

September 6, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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HOW FAR SHOULD YOU TRUST GOD IN YOUR TRIAL? Job 12-14

Sometimes people treat the Bible like a smorgasbord or a potluck supper. At a potluck supper we have the option of going through the line and picking out the good stuff (donuts and cookies) and leaving the stuff we don't care for (broccoli and asparagus).

There are people who, in a similar way, peruse the Bible and say, "I like that book but not this one." Or "I like that doctrine, but I disagree with this one." Actually, I must confess I feel that way myself sometimes. There are certain books of the Bible that I find difficult to embrace and savor. Leviticus and Ezekiel are two such books that I know are chocked full of wonderful truths. But when I study in those books it makes my brain sweat trying to make all the connections and trying to understand how the truths are relevant to life today.

The many and manifold speeches of Job and his friends are like that. As I read them I think about Solomon's warning that *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent (Proverbs 10:19)*. We will read at the end of the book that God began to draw the test to a close by asking, *"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2)*.

It is true that Job and all four of his counselors (including Elihu at the end) are quite verbose. Their words are many, and their words do stir up each other's anger. But in the midst of all the words and all the attending conflict, there are some great nuggets of truth. Nearly everything that these men spoke about God is true and good. However, they often reveal that they did not understand the particular

truths about God, and how He acts did not apply to Job's circumstances.

Here in one of Job's longer speeches (chapters 12-14), we find a handful of wonderful truths that give us reason to exalt God and rest in His overruling care. We will quickly work through Job's arguments against his counselors and against God, his own self-defense, but then close by focusing on the wonderful truths that God is sovereign, wise, faithful, and purifying.

Job's Argument Against Counselors.

In frustration Job griped, "You are the people." It was not a compliment. *Then Job answered and said: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (12:1-2)*. The counselors who Job addressed had presented themselves as the authorities. We have to admit that, up to this point, all of them stated true facts about God. But we also must admit that up to this point all of them criticized Job for not being truthful about his sins. All of them presumed that Job was guilty. But none of them knew the whole truth about Job. And none of them understood what God was doing to Job any better than Job understood.

The whole process seemed to start out pretty well, as though these men were going to be good counselors who listen first. It is true that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sat silently for a long time (7 days and nights, 2:13). It is also true that Job spoke first, unleashing a very emotional barrage of self-loathing (3:1-26). But then the fireworks started. After Job had opened the session, each speech by the three counselors was a response to Job's complaint or confusion articulated.

We can learn from those men the importance of asking questions and withholding judgment as we try to help suffering friends. No doubt, at some point proof of the problem, suggested correction will be beneficial. But often as we ask questions, the sufferer will prove their own indictment against self or come up with their own solution for correcting their problem (if it is solvable).

Job was not happy with the way those men attacked him and falsely accused him. He told them that they were deceitful. *As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all. Oh*

that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom! Hear now my argument and listen to the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality toward him? Will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you? Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay (13:4-12).

Granted this was quite an emotional attack. Calling the counselors people who whitewash with lies and worthless doctors are very loaded pictures. Job meant that the counselors were covering over obvious facts in order to make their case against him look good. In response, Job declared that the wise thing for them to do would be to remain silent. In other words, “No thanks for your advice!”

Then Job became more serious warning with a threat regarding God’s judgment. The counselors really didn’t speak the truth about God. Yes, many of their points were true. But the points did not truthfully explain what God was doing in Job. Therefore, would not God bring them into judgment? Consider Job’s rhetorical questions: *Will it be well with you when he searches you out (v.9)? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality (v.10). Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you (v.11)?* These were serious threats, which would not sit well with the accused. A soft answer would have been better as Solomon promised a better response. *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).* Job spoke out of utter frustration, which we understand.

Having warned his counselors, Job told them to just be quiet and listen to what he was saying. Of first importance, Job wanted to affirm that God is just. *Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may. Why should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him (13:13-16).*

Job was sure that his testimony proved that he loved and feared God. He was also sure that God is always right. Therefore, even if it cost him his life, he desired to present his case to God. There are not

many people who could approach God with such confidence. I know that my case proves that I am guilty and deserving eternal punishment. Therefore, I approach God with the confidence that Christ’s sacrifice has removed my guilt. And, if God slays me, still I will trust Him? We will consider more thoughts on this statement later.

Still Job remained certain of his innocence. He told the counselors, *Keep listening to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears. Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be in the right. Who is there who will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die (13:17-19).* The suffering saint had carefully thought through his case. He was sure that no one could prove him wrong. Therefore, he offered his self-defense.

