
Day 254 - September 11

The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE)
Job and the Problem of Suffering

Readings: *Job 11:1-14:22*

Reflections:

- Zophar's name means "chirping" or "rising early." Maybe there is an association with a bird chirping first thing in the morning. I wonder if it implies someone who is annoying. 😊 He is seemingly a bit more confrontational and hotheaded.
- Zophar is outraged by what Job is saying and by his claim of innocence. He can't help but confront Job for his arrogance.
- He makes an interesting statement: "God...would... disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides." This could also be understood as "true wisdom is doubly deep." In other words, Job thinks he knows wisdom but true wisdom goes way beyond what Job could ever know. Zophar goes on to say: In fact, you should be receiving even more punishment than you are receiving because obviously God has forgotten some of your sin. Nice encouragement for Job as he sits in his excruciating pain, with open sores, mourning the death of his children.
- Zophar's conviction is the same as the others: You have no way of knowing the depth of God's wisdom and will and therefore, if you would just repent from your sin, your life would be fantastic!
- Job's response remains unchanged. Job begins by saying that his friends hold the popular opinion ("Doubtless you are the people" or "You represent everyone else") but he has a mind and perspective equal to their perspectives. He acknowledges that his suffering has made him a laughingstock, particular after the harsh treatment from Zophar.
- Job then appeals to the created order to reaffirm that all of life is in God's care. He affirms that God has ultimate power and wisdom and that all things, the obvious and the hidden, the weak and the strong, the wise and the foolish, all belong to God and are under his dominion and rule. No one can stand up to God.
- Yet, Job still wants to talk to God and understand what is happening in his life. Here we see that Job's complaint is ultimately relational in his desire to find out what God is truly thinking. He is unwilling to pretend to be the cause of his own suffering just to make sense

of what seems senseless or to let God off the hook for what is apparently a contradiction to the promise of blessing for righteous life. Job wants to have it out with God and all these friends do is keep saying things that aren't true or don't apply to Job. They are empty words that just don't hold up to the truth.

- Job then makes a bold statement: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless person would dare come before him!" This is a statement of true commitment to relationship, true commitment to the truth, true surrender to the will of God. Religion makes everything non-relational, especially with God. There is no dialogue or battle of wills or colliding perspectives that comes with true relationship. Job doesn't understand what is happening but he is taking it up with God.
- All Job wants is for God to give him a break from the suffering (probably most of the break he needs is from his friends going on and on about all the wrong stuff) and then to open up a way for him to talk with Job. (See Job 13:2-22)
- Job then continues to restate his questions and convictions: What sin did he commit that would merit what he is going through? Man lives a short time and then dies. Although trees sprout again, people just live once and then die. But there is hope. Job refers to waiting in the grave for God to call him, to renew him in some way. Although the Old Testament has no developed understanding of the resurrection, it would seem that there is some cryptic reference here in Job 14:13-17 to life after death in God's presence. "You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made." It is a beautiful image of God wanting to rescue us because of his love for us.
- In this reference to the hope of resurrection, Job also says, "My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin." Might Job be suggesting that redemption from the grave will include forgiveness from sin? Could this be a foreshadowing of the forgiveness and eternal life proclaimed through Jesus? It is difficult to determine in the original language.
- Whatever Job is thinking, he ends up in despair. God destroys a man's hope, overpowers him, and he is gone. He has no sense of legacy in the grave and as he dies, he only feels his own pain and mourns only for himself. Job remains in deep despair.
- What we see here is that without a clear sense of God's identification with suffering, no clear conviction of life after death, then suffering really does become meaningless. Job won't let it go and so we again are left with such a stark contrast between the message of Job (from the story of "what doesn't work") and the message of Jesus (the story of "what does work"). Jesus alone gives us hope when confronting suffering and death. Job continues to drive home this truth.