

Job 4-5

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Preacher: David Helm

- [0 : 00] Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking?
- Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient.
- It touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember, who that was innocent ever perished?
- Or where were the uprights cut off? As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.
- The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions are broken. The strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.
- [1 : 07] Now a word was brought to me stealthily, my ear received the whisper of it. Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling which made all my bones shake.
- A spirit glided past my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes.
- There was silence, then I heard a voice. Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his maker? This is the word of the Lord.
- Praise be to God. Please be seated. Thank you. Well, good morning, and welcome to Holy Trinity Church.
- I'm so glad that you are with us today. We have launched, as of last Sunday, into a winter series simply titled Wise Living.
- [2 : 20] We're in week two. What we really wanted to accomplish was some practical advice, but not just human advice, biblical advice, to live well in light of the coming year.
- Last week, we opened the series with a title on Job's own sufferings, and we're inquiring how would we live well if, in the coming year, God asked us to go through a particular season of suffering, suffering along the lines in Job's life, all-encompassing financial, economic, familial, even death.
- But what would it take for us to enter well into the year not knowing the outcome if God asks us to go through a season of suffering?
- Today, we simply want to ask a separate question to help us in the coming year. Simply, not all of us are going to experience something this year that is incredibly difficult.
- But we'll probably know somebody, and know somebody well, who does. And how can we help others who are in a season of suffering?
- [3 : 49] That's often the question we begin to ask when we hear that somebody is going through a difficult time. How can I help? But more often than not, we're not sure what is to be made available or what usefulness we might be to them.

And so, when we come to today's text, we are looking at Job's friend, Eliphaz, the first of three to speak in offering help.

You know, when I first conceived of the series, I thought this message would be the world's view on human suffering. And I've been completely corrected as I've read the text.

Job himself was a righteous man, blameless in all his ways, even to the point where he interceded on behalf of others. And these are his friends.

So, these words from Eliphaz are not really some misguided worldly take in an attempt to help somebody go through a difficult time.

[4 : 57] They are the words of someone who was obviously a fearer of God, a conversationalist with Job. He was himself trying to live well.

And so, in one sense, he fits well. We know they're friends, even there in chapter 2, verse 11. It says that they sat with him for seven days.

That's a way to live well in the coming year when you encounter a friend or a family member who is going through a difficult season.

Just call it the ministry of presence. Just be there. I don't know what to say, so I've come to sit.

Eventually, though, you can see there in verse 2, the sitting gave way to speaking.

[6 : 10] The rest gave way to a word. He wants to move beyond a ministry of presence to some familial, friendly preaching, as it were, to shore his friend up who is really depressed and despairing and having difficulty getting through the nights.

And so, in chapter 4, verse 2, if one ventures a word with you, may I say something? He speaks. The coming alongside gives way in these 17 verses to the beginning of a conversation.

And it's a conversation that's really going to carry the bulk of the whole book. All three friends will speak in succession. And all three will have Job respond.

And all three will speak again. And Job will respond. And you will watch four friends in the midst of the dark night of the soul.

So what can we learn from these first 17 verses on how you and I can help others who are encountering a difficult season?

[7 : 27] It's interesting to me that he desires to say a word. He wants to do, he wants to say something that would lift some of the burden. Can I have a word with you?

And then he almost validates the need for a word because he says in verse 3, You know, Job, you instructed many. Your words have been a help to others.

I hope you'll let my words minister now to you. He wants to bring God into view.

It isn't just as if someone is undergoing mental depression or a physical ailment or an economic downturn that is to be treated mentally and materially.

No, there's an element in this friendship where God comes into play because they're both believers in a God of some order.

[8 : 41] And he wants to share a truth that they share about God. Today, these notions of truth are more and more difficult.

There was a day when there were true things to say. If you're younger, you might not recall that day. You'll have to take my word for it. But there was a day where there was something called truth, where you could call one set of claims true and another false, or you could call both sets of claims true or both sets of claims false, depending upon the claims themselves.

And the material that we had available to us to determine a true word about God was simply statements of fact. We began to look at empirical evidence.

We also shared moral certitudes. And then, of course, we had the notion of God, all of these things which are less around us today.

A statement of fact. You either did or did not go to buy a package of cigarettes. That's at the gas station last Tuesday. And that act could be verified through either witnesses or cameras.

[9 : 53] We would know the truth about the matter. But take a moral suititude. It gets a little more difficult. You have the right to...

Where was I? In Philadelphia yesterday. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Happiness. It's a little bit more difficult to prove empirically, but together we share the belief.

It's a certitude. It's a truth that we all agree on. Well, they all agreed on a God.

And that God was engaged in the suffering of life. Notice verse 6, how he brings God in.

Is not your fear of God your confidence and the integrity of your ways your hope? Believe it or not, that question is meant to be an encouragement. He's friendly.

[10 : 52] He's coming to Job and saying, Look, Job, you have always held on to the fear of God as your confidence and the integrity of ways your hope.

In other words, in a sense, persevere in that which you and I have shared about God. But then he goes on. Remember.

