

September 27, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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I WILL SHOW YOU! Job 15

In 1898 H. G. Wells wrote a science fiction novel titled *War of the Worlds* which is about aliens from space landing on earth and then proceeding to take over our world. On Halloween eve, 1938, Orson Welles directed an adaptation of that story on his radio drama series called *The Mercury Theater on the Air*. The radio show began as it typically did with the music, introductions, and such. But then as it progressed, the show began to be interrupted by news bulletins about some kind of strange object falling from the sky on a farm at Grover's Mill, New Jersey. Of course, the listeners' anxiety grew as more and more reports supposedly tracked the aliens landing in New York City and then all over the country.

You must remember that in October 1938 the world was already on edge. A year earlier Japan had invaded China. In March 1938 Nazi Germany had absorbed Austria without firing a shot. In September Britain and France had agreed to let Italy and Germany "own" Czechoslovakia. War and uncertainty were already in the air. Radio was the prime source for the latest news. It was supposed to be "up to the minute." And some people were convinced that the sky was falling, which really was not Orson Welles' intent.

Our cultural history claims that panic ensued across the nation, especially in the large cities, when *The Mercury Theater* listeners were convinced that the Martians had actually attacked. In reality, the panic was probably not all that massive because *The Mercury Theater on the Air* didn't have that many listeners.

That some people panicked at the so-called news is a reminder that we must be careful about assumptions in response to what we hear. That many people today believe that there was a massive,

nationwide panic in response to the story also teaches the same lesson. There probably wasn't.

We are thoroughly inundated with this problem daily. There is so much "news" flying through the media and internet – not to mention at the gossip table at work. Do you make assumptions and draw irrefutable conclusions about what you hear or do you check out your sources?

For example, a couple of weeks ago my wife said to me, "Have you heard about anything new happening in Portland?" Now to set the background to that question, you need to realize that our son Mark and his family live in Portland, OR, and, at that point, the city had endured ninety straight days of protesting and rioting which includes burning stuff. So I said, "No, why?" Pat said, "Well someone asked me if Mark's family had evacuated Portland because of the fires." We didn't get upset, worried, or panic. At the moment we agreed that Mark is an adult and he makes pretty good decisions, and if he needed to evacuate his family he would, and if he thought we ought to know he would inform us — none of which occurred.

The next day, I thought I would check out any news on the subject. Sure enough, there were some fires burning in Clackamas County about 35 miles south of the city. No problem for our kids. Truth is comforting.

So how do you respond to so-called evidence? Do you check the source? Do you verify before you respond or repeat? How do you verify? That is a very difficult responsibility in our day. Even the reputed "verification" websites are so politically jaded that their proof is either incomplete or misinterpreted.

We, the people of God, are the most privileged people in the world. Yes, the world of news and stuff and lies is swirling and overflowing. But we have the Word of God that cuts through all the ideas and assumptions of limited human wisdom. It is not going to change. The principles that were true 5,000 years ago are still true.

Job and his friends looked at current, obvious circumstances and made assumptions. It was so logical. They rested in a syllogism, a very common, typical argument in logic.

Major premise: God judges sin.

Minor premise: God is judging Job.

Conclusion: Job is a sinner.

We often try to reduce the complex circumstances of life to such simple syllogisms when we should not. We are so much wiser to always resort to the truth God has given us in His Word and interpret life through that lens. One area of truth, illustrated by our text, calls for our attention. It is true that God must justifiably punish sin. It follows then that God will punish sinners, real people like us. But the Bible **alone** also reveals that God has already punished God the Son for the sins of His people. Then God convicts a sinner of sin in order to draw that person to Himself for forgiveness to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. That is wonderfully good news standing in vivid contrast to the depressive assumption that God simply punishes sinners.

Assumptions Are Not Evidence (vv.1-16).

This text is full of Eliphaz the counselor's assumptions (vv.1-6). He assumed that wise men speak wise words. That seems like a fair assumption, doesn't it? *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: "Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? Should he argue in unprofitable talk, or in words with which he can do no good?" (vv.1-3).*

What the counselor meant was that Job must not be wise because his answers are as unsubstantial as wind. In his opinion, Job's arguments were empty because his words were unprofitable. Therefore, Eliphaz the truly wise man concluded that indeed Job was not a wise man. He accused Job of *doing away with the fear of God and hindering meditation before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you (vv.4-6).* Eliphaz assumed that Job discounted the fear of God, that he did away with devotion to God (*meditation*). And the problem was that Job's words were influenced by his sin (vv.5-6). Apparently, his sin clouded his thinking. Therefore, Job's arguments were not righteous and proved that he was a sinner. Were those assumptions actually helpful to solve the problem?

