

Sunday February 6th, 2022

Job 8:1-7; 9:1-12
“Time to Meet Bildad”

The Pope met with his Cardinals to discuss a proposal from Ariel Sharon, the leader of Israel. “Your Holiness,” said one of his Cardinals, “Mr. Sharon wants to challenge you to a game of golf to show the friendship and ecumenical spirit shared by the Jewish and Catholic faiths.” The Pope thought this was a good idea, but he had never held a golf club in his hand. “Don’t we have a Cardinal to represent me?” he asked.

“None that plays very well,” a Cardinal replied. “But,” he added, “there is a man named Jack Nicklaus, an American golfer who is a devout Catholic. We can offer to make him a Cardinal, then ask him to play Mr. Sharon as your personal representative. In addition, to showing our spirit of cooperation, we’ll also win the match.” Everyone agreed it was a good idea. The call was made. Of course, Nicklaus was honored and agreed to play.

The day after the match, Nicklaus reported to the Vatican. “I have some good news and some bad news, your Holiness,” said the golfer. “Tell me the good news first, Cardinal Nicklaus,” said the Pope. “Well, your Holiness, I don’t like to brag, but even though I’ve played some pretty terrific rounds of golf in my life, this was by far the best I have ever played. I must’ve been inspired from above. My drives were long and true, my irons were accurate and purposeful, and my putting was perfect. With all due respect, my play was truly miraculous.

“There’s bad news?” the Pope asked. “Yes,” Nicklaus sighed. “I lost to Rabbi Tiger Woods by three strokes.”

We humans are hardwired to think things should always be fair. Children learn this early on, demanding equal shares of whatever is being doled out, to any punishment being delivered. If we watch sports we yell at the TV when the refs do not seem to be applying the rules fairly to both teams; especially our favourite team. How often have we heard from people of all ages, “that’s not fair” Fairness is also the underpinnings of the idea that God is just.

This idea of God being just and fair is the worldview of Job’s friends, and is also the framework of the religion of Islam, and all other monotheistic religions. Eliphaz was trying to be gentle with Job, but Bildad is angry. His words have a harshness to them. Bildad has become antsy listening to Job, not because he’s tired of intellectual debate, but because he sees Job’s words as empty and useless. They are nothing but hot air.

God is fair Bildad argues. It’s the truth of the universe. Cruelly, Bildad argues that Job’s children died because they had sinned. Bad things happen to bad people. Remember Annanias and Sapphira in Acts 5? These are very hurtful words to a man who lost all his children, and it ignores the fact that Job exhausted himself sacrificing, and praying to atone for his children’s actions.

But this matters not to Bildad. Sacrifice does nothing, and there is no such thing as redemptive suffering. Bildad reminds Job that as bad as things are, he is still alive. Therefore, he was not as great a sinner as his children. Even now, Bildad argues, if Job turns to God and repents all will be restored. “Rightful habitation” is the phrase used here.

Bildad's system or worldview is black and white and a cold reality. There is no place for grace in his well-ordered universe. To prove his point, Bildad references how the system worked in the past. As long as people pondered these things, they have concluded the same thing. Then Bildad gives two illustrations he hopes will prove his point.

The first is negative and from nature. Papyrus reeds need marshy areas to grow. They cannot flourish if there is no water. If you cut down flowers they will wither before the planted ones. This is just like Job's children, cut down in their prime. Job is like a reed moved away from the sustaining water. These are the paths of those who forget God. Those who do not realize this truth are living on something as flimsy as a spider web.

Then second illustration is also from nature, but has a positive twist. A truly righteous person is like a plant that thrives by sending shoots all over the garden and entwines around rocks. Even if the plant is destroyed it will spring up again. Bildad is saying, "if you have truly been blameless before God, then from even the most devastating events you shall spring back to full vigor. In God's fairness, Job's circumstance is only a set back.

I hope you see the coldness in what Bildad says. Good people are blessed, bad people are cursed. Clearly your life is evidence of which you are Job. Not very consoling is it.

Job's response to Bildad is an honest grappling of a believer with God, when a person's worldview crumbles around them. In some ways, Job is right in what he says, and in other ways he is wrong, but that is the nature of wrestling for the truth. In trying to understand the character of God he cannot reconcile God's character with his actions. Job knows everything comes from God's hand, and Job's flawed conclusion is that the unfairness he experiences, means God is unjust.

So, the main point of this dialogue is, who or what is the causation of bad things? In Chapters 1 and 2 we got a glimpse of this design, but Job did not get this insight. Is there a sinister agency behind bad things? In 1 Chronicles 21 we read that David undertook a census against God's direction. We read that Satan stood against Israel and incited David to take the census. But the Chronicler does not suggest that Satan did it of his own volition.

The use of other agents to do terrible things is all part of a larger plan for the glorification of God. Something Job couldn't see, nor his friends, and frankly neither do we. Job's experience points out that the world is not fair. Bad things do happen to good people. Jesus said that "the rain falls on the just and unjust alike". Job roots out a major flaw in Bildad's argument. "How can any mortal be truly justified before God."

And yet, as we shall see time and time again in Job, getting right with God is Job primary desire. Those who worship idols long for what the idol promises: a good harvest, children money, etc. Job though cares for none of that; he longs for God. The problem is that he can see no way to achieve that. God is too beyond us that it is impossible to stand before him and succeed, that is survive. It cannot be done. Job then goes on to paint quite a picture of the natural order being disrupted or turned on its head.

