

Job Chapters 11-14 - John Karmelich

We all know what it's like to be so frustrated that we say things we regret later. I'd argue that describes Job in these chapters. They begin with a few thoughts by the third of Job's friends, who in essence just repeats a lot of the same arguments the other two guys stated. Then we get a three-chapter response by Job where I'd argue he "had it". I don't know if he was yelling, but one can sense his frustration here in the text. As usual, his speech includes some prayers to God for all his suffering, as he's asking Him for an explanation, something Job will apologize for later in the book.

Most of you have heard the acronym "HALT". It means to pay attention as one is angry. HALT is one big reminder when one is losing it, it's usually because we're either Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. It is a reminder to take a quick inventory of those things. I have no idea if Job was feeling one or more of one of those but when we read most of the text in this lesson, we can sense Job's frustration coming out in this text. I'll point out later Job's error, but my point is when we're angry we're likely to say things in haste we'll regret later as Job does in these chapters. If you take away one thing from this lesson, it's to think about HALT the next time we're "losing it" and maybe we won't say something bad in haste!

With that said, let me talk more about these four chapters! To do this I always feel the need to help the first-time reader with a quick "so far summary": The opening two chapters shows us a debate between God and Satan that Job and his three friends were not privy to! The key point is God referred to Job as a righteousness person to Satan. That doesn't mean Job's sinless, just that he's got no significant sin that requires confessing. Satan argues the only reason Job honors God is because He's blessed Job (wealth, big family). The bet is over whether Job will still honor God after losing all that. After Job is inflicted with losing everything and horrible physical pain, three friends show up to comfort him. They started with seven days of silence, then Job speaks out to say in effect, "I wish I was dead instead of being in all of this pain". He never tries to kill himself, but asks God to end his life. It leads to a debate with his three friends. These four chapters are about the 3rd friend getting a turn to take his best shot at Job! Then we get a three-chapter response by Job! (As I state way too often, chapter breaks weren't added till the time of the printing press!)

In this debate, one must remember that often what the "next guy says" is a reflection of the last speech. It appears that each guy allows Job to respond between the next speech. I wonder how it was recorded but that's a discussion for another day. I read Moses once lived in the same city where Job says he was from! There's a reference to JWTH (Jehovah) in these chapters. Some scholars argue Moses got ahold of this book and copied it. A theory, but who knows! OK then, time for the details:

The way that I'd describe the third guy's speech (Zophar) is he goes over the basics about God. At least we know these three guys believed in God's existence although none of them ever prayed to God. They don't seem to grasp how He judges people. The advice these three guys give is correct, say 90% of the time. In other words, when we're suffering it may be due to some unconfessed sin, but not always. We all know sometimes people just suffer because we live in a fallen world or bad things happen. I'm sure this isn't the first time Job suffered, but it was definitely the worst! Imagine losing one's family, health and wealth all in one shot and still live to talk about it! With that in mind, Zophar is basically saying by studying nature we can figure out God exists and His work is obvious by examples in nature! He states strange examples like a donkey cannot give birth to a human, to point out nature works as it does!

The final part of Chapter 11 is another plea for Job to repent of whatever he did. Remember that all of these three guys are convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt Job must have sinned something bad to get in a situation this bad. Of course, they are wrong, but that's what they are arguing! The final part of the speech is another plea for Job to repent. I am positive Job racked his brain to consider what he could be guilty of. Job refused to lie and make something up to get these guys off his back. Instead, he just said in effect to his friends was, I'm not guilty of what you are accusing me of, through these long debates.

With that said, Job gives his longest response of the debate in Chapters 12-14. Job starts by saying the speech just given by Zophar is "stating the obvious" and what he says anyone could figure out, and Job is well aware of how God works. Verse 6 makes an interesting comment (usually translated): "the tents of robbers are at peace" implying that God doesn't always judge in this lifetime. After pointing out one can see of how God works by watching nature, Job says an advantage of getting older is we understand better the ways the world and how God works.

Job goes on to give a speech in effect saying God can do what He wants when He wants because He is God and well, "we' not" so deal with it! The rest of Chapter 12 is Job giving his own examples of how God is capable of working in our lives. In summary, one can sense the frustration building in Job as he is responding to the arguments presented to him.

By Chapter 13, is when Job makes his first mistake. In the early verses, Job says he wanted to speak to God in effect to demand an answer for his suffering. (Later in the book Job repents of this!) My point again is when we get frustrated, we often say things we regret later. Job goes on to say in effect God is all powerful and "who are you" (his three friends) to assume what God's doing in Job's case? Notice in Verse 10 it says God will rebuke you (the 3 guys) and God does that when He speaks in the last section of the book! Job seems to jump back and forth between complaining about the situation to asking God to let up on him, or else take his life or give a reason! Again, one can sense Job's frustration as anyone would be who would go through this! Some good advice is when we're trying to comfort someone who is hurting, don't try to fix it, but let them talk it out as often they'll be comforted when we acknowledge what they are dealing with! Job finishes Chapter 13 by asking God in effect His reason for "all of this"! Job also realizes the length of time we have to live is limited, and we must make the best of life! If one is suffering horribly, it's normal to ask for relief, or an explanation. We can't blame Job for lashing out like he did, as he is looking for an explanation since he can't think of any sin he needs to repent of.

It appears that Job is jumping back and forth between praying to God and talking to his friends. We see in Chapter 14 more truths about how short life is! Job states how all people are born with an incurable sin disease. He realizes he's not perfect and there's a difference between being sinless and blameless. It is obvious Job realizes he's not sinless but as God stated in the opening chapters Job is right in that he's blameless of any significant sin! Job uses an example of a tree being cut down, but it often still sprouts new branches after that! In contrast once we die, that's a wrap for our lives on earth! The point is Job's stating the obvious is again that he can't think of a sin to confess and he refuses to lie about that!

Bottom line Job rebukes his three friends by saying in effect, in many or most cases, pain can come by a lack of repenting but that's not it in my case here! The lesson for you and me is about what's normally or often true is not always the case. Job suffered for reasons he wasn't privy to know. All we can do in tough times is to listen, comfort and not try to fix things like his friends did. I sense Job did "lose it" in his speech a little but again, when someone is suffering badly it's hard to accept perfection let alone for times when there are no significant problems. My conclusion is we must give grace for a bad situation, instead of trying to look for a reason or trying to fix the problem ourself!

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