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Sermon Notes

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Eliphaz's First Speech: "You Reap What You Sow"

Job 4-5

We now come to the longest section of the Book of Job... the cycle of speeches that runs from chapter 4 through chapter 27... it is made up of a series of dialogues between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

There are three cycles, each made up of six speeches... each comforter delivers a speech to Job, and Job responds to each of them in turn. Job's responses are significantly longer than the speeches of his friends and comforters, and Job's responses usually come in two basic parts: his answer to them, and his lamentation toward God.

Job's friends really do desire to help him... and much of what they say is doctrinally accurate. But they speak wrongly about God, as God himself says... (Job 42:7) and they speak wrongly about Job's true condition. In the end, they fail miserably as Job himself says:

Job 16:2 miserable comforters are you all!

The ultimate reason for this is that all three of them have the same basic approach: the reason Job is suffering is because he must have sinned. The greatness of the suffering is proportional to the greatness of Job's sins... just because that's what their theology instructs them. So Job must be a very great sinner because of the magnitude of his sins. This is the miserable counsel Job rages against... because it is NOT TRUE!

It is very difficult to counsel a deeply depressed person who is going through the worst trial of their lives. It feels like no matter what you say, you make it worse.

One woman was talking about what it was like to try to lift the spirits of another woman who was going through deep depression, and how no matter what she did, it was wrong:

“You cook their favorite meal, you tidy their kitchen while they are out, you put fresh flowers in the hall, you suggest that they buy a new coat. All are wrong! You were supposed to realize that their present loss of appetite means that the sight of their favorite meal would reduce them to tears. Tidying the kitchen was actually a way of saying to them that you dislike the way they leave the kitchen in chaos. Putting fresh flowers in the hall was wrong, because they will soon die, and they look so much prettier in the garden. And as for suggesting a new coat, that was a threat because you are probably saying they should at least try to do something about their disheveled appearance, no matter how low they feel.” [quoted in David Atkinson’s commentary on Job: *The Message of Job*]

Not only do Job’s friends fail as comforters, their words are a complex mix of many true assertions with faulty applications

So how are we to approach the words of these three friends?

Today I will walk through Eliphaz’s first speech... just what he says

I will declare some of what Eliphaz GOT RIGHT... I will declare what I feel Eliphaz GOT WRONG

Then, I will seek to apply it to us

I. Eliphaz the Temanite

A. Eliphaz

1. Eliphaz speaks first... therefore, he is probably the oldest and wisest of the three friends

2. He seems to say the most profound things of the three men, and is generally the kindest to Job
3. He has a deep faith in God as a transcendent holy God
4. He yearns to help his friend make it right with God and get back into the blessed life he formerly knew
5. Eliphaz will assert that no human being is righteous before such a holy God, and that whenever there is trouble, it is inevitably because the individuals have sinned in some way; everyone is guilty of error
6. The law of retribution operates always... YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW
7. So the best thing Job can do is quickly repent and appeal to God's mercy so that his prosperity can continue
8. Eliphaz appeals often to his experience... to what his years on earth have taught him
9. He is also very logical, and he follows his logic and his doctrine where it leads... he ends up placing his logic and rational side above faith in a living, loving God
10. In the end, his views lead him to make a devastating evaluation of Job that is stunning in how wrong it is:

Job 22:5 Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?

11. In this charge, Eliphaz extends it to stunning levels, accusing Job of many things he never did!!!

Job 22:6-11 You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. ⁷ You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, ⁸ though you were a powerful man, owning land-- an honored man, living on it. ⁹ And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. ¹⁰ That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, ¹¹ why it is so dark you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you.

12. But for these charges he has no proof... he is just following his theology where it logically leads
13. There is MUCH he doesn't know... like God's assessment of Job, and the heavenly conversation between God and Satan about Job, and Satan's assaults, and Job's actual track record 24/7
14. Many times we humans jump to conclusions based on appearances and wrongly judge people through our lack of knowledge

II. An Overview of Eliphaz's First Speech

A. "It's Time to Practice What You Preached!" (4:1-6)

Job 4:1-6 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: ² "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking? ³ Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. ⁴ Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. ⁵ But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. ⁶ Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?

