

Text Driven Preaching Workshop
Job's Three Friends
Deron J. Biles

What Job's Friends DID Right

- A. They came when their friend was sick (2:11)
- B. They empathized with him (2:12)
- C. They spent time with him (2:13)
- D. They spoke their convictions to his face, and not behind his back
- E. They desired to see God justified

Question: Because it is true that wicked suffer for wickedness, does it naturally follow that all suffering is a result of wickedness?

General Introductory Comments about Job and His Friends

- A. Who were Job's Three Friends?
 - 1. Eliphaz was from Teman
 - 2. Bildad was a Shuhite
 - 3. Zophar was a Naamathite

- They are generally presented as Wise Men from the Arabic world. They represent the common theological "wisdom" of the ancient world, but the text gives no indication that they should be reduced to mere caricatures.
- B. The Structure of the Debate

There are three cycles of debate. Each friend is given 3 opportunities to speak (Zophar only speaks twice). After each friend speaks, Job is given an opportunity for rebuttal.
- C. On what are their arguments based?
 - 1. **Eliphaz** = wisdom is through **Experience** (4:8, 12-21; 5:3, 27; **15:27**)
 - 2. **Bildad** = wisdom is through **Tradition** (8:8-10; 18:17)
 - 3. **Zophar** = wisdom is through **Reason** (11:5-19; 20:4ff)
- D. Perspectives on Job's Situation
 - 1. **Job:** - Job 3:26 (cf. 3:17; 14:1) – rogetz – "trouble

2. **Friends:**
 - a. Yasar – 4:3 “instruction”
 - b. Musar – 5:17 – “chastening”
 - c. Yacach – 5:17; 22:4 – “correction”
 - d. Mishpat – 22:4 – “judgment” (cf. 19:7; 27:4)

ROUND ONE:

A. Eliphaz - “But, Who Can Keep From Speaking?”

Eliphaz’s primary **Basis of Authority** is **EXPERIENCE**

- *He looked to his experience as the infallible yardstick OF truth and by which he measured the religious experiences of others*

He begins in 4:2 by saying, “if we speak a word to you will you become weary?”

- Lit. “if we **test** (נָסָה – “nasah”) a word to you ...”
 - The word can imply, “to put to the test;” “examine;” “prove”

To support his point, Eliphaz relates a dream that he had (4:12-21) in which he claims to have received *some kind of Divine Revelation*.

5:2 – Eliphaz accuses Job of Anger

- Job responds 3x using that same word (6:2; 10:17; 17:7)
 - When Job uses that word of himself – expresses his grief
 - When Job uses that word of friends – their anger towards him

Job 5:7 – “man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward!”

- The Hebrew is complicated here
 - Some see that as a somewhat fatalistic suggestion that trouble just comes naturally (just like sparks that fly upward)
 - That seems contrary to his argument that Job’s trouble was caused by his own sin
 - However, the **context** before is about fools (in 5:2-5), and then in 5:6, he says that affliction does not come from dust (it’s not the land’s fault; *it’s not Adam and Eve’s fault!*)
 - The Hebrew verb can mean, “is born” or “gives birth to”
 - Cf. 5:4 – “his sons”
 - Cf. 5:7b - וּבְנֵי־רִשְׁפָּן (lit. “sons of flame”)
 - רִשְׁפָּן can mean plague or pestilence (Cf. Deut 32:34; Ps. 78:48)
 - I prefer a translation something like – “Man gives birth to trouble, and children of pestilence exalt themselves.”
- He follows by saying – I would look up!

Eliphaz’s **solution** is for Job to seek God (5:8); accept God’s correction (5:17); and find God’s Shalom (5:24)

Eliphaz said some things right

1. Fear of God is our confidence and Wisdom (4:6; 27)
2. Can a man be just before God (4:17) - we all sinners before Him
3. We should seek God in our trouble – (5:8)

Where Eliphaz was wrong

1. My experiences are not universal for all
2. I should take my prayer to God - but not necessarily expect immediate answer
3. His claim that Job should confess presumes that he knows what only God knows about Job's sin
4. Not all unrighteous people are destroyed immediately
5. Seems to be suggesting that we worship God for what we get from it

B. Bildad - “How long will you speak these things?”

Bildad began with a series of rhetorical questions

- His first question responds directly to Job (8:2)
- Bildad's second rhetorical question gets to the heart of his point regarding the Justice of God.

8:2 (cf. 11:2-3) He, like Zophar who will follow him, described Job as being “windy.” He seems to use this image as a subtle warning to Job, cautioning him of the implicit dangers of careless speech.

8:4 - He uses a deeply personal argument that implicates Job's children. Maybe your kids deserved to die!

- The argument is callous, but *seems to be* intended to give Job an out
- Ascribes the death of Job's children to the fact that their sins have caught up with them (8:4)

Bildad's basis of authority is **TRADITION** (8:8-10)

In the end, like Eliphaz, Bildad believes that God *always* punishes evil and *always* rewards good

Bildad said some things right

1. God is a God of Justice
2. God will forgive if you “earnestly seek Him.”
3. We can learn from previous generations. Traditions can be good things.

