

Job Chapter 11

Recap from our last discussion:

In our last class, we covered Job chapter 10. In this chapter, Job considers the idea that God created him, all the while knowing he would eventually cause him to suffer greatly. Job asks God rhetorically if God has “eyes of flesh” and if his “days are as the days of a man, or your years as a man’s years” (verses 4-5) to demonstrate that God indeed has a perspective beyond man’s ability. Why then create something just to make it suffer? Job recounts in verses 9-12 how God had carefully and skillfully brought about his existence, and then had lovingly provided for him. Yet in verses 13-17, Job states his belief that it was actually God’s intention all along to make him suffer. For Job, this makes no sense.

We made an application from Job’s reasonings to a still-popular criticism of God, in that why would God create living beings who might be subject to an existence of ongoing, continual suffering (both in this life and the next)? Some good discussion followed, and here are some of the ideas that were presented:

- **“We aren’t in the position to question God.”** Critics of God argue – much like Job – that if such a God exists, it would be better to never have existed than to exist for the purpose of suffering endlessly. The answer of “we have no right to question God” is both coherent and logically sound. As stated in Romans 9:20-21: “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” Paul then talks about how God had endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, desiring to make his power and wrath known, but also wanting to make known the riches of his glory for the “vessels of mercy.” However, we’ve also talked about the importance of balancing the rest of what the Bible teaches us about God’s character beyond his authority and right to judge. The shortcoming of this answer is that it doesn’t motivate anyone to want to serve God other than by fear of being punished. We must be cautious to not inadvertently trivialize the other attributes of God that motivate him to action and motivate us to service, like his love and purity.
- **“From a cosmological, big-picture perspective, there are more important things happening than me merely existing without experiencing pain.”** In other words, principles of love and goodness are more valuable than even our lives. Regardless of their religious beliefs, people can understand this if we use a common example: why is it a noble thing to stand up for those who cannot help themselves, even if it puts you in harm’s way? Because in some cosmic, almost intangible sense, defending a code of right and wrong is worth fighting for even if it means I suffer physically. (Here, critics may come back with how many people have sacrificed themselves for ideas that our theology doesn’t agree with. And they are right: people certainly can sacrifice themselves for misguided principles of right and wrong. But that observation does nothing to disprove the proposal that preserving our own lives and comfort is not as important as “doing the right thing,” though we may disagree on what the right thing is. That is a different topic on whether an authoritative standard of right and wrong exists.) As Christians, practicing personal sacrifice for principles that are bigger than ourselves is central to our theology. John 3:16 reminds us that God sacrificed his son as a demonstration of love. The act of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others defines the type of relationship God wants to have with us. Christianity is intended to be much deeper than motivating its followers to act on the basis of fear so that we might avoid suffering. To reject the offer of God’s son is not merely to reject a God who threatened to punish, but a God who offered to love. God has spared nothing to demonstrate his love for us – short of compromising on his own purity – so that we would be convinced his

way for us is better than our own. It is true that we did not ask to exist, but we have not been consigned merely to suffer as Job had come to believe in his despair. We have rather been given an opportunity for greatness.

- **“What did Jesus do when he was around those who suffered?”** What a wonderful thought that Shawn incorporated into his lesson! Jesus did not explain in every case why the people around him were suffering. Instead, he served them and healed them. Which is more necessary: a logical explanation of why I am suffering, or being healed? Which is more beneficial? Which motivates us to serve? Maybe we forget that we’ve been healed spiritually, or maybe we no longer believe it to be true in our heart. If that is the case, can we discuss it and get to the root of our own insecurity?
- **“Let’s be careful to not place God into our own little box.”** There is some irony in how Job and his friends occasionally speak on behalf of God or presume upon his motives, all the while acknowledging how God’s ways are higher than our own and how God possesses a perspective beyond man’s ability to comprehend. There is a line we must walk between growing in our understanding of God, while being careful to not require God to fit into the limits of my own ability to comprehend him.

In considering the above points, let us demonstrate wisdom pertaining to real-life context. These are intellectual arguments that have their place for when people are seeking to turn others away from God, or for ensuring our own faith is on stable footing. But let us not employ them when those we know and love are going through a trial.

In Job chapter 11, we read Zophar’s first statement. I think it would be beneficial for you to first read it and then go through the following breakdown.

In verses 1-3, Zophar seems to be motivated by a sense of righteous indignation at what Job has said. As is the case with Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and later Elihu, we again see the importance of the speaker needing to first justify his right to speak. From Zophar’s perspective, he has not only a right to speak up, but an obligation.

In verses 4-6, Zophar takes exception to Job’s defense, and along the same line of thinking as Eliphaz, refers to God’s standards of purity. I believe Zophar is trying to convince Job that Job doesn’t know what purity is. If God would open his mouth and teach him, then Job would realize he deserved worse than what had happened to him already. By extension then, Zophar may be arguing that Job has no right to defend his innocence before God. Zophar’s evidence against Job is what Job has just spoken, and perhaps the need to further identify the root issue or sin that lead to Job’s suffering is now irrelevant. According to Zophar, Job needs to repent rather than defend himself. And anything short of repentance, as Zophar reasons, only proves he is further hardening his face against God.

