



JOB'S RESPONSE TO ELIPHAZ

Text: Job 6&7

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Some years ago, I had a stage where I would be listening to some beautiful music in the car, and I would just break out sobbing. You may be wondering what was wrong with me? So did I. Till I connected it with my dad's death a few weeks before. I was going through the typical reactions of grief. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross has defined the stages of grief including shock, anger and depression. When we look at Job we can sense those stages. Job's loss was huge. He had lost all his possessions, all his children, even his own health. In chapter 2 we saw Job numbed in silence for seven days. That gave way to his outburst when he cursed the day of his birth. Now, in chapters 6&7 we see that Job is getting angry. That is the main reaction we see here. Job is responding to Eliphaz who basically said 'You reap what you sow. You are suffering, so you must have done something bad. Repent and all will be fine again'.

In reply Job is not impressed with his friend. "*...no wonder my words were impetuous*". 'What would you expect when some one has suffered as much as I have?' Job says the weight of his suffering is more than all "*...the sand of the seas*." 'Of course, I am upset. God has let fly a rain of arrows. Their poisonous tips are tearing the life out of me. I feel like I am target practice for God. You think I carry on? Well of course I am. Does a donkey or an ox bellow if they have their food? Of course not! I'm not bellowing for no reason. Wouldn't you recoil at putrid food? Well I am repulsed at my suffering. I bristle at what has happened to me!' What Job is doing is to justify his initial outburst. He ignores what Eliphaz said in his speech. It was so unhelpful it does not even warrant a response. Instead he turns to God.

Job goes back to what he had said in his first lament. He requests that God "...*would be willing to crush...*" him and finish him off. His suffering is so bad that he wants it to end as soon as possible. And given his condition, the only relief is in death. Now, understand that Job is acting from faith here. He wants to die. But he does not contemplate suicide. He knows life is God's to give or take. For God, it would be so easy. Like a woman snipping the thread as she finishes sowing a garment. Snip, and he is gone. Eliphaz may accuse him of wrong. But Job consoles himself that he has not "...*denied the words of the Holy One*". He has not broken faith with God. And he does not want to. 'So, God, take me before my anger goes over the top and I go too far.' If God takes him it would be a witness to the others that God answered his prayer. That God sees Job as being right. Job will not repent as Eliphaz said he should. He has not denied God in the past. He doesn't now. He is in fact turning to God. In his anger, he is grappling with God. He is demanding God intervene. That God show himself and be involved with him. There is faith here. But his strength is wearing thin. "*Do I have the power to help myself?*" That's what we will hear often with those who are grieving and depressed. 'I just don't have any energy anymore. I am so tired'.

Job turns from expressing anger with God to anger at his friends. He feels they have really let him down. "*A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty*". In our grief, we can be very angry and even blow up at God. But that doesn't mean we have given up on God. That's the time we need to be carried along by friends. But Job says his three friends "...*are as undependable as intermittent streams*". One minute there's a flash flood, water everywhere, then there's nothing. Precisely in the heat, when you need the water most, there is none. Job says, 'That's what you guys are like.' "...*you see something dreadful and are afraid*". Job implies they fear what God has done to him God will do to them. I have noticed on occasion, when someone is seriously ill that friends find it difficult to visit them. A person once admitted they avoided their sick friend because they were afraid. They saw their own mortality. They saw what could happen to them. So, they coped by avoiding the person suffering. As Job puts, it's like we avoid the person who always wants to borrow money from us. Something else we should realize here. Often when we vent our grief in anger, we do so towards those who are nearest to us. We can lash out at a spouse or friend. Many a marriage has broken after the death of a child. In their anger, they blame each other. Mostly the anger is undeserved. But we can't restrain the grief that drives our anger. So, we take it out on each other. But there

are times, like here with Job when the anger is valid. We've had friends who failed us in our hour of need. They didn't have the courage to sit with us in our grief.

Job says sympathetic guidance would be good. He is willing to be taught. 'But please offer gentle instruction. Don't badger me into confessing something I didn't do.' If his friends are gentle he will be silent and attentive. He is willing for them to help him deal with his struggle. Eliphaz might wonder about that. He would have thought he had given what were wise words. But Job is pointing out that what Eliphaz said was hurtful. 'You have not really listened to me'. *"Do you mean to correct what I say and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?"* 'Don't treat me like a windbag. Really hear what I'm saying. Because then you'll understand what's going on for me. At this moment, I feel you are like lawyers haranguing me. You guys are so insensitive you would even gamble over who gets an orphan'. Job is throwing insults he is so angry. 'Don't be so patronizing. Come to my level and understand me. At least, look me in the eye. Don't turn your face away. Don't look elsewhere because you reject what I say. Don't look away because you can't stand the sight of how I look. When you do that you reject me. Sit with me. Look at me. Look me in the eye and you will see that I am not lying. I am not lying when I say I have done nothing wrong. That is my whole struggle. I love the Lord. I have been faithful. Yes, of course I am a sinner. But I haven't done anything I know that I deserve to have my life so totally ripped to shreds'.

