

“Can a Man Be in the Right?” (Job 4–14)

February 26, 2017

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How do you respond to other people’s tragedies? What do you think and what do you do when you hear of some disaster in another part of the world? It doesn’t matter much if it’s a natural disaster like an earthquake or a terrorist attack. How do you respond to such news? What if it’s a personal tragedy, perhaps one that affects a famous person or an acquaintance? What goes through your mind? What do you do?

There are a number of ways that people respond to tragedies. Sometimes people respond with compassion and acts of service. Sometimes people have the opposite response. There’s a German word called *Schadenfreude*, which literal means joy (*Freude*) that comes from (other people’s) misfortunes (*Schaden*). Some people get a sense of satisfaction and glee if someone they dislike gets cancer, or has some other bad thing befall him or her.

Some people respond by thinking, “It’s their fault. They deserved it.” In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which hit part of the Gulf Coast in 2005, various religious leaders blamed the hurricane on various sins. Nancy Gibbs, writing in *Time* magazine, reports:

An ultraconservative Israeli rabbi declared that Katrina was retribution for U.S. support of the Israeli pullout from Gaza. Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam called Katrina judgment for the Iraq war. The Christian Civic Group of Maine noted that the hurricane struck just as New Orleans was planning a huge gay-rights festival. A Kuwaiti official said, “The Terrorist Katrina is One of the Soldiers of Allah.” There was, in other words, broad agreement in some far-reaching quarters that Katrina represented God’s punishment, just no consensus on the sin.¹

It’s interesting how all these leaders, coming from different faiths, were so sure they knew why the hurricane happened.

Others take the opposite approach. They think that God had nothing to do with it. The rabbi Harold Kushner famously wrote a book called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.² He came to the conclusion that God is not all-powerful, so he is not able to stop tragic things

¹ Nancy Gibbs, “Where Was God?” *Time*, September 15, 2005, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1105669,00.html>, accessed February 25, 2017.

² Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981).

from happening. Concerning Hurricane Katrina, Kushner said that “God was not in the hurricane.”³ Apparently, God isn’t omnipresent, at least according to Kushner.

When tragedies strike, other people may despair, concluding that the event is meaningless and there is no hope. Not only is God not in the hurricane, but God can’t help people after the hurricane ravages the land and destroys lives.

Today, we’re going to see how Job’s three friends respond to his tragedy, and how Job responds to them and how he speaks to God. Two weeks ago, we began looking at this important book of the Bible. If you weren’t with us, I’ll recap as briefly as I can. Somewhere in the Middle East, perhaps as long as four thousand years ago, there was a righteous man named Job who feared God. God had blessed him with wealth and a large family. Unbeknownst to Job, God and Satan had a conversation in heaven. Satan claimed that Job only worshiped God because God had given him good things. Take away those things, said Satan, and Job will curse you. So, God allowed Satan to attack Job’s possessions. Job lost all his animals, servants, and even his ten children, who died in a terrible accident. Job didn’t curse God. He mourned and then worshiped God.⁴ Satan then claimed that if Job’s body were affected, then Job would curse God. So, God allowed Satan to hurt Job’s body, as long as he didn’t kill him. Job developed a terrible skin condition, but he still didn’t curse God. Then his three friends arrived to comfort him. They sat in silence with him for a week.⁵

Then Job erupted with a painful lament, cursing the day he was born. He wished he was dead. He didn’t take any steps to kill himself, but he clearly thought that death was better than living this miserable existence.⁶

Now, this week, we’ll look at the first round of dialogue between Job and his friends. Each of his friends speaks to Job, and Job responds to each one in turn. There are actually three of these cycles. Since these speeches can be a bit repetitive, we’re going to look at one cycle per week. That means we’re going to look at eleven chapters’ worth of material today. I won’t have time to read each verse, so I’ll summarize the speeches and look at some key verses.

³ See Chapter 3, “God Was Not in the Hurricane,” in Harold S. Kushner, *Conquering Fear* (New York: Anchor, 2009).

⁴ These events took place in Job 1.

⁵ These events took place in Job 2.

⁶ Job’s lament is found in Job 3.

The first friend to speak is named Eliphaz. His speech is found in chapters 4 and 5. Let's look at the beginning of his speech. This is Job 4:1–6.

- ¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:
- ² “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?
Yet who can keep from speaking?”
- ³ Behold, you have instructed many,
and you have strengthened the weak hands.
- ⁴ Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees.
- ⁵ But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
it touches you, and you are dismayed.
- ⁶ Is not your fear of God your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?⁷

Eliphaz begins by asking if Job will be impatient with his words. This is hardly a sensitive way to deal with a man who is hurting and mourning. But he does say some nice things about Job. And then encourages Job to fear God. But verses 7 and 8 are key to his speech:

- ⁷ “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?”
- ⁸ As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.

Eliphaz is saying that no innocent person has ever perished. The implication is that Job isn't innocent. And then Eliphaz says, “You reap what you sow.” In other words, he's assuming that Job must have done something bad in order to deserve what he's getting.

All three friends are slightly different, but they all assume Job has done something wrong. They believe in the principle of retribution: If you do something bad, something bad will happen to you. If you sin against God, he will punish you. But the mistake they make is reversing those statements: If something bad is happening to you, you must have done something bad. If it appears that you're being punished, you must have sinned.

They're actually making a mistake in logic. In logic, there's something called the deductive argument. It's meant to demonstrate that a statement must be true. It usually consists of a major premise and a minor premise, followed by a conclusion. If the premises are true and

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

the form of the argument is valid, then the conclusion must follow. So, for example, here's a deductive argument:

1. All normal dogs have four legs. (That's the major premise.)
2. Tucker [the name of my dog] is a normal dog. (That's the minor premise.)
3. Therefore, Tucker has four legs. (That's the conclusion.)

That may be a silly example, but it works. Sure, some dogs may have three legs, but I said "normal dogs" have four legs. And if you find out that a particular dog is a normal dog, it must follow that that particular dog has four legs.

The equivalent argument in the book of Job would be:

1. All people who sin suffer.
2. Job has sinned.
3. Therefore, Job will suffer.

But that's not what's happening here. The friends are making an error in their reasoning. Go back to the dog example. Imagine if I say:

1. All normal dogs have four legs.
2. Tucker has four legs.
3. Therefore, Tucker is a dog.

Is that a valid argument? No, because other animals have four legs. If Tucker has four legs, he could be a horse or an elephant.

What Job's friends are doing is making the following argument:

1. All people who sin suffer.
2. Job is suffering.
3. Therefore, Job must have sinned.

But that's like saying any four-legged animal must be a dog. There may be other reasons why Job is suffering. What they don't know is that Job is suffering because God is demonstrating that Job has true faith, one that is not dependent on circumstances. God is showing that to Satan. And, it seems, God is also showing that to Job. But we'll talk about that another week.

Let's look at how Eliphaz comes to his conclusion about Job's condition. We'll read verses 12–19:

- ¹² "Now a word was brought to me stealthily;
my ear received the whisper of it.
- ¹³ Amid thoughts from visions of the night,

when deep sleep falls on men,
 14 dread came upon me, and trembling,
 which made all my bones shake.
 15 A spirit glided past my face;
 the hair of my flesh stood up.
 16 It stood still,
 but I could not discern its appearance.
 A form was before my eyes;
 there was silence, then I heard a voice:
 17 ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God?
 Can a man be pure before his Maker?
 18 Even in his servants he puts no trust,
 and his angels he charges with error;
 19 how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
 whose foundation is in the dust,
 who are crushed like the moth.

Notice that Eliphaz is claiming some kind of personal revelation. He had a vision in the night. A spirit went past him, and he heard a voice that asks, “Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?” Those are good questions. In fact, those are some of the biggest questions we can ask. When a tragedy affects us, we may feel that it’s because we’re not right with God. And we may wonder how we can be in God’s good graces, on his good side, so that we won’t face condemnation.

The problem is that Eliphaz assumes that every creature is wrong in God’s eyes simply by being a creature. He says that God charges angels with error. How much more will God charge humans, who live in mere “houses of clay”? In Eliphaz’s world, simply being alive is a sin.⁸

Then, in chapter 5, Eliphaz seems to call Job a fool. But worse than that, he implies that because he is foolish, his children have died. He says this of the fool in verse 4:

4 His children are far from safety;
 they are crushed in the gate,
 and there is no one to deliver them.

⁸ “[A]t this time he will not accuse Job of any blatant sin. Rather he grounds the reason for Job’s suffering in the limitations and sinfulness of all creatures. No one is without error before God. Consequently, Job’s plight is no serious disgrace, but primarily an occasion for him to beseech God’s mercy and experience his saving grace.” John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 129.

