphaz, portending the scene for the next twenty plus chapters, speaks wisdom. But all their words of wisdom did not apply to Job's situation. They were afraid and didn't really know what to say. When God is doing His special, ordained work in our lives, human wisdom will prove to be unsatisfactory. Even divine wisdom from the Bible misapplied will not alleviate that frustration and bitterness of soul.

Therefore, Job felt frustration because of what he perceived to be injustice (6:22-30). "Isn't a friend in need a friend indeed?" he wondered. *Have I said, "Make me a gift"? Or, "From your wealth offer a bribe for me"? Or, "Deliver me from the adversary's hand"? Or, "Redeem me from the hand of the ruthless"?* (6:22-23). Job had not used his affliction as opportunity to become a burden to his friends. He did not demand anything. And yet if they were really his friends, would they not try to offer some kind of help? Instead, as the speech of Eliphaz indicated, Job was only going to get rebuke from them.

And suddenly at 6:34 it appears that Job's whole attitude changed. Out of nowhere it seems that Job decided, "Show some sympathy." *Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone astray (6:34).* There is a difference between teaching and rebuke. Teaching first attempts to reveal the need and then offers the solution. When that process is rejected, it is time for rebuke. Eliphaz

went straight to the rebuke as if Job had manifested a stubborn, selfish, rebellious spirit.

Another request from Job was that the counselors would teach him gently. Eliphaz's words were pretty forceful. *How forceful are upright words! But what does reproof from you reprove (6:25)?* Again, there is a time for rebuke. But Job was already crushed and didn't appear to need more crushing. And so he asked, *Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind?(6:26).* If his words were empty, why bother trying to reprove? *You would even cast lots over the fatherless, and bargain over your friend (6:27).* The friends demonstrated an attitude of "hyper-justice." The kind of attitude that puts the squeeze on needy people instead of offering help.

Therefore, Job offered a plea for mercy. *But now, be pleased to look at me, for I will not lie to your face. Please turn; let no injustice be done. Turn now; my vindication is at stake. Is there any injustice on my tongue? Cannot my palate discern the cause of calamity? (6:28-30).* He begged his friends to "turn." That is to relent, change your attitude to a positive understanding attitude. Because, though Job's thoughts and words focus on the hopelessness of his situation, he was not being untrue or dramatic. He truly felt hopeless and needed help.

Questions for God (7:1-21).

Now Job turned his bitter words toward God. In doing so he acknowledged that affliction happens (7:1-6). Affliction is a common lot for humanity. *Has not man a hard service on earth, and 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).*

Because of sin's curse, life is not easy. The short version of the problem God stated in the Genesis Garden of Eden setting. *"Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat*

bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

That was not good for Adam or for any of the rest of us. In the real and long version, that painful curse works out in an endless variety of afflictions. At various times and on various levels, we all feel like slaves who just want a break (v.2). But to some sufferers (like Job) they feel they are *allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to them.*

Those bitter words remind us that affliction can seem endless to the one who is suffering. At times rest is fleeting. *When I lie down I say, “When shall I arise?” But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn (v.4).* Generally speaking, life is miserable. *My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh (v.5).* In fact, there are days when the end seems near but life to that point is hopeless. *My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle and come to their end without hope (v.6).*

All of those rose up as a complaint about God’s activity (7:7-21). “Why does God focus on a mere man?” Job wondered. That is a good question in light of the fact that all of us are simply and quickly passing away. *Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more; while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him anymore (7:7-10).*

The exhausted laborer and slave have hope that a time of rest will come (7:1-2). Job did not have that hope. He felt like his life would pass away like a vapor in the context of suffering with affliction. It does! Job knew he was about to go “down” to the grave and be remembered no more. Therefore, he pled with God to “remember” (an imperative). This is a key statement about Job’s continued faith in God. At times it seemed to waver. At times he felt hopeless. But throughout this ordeal, Job continued to hope in God that somehow He would hear and answer. And when God hears and answers the sufferer, it is all of grace!

But why does God even bother with us? *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 (v.17)?* Man is so

insignificant that only God’s mercy and grace causes Him to show us attention. Why would God be interested in mere humans who pass away so quickly? Because He made us in His image for His glory. Even in the affliction, God is bringing that image more clearly to the surface.

This second of Job’s speech ends with the mere man complaining against God. He admitted that his words flow from a bitter soul. *Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me? When I say, “My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,” then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are a breath (7:11-16).*

Once again, even though he ultimately trusts God, Job lets his emotions fly unrestrained. His words flow out of a heart that is in anguish, sunk in bitterness. The word *anguish* describes the feeling that we have been pushed into a narrow passage that constrains us so that we cannot go forward, cannot turn left or right or around and go back. Job felt like he was stuck in unrelenting affliction. The word translated *bitterness* is the well-known word *mara*, which Naomi used to describe herself after losing her husband and two sons to death and returning to Bethlehem from Moab. When people referred to her as Naomi, *she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20).* Jesus rightly taught that our words are the overflow of our hearts. When the sufferer feels trapped and bitter against God, his or her words will manifest that feeling.

In suffering, we are going to have questions that remain unanswered for a time. *Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be (7:19).* In verse twenty, Job asked why God watches him. The idea of watch or “look” generally means to gaze upon with interest or approval. To Job, God’s attention means suffering and he would rather be without that attention.

It appears that Job forgot that sin is an offense against God’s character first. *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? (7:20). Job maintained that he did not know about any sin in his life. But just in case he asked, *“Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be (7:21).* In time God would answer all these questions. In time God will answer our questions about suffering. But the time and intensity of His children’s suffering is God’s decision to make.

Job pointed out a very important truth in the midst of his anguished and bitter words: 1) All people are passing away whether we suffer or prosper. 2) Therefore, all suffering and prosperity is also passing away. What matters is the eternal. God is and will always be.

In contrast to our passing lives and passing troubles, God’s word is also settled forever and will never change. Therefore, whether we suffer or prosper, our hope, our confidence, our security, and, therefore, our focus will be on Him and His promises.

Job illustrates for us how clouded our perception of God can become. He helps us see that affliction can become so intense that we cannot even think clearly about who God is and what He has promised. However, in the midst of the dark night, as we are fighting with all our strength not to lose faith in God, we must remember that He is holding on to us with no chance at all that He will ever let us go.