Remember. And I want to draw your attention to chapter 4, verse 7 to 11. This is what he really has to say about God.

Remember. Who was it that was innocent, whichever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen.

Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish. Now this is quite a statement.

[11 : 48] What he's saying to Job is, You and I both know that in a world in which God exists, who is both just and good, and righteous, innocent people don't get the short end of the stick.

Who sees the innocent perish? It's almost like a mathematical syllogism. Job, if you're suffering, the one who is suffering is, therefore, is a result of sin.

And then, if this is that, then the fact that you are suffering ought to make you aware that you are a sinner. Job, you've got a problem.

I want to share that with you because we understand the same God. And, of course, in one sense, he's right.

In another sense, he's got the wrong end of the stick completely. He's saying something true about their God.

[13 : 04] Innocent people get off. Guilty people are punished. But there was something desperately wrong about what he was saying, too.

Take a look at chapter 5 and verse 12. the most intriguing and revealing verse in Eliphaz's first speech about God.

He says something true. Quote, He frustrates the devices of the crafty so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wives in their own craftiness and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.

That's a statement he's making about God with people. That those who are not innocent, God finds them out and will catch them.

I don't know if you're aware, but Paul, the apostle, in a letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 3, he quotes Eliphaz's words here as indicating that which is true about God.

[14 : 27] So, Paul is saying, I am in agreement with Eliphaz. God frustrates the crafty people, brings them to their end.

So, it isn't that Eliphaz isn't saying true things about God, it's just not the truth of the situation that could be deduced on account of Job.

We know that because look at the end, God speaks to Eliphaz, chapter 42, and God has something to say concerning this speech in chapter 4 and 5.

He says in chapter 42 and verse 7, after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, my anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken to me what is right as my servant Job has.

Or down in verse 7. I don't want to deal with you according to your folly, for you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has.

[15 : 46] So Eliphaz comes to his suffering friend and says hold on to your fear of God, that's always been the integrity of your own ways.

I want to encourage you with these words and I want you to remember that the innocent people never perish. In other words, there's going to be hope for you yet, Job.

Yet the inclination of Eliphaz's thought is that Job has done something wrong. An account of doing something wrong, God has acted in an angry fashion toward him.

In other words, Eliphaz didn't remember that the righteous as well as the unrighteous go through difficult seasons in life.

The rain falls on the just and the unjust. Both get their crops watered or destroyed. When you meet someone this year who is struggling and you sit with them for a while, be gentle with your words.

[17 : 01] Be careful with what you say to them about God. Even the things which are true might not necessarily be true in accord with what is right in their situation.

Somebody goes through two, three, four weeks of illness. You're handling it medically. Be careful when you begin to think, I think there's a deep-rooted sin problem here that I need to share with them.

Be careful. You will live wisely in the coming year with those who are suffering by being gentle with their wounds and not wounding them with your words about God.

God. let us not be so quick then to speak and when we do speak let our hearts not judge one another.

May we not be the final arbiter on the cause of their suffering. this can happen walking down the street and having somebody ask for money from you.

[18 : 41] You can begin to think, I can begin to think, what wicked thing did they do and for how long did they do it to end up like this?

we need to begin to think of the image of God in everyone and the mysterious eternal will in God's own mind for permitting the things which will flow through this congregation in the coming year.

And when we come alongside one another and we want to have a word about God be careful lest your words be in the eyes of God something not right concerning him.

Let me just make one more point on the morning just glancing down at 12 to 17. this is a different thing.

It's not a word that Eliphaz wanted to share about God. This is a word that Eliphaz claims to have received himself from God.

[20 : 04] that's the way in which he's trying to help Job. If that first line verses 7 through 11 depends on empirical evidence and moral certitudes and shared understandings in verses 12 through 17 he's shifted to something which is highly personal to his own experience and it's subjective in its understanding.

He claims to have received a vision in the night a dream a special revelation from God. You know how it is when we have someone who is deeply on our minds and we're concerned for their well-being.

I've done it myself. You know God spoke to me and I've been thinking about you a lot or we say this the Lord put something on my heart and we begin to communicate ever so gently in this subjective experiential read that we think we now have words that have been revealed to me that you will be better for hearing.

Take a look at the way it's done in poetry verse 12 now a word was brought to me stealthily my ear received the whisper of amid thoughts from visions of the night when deep sleep falls upon men dread came upon me and trembling which made all my bones shake a spirit glided by my face I mean how are you going to argue with this if you're Job the hair of my flesh stood up I mean this is really a moment when the individual is saying God showed up in my living room at two in the morning there was a form before my eyes there was silence and then I heard a voice and at this point you're waiting for some incredible revelation that could be had in no other way but by divine intervention and what he says is can mortal man be right before God can a man be pure before his maker and for me at least as a reader it's a big letdown this is this is self evident you don't need a vision or a dream to say you can be right before