Eliphaz doesn't score any more sensitivity points. And then, in most of chapter 5, he urges Job to follow God. So, in verse 8, he says,

⁸ “As for me, I would seek God,
and to God would I commit my cause . . .

And in verses 17 and 18, he says,

¹⁷ “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves;
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.
¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up;
he shatters, but his hands heal.

Eliphaz is basically saying, “Job, you're a human being, which means you're a sinful wretch. That's why your children have died. Turn to God and accept his discipline, and everything will be okay.”

As you might imagine, this doesn't go over well with Job. Job doesn't immediately respond to Eliphaz. Instead, he says how terrible he feels. Look at the first four verses of chapter 6:

¹ Then Job answered and said:
² “Oh that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!
³ For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;
therefore my words have been rash.
⁴ For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.

Job's vexation is heavier than the sand of the sea. That's quite a poetic way of saying how miserable he is. But here's something that sounds shocking: He says that God's poisonous arrows are in him. God is terrorizing him. A few verses later, in verses 8–10, he says this:

⁸ “Oh that I might have my request,
and that God would fulfill my hope,
⁹ that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
¹⁰ This would be my comfort;
I would even exult in pain unsparing,
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

Job wants God to crush him. It would be his only hope. He says this because he can't understand why God is putting him through this ordeal. He is innocent. He has "not denied the words" of God.

Then Job tells his friends how terrible they've been. Look at verse 14:

¹⁴ "He who withholds kindness from a friend
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.

In the next verse, he says, "My brothers are treacherous." Then look at verses 24–27:

²⁴ "Teach me, and I will be silent;
make me understand how I have gone astray.
²⁵ How forceful are upright words!
But what does reproof from you reprove?
²⁶ Do you think that you can reprove words,
when the speech of a despairing man is wind?
²⁷ You would even cast lots over the fatherless,
and bargain over your friend.

Job wants his friends to show him where he is wrong. Can't they see that he is in despair? His words of lament are mere "wind" that he is venting, not arguments to be corrected. These friends are so bad that they would cast lots over orphans and haggle over the price of a friend.

But Job insists that he is not lying (v. 28). He says that his "vindication is at stake" (v. 29). He insists that he has committed no injustice (v. 30).

In chapter 7, Job again laments his situation. He can't find rest or comfort (vv. 2–5). His life will vanish forever (vv. 6–10). Then Job starts speaking directly to God. He feels like God is guarding him, hounding him, always watching him, never forgiving him. Let's read verses 11–21:

¹¹ "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
¹² Am I the sea, or a sea monster,
that you set a guard over me?
¹³ When I say, 'My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint,'
¹⁴ then you scare me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,
¹⁵ so that I would choose strangling
and death rather than my bones.
¹⁶ I loathe my life; I would not live forever.

Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.
 17 What is man, that you make so much of him,
 and that you set your heart on him,
 18 visit him every morning
 and test him every moment?
 19 How long will you not look away from me,
 nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit?
 20 If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?
 Why have you made me your mark?
 Why have I become a burden to you?
 21 Why do you not pardon my transgression
 and take away my iniquity?
 For now I shall lie in the earth;
 you will seek me, but I shall not be.”

Job’s second friend, Bildad, speaks next. Let’s read the beginning of his speech, chapter 8, verses 1–7:

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:
 2 “How long will you say these things,
 and the words of your mouth be a great wind?
 3 Does God pervert justice?
 Or does the Almighty pervert the right?
 4 If your children have sinned against him,
 he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.
 5 If you will seek God
 and plead with the Almighty for mercy,
 6 if you are pure and upright,
 surely then he will rouse himself for you
 and restore your rightful habitation.
 7 And though your beginning was small,
 your latter days will be very great.

Bildad says that Job is full of “windy words.” He insists that God is just. He also suggests that Job’s children died because of their sin. He’s perhaps more insensitive than Eliphaz. But he says that if Job would only seek out God and ask for mercy, then all would be well.

