

Job Chapters 15-17 - John Karmelich

I have to admit, if that was me in the middle of this debate instead of Job, I'd end it here for the sake of peace and say to the other three guys, "You got me! I did this or that horrible sin and I confess!" Job is the kind of guy who "stuck to his guns" since he didn't have a great sin to confess. As I like to do, here is my standard quick summary of the book so far: Chapters 1-2 was in effect a discussion between God and Satan. He argued Job was only "Pro-God" because God blessed him. So, God let Satan take away Job's possessions, kill his family and ruin his health! He wasn't aware of the bet. It led to a big debate, that we're in the middle of here, between Job and 3 friends over why he's suffering so much! The three friends insist Job must confess whatever horrible sin he's guilty of and the suffering will end. He states correctly he's not guilty of anything. He's not saying he's sinless, just there's no great non-confessed sin in his life at the moment. As God said near the start of the book, Job's blameless, which simply means Job loves God and currently has no great sin in his life! Anyway, we are now starting the second of the three rounds of debate over the "why is Job suffering" so badly! What God wants us to learn from this debate isn't Job's innocence, it is to discuss life, as many times we'll be stuck in some horrible situation with no logical explanation, and we must deal with our problems the best we can!

It is necessary to remember that the arguments Job's three friends make are good arguments that would be correct in most cases. In effect we're reading a big "cause and effect" debate. Job is hurting, and the three friends are convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Job committed some major sin that caused him to be in so much pain. Obviously his three friends are wrong. That leads to the big question: why is all this in the bible? Why have dozens of debate chapters? Why does God want us to know all this? As we know when we deal with tragedies, they rarely go away instantly. Discussing "cause and effect" not only kills time, but gets us to think about our relationship with God, and the reasons we go through what we must deal with in life.

All of that leads to this lesson which covers the first of his three friends (on Round 2) and Job's defense after this speech. One has to remember that these speeches should be read in context. I just mean what the speaker is saying is often a response to what was said last. So, I'll discuss that a bit as we go! All of this leads to my favorite question, "Now what"? As in, why should I study these chapters and what's in it for me if I read the rest of this lesson? The best answer I can give is "we are in the middle of all this" and just like when we're in the middle of a significant trial, talking it out, even when the other person is saying things that may be true but don't apply to us, it's good to talk it out as it makes us think about an awkward situation and what to say or not say in such situations. Bottom line, let me discuss these three chapters and see where they lead us:

Chapter 15 (again, chapter numbers were not added till about the time of the printing press). Eliphaz is starting his second of third responses. Since the responses focus on what was last said, I suspect either this was written later, or it's written as a book for us to study! Whether or not the actual story is true, is a question we can ask Job in heaven! Anyway, Eliphaz opens by saying in effect, "Hey Job, what you are saying is a bunch of hot air!" Eliphaz tells us that the three men are older than Job and they've seen how the world works as well as Job! Eliphaz is convinced Job has turned from God and that's why he's suffering the way he is! The last part of the chapter is Eliphaz giving a speech about those who ignore God and the consequences of that. As I implied in the beginning, think "cause and effect". In many or most cases, it is true in life that when people turn from biblical values, they usually suffer. Aren't there a lot of people who live successful lives and ignore God? Job's going to state that later as a defense!

In effect, Eliphaz is making a backhanded way to insult Job. The idea in effect is, "Aren't you just like one of those people I'm describing that's turned from God"? I have to admit if I was Job, I'd be tired of this by now. I'd either do a false confession to end it or tell them to "stick it where the sun don't shine"! Bottom line, neither party is budging! I realize Job has got nothing better to do at the moment! Maybe he still thinks he can convince them, or maybe the debate helps Job to get his mind off the pain! In life sometimes we need to "ride out" moments like this, even if it seems pointless in the middle of it. With that said, it is time for two more chapters of Job talking:

Job opens this round by stating what I would say, "You guys are terrible at giving comfort to someone in a lot of physical pain!" Job goes on to say, "I could make all sorts of accusations too, and obviously it's not solving the problem! By Verse 7 he states he admits God has allowed all that pain to occur! So he's admitting that He believes in God and God allows it, but it's not due to any sin issues! Job in effect turns the present situation over to God by saying in effect, "You've allowed these men to come here for an insult session as opposed to trying to help me or looking for a solution that makes sense!" Job uses a bunch of colorful illustrations to describe his suffering. Let's be honest, when one is in serious physical pain it's really hard to focus on other things and it's hard for Job to get his mind off the pain! That's the same thing we can go through when we're suffering as it's hard not to think about the pain and focus on the debate! Job ends this chapter by stating he thinks he doesn't have a long time to live after this! How do we feel when our world is falling apart? Job still wishes he could argue his case to God. Job states that in effect at the end of Chapter 16, something he'll regret later in the book when God speaks to him!

By Chapter 17, it appears Job is losing hope. His friends aren't helping the situation and God won't say anything, at least on Job's timing! That's a reminder to us, we can't force God to speak when we desire. God works His way on His timing. My favorite prayer in desiring a response is one of surrender! Time to get back to Job then: Ask yourself when you're really hurting, how often do you lose hope? It's hard to blame Job as he spends much of Chapter 17 losing hope and complaining about his situation! One of the things I've learned in life is God does His best work after we've given up hope in any solution other than Him interfering. In effect Job's closing argument to Eliphaz is not only is he wrong about Job as a blameless person, also that Job is painfully aware of his situation that God allowed to happen but still it is a matter of why did God allow it and not the reason these three men state so!

So what are we to learn from this? When we are hurting do we let everyone who feels like insulting us take their best stabs at us? Of course not. I will admit for a lot of Christians one of the hardest things to do is let other people minister to us versus us ministering to others. People like to help when there is a crisis. Even if they're help isn't perfect, letting others minister to us helps them to feel like they're doing something. Sometimes discussing the problem "ad nauseum" does help us see the situation in ways we wouldn't have done on day one. That is one reason why Jesus teaches us to pray over and over again in a tough situation as it helps us to think about it for a good while! That's a wrap for this lesson. Round 2 will continue in the next lesson!

If you liked this study, I wrote a more detailed account some years back with the links on this web site! Thanks for reading this!