

Job 6-7

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[0 : 00] Good evening. If you want to keep your finger in Job 6 and 7, that's where we're going to be. Let me pray.

Great God in heaven, purify my heart and cleanse my lips that your voice may be heard. Give us your spirit that we may understand your word and love and do your will.

To your glory. Amen. So, in the West Wing, Season 1, Episode 3. Any West Wing fans out there?

President Bartlett is wrestling with a national security issue. We learned in the last moments of the previous episode that terrorists have shot down an American plane filled with military personnel.

And he's then, the scene is him, President Bartlett, Admiral Fitzwallis, and Chief of Staff Leo McGarry in the Situation Room trying to figure out how to respond.

[1 : 09] So, I want to read you a little bit of the script there. President Bartlett, what is the virtue of a proportional response? Admiral Fitzwallis, I'm sorry? Bartlett, what's the virtue of a proportional response?

Why is it good? They hit an airplane, so we hit a transmitter, right? That's a proportional response? Fitzwallis, Sir, in the case of Pericles, which is their military plan, Bartlett, they hit a barracks, so we hit two transmitters.

Fitzwallis, that's roughly it, sir. Bartlett, it's what we do. I mean, this is what we do. Leo, yes, sir, it's what we do.

It's what we've always done. Bartlett, well, if it's what we do, if it's what we've always done, don't they know we're going to do it? Leo says, Sir, if you would turn your attention to Pericles 1.

Bartlett, I have turned my attention to Pericles 1. It's two ammo dumps and an abandoned railroad bridge and a Syrian intelligence agency. Those are four highly rated military targets, sir.

[2 : 13] Bartlett, but we know, they know we're going to do that. They know we're going to do that. Those areas have been abandoned for four days. We know from the satellites. We have intelligence. We know we're going to bomb them.

Sir, they did that, so we did this. It's the cost of doing business. It's been factored in, right? McGarry, Mr. President, Bartlett, am I missing something here?

No, sir. You're right, sir. Then I ask again, what is the virtue of a proportional response? Fitz Wallace, it isn't virtuous, Mr. President.

It's all there is, sir. I think this conversation, I don't think I've done it justice, but I think this conversation seems right to us.

We side with the president. We put ourselves in the shoes of deciding proportion and how proportion should favor us. The president has a friend who was killed on that plane, and so he wants to react.

- [3 : 16] He wants to overreact. He wants to, as we learn later in the episode, use the American military as the arm of the Lord to exact retribution.
- But mostly he wants to fight over this notion of a proportional response and how it's defined. And I think this is sort of what we like to do.
- We like to look at the blessings in our lives and say, I deserve that. And we want to look at the suffering in our lives and say, that really seems worse than I deserve.
- We want to be the ones who determine what we deserve and what others deserve. Job 6 and 7, I think, grapples with this idea. Job, having faced the first response of his friend Eliphaz, speaks here.
- We've got eight stanzas of poetry in these two chapters. And I think it works this way. Job defends his cries, stanzas 1 and 2, or chapter 6, 1 to 13.
- [4 : 27] Job is deserted by his friends, that's stanzas 3 to 5, or chapter 6, 14 to 30. Job, despairing over life's brevity, stanzas 6 and 7, it's chapter 7, 1 to 10.
- And Job, determined to speak, stanza 8, chapter 7, verses 11 to 21. So, Job defends his cries. The first two stanzas of Job's poetic speech begin to defend his crying out in chapter 3.
- The context here is actually important. As we know from chapter 1 and 2, Job is facing a terrible situation. His land has been destroyed, his livestock stolen, his servants and even his family have been killed.
- He is struck with loathsome sores. While he doesn't actually know, as far as we can tell, the maneuvering of Satan and God in conversation from these two chapters, he does cry out in pain to God.
- It's not very explicit yet, but in 3.23, Job starts to look at God as the one responsible for these tragedies in his life. As we saw last week, Eliphaz the Temanite has accused Job of overstating his pain and not looking closely enough at what he might have done to deserve God's reproof or why God might be punishing him this way.
- [5 : 52] If you look back at 5.17 to 27, that part of Eliphaz's speech really captures this idea, though it stops short of accusing Job of sin. And Eliphaz will actually later accuse Job of sin.
- In our text, in these first two stanzas, Job responds with an emotional outburst. He responds to the content of Eliphaz's speech.
- Job argues that he, Job, has... Job argues that Eliphaz has not actually understood the wretched state of Job.
- Notice the metaphors that Job uses to describe his anguish. Chapter 6, verses 2 and 3. Oh, that my vexation were weighed, for then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea.
- This is no mere minor complaint. It's actually superlative after superlative. The weight of all the sand in the sea does not compare to the weight of his pain.
- [7 : 00] And the cause becomes explicit here. Verse 4. It's actually God, the Almighty, who has struck him.
- Who has pierced his flesh with poisonous arrows. That's a striking image, isn't it? Not just imagining a friend, but actually imagining God himself has pierced your flesh with poisonous arrows.
- The rhetorical questions of verses 5 and 6 make this point. Job tells his friend, Eliphaz, that of course he has a good reason to be making this noise, making this scene, crying out in pain the way he has.
- And then, just like the first speech in chapter 3, Job's words turn dark. His pain is so great, so deep, that death is actually preferable to what he's facing.