God or pure before your maker it would be as if I stood up here this morning and told you that I had a visionary experience before entering and there is someone here this morning someone here this morning that's just been laid on my heart through this visionary experience somebody has a bad back I mean that's as self evident as you can get I mean I'm going to get four or five of you on that now this is not a good way to walk with your friend in the coming year when they go through a rough time just as you have to be careful about what you say about God you have to be careful concerning what you claim to have received through some special divine direct vision from

[23 : 51] God now this is this whole arena of subjective immediate impressionistic understandings that we take to be spirit led is only increasing in our day I think if you have a dream where you feel you've been wondering what it is I'll probably be ready to listen to you when two or three other people completely independent from you confirmed something concerning that dream or they had the same dream I'm going to need some collaborative evidence before I begin to explore the definiteness of the word you received especially if you received it for me preachers do this all the time though we dislodge ourselves from a biblical text here let me tell you how it happens

I read the text in preparation for Sunday and what moves me I equate with the Holy Spirit I equate my spirit being moved with the movement of the spirit and then I say I'm ready to preach because all preaching is conveying to you what the spirit impressed upon me but I gotta be honest with you at that point you need to ask me some questions because I'm only as good as my intuition when the subjective experiential word is equated with a divine spiritual discourse you better be careful people do this in their quiet times all the time well just look at a word let me let me just look down in front of me verse 8 of chapter 5 as for me

I would seek God and to God would I commit my cause and I'm going to meditate on that which I need to be meditating on God's word and I'm going to come out of there with something no and to God I would commit my cause who does great things and within a half an hour's time of meditation I have grabbed on to a word from God that he is going to bless my way and do great things for me such great things that are unsearchable or marvelous and notice they will be without number that that's ridiculous but we do it every day I think we do it in some sense because back back in the day people told us that the word of God was just a human book you couldn't discover the authorial intent of God because

God was never the author of the book the text itself is entirely just a human document that's corrupted and the original readers of that artwork author reader text well they were actually writing corrupted text as readers to make the God but that's not what we actually believe we actually believe that there is authorial intent in the scriptures that God himself through his spirit has given us these words and the interpretation of them is not open to you as the reader determining the ultimate meaning but to the author's intent for that word in its context and so bless his heart Carl Barth who lived in a day when everyone had just dismantled the scriptures altogether at least had the temerity to say you can find the authorial intent of a living God in the scriptures but you have to listen for it now that's a little different than what we do at!

when someone gets up here on Sunday and reads the Bible to you they say this is the word of the Lord and we say thanks be to God that's quite a moment in the service every week we do not have somebody come up here and say listen for the word of the Lord because then you're entirely wondering which parts are good and which parts are great which parts are corrupt and which parts and when you limit yourself to this visionary experience you divorce yourself from the text of scripture the word you receive from God is often the word of your own making we all do it this is why this is why you know I know he's a little controversial with this but Martin Luther says I am well satisfied with the Bible I don't need visions or angels only

[29 : 33] Martin Luther can get away with that what's he saying though here I stand I'm well satisfied with the scriptures the word I receive from God is the word that God has implanted through the apostolic teaching and inscripturated in this book this is why John Newton who did Amazing Grace said if I venture beyond the pole of the Bible I'm on enchanted ground and subject to illusions and distortions we need a little more of John Newton in us we love Amazing Grace and we love his conversion story but do you know the way he felt about the scriptures if I venture beyond the pole of the Bible I'm on enchanted ground and Eliphaz is coming and saying to to him hey man I got a word last night from the Lord for you and actually he calls upon

Job to repent let me shut this down wise living a number of us in the coming year will go through some difficult season you need to get Bing sermon last week to prepare you for 2019 if I go through a difficult season and I'm suffering along a number of lines what do I need to do to live well this week how are you going to walk with people who are going through difficult seasons be careful!

with your words and particularly the words you share with them about God and be very careful for claiming to have received a word from God that is unique to their own situation at the end of the book God calls these three friends together and paraphrasing says well you made your own run at it but you made a hash of it you weren't a lot of help to your friend in need but I'll tell you what go and apologize to him and ask him to forgive you and to offer sacrifices for you and I'll listen to him so that you end the year right now think of that for you and me then because we do this all the time we've all butchered with our words the very people we wanted to help but there is an advocate there is a righteous one for you to go to and to say

Lord Jesus with my words I often make a mess of it I offer words about you that aren't true according to the context I claim to receive words from you that are more often than not the illusions of my own thinking rather than through the revelation of what is a confirmed word and Jesus who stands at the right hand of the father will say to the father forgive them for they know not what they do you want to help those in need it's not always with your words you're going to have an opportunity in three minutes to help people in this congregation going through a season of difficulty it's called an offering we do once a month to meet the needs of people going through a tough season you got nothing to say that's fine make sure that we are meeting the needs of those who are there may your ministry of presence be great in the coming year and may the presentations of your words be edifying gentle non judgmental to the welfare of those who are hurting our heavenly father we want to live wisely and we need your help because we often make a mess of it we give ourselves to you again today with love and thanksgiving not wanting to labor long in our minds over the mistakes of our past but instead to walk forward with joy in service of you and your people in

Jesus name we pray amen