Mountains and the pillars of the earth are shaken. In Psalm 75:3 God says, “When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars”. Job however, acknowledges God is the creator and sustainer of all there is, but now it seems this same order is in disorder. Job is strongly hinting that God is the Maker but also the Trouble-Maker. The light has been replaced by darkness.

In this grand creation, there are evil things and disordered things. It is not perfect. Not only that, Bildad. There is an even greater problem. God is invisible. Which really means he is elusive. H.G Wells wrote in his book *The Invisible Man*, “He can pass by me, move on, come close to me, do me harm (snatching away my possessions and children) and I can’t even see him. I am no match for him.”

God is also too strong for us. It is absolutely absurd to think we can prevail over God. God could crush us with a whirlwind. Knock us down with and take away our breath. In God’s court my speech would be like shouting into a hurricane. The blameless and the wicked are both subject to terrors and destruction. Job’s conclusion then is simple. God is not fair. If both the blameless and wicked suffer, how is that fair?

Job says God actually laughs at the calamity falling on the innocent. Hard words to hear. The earth is given over to unjust people committing unjust acts. Job is pained by realizing that if God is truly sovereign, then all of this injustice is from him. He has no where else to go in his conclusions, despite what we or his friends think. So, he proposes three solutions to his problem.

He can simply deny he is suffering. He can put on a happy face and move on. This is what we desire to do when we have come through a grief. So, forget the pain. Keep a stiff upper lip! It is a strategy still employed by many today. Deny there is a problem or that we are in pain. Ask someone how they are, and they are bound to reply not with the truth but with a simple, “Fine thank you”.

His second idea is to try once again to make himself clean before God. Washing with snow carries with it the idea of purity, not whether snow is better than water. But Job despairs of this idea because he is convinced that no matter how clean he is, God is determined to prove him dirty. The reference to a pit and his stinky clothes conveys that point. Then finally, Job lands on the one idea that has great potential.

What job thinks he needs is a mediator between himself and God. Someone who knows the rules in God’s courtroom. But this too seems like an empty wish. There is no one for whom Job can turn to, to intercede for him. But behind all these futile ideas is one lingering reality. Every time Job gets knocked down in his thinking, his hope grows stronger. He senses that some day he may once again relate to God fully.

Job sums up his reply to Bildad with three questions directed at God. First. Why are you against me? Eliphaz and Bildad’s explanations will not satisfy his hunger for an answer. Then Job wonders, “Why do you watch me? In Chapter 7 Job describes God as a hostile watcher and he returns to that there in chapter 10. If God was human, he could understand the need to really observe and check out Job but God knows everything. God knows his heart.

It seems so unnecessary for God to treat him like this. Then he returns to a familiar question. Why did you create me? Job poetically describes God carefully putting him together like Adam. Taking unconnected matter and knitting it together as Jeremiah states. I am such a complex creature, Job ponders, so why bother to make me? What a creative act is each conception, gestation and birth.

Not only did you make me, but you granted me life and steadfast love. But this too leads to despair. Verse 13 states, “this was your purpose”. Its hard to hear, but Job says something like, you gave the appearance of being a loving creator, but you “hid in your heart” (v13) the cruel intentions that are now worked out in my life.” Now, he goes on, you watch me and deem guilty and will not forgive me.

Job sees three things God does. God renews his witness against Job. Every disaster says that Job is under judgement. Second, that God increases his vexation against Job. Far from being slow to anger, God is quick in anger. Then Job points out that wave upon wave of fresh troops, like a siege army, beset Job. God pours trouble upon trouble. So, Job goes back to an earlier refrain. “Why not just kill me?”

Just leave me alone for a moment’s peace. Soon, I will die and go to the land of the dead. Let me alone until then. We may be unsettled by Bildad’s position, but probably more so from Job’s response. We likely rankle at the things Job says and accuses God of doing to him and maybe all mankind. However, despite Job’s depiction of God as a monster, his intensity of argument reveals that Job had not reached the end of his search. He still longs for meaning.

Reflecting on Job’s words we may cringe at the depth of his anger, especially towards God. But how many of us have trod this same path. You’ve been wronged, you’ve been hurt, you’ve been cheated and you are *angry* at God. Whatever negative thing that’s happened in your life may leave you feeling like God doesn’t care—or wondering why He didn’t intervene when He should have. How can you possibly trust Him? Isn’t He supposed to love you?

Maybe you’re not even sure He exists. It’s OK to question the trials that you or someone you love are facing. Throughout history, people have struggled to understand why these things happen. Even people in the Bible like King David, Moses and Habakkuk didn’t hesitate to tell God how they felt.

David wrote, “How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your anger keep burning like fire?” (Psalm 89:46). The Prophet Habakkuk cried out, “How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?” (Habakkuk 1:2). Moses, as he was leading a group of complaining people to their homeland, said to God, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you...?” (Numbers 11:11).

These great Biblical figures weren’t immune to suffering and feelings of injustice. They were honest about their feelings, but also acknowledged that God is holy and that His ways are above our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

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Anger is a valid reaction to hardship, but when left unchecked, it can lead to hostility or bitterness and eat at you from the inside out. That's why the Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, "Be angry, and do not sin"—because when we give anger a foothold, it can lead to all kinds of negative thoughts and actions.

The burden you bear, the problem you face, the affliction you can't shake—it may be painful, overwhelming and frustrating. Whatever it is, there's nothing wrong with telling God about it. In fact, He already knows! Just be sure you're not consumed by your anger that you cannot see the hand of God at work even in our suffering. I am moved by something Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote and I hope it will stay with me for years to come.



Si I ask you; what sings for you when life gets hard?