

Job 18

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Date: 12 February 2012

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- [0 : 00] You can keep your finger there in Job 18. That's where we're going to be spending our evening as we continue our series in Job. 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 in love and do your will to your glory.
- Amen. Amen. Job 18. We have two stanzas of poetry here. The first stanza is verses 2 to 4.
- Bildad responds to Job. He responds as one whose feelings have been hurt by Job's words in chapters 16 and 17, at least of which is when Job calls them miserable comforters in 16.1.
- Bildad responds in anger, I think. So I'm calling this stanza the oh yeah section of Job 18.
- [1 : 08] Verses 5 to 21 comprise a second and lengthy stanza wherein Bildad philosophizes on the position, as all of the friends have so far, that it is the wicked, and by implication, only the wicked, who suffer.
- This is the way the world works in his estimation. So, those are the two sections. Stanza 1, verses 2 to 4, the oh yeah section.
- Stanza 2, verses 5 to 21, the way the world works. We're in Job 18, if you're wondering. So, stanza 1, the first verse of the stanza.
- It becomes clear that Bildad is not pleased with Job's responses. How long will you hunt for words? Consider, and then we will speak.
- The sense of this is, are you going to keep talking, Job? Why don't you listen a little bit? Think about your lot in life and consider what we might have to say.
- [2 : 20] He goes on, why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight? You who tear yourself in anger, shall the earth be forsaken for you or the rock be removed out of its place?
- It's as if Bildad is concerned for his reputation. Again, the sense of it is, what? You think we're stupid or something?
- We're not. You're the one who's trying to change the way the world works. And I think this is the crux of the matter. Bildad has a position on the way that the world works and Job, in his estimation, is foolishly fighting against it.
- So having challenged Job to shut up and listen, he launches into a somewhat lengthier stanza on the way of the world, which is where we go in stanza two.
- While this stanza is longer, Bildad's point is, I think, quite simple. The wicked will not prosper. Rather, they will suffer.
- [3 : 24] Verses five and six. Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out and the flame of his fire does not shine. The light is dark in his tent and his lamp above him is put out.
- The fate of the wicked is dark. And this end, in part, comes from the negative results of living as one who is wicked. In other words, the wicked man is culpable for his actions.

Verses seven and eight. His strong steps are shortened and his own schemes throw him down, for he is cast into a net by his own feet and he walks on its mesh. And I think this makes sense to us, right?

We can look at much wickedness and point to the negative results. Lying ultimately causes pain when the truth comes out.

Adultery ultimately ends in broken relationships. Alcohol abuse ultimately ends in tragedy. Greed, laziness, and all sorts of sin can and do visibly destroy the souls of mankind.

[4 : 33] Like an apple rotting from the inside, our wickedness has its consequences. Or as that great observer of culture, Tom York, singer of Radiohead, once put it, you do it to yourself, you do, and that's what really hurts.

The next eight verses, so verses nine through 16, return to focusing on the fate of the wicked. A trap seizes him by the heel. A snare lays hold of him.

A rope is hidden for him in the ground. A trap for him in the path. Terrors frighten him on every side and chase him at his heels. His strength is famished. And calamity is ready for his stumbling.

It consumes the parts of his skin. The firstborn of death consumes his limbs. He is torn from the tent in which he trusted and is brought to the king of terrors. In his tent dwells that which is none of his.

Sulfur is scattered over his habitation. His roots dry up beneath and his branches wither above. I mean, again, this seems fairly straightforward.

[5 : 44] The wicked will receive calamity and death. Six different hunting implements are referenced here in these first few verses. It's as though death and disease will hunt the wicked man down.

And when death and disease find him, it is a grisly picture indeed. The muscles deteriorate, the skin rots away, limbs fail and fall away. But even beyond the physical pain and looming demise of the wicked man, there's the abstract and ongoing value of a person's contribution to life on this earth.

Notice the next verses. His memory perishes from earth and he has no name in the street. He is thrust from light into darkness and driven out of the world.

He has no posterity or progeny among his people and no survivor where he used to live. They of the west are appalled at his day and horror seizes them of the east.

You see, as a wicked man, not only will he die, as we all must die, but he will be forgotten.

[6 : 58] His memory will fade. And in an impressively insensitive moment, Bildad notes that the wicked man loses his children and therefore any hope of being remembered.