1. Eliphaz recognizes Job's piety... his track record of previous godly instruction... the powerful effect that instruction had on others
2. Job has repeatedly instructed others and strengthened them in their weak moments... but now it's his time, and he's falling apart!
3. Eliphaz mildly rebukes Job for not heeding his own advice and becoming discouraged...
4. Basically it's "Practice what you preach, Job! It's time to put up or shut up!"
5. You should realize that everything is going to work out fine if you really are blameless and pious... and if you're patient!
6. You should simply trust in your piety and your blameless ways!

B. "You Reap What You Sow!" (4:7-11)

Job 4:7-11 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?

Where were the upright ever destroyed? ⁸ As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. ⁹ At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish. The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. ¹¹ The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

1. This is Eliphaz's fundamental worldview... an unchanging pattern that he has OBSERVED
2. "By simple observation, by experience, I have noticed... I have seen this pattern is never violated: the righteous never perish; those who plow evil reap a harvest of trouble"
3. God sees to it! With the slightest blast of his nostrils God can topple the wicked...in a moment, they perish... they die under the wrath of God!
4. The lions and lionesses (representing strong, dominant wicked people) may roar and growl for a while, but in the end their teeth will be broken and they will starve for lack of prey
5. Your only hope is to repent of your closet wickedness, throw yourself on the mercy of God, start behaving righteously and God will reward you

C. "Are You More Righteous Than God?" (4:12-17)

Job 4:12-17 "A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. ¹³ Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, ¹⁴ fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. ¹⁵ A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. ¹⁶ It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice: ¹⁷ 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?

1. Eliphaz's eerie vision... a build-up to his pronouncement... God has secretly revealed the truth to me, a timeless truth that is relevant here... it's like "I've had this direct revelation from God himself... so you better listen to me!"

2. **“Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Or more pure than his maker?”**

3. God doesn't make mistakes!! Fundamentally you are suffering because of your unrighteousness and impurity
4. You must take responsibility for your sins, Job... that is why you are suffering!
5. Clearly by claiming you are pure, you're saying God has made a terrible mistake! And that cannot be!

D. **“If Angels Are Vulnerable, Men Are Vastly More So” (4:18-21)**

Job 4:18-21 If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, ¹⁹ how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth! ²⁰ Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces; unnoticed, they perish forever. ²¹ Are not the cords of their tent pulled up, so that they die without wisdom?

1. Human sinners are extremely vulnerable... if God can so easily deal with rebellious angels (Satan and demons), how much more human rebels!
2. We are weak, we perish easily... we who are so fragile and die like a moth being crushed, we ought not to challenge God by our sins, because with the greatest of ease, he can unleash his mighty arm and pull us down like a tent!
3. So be warned, Job! As a preacher once put it, “Your arm's too short to box with God!”

E. **“Only God Can Rescue a Sinner from God!” (5:1-7)**

Job 5:1-7 "Call if you will, but who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? ² Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple. ³ I myself have seen a fool taking root, but suddenly his house was cursed. ⁴ His children are far from safety, crushed in court without a defender. ⁵ The hungry consume his harvest, taking it even from among thorns, and the thirsty pant after his wealth. ⁶ For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout

from the ground. ⁷ Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

1. If you are, as I believe, just receiving punishment from God for your sins, understand that no one can rescue you from God's hand... God is the omnipotent ruler of the universe
2. Sinners who are getting what they deserve from such a holy God are filled with resentment and envy for those who are not.
3. "I have seen..." Eliphaz resorts again to his personal experience, to what his life on earth has taught him. [BUT appearances can be deceiving, as they clearly are in Job's case!!]
4. What had Eliphaz seen? He had seen a fool taking root and beginning a harvest of success, but then God unleashed judgments on him and he was destroyed quickly
5. Hardship came on him quickly... and not for no reason! [You reap what you sow!!] The hungry and thirsty feasted on the wicked man's unjust prosperity. Hardship and trouble don't come naturally from the ground, but result from the curse of God.
6. *"Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward."* All human beings suffer in this sin-cursed world.

F. "God Opposes the Wicked, but Gives Grace to the Humble!" (5:8-16)

Job 5:8 "But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him.

Eliphaz's only counsel of hope to Job... repent and cast yourself on God's mercy... because he is AMAZING...

