

## JOB

### LESSON TWO

- a) Elihu comes forward with an answer that is perhaps truer, but incomplete.
  - (1) God sends calamities on good men by way of chastisement, not punishment; love, not anger; to purify, strengthen, and purge, to save from the pit (33:18,28).
2. What is man's future destiny?
  - a) Was death the end of all things?
  - b) What was Sheol, and what was the condition of those who dwelt in it.
  - c) Job looks upon it as about to become his abode (17:13), and even entreats that he be sent there (14:13).
  - d) He looks at being kept there for some indefinite period after which he looks for renewal (14:13).
  - e) He seeks to penetrate that darkness of the tomb and to cheer men by the glorious hope of a future life, and to clear God of any suspicion of unjust rule by pointing to a time when justice will be done, and the inequalities of the existing condition of things redressed by the permanent establishment of conditions entirely new.
3. Can a man be just before God?
  - a) Man cannot be absolutely just.
    - (1) The sins of his youth (13:26), sins of temper, rash speech (6:3, 26; 33:8-10) attach to him.
  - b) But he can be just in the sense of being honest, sincere, bent on serving god, unless he is a hypocrite and a castaway (9:21; 10:7; 12:4, etc.).
  - c) Jobs holds fast to his "justness," and is pronounced so by God himself. (1:1; 2:3).
  - d) He is ultimately approved and accepted by God (42:7,8), while the friends who pressured him to confess his sins are condemned, and pardoned only on Job's intercession (42:3,4).

- e) Thus, we learn that we can be just before God, live noble and worthy lives, and that we are bound to do so.
4. Can a man know God?
- a) Almost every page asserts that man has a knowledge of God, knowing him to be just, wise, good, eternal, almighty, omniscient.
  - b) However, it denies that man can comprehend God, and does so based on valid reasons (28:12-28; 36:26-33; 37:1-23; 38:4-41; 39; 40; 41).
    - (1) Man, therefore, must not presume to sit in judgment upon God.
    - (2) His attitude must be one of submission and reverence.
    - (3) Man cannot grasp the range of actual facts and consider their relations one to another; he has no power to comprehend the scheme of the universe, must less to sound the depths of the God who made it.
    - (4) In short, we are incompetent to understand the general scheme of things, and therefore, quite unfit to criticize and judge the ways of God.
  - c) He has revealed himself to us, not for speculative purposes, but for practical purposes, and it is our true wisdom to know that we only know him sufficiently for our practical guidance.
- II. The Bible, including Job, has several ways of answering the question of human suffering.
- A. Most of them fall from the lips of Job's friends as they attempt to console him.
    - 1. Job finds their explanations unsatisfactory.
    - 2. But even though they are unsatisfactory, they are not necessarily wrong.
    - 3. In fact, part of the drama of the book is the reasonableness of their arguments and the soundness of their views.
    - 4. Jobs friends are no straw men set up to be knocked down.

5. Thus, Elihu recognizes that the arguments end in a stalemate.
- B. By such tests (a false piety that disdains evil or a contempt for emotions as characteristic of the weak), Job's conduct is inexcusable.
1. He does not accept his loss with unflinching fortitude or check his emotions at the door.
  2. Job is human and he behaves as one.
    - a) Job grieves his losses.
    - b) He is depressed by his disease.
    - c) He does not experience the "untrammelled serenity" that some urge upon us as both the goal and sign of victorious living.
  3. The serenity attained by Job in the end was attained by working through the emotions of and as the harvest of his suffering.
- C. Men look for the explanation of suffering in cause and effect, looking back to find the cause in past sin.
1. Scripture looks forward and seeks explanations in hope.
  2. The purpose of suffering is seen not so much in its cause as in its result.
  3. But sometimes good seems never to come out of evil.
    - a) Men wait in vain.
    - b) God's slowness is irritating at best and destructive of faith at worst.
      - (1) We cry out with the souls underneath the altar that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?
      - (2) Where was God in all of this? Why did God allow this?
        - (a) What about Auschwitz?
        - (b) What about child abuse, sexual, physical and mental?
        - (c) What about the death of innocents in Oklahoma City bombing?