Then the counselor bombarded the suffering saint with rhetorical questions that accused him (vv.7-14). There were ten of these rhetorical questions by which Eliphaz didn't want an answer

and was not searching for information. He was simply hammering home his opinion about Job's attitude.

Consider the questions in order to learn the point the counselor was trying to drive home. He essentially claimed that he and his friends knew the truth which Job did not (vv.7-10). 7 *"Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father" (vv7-10).*

Eliphaz assumed that Job's attitude (very emotional) proved that he was not righteous (vv.11-13). *"Are the comforts of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring such words out of your mouth?" (vv.11-14).*

And Eliphaz assumed a very true principle by implying that there is none righteous, no not one (v.14). *"What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?" (v.14).*

However, the assumptions revealed in the questions were leading to a wrong conclusion (vv.15-16). How could Eliphaz know who or what God trusts? He boldly concluded, *"Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight" (v.15).* Okay, it is true that some angels fell with Satan. But how does Eliphaz know that God does not trust any angels? What about God's relationship with Gabriel and Michael?

And maybe the biggest question flowing from all those rhetorical questions is, "Was Job abominable?" That is what the counselor concluded when he affirmed that if God does not trust angels, *"how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!" (v.16).* Consider the argument he presented. He concluded that no human can be righteous (v.14). We agree. He concluded that even angels are not righteous (trustworthy) (v.15). Maybe, maybe not. Therefore, Job who is abominable and corrupt surely is not righteous (v.16). Or so a mere fellow human assumed.

Arrogance Does not Offer Help (vv.17-35).

Often a person who rashly makes assumptions and counts them as irrefutable evidence is also evidently arrogant (vv.17-19). That kind of person calls attention to himself and demands that others hear the authority as he speaks. *“I will show you; hear me, and what I have seen I will declare”* (v.17). If Eliphaz saw it, experienced it, and drew a conclusion, it was true. Therefore, Job better listen. At this point, I understand and sympathize with Job’s conclusion: *“No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you”* (Job 12:2).

The arrogant counselor was quite sure of himself. No errant influence here! *(What wise men have told, without hiding it from their fathers, to whom alone the land was given, and no stranger passed among them)(vv.18-19)*. Eliphaz insisted that his understanding or truth was not tainted by the influence of foreigners and outsiders. Sounds too much like some people who argue that their preference and opinion about life’s matters is incontrovertible.

Eliphaz gives pretty clear evidence that he made assumptions and that he was arrogant. But like all the counselors and Job, in there much self-expression, they did draw some true conclusions (vv.20-35). Verses twenty through twenty-four reveal how wickedness is painful. That is true. It is. *“The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him. He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword. He wanders abroad for bread, saying, ‘Where is it?’ He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand; distress and anguish terrify him; they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle”* (vv.20-24).

While this is a general truth, someone might argue: “Yes, but I’m not bad enough to experience such painful judgment.” Or “I’m just an average sinner.” “Surely God will be considerate on judgment day as He compares me with the really bad people.” “You need to stop and consider how God views your ‘minor’ wickedness.”

Those arguments don’t hold up well when we consider the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sin is just plain wickedness which Eliphaz described quite accurately. Unfortunately, he misapplied his description to Job. The counselor told Job that he stretched out his

hand against God. *“Because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty”* (v.25). The wicked sinner does run stubbornly against God, *“running stubbornly against him with a thickly bossed shield”* (v.26). He or she is greedy for pleasure *“because he has covered his face with his fat and gathered fat upon his waist”* (v.27). And they do live in the City of Destruction just like Christian did. He *“has lived in desolate cities, in houses that none should inhabit, which were ready to become heaps of ruins”* (v.28).

Those truths should rightfully lead to an accurate good warning. The sinner’s wealth is not enduring. *“He will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the earth”* (v.29). His judgment is coming. *“He will not depart from darkness; the flame will dry up his shoots, and by the breath of his mouth he will depart”* (v.30). *“It will be paid in full before his time, and his branch will not be green”* (v.32).

Therefore, the sinner must stop deceiving himself. It is so easy for sinners to trust in emptiness. And so Eliphaz warned, *“Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself, for emptiness will be his payment”* (v.31). But they are like grape vines and olive trees that look like they will produce but do not. *“He will shake off his unripe grape like the vine, and cast off his blossom like the olive tree”* (v.33). Their bribes result in nothing. *“For the company of the godless is barren, and fire consumes the tents of bribery”* (v.34). Their work and efforts are futile resulting in disappointment. *“They conceive trouble and give birth to evil, and their womb prepares deceit”* (v.35).