Job 5:9-16 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. ¹⁰ He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside. ¹¹ The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. ¹² He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. ¹³ He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away. ¹⁴ Darkness comes upon them in the daytime; at noon they grope as in the night. ¹⁵ He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth; he saves them

from the clutches of the powerful. ¹⁶ So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

1. The God who performs such natural wonders as giving rain to the earth can easily forgive you, heal you, restore your prosperity
2. Eliphaz makes two true statements—the rain is AMAZING! God catches the wise in their craftiness (more in a moment!)
3. Faulty application to Job: “Be honest about your sins... don’t continue in your wicked, crafty ways... because God will fight wicked oppressors and elevate humble people to great heights of safety above the reach of crafty, devious oppressors.”

G. “God Wounds, and God Heals!” (5:17-27)

Job 5:17-27 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸ For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. ¹⁹ From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. ²⁰ In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. ²¹ You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. ²² You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. ²³ For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you. ²⁴ You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing. ²⁵ You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth. ²⁶ You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season. ²⁷ "We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."

1. The final pitch: our best hope for you is that this staggering level of suffering which has undoubtedly come from a staggering level of wickedness can be healed and restored; that God will forgive you and restore you if you would just accept your correction and humble yourself under God’s mighty hand, you will find a level of new prosperity and security far better than the old situation which was (obviously) built through wicked oppression
2. Amazingly, to some degree this is exactly what DID happen to Job at the end of the book! Almost word for word!

3. Eliphaz has researched this whole thing... and now it's time to apply it to yourself, Job!! (Job 5:27)

III. What Eliphaz Got Right

A. Ministry of Presence; Ministry of Silence

1. Job and the three friends sat in silence with Job for seven days and seven nights without saying anything to him
2. Just moving TOWARD suffering rather than away from it is commendable
3. They joined this poor man and sat with him, giving him a sense that he was not alone in his sorrows
4. BUT once the talking started, the problems came!!

So... what did Eliphaz get right in his words?

B. God Is a Moral King, Ruling Righteously

1. The basic moral structure of the universe is true
2. We believe in a King who rules over human beings righteously
3. There is a powerful moral law in the universe... we are not living by the law of the jungle... mindless "Nature red in tooth and claw" ripping and shredding with no purpose at all...

Habakkuk 1:13-14 Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? ¹⁴ You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.

Thank God that is not true!!

C. The Law of Sowing and Reaping

1. This is Eliphaz's basic theology... you reap what you sow

Job 4:8 As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

2. Many verses support this doctrine

Proverbs 22:8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble

Matthew 7:2 with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows

Romans 2:6-7 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

SO... in general, God wants us to know this principle and live by it

D. Man's Basic Misery

Job 5:7 man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

John 16:33 In this world you will have trouble.

E. God Catches the Wise in the Craftiness

Job 5:13 He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away.

1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"

1. The devious plots of the wicked come back to haunt them
2. God rules over them and snares them in their own nets

Proverbs 26:27 If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.

3. Think about the Book of Esther... Haman, who hated Mordecai and conceived a plot to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews... in the end, he and his sons were hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai, and the Jews not only survived but prospered
4. God does rule over the clever wicked to laugh at all their schemes
5. This is especially true when it comes to all schemes and plots against Christ and his Kingdom

F. Only God Can Rescue Us from God

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.

1. This is Eliphaz's theology... God is staggeringly powerful and we are amazingly fragile
2. God could crush us in an instant
3. The only refuge there is from the wrath of God is the mercy of God
4. This is especially true with the gospel of Jesus Christ!
5. So we must FLEE to Christ and find mercy in Christ alone from the wrath of God for our sins

G. God's Natural Wonders Are Amazing

Job 5:9-10 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. ¹⁰ He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside.

1. God himself will celebrate his own power in creation
2. How is rain amazing? A remarkable devotion from John Piper years ago based on this verse

Is rain a great and unsearchable wonder wrought by God? Picture yourself as a farmer in the Near East, far from any lake or stream. A few wells keep the family and animals supplied with water. But if the crops are to grow and the family is to be fed from month to month, water has to come on the fields from another source. From where?

Well, the sky. The sky? Water will come out of the clear blue sky? Well, not exactly. Water will have to be carried in the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, over several hundred miles and then be poured out from the sky onto the fields. Carried? How much does it weigh? Well, if one inch of rain falls on one square mile

of farmland during the night, that would be 206 million gallons, which is 1.6 billion pounds of water.