Job’s Self-Defense.

Job was not just blowing a lot of hot air. He was not just venting to get stuff off his chest. He also understood truth. He wondered if truth about God wasn’t common knowledge. *But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these (12:3)?* Again a bit later Job reminded the counselors that they didn’t have a corner on truth. *Behold, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it. What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you (13:1-2).* It does seem from these arguments that people in Job’s day knew a great deal about God. Human experience and creation reveals much about God’s character.

But, truth without practice is frustrating. Sure Job knew much truth about God, just like his friends did. But what good was truth if He couldn’t talk to the God of truth. *But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God (13:3).* Hold on there Job! Thinking that we have the right and authority to barge into God’s presence betrays an underlying ignorance of God. It also reveals an ignorant exaltation of self. Most basically is the question Job has to address: “Where do you find God to argue with Him?” To argue with God would have been to prove that Job’s righteousness worked in relation to who he thought God was.

At least Job understood that God was in charge. But, on the other hand, knowing that God was in charge of all matters at this point

didn't make a lot of sense. *I am a laughingstock to my friends; I, who called to God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand (12:4-6).* Job had tried to live righteously, had called on God, and God had answered – in the past. Now God didn't answer Job, but He did seem to bless the sinners. If the God who is in charge is righteous, how could that make sense?

Job wasn't trying to belittle God. He readily admitted that God's authority was obvious. He illustrated how every part of God's creation should know that He maintains sovereign control. *But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food? (Job 12:1-11)*

People with experience should know truth like this. *Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days (12:12).* That is comforting assurance unless you are suffering. So why does God who controls all things for His glory allow His people to suffer? That is the root problem and question. It will be answered by the end of this book. The short answer for now is that our faith in God results in His glory.

Argument Against God (14:1-22)

Sadly, in his discouragement and frustration, Job did not honor God as he should have. In fact, his argument against God revealed his ignorance about God's work. Notice how Job carelessly threw out two requests to God. First he told God, *Withdraw your hand far from me (13:21).* That was a bad suggestion. Job didn't understand that the Lord is always perfectly wise as He allows His people to suffer. Furthermore, he didn't understand that if God withdraws His hand of testing, He would also withdraw His hand of protection and provision. No one would survive ten seconds if that actually happened. It would have been far safer and better for Job to pray with

penitent David, *Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:11).* Furthermore, neither Job nor anyone else can hide from God. *Only grant me two things, then I will not hide myself from your face (13:20).* Job's deal that he wouldn't hide from God was pretty dumb.

Second, Job demanded of God, *Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me (v.22).* Job did not demonstrate submission to His Creator and God. To make demands on God, who will in the end prove Himself to be so superior, was not wise. Listen to his accusations against his Creator. *How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff? For you write bitter things against me and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks and watch all my paths; you set a limit for the soles of my feet (13:23-28).*

Job's argument against God also revealed his ignorance about eternity. Of course it is true as Job said that each of us lives our allotted days quickly. *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not (14:1-2).* However, Job either forgot or never knew (which might be more likely) that everyone lives somewhere forever. *But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he? As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep (14:10-12).* And so Job asked, *If a man dies, shall he live again (14:14a)?*

Job wasn't looking for information. He was making a statement. Generally it appears that people in Job's day had no understanding of life after death. And yet maybe Job did, depending on what he meant by *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God (Job 19:26).*

Job's Important Conclusions.

In closing, we do well to pick out some of the choice truths that Job laid out in this complaint against everyone including God.

First, we are reminded that God is sovereign. *Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind (12:9-10).* The clear principle is that every living thing is in God's hand.

Look at verse ten again. *In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind (v.10).* God spoke all things into existence. In response to God's command, all the expansive host of space, the universe including stars, planets, and galaxies yet undiscovered. All inanimate things suddenly appeared. All animate but inarticulate things from the amoeba to the brontosaurus suddenly had life, mature life, full-grown life. In the same way, God created all people, beginning with the miracle of making Adam and Eve and continuing through procreation as the Creator continues to create.

The God who speaks all things into existence is the same God who sustains all things. All life in every part of creation is in the Creator's hand. Especially the next breath of each person is controlled, determined by God.

It would be difficult to make a more thorough and far-reaching statement about God's sovereignty. His will and purposes are evident in what He has made. His eternal will is made clear in how God maintains what He has made. God the Creator is sovereign.

