

Job Chapters 18-21 - John Karmelich

This week I kept thinking about what I would do if I was Job in the middle of all of this? As most of us know by now, God called Job a righteous man in the opening of this book (not sinless!). Job's someone who sought God regularly and did his best to honor Him. In the first chapter, Satan said in effect, "Job only honors God because of all the ways He blessed his life!" Job wasn't aware of a "bet" that went on in heaven over that issue. All he knew was he lost his family, his wealth, and his health all within what was probably a short time span. For most of the book he deals with three friends who endlessly accuse him of an unconfessed sin that caused that! In these chapters we're in the middle of that debate! Realize many things his three friends say make common sense, but those things don't apply to Job in this case.

At this point in the book, we're finishing the second of three rounds of those debates over "what's going on here anyway?" One of the things I've learned in the many years that I've written bible studies is God likes to put me in situations to help me relate to a passage better. Not long ago I suffered an injury (due to an accident) and have fully recovered. I'm stating that, as I believe God used that time of isolation to help me relate better to Job's situation! That leads back to the question of what would we do if we went through some sort of horrible suffering? Would we put up with our friend's abuse even though we can't think of any great sin we committed? Do we keep defending ourselves? I realized Job has nothing else to do with his time at that moment. The lesson here is God allows us to deal with stuff we can't explain not only to digest the situation, but also to make the best decisions we can through it!

Again, this lesson deals with two sets of "back and forth" in this seemingly endless debate. It will end after three rounds and then the situation changes, as we'll see later in the book. As I stated, we are now in the middle of Round #2. This lesson covers the rest of Round 2. It is one more speech by friend #2 and #3, and a response by Job after each one. What each speaker says includes a few comments on the previous speaker. Both sides accuse each other of spitting out "hot air" which is a way of saying, one's just stating the obvious and wasting everyone's time! Realize God speaks after that debate and accuses all three "friends" of being wrong! If they're wrong, why have these speeches in the bible? One reason is there is a lot of truth to what they say, but it just doesn't apply to Job! Another is to realize in life, we must often listen to a lot of "talk" that doesn't apply but must be said so the arguments can successfully be rebuked. I like to think that when people are talking about God, He likes to listen, the same way we might ease drop on a conversation about us! Also realize in these speeches Job says a few things wrong about God, as well as biblically correct things! I suspect God enjoyed this debate as much as He wants us to learn lessons about all the "back and forth". Like us when we've got nothing better to during time of suffering let's continue studying the debate as to see what God wants us to learn from this process.

What's unique about these chapters is those guys criticizing Job don't focus so much on him as much as arguments about how God and the way the world works. The underlying implication is "Job, since you are suffering so badly, you must have done something terrible to tick God off". Of course, that's not the case with God and Job but that's the implication of their arguments. Bildad speaks first. He asks Job if he's ignoring his friend's advice. Again, the implication is Job's done wrong! In effect he makes a set of arguments that wicked people don't get away with stuff in the long run! In effect Job would answer the claim that God works that way in Chapter 21 by saying lots of wicked people live nice lives and they'll have children that inherit stuff. His point is that God's judgement does not always manifest itself in our lifetime. I've always loved the expression, "God's gears grind slowly but thoroughly!" Anyway, we see Bildad (one of the three) in Chapter 18 falsely saying God always judges within our lifetimes.

In Chapter 19, it appears that Job has another of his "I've had it with this discussion" moments! He will focus on his relationship with God: His key point is God will do what He will do (even though Job has no idea why God is allowing all of this punishment to occur to him). Chapter 19 also contains a fact of life that most Christians and even many religious Jewish people accept as fact: That God will judge all people. Job states in Verse 25 that "His redeemer lives" and will stand on the earth on the last day. Yes it refers to God judging the world. The verse hints of Jesus as God judging the world as Jesus will be a human forever as well as God so Jesus can "stand on the earth" in judgment. It's amazing how even the oldest book in the bible can teach us realities about Jesus millennial before the Cross!

With that said, Chapter 19 is more than just that one glorious statement. Job also laments about the fact even his wife (who wasn't killed) and his siblings aren't helping him in his hour of need. Bottom line is Job's asking for mercy from his friends to ease up on what Job knows is "false rhetoric". He still wants them there as the text implies Job has no one else to talk to! Job ends the chapter stating that he is well aware God will judge him one day, so even if God won't answer him, Job will see Him one day!

In Chapter 20 Zophar gives his last speech. He doesn't speak in the third and final round (next lesson). He responds in effect that Bildad already said that the wicked will suffer. The implication is Job's still getting what he deserves and then some because he won't confess! He is basically arguing people that turn from God will get what they deserve but in this lifetime! That is why Job spends Chapter 21 with the obvious fact that many rotten people live great lives in this life as "that's the only joy they'll receive for all of eternity"!

The bottom line is none of the arguments thrown at Job are convincing enough that he must repent of a sin he's unaware of committing! Yes, we still got one more round to go and that's next week's lesson: I want to end with the thought I had in the beginning, what would we do if we're Job and dealing with all of this? We get clues that Job wanted the debate partially as he had nothing better to do, his family did not want to help and he wanted someone to talk to, even though they disagree with him! Maybe that is what we need as well! All of us at times go through hard times. Just having someone to talk it out with can help ease the burden of whatever suffering we're dealing with. We may or may not know why it is that we are in such "hot water". All we know is we can't change the past, just learn from it. It does not mean we must lie by say, confessing sins we didn't do. At the same time, just talking about it will help us to think about life.

Bottom line if we are in Job's shoes, I'd do what he does, talk it out to both get my mind off the pain, as well as think about big picture ideas such as God's role in all of this. Even if it doesn't change the mind of anybody, it helps us to think about our relationship with God which is what matters for eternity. The fact we're dealing with pain is well a part of life and hopefully talking it out with others would help for the time being while we deal with whatever temporary (this lifetime) issues we must deal with!

With that said, next week we'll get begin the final round of the debate! Thanks for reading!

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!