That's deep pain. His anguish is so intense that the only comfort he can imagine is death.

[8 : 11] Is God actually finally giving him release? That's what verses 8 and 10 show us. But it's not just God against whom Job complains.

So, number two, Job deserted by his friends. While he defends his cries of pain and tries once again to convey how truly grieved he is, it's actually not just his relationship with God that seems to be crumbling around him.

In a book that revolves around three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends, it takes exactly one speech from one friend for Job to feel abandoned.

The last three stanzas of chapter 6, Job responds to Eliphaz's tactics here. He responded to his content above, now he's responding to the tactics.

Verse 14, He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. As we will see later in the book, fear of the Almighty is synonymous with wisdom.

[9 : 17] Job is saying that the unkindness that Eliphaz has shown in his accusation is foolish and offensive. And like the torrential streams of melted ice coming down a mountain, so swift is his friend's ability to jump to conclusions about his pain.

Verses 15 to 17. Like a mirage disappearing in the eyes of a traveling caravan in the desert, so quickly does his friend's compassion disappear.

here. Verses 18 to 20. Job in this moment feels abandoned. Verse 21, For you have now become nothing, you see my calamity and are afraid.

He's frustrated now. Notice the change in tone with verse 22. I mean, he's actually frustrated. Job challenges his friends. He says, If I've done something wrong that makes me deserve this, then show it to me.

My vindication is at stake. So he challenges the friends to show him what he has done. Show me my reproof, he says. That language in verse 25 points us back actually to what Eliphaz said in 517.

[10 : 33] And Job's comment in verse 26, I think, captures the tone of this frustration. Do you think that you can reprove words when the speech of a despairing man is wind? It's a powerful statement.

Job is saying to Eliphaz, I am crying out in pain and you are trying to parse my grammar. I'm tormented and I am sighing in deepest anguish and you want to correct my speech?

Job's whole argument is that this horrible situation that he is in is actually way out of proportion to what possible sins he might have committed.

His friends just don't get it. They want to quibble over words why he bears his soul in agony. And they are so insensitive in their betrayal and their lack of compassion.

It's as though they are gambling with orphans. That's what verse 27 is saying. With chapter 7 Job turns to the philosophical.

[11 : 51] He stops these second person accusations and moves to a philosophical man. He considers the fate of mankind as it compares to a servant or a slave.

7.1 Has not man a hard service on earth and are not his days like the days of a hired hand? He considers that the life of every person is riddled with grief and nights of misery.

His life like everybody's is filled with restlessness and pain. The mental anguish of which he has been speaking is inseparable from the physical pain.

Look at that in verse 5. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt. My skin hardens and breaks out afresh. And what's more, life is actually short.

Faster than the weaver's shuttle, his days pass before him. Verse 6. Life is like a breath. Verse 7. The day is coming so soon when Job will perish and God will not behold him in this life.

- [12 : 57] And Job is wondering then why God would strike him this way. If his life is so short why would God spend so much effort foisting him into such calamity?

And that thought turns him once again to defending his complaint. He is determined to speak here. So number 4. Job determined to speak. Verse 11. The final stanza of chapter 7 begins.

And Job's renewed commitment to speak. He says in this first sentence here, this first tricolon of the chapter, I will not restrain my mouth.

I will speak in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. The sense of it is this. I will not shut up. I'm not going to.

Having considered the depth of his anguish in chapter 6, the desertion of his friends and the brevity of his life, he actually now turns and addresses God. This man who once had the comfort of family and at least three good friends and something of a good relationship with God now feels abandoned by everybody.

- [14 : 20] Ironically, except God. God because it's actually God who torments him in his mind. He actually here, I mean, this is somewhat surprising, having just talked about how abandoned he feels.

He's saying, why won't God leave me alone? Look at verses 17 to 19. what is man that you make so much of him and that you set your heart on him?