Perhaps the three friends are not looking at him or appreciating what Job is saying. Because in the rest of what Job says he ignores his friends. It's back to a depressive lament. He wonders about the point of anything. All human beings have it hard. For all the hard work, all you get is a small wage. Or if you are a slave just a brief chance to relax. But Job's situation is even harder. He doesn't even get the meager reward others do. He has months of futility. He can't even relax at night because he tosses and turns, unable to sleep, wishing it was morning. In the morning, he discovers worms have bred in his sores. During the long nights memories of his past make him sadly realize how quickly his days are passing. The speed of life is like the rapid movement of a weaver's shuttle. Soon the cloth is finished and the cord is cut. Life is over. The tired laborer can hope for something pleasurable at the end of his long day. But Job has no hope for any pleasant moments. That is so tragic, isn't it? The basic human drive is to live. It is what keeps us going. And our life is worth living when we have our pleasant moments. Like the wonderful meal with the family. Or the sunset at the end of the day. And the

relaxing time and laughter with friends. Those who suffer badly can miss out on that. All Job wants is a few moments of the normal pleasures of life. But more than anything he wants God to notice him. If he lives and dies without relating to God it's all pointless. In a backhanded plea, he says God will lose out if Job dies. (8) "*...you will look for me, but I will be no more.*" 'Think of me, relate with me. Or you will miss out'. Job will have died as quickly and quietly as a cloud drifts across the sky and vanishes. 'Stop hiding God. Come out and show yourself, before I am dead and gone.'

Job, realizing what he has just said, vents his anger at God. Anger is the flip side of depression. They are the two sides of the same coin. Anger turned inwards can lead to depression. He lashes out. "*I will complain in the bitterness of my soul*". He is not going to keep a meek silence. He is angry and he speaks his mind, without restraint. He has a go at God. Sarcastically he asks God why God has put a guard on him, as if he were some 'monster of the sea', that needs to be kept in check. Job wishes he could lie down on his bed and get some peace. But in the middle of the night he wakes, sweating, delirious, frightened by dreams sent by God. Other times he is woken by such severe coughing fits he feels he is about to choke to death. 'Frankly', he says to God 'I wish I did choke. I prefer "*...strangling and death rather than this body of mine*". It's known that in our grief we can have great mood swings. Just before Job said he wanted God to show himself. Now in his anger he says "*Let me alone*". 'Stop hounding me and let me have a few good days before I die'.

In verse 17 Job is so frustrated at God's hostility that he makes a parody of the words we also see in Psalm 8 "*What is man that you are mindful of him*". The psalmist marvels that a God pays attention to a mere human being. He is a speck of dust in the vast universe. Yet God keeps his loving eye on him and surrounds him with his care. But Job turns this concept inside out. He sees God's vigilance as unrelenting oppression. He feels God is watching for every little mistake, punishing his tiniest flaw. He is saying 'God go away and give me space. You are so powerful and I'm so puny. How could I even have any effect on you that you feel compelled to devastate me?' "*If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O Watcher of man?*" The title '*Watcher of man*' refers to God's divine oversight and protection. But Job uses the title with scathing sarcasm. God's constant surveillance causes him so much agony. Job just wants to know why God cannot pardon his offenses and forgive. Then he can be released from his burden and die peacefully.

I think the strength of Job's anger can leave us feeling rather uncomfortable. Aren't we supposed to grieve quietly, trusting in God? We need to be careful to recognize that anger is part of the grieving process. Don't be surprised at it. Perhaps we have felt the bad end of an angry outburst as we have tried to comfort someone. The emotion of anger is, itself, not wrong. It is an expression that something is not right. The Bible describes God as being angry. And Jesus, when he cleared out the temple was very angry. But there is a fine line between anger that is brutal and destructive and anger that comes from faith. Jesus' anger was for the honour of his Father and the temple as God's house. Job's anger also comes from a place of faith. The opposite of love is not anger but indifference. Job is not indifferent to God. Job has not put away his faith. Or come to hate God. Job knows that God is all he has. God is his life. What God gives he has. The anger is an expression of faith. His anger leads him to God. As he struggles with God, he openly expresses his pain, his fear, his suffering, his confusion. His anger at God is a recognition of God. It expresses his hanging on to God.

Job at the end asks God to 'pardon' him. The Hebrew word 'nasa' means 'to bear'. That is, to 'bear' the burden of another's guilt. Job, in his anger, wants God to pardon. To give him peace. The irony is he did not know God himself would be the burden bearer. In Jesus, God's son, we have the one who bears our burdens. He is the one who paid for the guilt that is ours. Job's suffering is enormous, like the 'sands of the seas' he says. But even his suffering pails into insignificance in comparison to what Jesus bore in hell. Jesus, too, experience God's dark side. But, amazingly, through it has come grace. Grace and mercy, so all who believe might be pardoned.

In our day, we too need to be gracious with those who suffer. Look them in the eye and hear their story. Have the courage to sit with them and just listen. Even if it is hard to cope with and it reminds you of your own mortality. It is such a gift to them. It's an expression of God's presence with his grace. Don't be shocked at their anger. Especially if they lash out at you or God. Bear it and be gentle. Don't take it personally. It is a sign of their suffering. It's a sign that something is very wrong. Get angry yourself. Get angry that there is so much wrong because of sin. Channel your anger. Cry out to God for mercy. Stand up for justice. Tell the neighbour about Jesus. Christ is the only hope we have. With him there is forgiveness and life. Without him, life is indeed a fleeting, meaningless nothing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

- Can you recognise the stages of grief, like anger, in times of your life, eg loss of a loved one? How has this sermon about Job's anger helped you?
- What does Job want from his friends? Is that what you needed in your times of suffering/anger? How can we help another in their suffering/anger?
- Why is Job angry at God? Is he wrong in what he does, or does his anger energise his relationship with God? Why?