If Eliphaz relied on a personal revelation from a spirit, Bildad appeals to tradition. He says, in verses 8–10:

8 “For inquire, please, of bygone ages,
 and consider what the fathers have searched out.
 9 For we are but of yesterday and know nothing,
 for our days on earth are a shadow.

10 Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?

He claims to represent the wisdom of the ages. And such tradition says that “the hope of the godless shall perish” (v. 13). He finishes his speech with these words:

20 “Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,
nor take the hand of evildoers.
21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouting.
22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.”

In chapter 9, Job responds by saying that it’s impossible to contend with God. He, too, wonders, how a man can be in the right before God. For Job, it seems that God is too powerful. Let’s read chapter 9, verses 2–4:

2 “Truly I know that it is so:
But how can a man be in the right before God?
3 If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand times.
4 He is wise in heart and mighty in strength
—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?—

Now skip down to verse 15:

15 Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.
16 If I summoned him and he answered me,
I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.
17 For he crushes me with a tempest
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
18 he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
19 If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?
20 Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.
21 I am blameless; I regard not myself;
I loathe my life.
22 It is all one; therefore I say,
‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’
23 When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.
24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges—

if it is not he, who then is it?

Notice that Job seems to be saying that both the innocent and the wicked meet the same fate. More than that, the earth seems to be given over to wicked people. Job is coming dangerously close to saying that God isn't just.

Though Job thinks that God is so powerful he may not listen to him, Job wants more and more to have an audience with God. He wants God to explain himself. But he thinks it will be of no use. What he really needs is an arbiter, someone who will come between God and him. Let's read chapter 9, verses 29–35, and chapter 10, verses 1–2:

- ²⁹ I shall be condemned;
 why then do I labor in vain?
³⁰ If I wash myself with snow
 and cleanse my hands with lye,
³¹ yet you will plunge me into a pit,
 and my own clothes will abhor me.
³² For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
 that we should come to trial together.
³³ There is no arbiter between us,
 who might lay his hand on us both.
³⁴ Let him take his rod away from me,
 and let not dread of him terrify me.
³⁵ Then I would speak without fear of him,
 for I am not so in myself.
- ¹ “I loathe my life;
I will give free utterance to my complaint;
 I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
² I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
 let me know why you contend against me.

Again, Job wants God to answer him, but he feels that someone needs to come in between God and himself. He feels like he is being condemned without a trial. He wants to enter into a courtroom with God, to have some kind of mediator work things out between them.

Now let's look at what Job's third friend, Zophar, says. We'll read chapter 11, verses 1–12:

- ¹ Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

² “Should a multitude of words go unanswered,
 and a man full of talk be judged right?
³ Should your babble silence men,

- and when you mock, shall no one shame you?
⁴ For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure,
and I am clean in God’s eyes.’
⁵ But oh, that God would speak
and open his lips to you,
⁶ and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For he is manifold in understanding.
Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.
- ⁷ “Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
⁸ It is higher than heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?
⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.
¹⁰ If he passes through and imprisons
and summons the court, who can turn him back?
¹¹ For he knows worthless men;
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?
¹² But a stupid man will get understanding
when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man!

Zophar assumes that Job is guilty. If God spoke to Job, he would show that Job is actually receiving less than his guilt deserves. Zophar’s main point is that God’s wisdom is far beyond man’s wisdom. He even suggests that Job is worthless and stupid.

At the end of his speech, Zophar says that if Job reaches out to God and stops sinning, all will be well (vv. 13–19). But the wicked will perish (v. 20).

Zophar’s speech provokes the last speech we’ll look at today, which is Job’s response in chapters 12–14. Job begins some sarcasm. Look at chapter 12, verses 2 and 3:

- ² “No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.
³ But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?

His friends may think they’re wise, but Job has knowledge, too. And one thing he says is that the wicked don’t always suffer in this life. Look at verse 6:

- ⁶ The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hand.