- (d) What about earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes that strike without reference to purity?
  - (3) Some may be caused by the cruelty of man, but in others we see the hand of God.
    - (a) Why does he seem so whimsical?
    - (b) Why does he heal one person and not another?
    - (c) Why be concerned with one person's health anyway when thousands die in natural and man-made disasters?
  - c) God's self-restraint that sometimes requires centuries for the outworking of his justice is hidden to us since we cannot see the big picture.
  - d) The insignificance of one man's suffering in relation to the great battle in the unseen world as evil fights good and the good God and the Serpent (Dragon, Devil, Satan) battles against the Woman's offspring (Rev. 12) is hard for us to accept.
  - e) It is easier to see the hand of God in the spectacular and the immediate, and the sinner who sees the hand of God delayed is apt to take God's delay as a sign that he is indifferent or absent. (Eccl. 8:11).
- 4. There are passages that postpone God's ultimate justice to the final judgment, and, while the book of Job hints at and moves in the direction of such a solution, it is concerned mainly with this life.
  - a) Given time, both the righteous and the wicked will "get his."
  - b) This solution expressed by Zophar in chapter 20, puts a great strain on Job's faith.
    - (1) He is not inclined to wait until eternity to see justice done.
    - (2) In chapter 21 he vigorously contradicts Zophar.
    - (3) Even if everything is going to be straightened out after while (a long while),

can this ever offset or even balance the evil people received before that final settlement?

5. The biblical answer is that God (but only God) can transform evil into good, so that in retrospect (but only in retrospect) it is seen to have actually been good, without diminishing in the least the awful reality of the evil as it was endured.
  - a) To the extent that Job cannot affirm this full truth, it is because Jesus Christ cannot yet be placed in the picture.
  - b) In Him, the greatest of evils works the greatest of good – man’s salvation.
  - c) Job does see part of the answer by teaching that when the experience is over, the sufferer will appreciate it in a new way because of what he has learned.
    - (1) Suffering is not always punitive or even corrective.
    - (2) It can be instructive.
    - (3) It can be a discipline or a warning.
- D. Such answers to the question of suffering are confined to the individual.
  1. They are valid and valuable because they take the individual seriously in his moral connection to God.
  2. But no individual exists alone – no man is an island.
    - a) Man exists individually, but he exists individually in a social setting.
    - b) Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasized individual responsibility, not as the only truth or even as the highest truth, but in response to the error of those who taught social solidarity (The father’s have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge, Ezek. 18:1,2) in order to avoid responsibility. (Deut. 5:9 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me,
    - c) Neither side give the whole picture.

- (1) Each man stands directly before God, but no man stands alone.
  - (2) One man sins, and like stone-bred circles on water, the effect spreads across the race.
  - (3) No-one's suffering is ever completely private in its causes or its effects.
  - (4) Consequences of our evil are inherited from our ancestors, shared with our contemporaries, and bequeathed to our posterity.
3. This emphasis escapes from one pit only to fall into another.
- a) If evil is punishment for sin, why should Job suffer for anyone's sins but his own?
  - b) Job's problems are caused by criminals, by nature, by disease – things that could and do happen to everybody.
  - c) Behind these things we can see the hand of Satan, but it is harder to see the fairness and goodness of God, not to mention his good intentions.
4. Yet in spite of these conundrums, it is part of the answer that man can accept suffering as the tribute he pays to the freedom of others.
- a) We may reflect upon occasions when others have paid for our freedom when he have caused them pain and suffering.
  - b) When tempted to ask, "Why does God permit this to happen to me," we might ask ourselves how we would feel if God paralyzed our feet when they ran to do evil, our arms when lifted against others, or our tongues when we spoke evil.
5. It is part of the answer that it is possible for one person to share the burdens of others.
- a) The price paid for this can be suffering.
  - b) But when done in love, such suffering becomes the noblest of deeds.
  - c) While Job merely hints at this solution, that suffering can be voluntary and vicarious is one of the most amazing and liberating of all the truths revealed in scripture.

- (1) The patient endurance of wrong can conquer evil.
- (2) The sufferer can fortify others by his or her example.
- (3) The ills of life can sweeten a person or turn a person sour.
- (4) The metal that has not been tempered in the fire has no strength.