Those conclusions are certainly true. But they didn’t apply to Job. Eliphaz was arrogant to make such rash assumptions.

The Lesson.

An important lesson and necessary reminder from this part of Job’s story is that it is good and right to warn sinners of pending judgment. It is true that God must justifiably punish sin. This is exactly what Eliphaz argued according to verses 14-16.

This has to be the case because God is our Holy Creator. Of necessity, He who creates must determine the rules of operation. Consider for example, the person who invents a new tool or even a

software program. The inventor has a particular response or purpose in mind for the new object. It will accomplish a particular task in a particular way. For example, the inventor of a tool that make a board smooth (we will call it an electric sander) would be mighty surprised to discover that the same tool drives nails (we call those hammers). So, too, our Creator, who creates all things, forever determines, “This is how this works.” Therefore, God makes the rules for His creation according to His character.

God’s character is perfectly righteous and just. Those two words are similar. To be righteous is to have no taint of sin, to always achieve and adhere to a pure, sinless standard. To be just is to think, decide, and act according to the standard of righteousness. In the Old Testament writings, those two words are often found together in the same verse or thought. For example, we see that trend in three different statements in Job. “*I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban*” (Job 29:14). “*Shall one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn him who is righteous and mighty?*” (Job 34:17). “*The Almighty – we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate*” (Job 37:23).

A similar comparison is found in the New Testament especially in Paul’s argument that no one is made righteous by keeping the law because the law cannot justify. *And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness* (Romans 4:5). Therefore, God must make declarations of justice in keeping with His righteous character. That means NO SIN can be tolerated. Sin is “out of bounds” or not according to design.

Sin is any variation or breach of the purpose for which God made us. In general, for what purpose did God make us? Solomon, after a lifetime of research concluded, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). God’s commands reveal, define, describe God’s righteous character, the standard by which His created beings must live. Which creates a major problem because nobody, but nobody is able to keep the Creator’s commands. *As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become*

worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12). *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). This is exactly what Eliphaz argued in verse 25-27. Because of His character, the Creator is not allowed to tolerate any “commandment breaking” of which we are all guilty.

That’s a problem because it is also true that God does and will punish sinners. This is exactly what Eliphaz argued in verses 28-32. God’s law must condemn sin and sinners. After reminding us that God created us to keep His commands, Solomon taught, *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14). It is not that God simply disapproves of the breaking of His law (though He does). It is not that God simply threatens to punish people who break His law (though He does). But God has promised that He will and does punish the breaking of His law both in life and in eternity.

God brings the sinner’s deeds into judgment in this life. Sometimes God punishes the proud, the scoffer, the idolater, the sinner of every kind with unfavorable circumstances in life. Eliphaz listed some of those painful consequences (vv.20-24). Almost without exception sinners experience punishment for sin in life simply as natural consequences. The liar is often lied to. The murderer is executed. The faithless person is deceived. The deceiver is plagued by a guilty conscience, sometimes to the point of mental illness. And ultimately, the sinner winds down physically due to consequences of sin.

But worse is that God will punish the unrepentant, faithless sinner forever. John saw that reality promised in the Revelation. *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was*

not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

That is where Job's counselors leave him. That is where we can leave sinners if we are not careful. The assumption that all have sinned is exactly right. The assumption that God will judge sinners for eternity is exactly right. It is not good to leave sinners with no hope.

Leaving a sinner under conviction of sin is possible. Sinners can be convinced. It was Eliphaz's goal to convince Job that he was a sinner who needed to repent. If we truly love people, we, too, will desire to convince them that they are sinners in need of the Savior. In fact, it is possible that we can fully convince a person that they have sinned and continue to sin against the righteous and holy Creator God – in their brains. Only the Holy Spirit of God is able to bring conviction of sin to the heart. Only the Holy Spirit is able to change the heart by the miracle of regeneration. He does that as we bring the sinner face to face with the truth of God's Word.

It is good and right to help sinners see that they are sinners. But the good news of forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life through faith in Christ's sacrifice on the cross was news Job never heard from his friends. May that never be said of us as we tell the truth about sin and sinners. We need to give convicted sinners hope. The good news that God forgives sin really does not show up in Eliphaz's second argument. And we can easily conceal that good news by being too zealous to prove our point that sinners sin.

It is right to assume that all have sinned and show the sinner that truth. It is right to assume that God will judge sin and show the sinner that stark reality. But it is also right to assume that God desires to forgive sin through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and be sure to show the sinner that good news.