It is, of course, so spectacularly insensitive because Job has not only been struck with boils and lost his vast wealth, but all ten of his children were killed back in chapter two when a great wind caused the oldest son's house to collapse.

Bildad has, to use a bit of a cliché, he has kicked the man when he is down. And it's no wonder that Job complains that his friends abuse him.

Which he's done on several occasions in chapters six and twelve and thirteen. But, of course, Bildad brings it to a close with verse twenty-one. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous.

Again, a little irony there, given that Job's lost his home and his son's home collapsed on his children. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous.

[8 : 05] Such is the place of him who knows not God. I think we want to identify with Bildad's observations.

I mean, it's a pretty sensible position, isn't it? This is every hero story. This is every comic book. This is every movie. When a particularly horrible villain does particularly horrible things, we root against him.

We root for his demise. I mean, it offends our sense of justice for the wicked man to get anything less than total demise.

But, of course, there's an important question, then, under the surface. Is that right? Is that universal?

Does the wicked man suffer and the righteous man prosper? I mean, because Bildad's point to Job rests on it being universal. Bildad's point is that Job is suffering just as the wicked man must suffer.

[9 : 13] He's, in fact, tactlessly specific in his descriptions, carefully connecting every fate of the wicked man to Job's actual experiences.

His descriptions are implicit accusations. Job, you are faced with such a horrible life, such a painful fate, because obviously, Job, you are wicked, is his point.

Is that right? Interestingly, it's the same assumption that the disciples make in John 9. Turn there, if you will. John 9, 1 through 3.

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. You see, this man was blind from birth. And the disciples assumed, therefore, he or his parents must have sinned to cause his blindness.

[10 : 22] Something horrible has happened. Therefore, he must deserve it, because somebody, somewhere along the way, did something awful, and he deserves it. I mean, it's a wonderful, simple, and seemingly just system that these disciples want.

But, of course, it's not that simple. It's just simplistic. I mean, Jesus immediately points out a third option.

It isn't about whether he or his parents sinned. It is about this opportunity to demonstrate the works of God. And then Jesus spits in the dirt, creating a little mud, rubs it in his eyes, tells him to go wash, and he's healed.

See, like Bildad, the disciples have no category. They see no possibility that a righteous man might suffer. And, in fact, the disciples fail to see this at the critical moment of the gospel.

Look at Mark, chapter 8, starting in verse 31. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

[11 : 36] And after three days, rise again. And he said this plainly. This is Jesus talking. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

You see, Jesus is the Christ and the Messiah. And Peter had no category for a Messiah that would come and suffer and die.

And this, I think, is the point. Our religion, our faith, the core of what we believe revolves around this point. A perfectly righteous man, the Christ, the Son of God, the only man who lived without sin, did need to suffer and die and on the third day rise again.

Peter got corrected. And I think that's the lesson for us. Are we the sort of people who draw simple conclusions about how suffering and prosperity are the consequences of wickedness or righteousness?

I mean, I think it's easy to fall into this trap. We think that if we pray and do good things, then God owes us one. I mean, it's very easy to pray this way, isn't it?

[12 : 59] Dear God, I'm a pretty good guy. I read my Bible, go to church, fix my problems, give me good things, help me pass this test, help me find a potential spouse, get me a good job.

Maybe we even assume that if we do evil things, we deserve to face bad consequences. Dear God, I was rude to my parents yesterday, so I deserve to get the flu.

I deserve to stub my toe. I mean, it's easy for us to be an amazingly superstitious people, isn't it? It's easy to draw these simplistic connections and believe Bill Dad.

The wicked should suffer and the righteous and the innocent should prosper. And in one sense, this is true. This may be the way the world seems to work and it may be the way we want the world to work.

Though I think if, I think if we're honest about how evil we each are, we probably really don't want it to work that way. But in a much more important sense, this is not the way God works.

[14 : 18] This is the beautiful mystery of what we are about to celebrate in the table. And it's the best proof that Bill Dad is wrong. A righteous man named Jesus Christ suffered without deserving it on our behalf so that we, the wicked, would not have to face the ultimate suffering we deserve.

This is the gospel. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son that in his death you have reversed our fortunes, pouring on him the wrath we deserve and blessing us as though we had his righteousness.

Help us to live with this truth on our minds and in our hearts that we may learn to love and seek your will to your glory. We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.