- E. The Bible affirms two truths that collide in Job – Suffering is the common burden of all men and the lonely burden of each man.
1. It explains it as punitive, corrective, exemplary, vicarious.
  2. From one angle suffering is inflicted by God in justice.
  3. From another angle it can be accepted by person in love.
  4. These truths need to be stated with sensitivity; it is amazing how trite and sanctimonious they sound as they fall from the lips of Job's friends.
    - a) Their ineptitude does not invalidate what they say.
    - b) To the extent that they speak the truth, those truths cannot be rejected without leaving the world in moral chaos.
    - c) They are correct as far as they go, but these truths do not cover all of the facts.
    - d) They do not apply to Job, as both he and God know.
  5. Job's friends were well meaning but presumptuous.
    - a) Job's case was special and generalized doctrines were not applicable.
    - b) Nothing but the Voice from the tempest can meet his case.
    - c) Beyond the human concept of deserved suffering, lies undeserved suffering, and it was the latter into which Job was plunged.
      - (1) The case of Job opens up a whole new dimension.
      - (2) There is a vast area of human misery that is neither penal, nor remedial, nor redemptive.
  6. To reject Job as one already rejected by God is the final human cruelty.

- a) Job's friends are doing the best that they can with their best wisdom to comfort him, but they become "miserable comforters" and add to his pain.
  - b) What he needs is compassion, not advice.
  - c) The helplessness of Job is pathetic.
    - (1) If he had sinned, he could repent.
    - (2) But he cannot invent imaginary sins of which to repent.
    - (3) There is nothing he can do but cry out to God from the depths.
    - (4) He is alone in this anger until he discovers that God has not deserted him.
  - d) But, like Jesus, he does not at first, and not for a long time, receive an answer to his desolate cry, "My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?"
    - (1) Yet the way of the cross (suffering) became the road to God.
    - (2) Of all human beings, the innocent sufferer stands closest to God.
    - (3) Job's final contentment is inexplicable unless he found a place of spiritual growth in the valley of the shadow.
    - (4) God sometimes permits the valley of the shadow because it is there that we discover the power of his comforting rod and staff.
    - (5) Perhaps it is because it is there that in his love and grace he calls on us to serve him through our pain and suffering, recognizing that they have a higher purpose than we are able to see upon the earth.
7. One of the points of the book of Job may be to help us to see that there are more questions than there are answers.
- a) This is hard to accept for a society that prides itself on its ability to answer all questions.
  - b) In Job there is precious little in the way of an answer as we understand that term.
    - (1) We confront a good man who suffers intolerably.
    - (2) We are caught up in his undeserved and unjust suffering.



- (3) We cry out with Job unto God to tell us what is happening and why.
  - (4) We feel his sense of abandonment as his family is lost and his wife asks him to curse God.
  - (5) There is nothing we can say or do that will make his plight any easier or his situation any better.
8. Job doesn't give us any answers, but it does show us how one man at the end of his day of suffering was able to live with his questions.
- F. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 were all sufferers, and many of them died without deliverance.
1. No suffering is pleasant at the time, but *afterwards* it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who have been exercised (trained) by it." Heb. 12:11.
  2. No one should seek to inflict it on himself, and, while no one who has felt his rod would wish to go that road again, no one who has come with Job to understand what the Lord is aiming at (James 5:11), would wish not to have trodden that path.
  3. The body of Jesus forever bears the scars of crucifixion, and they are its chief glory.
- G. What Job longed for blindly has actually happened.
1. God himself has actually joined us in our suffering, borne our stripes, and acquired a new completeness through that which he endured. Heb. 5:7-9.
  2. All of the meanings of suffering converge on Christ.
    - a) He entered a suffering prepared for him and reserved for him alone.
    - b) As the substitute for sinners, his suffering was penal.
    - c) They were also a full and authentic sharing of our human condition with a love that gave itself completely into the furnace of affliction.
  3. That the Lord Himself has embraced and absorbed the undeserved consequences of all evil is the final answer to Job and to all the Jobs of humanity.
  4. As an innocent sufferer, Job is the companion of God.