Therefore, the practice will prove the principle of God's sovereignty. *The hand of the LORD has done this.* The word "this" refers most directly to the previous statement; *But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you (Job 12:7).* "This" refers to God having created all things. But the word also refers to God's sovereign control even when He brings about what does not make sense to us at all (12:6).

But in the larger context, it is a reference to God's work with Job. Who was unaware that Job's trials were God-sent? That is why his friends argued that Job needed to get right with God so the trouble would go away. What do we learn from this? We, too, like Job, but not to Job's extent, will fall into various kinds of trials and testings. The whole world will also (and does) undergo various kinds of judgments. Nations, rulers, and individuals will experience divine punishment, as God raises up one nation to put down another. And

ultimately in the last days divine judgment will be realized as God pours out judgment against all sinners.

Everyone in that day will know that God's hand has done this. *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17).*

The *hand of the Lord has done this* is an abundant testimony to God's work according to His sovereign choice. Because we know that God is sovereign, we know that He has a purpose in every trial that we face. There are no accidents with God. The purpose of the trial is to strengthen our faith in Him who is the Blessed Controller of all things.

Second, Job reminded us that God is not only sovereign but He is wise. *With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open (12:13-14).* Notice the attributes of wisdom Job listed. These are four characteristics of God. First, God has wisdom. The Hebrew words speaks of skill, ability, knowing how to make things work. That trait of God was so obvious in creation. Wisdom says of itself, *The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth (Proverbs 8:22-23).* Very practically that means that God knows how to make things work in your life and trials. He knows how to achieve His goal for you.

Another trait of God's wisdom is found in His might. Typically the word speaks of strength or power. God has the ability to make things work and the strength to bring about His desired goals.

Furthermore, God's wisdom reveals His counsel. God's counsel is His determined purpose. Often this word refers to multiple input as in a group of counselors. The counselors in this case are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who said, "Let us make man in our image," and other eternal decrees. The three persons of the Godhead are involved in bringing about their proposed goal through your trial.

Finally God's wisdom is characterized by understanding. That is not just gathering of knowledge, but insight, perception, discernment into all matters, events, circumstances of your life. God knows what you are facing and why you are facing it.

Great news is that we mere humans cannot resist God's wisdom. He opens, shuts, builds up, and tears down, and there is no one who can stop Him. Better for us to ask God to help us understand "why" than to beg God to change it. And trying to run or threatening God (as it appears Job did on occasion) is futile.

A third wonderful truth in Job's diatribe is that God is faithful. Job concluded, *Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face (13:15)*. Isn't it dangerous to pressure God? Sure, but what does that have to do with trusting God. Look at the end of the verse. It is very important: *yet I will argue my ways to his face (13:15b)*. Job was definitely not going to take this unfair trial lying down. We need to be careful to guard ourselves against thinking we know more than God does because that can be deadly.

So what is the solution? Trust God even if it means death. We are all very familiar with the words, *though he slay me, I will hope in him*. Typically we take this to mean, "Even if God kills me in the process of my trial, I am going to trust Him." But, more accurately it means, "I am going to find God and argue my ways to His face even if He kills me." Or it can mean, "Even though He slay me, I will not sit back and wait silently."

That last interpretation sounds a bit "in your face." But even that expresses faith and hope. Job firmly believed he understood God's standard of righteousness and had achieved it and lived by it. Job firmly trusted that if he could talk to God, God would understand him. He was very confident, even to the death, that God would call him righteous.

For us it is even a firmer promise. I know that I am right in God's sight because God Himself put the righteousness of Christ on my account. Therefore, I can trust God's promise of eternal life, even if His plan is for me to be killed in the process. That reality has been lived out by thousands of martyrs for Christ.

The final truth we find in these words is that God is purifying. *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one (14:4)*. The need is to make the unclean clean. This is a reference to

spiritual cleanness. It is like asking, "Who can make oneself righteous?" The sad reality is that too many people don't ever entertain the question. The accurate answer is that no one can make himself righteous according to God's standard. But to be unrighteous is to invite God's eternal wrath against our sin.

Only God can cleanse away sin. Only God, who alone is righteous, has the ability to bring a sinner to that standard. And God has provided the only means to cleanse away all sin and make us clean. The provision for cleanness is the blood of Christ's sacrifice for sin on the cross. A great thing to remember in the midst of affliction is that I have been made clean by God's grace through faith in what He has already done for me.

So how do you plan to get the opportunity to argue your case to God? You won't. What will you argue to support your claim of righteousness? We should be confident in our humility before our Creator confessing with Lidie Edmunds,
"I need no other argument,
I need no other plea.
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me."