Job's point is that if the wicked don't always suffer, one can't assume that someone who is suffering is necessarily wicked. Life doesn't always work that way. Sometimes, God decides to do overthrow kings and nations for reasons that only God knows. God is free to do what he wants. Let's read verses 13–25:

- 13 “With God are wisdom and might;
he has counsel and understanding.
- 14 If he tears down, none can rebuild;
if he shuts a man in, none can open.
- 15 If he withholds the waters, they dry up;
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.
- 16 With him are strength and sound wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.
- 17 He leads counselors away stripped,
and judges he makes fools.
- 18 He looses the bonds of kings
and binds a waistcloth on their hips.
- 19 He leads priests away stripped
and overthrows the mighty.
- 20 He deprives of speech those who are trusted
and takes away the discernment of the elders.
- 21 He pours contempt on princes
and loosens the belt of the strong.
- 22 He uncovers the deeps out of darkness
and brings deep darkness to light.
- 23 He makes nations great, and he destroys them;
he enlarges nations, and leads them away.
- 24 He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth
and makes them wander in a trackless waste.
- 25 They grope in the dark without light,
and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.

Job's friends assume that God works in a mechanical way, always punishing sin and rewarding repentance. But Job knows that God doesn't always work in ways that we expect.

In chapter 13, Job tells his friends that he wants to argue his case before God. He also tells them that they are liars with useless words and that it would be better if they remained quiet.

Let's read chapter 13, verses 1–5:

- 1 “Behold, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.
- 2 What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
- 3 But I would speak to the Almighty,

- and I desire to argue my case with God.
4 As for you, you whitewash with lies;
worthless physicians are you all.
5 Oh that you would keep silent,
and it would be your wisdom!

And the look at verse 12:

- 12 Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defenses are defenses of clay.

Then Job begins to focus his attention once again toward God. He wants to make his case before God, even if it means losing his life. Look at verses 13–15:

- 13 “Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.
14 Why should I take my flesh in my teeth
and put my life in my hand?
15 Though he slay me, I will hope in him;
yet I will argue my ways to his face.

That first line of verse 15 could be translated, “If he were to slay me, I would have no hope.”⁹ Most commentators think that is the original reading. As we’ll see next week, though Job thinks God is being cruel to him, he does maintain some hope. But now, Job doesn’t care about the result of his meeting with God. He simply wants to make his case to God. Look at verses 18–24:

- 18 Behold, I have prepared my case;
I know that I shall be in the right.
19 Who is there who will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.
20 Only grant me two things,
then I will not hide myself from your face:
21 withdraw your hand far from me,
and let not dread of you terrify me.
22 Then call, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and you reply to me.
23 How many are my iniquities and my sins?
Make me know my transgression and my sin.
24 Why do you hide your face
and count me as your enemy?

⁹ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 221.

Job wants God to relent and to stop terrorizing him. Job wants an answer from God. He wants to know what his sins are and why God is treating him as an enemy. And then Job wants to be alone to die, which is what he talks about in chapter 14.

Now that we've looked at the content of these speeches, I want to draw a few conclusions. One of the obvious points is how terrible Job's friends behave. Instead of comforting Job, they accuse him. They are like those religious pontificators, saying that Hurricane Katrina happened because of some sin. When they accuse Job, they are actually doing something very evil. They are carrying out the work of Satan. We only hear the word "Satan" in the first couple chapters of Job. But that doesn't mean he disappears from the book. When these "worthless physicians" accuse Job, they are doing Satan's work. Satan is the accuser (Zech. 3:1–5; Rev. 12:10). He wants God's people to feel condemned. Perhaps the spirit that Eliphaz saw in a dream was not the Holy Spirit, but an evil, demonic one.

What's interesting is that they say, "Do this and you will be rewarded. Confess your sins and God will give you a good life." The reward they are offering Job is not a better relationship with God, and it's certainly not the truth. They are trying to get Job to confess sins he hasn't committed in order to get rewards from God. And what did Satan accuse Job of doing in the first place? He claimed that Job only worshiped God because he received good things from him.¹⁰ If Job did something false in order to get those good things again, he would be proving Satan right.

Now think about what Satan did when Jesus, the Son of God, walked the earth. Satan tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13) by offering him good things: all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus resisted Satan's temptation. That doesn't mean that Satan was done with Jesus. Satan then worked through the scribes, the Pharisees, all the religious leaders in Jerusalem who tried to test and trap Jesus in his words. When they couldn't do that, they simply made plans to kill him, and Satan worked through one of Jesus' friends, Judas. In a similar way, Satan is working through these three friends of Job.¹¹

¹⁰ "If Job listened to either his wife or his friends, the adversary would have been declared the victor, and it would have to be concluded that there really was no such thing as disinterested righteousness, thus calling into question the legitimacy of God's policy of rewarding the righteous." John H. Walton, "Job 1: Book Of," ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 341. Nearly every commentator on Job points this out.