Going back to the idea about not putting God into our own little box, we need to be careful to not follow a line of reason that Zophar seems to be on, which goes:

- Assumption: I’m on the same side as God.
- Observation: I’m upset by what I am hearing and seeing.
- Conclusion: Therefore, God must be upset, too.

Although the above may be correct when applied to many of our experiences, we need to leave some room to be taught something new and maybe even challenging to our current faith.

In response to this line of reasoning, Job is going to accuse his friends later in chapter 13:4-10, in that they are not being fair in their assessment because they are over-zealous to defend God. Job reminds his friends that God is not impressed with people who show partiality, even when attempting to defend God. (Interesting that Job seems to believe God would agree with his own assessment of God, and not that of his friends. But more on that in later chapters.) As we continue to see, it seems unfathomable to Job's friends that God would do any of this for any reason other than to punish the guilty.

In verses 7-9, Zophar intends to defend God's judgments, and by extension, God's wisdom. As noted earlier, there is a bit of irony here in that Zophar speaks as though he is a mouthpiece for God, and yet argues "who can find out the deep things of God?"

In verses 10-12, Zophar seems to be addressing Job's statements in chapter 9:22-24 pertaining to how God punishes both the innocent and the wicked alike. According to Zophar, God knows the difference between an innocent man and a guilty man, and he deals with each appropriately. Continuing the theme we've seen to this point from Job's friends, Zophar is making a correct statement but is not applying it properly to Job, based on some faulty assumptions.

Verse 12 is a little tricky for me. There seem to be two ways it could be read. First, the way the ESV renders it would mean something like this: a man guilty of iniquity and too foolish to acknowledge it will receive wisdom when a man is born from a donkey. Or as we would say: "when pigs fly." In other words, it isn't going to happen. The second way it could be understood is a commentary on Job's insincerity. It would mean something like this: on the surface, Job appears to be a man of piety and wisdom. But on the inside, he is a wild donkey of a man, rebellious and untamable. If the latter was intended, then perhaps Zophar is playing off Job's words when Job compared himself to a wild donkey braying when no food is given to it (see Job 6:5). As we continue in this chapter, we will see Zophar take other things Job said and turn them around on Job.

In verses 13-20, Zophar follows the same pattern as his friends in that after issuing a sharp rebuke, he offers a plea for Job to change. Verses 13-14 paint an interesting picture of nearness and farness: according to Zophar, Job should stretch out his hand towards God, indicating God is far away from Job. But the distance between Job and God is due to the iniquity in the hands with which Job would use to reach for God, which he must "put far away" from himself. Along those same lines, Zophar insinuates that as it pertains to injustice, it is very close to Job as to "dwell in his tents." By mentioning "injustice," perhaps Zophar is referring again specifically to the statement Job made about how God sees no difference between the innocent and the wicked. Certainly, Job has not in his life demonstrated himself to be an unjust person. I understand Zophar to be giving advice to Job, but also telling him that his priorities are off: he has brought evil near to himself and pushed good far away.

Throughout this section, and as briefly mentioned above, Zophar also ties in some imagery that has been discussed by Job, in order to make his points and accusation complete. For example:

- Verse 15:
 - Job's face is blemished, but would be made clean if he will repent.
 - Job has spoken of his terror thinking about being made God's mark for suffering, but he can regain security and not be afraid if he repents. The need for Job to feel security rather than fear is mentioned again in verse 19.
- Verse 16:
 - "Waters that have passed away" call to mind Job's remarks (see Job 6:15) when he refers to his friends as "torrential streams that pass away." Job meant it in the sense

that his friends are treacherous in their advice, though appearing to offer wisdom like one would offer water to a thirsty man. And while these streams of water may be found after it rains, they dry up quickly, making remembrance of their geographical location worthless given their lack of endurance. I can imagine Zophar, calling to mind this insult, speaking to Job with the following emphasis: “you will forget your misery; you will remember IT as waters that have passed away;” that is to say, in contrast to the supposed worthlessness of remembering the advice his friends are giving him. The point being: listen to us and stop being miserable, rather than the other way around.

- Verse 17: “Your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning”
 - This calls to mind the many times Job has offered his preference for darkness instead of light (Job 3:3-9; 3:20-23; 10:21-22). As Zophar inverted Job’s indictment of his friends as “torrential streams” to make his own point in verse 16, in verse 17 he inverts Job’s stated desire for darkness. Job’s statement is one of hopelessness, whereas Zophar’s is a message to bring back hope (see verse 18).

What about you? Is there anything you read in chapter 11 that was interesting or relatable to you? Do you have any questions about it? If so, please share!