

Session 3

January 26, 2020

WHY AM I SUFFERING?

Job 11:13-16; 23:8-12.

John 9:1-3

How many times have you heard it said, “Life isn’t fair?”

If anyone ever had the right to say that, it would be the Old Testament role model of patience, Job. In Job chapters 1 and 2, this righteous and prosperous man lost everything he had—his family, his possessions, his health, and nearly his life—all because God was *bragging* on him! The remainder of the book describes Job’s dealing with his suffering, the advice offered by his so-called friends (whom he referred to as “miserable comforters”), and a final confrontation with God Himself who puts Job in his place before restoring his good fortune. The book is a classic study of human suffering and all the explanations (both accurate and erroneous) of what causes suffering and how to alleviate it.

Not all personal suffering is the result of personal sin (Job 11:13-16). As I mentioned back in session 1, some suffering is indeed the direct consequence of direct sin. Haman was hanged on the gallows he devised for Mordechai (Esther 7:10). King David lost his son as a direct consequence of the adultery and murder he committed (2 Sam. 12:14). Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and the disciples about the property they sold (in short, *they had pride; they lied; and they died!* Acts 5:1-11). But the truth is, suffering comes for other reasons as well. Verses 13-16 are not the words of Job, but of his friend Zophar, who exemplifies the all-too-popular concept that prosperity is always the result of righteousness and that suffering is always the result of sin. The principles Zophar stated in verses 13 and 14 are good ones. To “redirect the heart” (v. 13) means to re-focus one’s affections or get one’s priorities right. And fervent prayer (v. 14) is always a good thing. To remove iniquity from one’s hands and to correct whatever injustices one might be harboring (v. 14) are certainly ways to please God. The problem with Zophar’s counsel is the assumption he made that God is punishing Job for some terrible sin!

There are times when everyone—even the righteous—suffer (Job 23:8-12). Throughout Job’s ordeal, his friends were trying to persuade him to confess to some heinous sin that he had not committed. And throughout, Job stood his ground. This section of Scripture is one of many in which he defends himself (this time, to Eliphaz). In verses 8 and 9 we sense Job’s *frustration*: simply put, God cannot be found. He is certainly there, and He is actively moving. Yet, His presence remains far away (see also Ps. 13; Ps. 22). In verses 11 and 12, we see Job’s *determination*. In the midst of difficult times, Job remained committed. His feet followed God’s path; he did not stray away from it (v. 11). He kept His commands; he treasured God’s word (v. 12). Sandwiched between Job’s frustration and his determination is his *declaration*. In verse 10 Job makes two important statements: first, “God knows where I am.” Even though Job couldn’t *feel* His presence, he exercised his faith (see Deut. 31:6). Second, “God is testing me.” The picture is one of precious metal being purged in the furnace to burn off the dross, leaving behind only the purest sample of—in this case—gold (see Prov. 17:3; Mal. 3:3). Whereas the devil

tempts one so that he might sin, God tests one so that he might shine! Unlike his dour friends, Job understood that even the righteous suffer...and this too, is the plan of God.

In every case, God knows what He is doing (John 9:1-3). This story represents the clearest teaching Jesus gave regarding the suffering of the innocent. Like the friends of Job, the disciples shared the view that personal suffering was always the result of personal sin. The idea that it could have been the man's own sin (even though he was born that way) either reflects the consequences of the innate sin nature or a contemporary heresy of the day. That the blindness may have been the result of his parents' sin refers to the Old Testament tradition they had been taught (see Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9). Jesus made it clear that this man, together with his blindness had been carefully set in time and place, "so that God's works might be displayed in him" (v. 3).