

Job Chapters 3-5 - John Karmelich

Most of us have had to deal with some form of tragedy at some point in our lives. What Job dealt with is most likely worse than anything we've had to face. Most of us have had to deal with death of a loved one and most of us have dealt with serious pain at some point. Imagine losing everything you possess, all your children died instantly, and to top it off, you started suffering an incredible amount of physical pain. What would you do? After going through all that, then a bunch of old friends come over to say to you in effect, "Repent of your sin and you'll be fine!" What would we do in that situation? If I was in that situation, first I'd be happy I had company to help get my mind off the pain. Then, I'd hate having to listen to arguments that doesn't provide any comfort or relief. Bottom line, the situation is what it is, and Job had to deal with it.

To cut to the chase, Chapter 3 is the first speech by Job. There is no "Hello old friends, welcome to my pity party!" Realize for most of the rest of the book, we're reading Jewish style poetry. That just means thoughts connect as opposed to word rhyming! With that said Chapter 3's essentially Job's wish that he never was born, as in his mind, to never live would be better than all the suffering he's dealing with!

Chapter 4 and 5 are one speech by one of his friends who will get three rounds to take their best shot at Job, to tell him to repent of his sin and then life will be better. God will respond after all of this, to tell Job his three friends are wrong. So, do we ignore everything they say? I'd argue, no. They make valid points, it's simply that the points they make don't apply to Job here. A reason this long debate is here, is to teach us good people can state biblical truths, but they don't necessarily apply in all cases.

So how does this apply to us? When we go through horrible times, of course we should take inventory of our lives if there's any sin to confess, confess it, turn from it and get on with our lives! We also need to remember that eternity is well, eternally longer than whatever pain we must deal with in this life. It's ok to grieve, but not ok to wish we never were born. God doesn't make mistakes.

With all of that out of my system, let me state some more facts about these three chapters! The first we hear Job speak is Chapter 3. It's a "woe is me" speech in poetry format. I know it's hard not to focus on one's pain when one is suffering the way Job did at that moment. There is no "thanks for coming" or an acknowledgement of them being here. For all we know maybe that occurred and it's the debate that we get to see. I know for me when I'm miserable it's really hard to focus on anything else. Chapter 3 is all a speech by Job saying in effect, "I wish I was never born". Notice we don't see Job say to any of those with him, "Get a big rock, kill me and put me out of my misery." Even in Job's misery, he never wants to commit suicide or allow himself to be murdered as both are the "don't kill" sin.

So why give this speech? It should be obvious to the visitors who we assume heard about the loss of all of Job's family, plus he was sitting in an ash heap scraping his boils that he's in pain! One reason is he's just expressing in colorful ways how much pain he's in! Job wishes he never was born, as he compares his life to those who are in total misery who long for death but "not yet"! In a sense we can understand why his friends reacted the way they did. Let's be honest when miserable people look for reasons what was the cause, that's when we see lots of "Job you must repent of the sin that caused this". It seems like the obvious thing to Job's three friends that he believed in God, so it is natural to think these other three guys state in effect many times, "God is obviously punishing you for some sin you committed".

It always amazes me as I study Job that we never read of the three friends trying to do anything to help Job. There's no, "Let's move from this ash heap and find a better place to talk!" There's no let us make bandages or balm for you to relieve the pain! Instead, we got a long insulting "repent or else" series of speeches that make up most of the book. OK why? Men have a tendency to want to seek solutions and not work on comfort. Besides they thought Job deserved this punishment and lay into him for most the book. Obviously, there's stuff God wants us to learn from these speeches or else they wouldn't be a big part of the bible. If nothing else, remember that the speeches these three guys make are full of biblical truths, they just don't apply to Job's situation. He was being tested by God and it wasn't punishment in any way or form that God wanted to inflict on Job. For what it's worth his reward at the end of all this, is far greater than all he suffered. A good thing to remember when we go through rough times!

The first speaker (of the three) was Eliphaz the Temanite (grateful for cut and paste, as these names are hard to pronounce!) Temanite was a place that's now part of Jordan. Don't worry about that detail! He opens by saying in effect, "Hey Job, are you willing to listen now?" He reminds Job that he's counseled lots of people so it's time for him to "Shut up and listen"! Eliphaz states that the innocent never suffer! (How many people suffer horrible things through no fault of their own?) It reminds us to take all these speeches here with a "grain of salt"! Eliphaz then goes to say everyone perishes at one point. He uses the example of a strong lion who will die if there's no food!

A key line in his speech is Verse 17 in Chapter 4. "Can mortal man be in the right before God?" Keep in mind this was written before the rest of bible so there was some knowledge of God before the bible! A key point is we all die, and we all suffer from "sin disease". Realize God's punishing people for their sins a long time before the first five books of the Bible (Torah) were put together. Eliphaz was right of course, it is just that Job's suffering has nothing to do with that biblical truth!

In Chapter 5 Eliphaz continues: Keep in mind there are three people taking turns speaking and Job will give a response after each speech. Eliphaz's first speech ends with this chapter. In essence he's calling Job a fool (which simply refers to a person who doesn't believe God exists)! Eliphaz spends the rest of the chapter giving evidence of God's existence: E.g., how God designed the world so rain clouds would travel over the land to bring rain. Then he gets less obvious but also states a true point that God's going to trap the "crafty" at their own game! I always think of the Wile E Coyote cartoon when I think about someone falling in their own trap, but that's the general idea here.

The point Eliphaz is getting at is Job is suffering so much, so he must have done something wrong. Of course, that's not true, but it's also equally true God doesn't let sinners get away with things eternally. It is common knowledge for those of us who believe in God and have seen life for a while. The big point that we'll see a lot in this book will be that Job's three friends (and I use that term loosely based on how they treat him) makes good points about life but doesn't apply to Job. I picture Job contemplating all of this, of Job knows they don't apply to him. He'll state that in his defense that begins in Chapter 6.

OK John, assume most of us know this story. We realize Job is right and Gods going to rebuke these 3 guys in the end, so why should we care about all of this? Why are all these details in the bible? First it is to remind us that even people who are wrong about the conclusion can be right about specific points!

If we learn nothing else, I'd say it's important to hear other perspectives (especially if we've got nothing better to do because we're in pain), then be patient and give others time to make their case. The point in a good debate is to be patient. Often people will lose their own cases by what they argue. Besides that, Job had nothing better to do but to sit and debate and get his mind off his miseries! A good thing for us to keep in mind when we go through times like that. OK, to be continued of course 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!