¹¹ We could say that Satan also worked through Peter, who tried to urge Jesus not to die (Matt. 16:21–23). In a similar way, perhaps Satan was working through Job's wife, who urged Job to "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

When tragedy strikes, we don't need to accuse people of sin. Now, it's possible that bad things happen to people because they did sin. Tragedies can be God's judgment. We do know that natural disasters, diseases, and death are in the world because the presence of sin in general. But we don't know why any particular event has occurred. After all, in Jesus' day, people assumed that a man born blind had that condition because his parents had sinned or he had sinned (John 9:1–2). But Jesus said, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). Sometimes, a bad event occurs not because of any particular sin, but because God wants to display his power and his mercy. We don't know why any bad thing has happened. It is better to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15) and provide comfort than to accuse people. That doesn't mean we can't urge people to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus. But it means we should be compassionate and humble. Job's friends did a good thing when they came to him and sat with him for a week. Sometimes the best thing we can do for people who are hurting is to be with them and to be quiet.

The second thing I want us to think about is this: When we read Job's words, they can be shocking. He seems to be accusing God of being unfair, of terrorizing him. The best thing I read about this comes from Peter Kreeft, who writes,

God is infinite love, and the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Job's love for God is infected with hate, but the three friends' love for God is infected with indifference. Job stays married to God and throws dishes at him; the three friends have a polite nonmarriage, with separate bedrooms and separate vacations. The family that fights together stays together.¹²

Job's friends talk about God as an impersonal force, a being who always does this or that. They act as if they know it all. Job can't understand what is happening. He may not always say the right thing, but he is wrestling with God. He doesn't assume to know everything about God. In fact, he can't figure out what God is doing. But he's talking to God. He isn't walking away from him. This is what is important. When bad things happen to us and we don't understand it, the important thing is to keep wrestling with God. Ask him questions. Tell him how you're feeling. He already knows!

The third thing I want us to think about is the idea that comes up a few times in the book of Job: Can a man be in the right before God? (Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4). How can human beings, who

¹² Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 89.

are finite creatures, come before the infinite God? How can human beings, who have sinned at some point in their lives, stand before God and not be punished? Even Job sinned at some point. He knows that. He just thinks that what has happened to him is out of proportion to his sins. Job thinks that if he is going to be in the right before God's eyes, he will need an arbiter, a mediator, but he doesn't think there is anyone who qualifies. After all, who can tell God what to do?

Though Job couldn't see who could serve as a mediator between God and human beings, we know that there is one. Jesus is that mediator. He is both God and man. He is perfect—he never sinned—but because he is also a human being and was tempted, he can relate to us. And he is the advocate for all who come to him and trust him (1 John 2:1–2). The apostle Paul writes, in 1 Timothy 2:5–6: “[T]here is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

The fact is that all of us have sinned. All of us have ignored God, rejected him, rebelled against him, and done what we know to be wrong. And the reality is that because of our sin, we deserve death. We deserve that because sin is a slap in God's face. He is good and he has given us everything we have, including life and breath. And we ignore him. We also deserve punishment because sin is the pollution of a world that God made good. Sin destroys God's world. It hurts us and other people. But God loves us so much that he offered up his own Son. And Jesus offered up himself willingly. Though he is the only perfect human being (who also is God), the only one who never sinned, he died a terrible death. He was treated as a criminal. And on the cross he experienced more than death. He absorbed the punishment for sin. He drank the bitter cup of God's wrath. And he did that so we don't have to. And though we will die, that's not the end of the story. For those who love and trust Jesus, there is life after death. Jesus didn't just die; he rose from the grave. And all God's people will rise and live life in a perfect world, all because of what Jesus did.

So, we do have an arbiter. And we have someone who has revealed more of the deep things of God to us. We still may struggle to make sense out of life. But we can't say God doesn't care. He cares so much he died for us. And we can't say that we don't have someone who will represent us before God. We do. His name is Jesus. And if we're united to him by faith, we don't have to go on trial before God. Jesus went on trial for us.

The question for us is: Do we love Jesus for who he is? Not for what he can give us, but for who he is and how he has loved us? Do we trust that he's good? Do we trust that he's God? Will we follow him?