Visit him every morning and test him every moment. How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit? Job wants, I think, more than anything, a moment's peace.

Somehow he thinks that this is only possible if God will leave him, give him a minute to rest, a brief reprieve from feeling so much sorrow.

And in asking God to leave him alone, Job returns in these last two verses to the question he yelled at his friends. Only this time the question is a sincere one directed toward God.

- [15 : 36] Job has spent the last two chapters voicing the complaint that his circumstances are far worse than he deserves. In this reproof, if it's reproof, then it's an overreaction by God to whatever paltry sin he committed.

He asks God what he's done to deserve it, and then in the same breath asks God why he can't get over it already. Look at verses 20 and 21. 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? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? He's saying, why, oh Lord, can't you just get over this already?

Seems! see the speech as a whole. His word to Eliphaz is clear.

He's saying, I am not overreacting in my cries of pain, it's actually the God who torments me who's overreacting. And his question to God, I think, is also clear.

- [16 : 54] He's saying, what could I possibly have done to deserve this overreaction? I think there are a couple lessons here for us. The first one is, I think, a hard lesson.

It's the lesson that Job is ultimately not completely right, and that Eliphaz is not completely wrong. I mean, this is not what anybody who's actually suffering wants to hear, but the New Testament does assert something like what Eliphaz says, that all humanity actually does deserve the wrath of God and ultimately death because of our sinfulness.

It's Romans 3, 9-23. Eliphaz is wrong in his assertion that only the wicked suffer and that the righteous will prosper, but he's not wrong about Job.

Job actually should consider his sin as a root cause of his suffering. I mean, in the grander sense, that original sin brought suffering and death into the world, and Job's sins make him a part of that.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3-23. Remember that while Job seems to argue that his punishment is way out of proportion to his crimes, he does not claim sinlessness.

[18 : 14] Chapter 7 verses 20-21 make that clear. Job, for his part, though, is also wrong. He shows, I think, a fascinatingly amazing arrogance here in presuming that he does not deserve the pain he has encountered.

He actually puts himself in the place of God, judging his own sins as though God is wrong to have struck him the way he has. And so the lesson is clear.

Job, no more than President Bartlett in the beginning, gets to determine the virtue of a proportional response. Job's complaint is bold and foolish, for the wages of sin is death, says Paul in Romans 6.

Now, importantly, Job's complaint also ironically anticipates Jesus. Jesus was the only truly righteous person, and Jesus suffered.

And when, like Job, he cried out in pain, asking God to explain his forsaking him, that's Mark 15, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus is actually the only person that deserved an answer.

[19 : 33] He's the only person who actually got more suffering than he deserved. He's the only person whose punishment was actually out of proportion to his crimes. He was, unlike Job, truly sinless.

And because he was sinless, and died, and rose again, we have hope. Each of those Roman statements I just mentioned actually has a second half.

Romans 3, 23, and 24, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6, 23, for the wages of sin is death. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Job rightly identifies the only possible way forward.

His only hope of vindication is found in God. And while he asks God to leave him alone, he knows that his hope is only there.

[20 : 39] The second one, the second lesson for us, I think is a little more practical. It's for those of us who have friends who might be suffering.

We need to learn something from Eliphaz's tactics here. While his theology may have been partially right, and while all who suffer are sinners and so deserve it, in part, their suffering, this is really no way to be a friend.

In this respect, God actually vindicates Job in chapter 42 and is not terribly impressed with Eliphaz and the friends. And I don't think it's any wonder why God is not impressed with the friends here.

As we work through the responses of Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar, their stunning lack of sympathy, and their overwhelming lack of compassion becomes abundantly clear.

And I think there's a bit of a warning here for us, especially those of us who err on the side of theological truth over humility and Christ-like love. hope. I mean, there's tremendous hope in suffering.

[22 : 06] We've already seen that with Job and how he anticipates Jesus. And so whatever pain we face, whatever losses we encounter, whatever anguish we feel, it in some way anticipates the death of Jesus on our behalf.

But he didn't just die, he rose again, and so there is hope. So as we consider our own grief, as we come alongside those who are in the storm, grappling with the harshness of this life, we do well to remember this hope.

We do well to point to the only person who provides vindication. Even the vindication we don't deserve. And so as we prepare our hearts to come to this table, I think we celebrate this undeserved vindication.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you broken and hurting, saddened by the effects of sin in this world.

the effects we face, even what is faced by those around us. We come to you knowing that only you bring us beyond pain to hope.

[23 : 41] Help us to see what Job did not see, that you bring salvation. and as we grow in hope, help us to be a comfort to others.

We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.