Where Bildad was wrong

1. No start well – 8:2 –“Your words are a blast of wind.”
- that's the very first thing he said to Job!
2. Uncompassionate and Frustrated – (Cf. 18:2)
3. The wicked aren't always judged immediately

C. **Zophar** - “Speak, Lord, your servant is not listening!”

Zophar focuses on the logical necessity of Job’s guilt. He is the least accommodating of the three friends

Zophar’s source of authority = **REASON!** (11:5-19; 20:4ff)

11:6 – *God has punished you less than your sin deserves!*

- His major argument (11:7) is that God’s mysteries are unfathomable. Though he seems to grasp them.

11:13-14 - His advice

- Redirect your heart
- Spread out your hands (lit. “palms;” face up) -- (come clean about your sin; clean hands)

Zophar said some things right

- Some good - I don’t know all that God knows -- **TRUE**

Where Zophar was wrong

- Comes across both arrogant and callous
- calls Job a windbag, chatterer (liar), boastful, mockery
- challenges Job’s claim to innocence
(3 X Job claimed to be pure: 6:30, 9:20-21, 10:7)
- Job would discover that God has actually been merciful to him, in that He hasn’t killed Job - Job should repent ... or else his eyes would fail and his only hope would be death

ROUND TWO:

In the second cycle, the fate of the wicked seems to be the focus. All three friends end their 2nd speeches with somewhat lengthy descriptions of the fate of the wicked (Eliphaz – 15:20-35; Bildad – 18:5-21; Zophar – 20:5-29)

A. **Eliphaz**

In his second speech, Eliphaz is not as sympathetic to Job as he was in his first. He begins the 2nd round by accusing Job of casting off fear and restraining prayer (15:4).

Eliphaz again employs a barrage of rhetorical questions

He mockingly asks of Job – “Are you the first person to ever live?”
Implying that others have also suffered before him (15:7)

“What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not with us?
Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father” (v. 10).

He speaks of his own council as “the consolations of God.” (15:11)

B. **Bildad** – offers no hope for Job

In his second speech, Bildad offers no hope for Job.

He says to Job in 18:2 – “gain understanding, so we can speak!”

- You aren’t smart enough to have this argument with us!

His concern seems to be with the fact that Job has insulted the friends’ intelligence (18:3), also attacks Job’s intellectual and moral arrogance (v. 4)

After this introduction, Bildad proceeds, in 18:5-21, in a lengthy excursion regarding the wicked. In 18:8-10, he uses six different Hebrew words for “traps” into which the wicked stumble; in a not-so-subtle implication that Job deserves what he has received.

In the end, Bildad suggests a lengthy list of judgments that the wicked can expect with three thinly veiled and cruel references to Job’s sorrow. According to Bildad, the wicked will face: terror (11), weakness (12), destruction (12), skin disease (13), loss of property (14), he will be forgotten (17), he will have no reputation (17), and he will have no offspring (19).

C. **Zophar** – attempts to use Job’s own words to mock him

Zophar begins his second speech agitated (20:2). He uses a number of direct references to Job’s speeches. He seems insulted by Job’s correction (20:3a)

Zophar seems to be using Job’s words to mock him

- Job rhetorically asked in 14:10 – “where is he?”
- To which Zophar responds in 20:7 using the same phrase

Job has said of his own fleeting existence, “The eye that sees me will not behold me

- Zophar responded in 20:9 – the eye that saw him will see him no more

Zophar *seems to admit the perception that wicked may triumph*, but stipulates that their triumph will be short (20:5).

ROUND THREE:

The views are not more clearly defined; they are simply more emphatically spoken.

Eliphaz - Eliphaz’s final speech in chap. 22 reflects two recurring themes. First, he finally states explicitly that Job’s suffering is an expression of God’s rebuke and judgment (22:4), which are the result of Job’s “great wickedness” and “endless sins” (22:5). Second, despite his conclusion that Job is sinful, Eliphaz’s speech reveals that he has not yet entirely given up on the idea of moving Job beyond his grief—or his sinfulness—and restoring him to his proper place in relation to God and others.

22:5-9 – Eliphaz lists a series of unsupported indictments against Job. Charges Job will refute in Job 31. The accusation from Eliphaz in 22:5 seems contradictory to his statement in 4:6 that Job was pious. He lists a series of sins of which he believes Job to be guilty:

1. Took collateral without cause
2. Stripping the needy naked
3. Gave no water to the thirsty
4. Withheld food from hungry
5. Sent widows away empty
6. Withheld from orphans

- These accusations suggest that Job is being punished by God for what he DID NOT do and not necessarily for what he DID.

Eliphaz once again counsels Job to repent and return to the Lord (vv. 21-25). He encourages Job, in 22:21, to “yield” (יָצַד - “*sakan*”) to God in order to be at peace (shalom) with Him

- A word that could be translated “to become acquainted with God” or “to become useful TO God”)
- The implication could be that Job doesn’t even KNOW God or has become unuseful to Him.

Bildad

Bildad’s final speech is only 5 verses and emphasizes God’s majesty and the incapacity of mankind to be just before Him.

Application

A. Pastoral Care is More about being Present than it is about being Right

B. Pastoral Care Recognizes that Pain speaks more Candidly than does Peace

C. Pastoral Care is Dangerous Apart from the Wisdom of God