That's heavy. So how does it get up in the sky and stay up there if it's so heavy? Well, it gets up there by evaporation... meaning that the water sort of stops being liquid for a while so it can go up and not down. So how does it get down? Well, condensation happens. What's that? The water starts becoming water again by gathering around little dust particles between a thousandth and a ten thousandth of a centimeter wide. That's about 100 times smaller than the eye of a gnat. That's small!!

What about the salt? Salt? Yes, the Mediterranean Sea is salt water. That would kill the crops. What about the salt? Well, the salt has to be taken out. Oh. So the sky picks up a billion pounds of water from the sea and takes out the salt and then carries it for three hundred miles and then dumps it on the farm?

Well it doesn't dump it. If it dumped a billion pounds of water on the farm, the wheat would be crushed. So the sky dribbles the billion pounds water down in little drops. And they have to be big enough to fall for one mile or so without evaporating, and small enough to keep from crushing the wheat stalks.

So... rain really is a great and unsearchable thing that God has done. I think I should be thankful - lots more thankful than I am.

H. Blessed is the One Whom God Disciplines

1. We concentrated on this last time, so I'll just mention it quickly this time
2. Whenever we suffer any painful circumstance in our lives, we should be humble before God and ask if God is dealing with us in our sins
3. So whereas we should not dig into other people's souls to try to smoke out their hidden sins when they are going through sorrows and suffering, we should do it ourselves

4. God disciplines us for our sins so that we may share in his holiness

I. God Wounds and Heals

1. Eliphaz was right that God has the power to restore us completely
2. Frankly that is exactly God DID do at the end of this book, restoring Job's wealth and giving him ten new children
3. The ultimate end of this restoration and healing is heaven...

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

IV. What Eliphaz Got Wrong

A. The Law of Sowing and Reaping Doesn't Work in Reverse

1. While it is true that people who sow evil reap bad consequences, the opposite is not true: everyone experiencing bad consequences has sown evil seed
2. Job is clear example... there is NO vast, mountainous iniquity in Job that has now merited this level of suffering
3. Not everyone in this world suffers because of their own sins
4. A vast majority of the suffering in the world is NOT directly tied to specific patterns of evil by those enduring the suffering

B. Failure to listen sympathetically and "believe the best" about Job

1. Eliphaz and the other two think Job is lying when he claims he has no pattern of sin that lines up with this measure of suffering
2. They refuse to believe him... they assume the worst!
3. They are TERRIBLE FRIENDS! They have thrown out all the data they had of this man over years and years of clear righteousness

4. They believe their theory more than the evidence of Job's life
5. They call him a liar of the worst kind!!

C. Failure to be humble

1. they excuse their own daily pattern of sin—what David said about himself

Psalm 40:12 my sins ... are more than the hairs of my head

2. Job himself acknowledges, and which every honest person acknowledges... especially when it comes to sins of omission, and sins of the heart
3. But Eliphaz has lost sight of this in his own case!
4. Eliphaz and the other two really do believe that Job is guilty of some vast level of wickedness to have reaped such a vast level of suffering. Since they themselves have not reaped any such level of suffering, they must be more righteous than Job.
5. Ironically, it was specifically because they WEREN'T as righteous as Job that these miseries did not happen to them but to him!

D. Failure to show compassion

1. this follows the last one; the more Job defends himself and denies their shallow theology, the more frustrated they get with him, and they bolder they get in their horrible accusations of him...
2. "You must be a GREAT sinner to suffer such GREAT things!"
3. There is almost no compassion in these men once things get going
4. This is a natural outflow of their merciless theology

E. Failure to deal honestly with all the data/experiences:

1. While Job is the example of a righteous man suffering great sorrows not tied to his real character and deeds, Ps. 73/Job 21 gives examples of evil men seemingly rewarded for their wickedness by every kind of earthly success

2. So... their theology is too narrow; it doesn't cover all the data

F. Underestimating God's Complex Response to Evil

1. God's vast, mysterious providence, and the vast complex problem of sin and consequences in this present evil age—no simple solutions exist

G. Failure to see from an eternal perspective

1. to realize this world is not all there is... Judgment Day and the New Heavens/New Earth ("home of righteousness") answers everything;
2. all accounts are NOT settled here on earth; God settles his accounts on Judgment Day and in the eternity that follows—hell for the wicked, heaven for the faith-filled godly.
3. Eternity answers these gnarly temporal questions!! Fundamentally, the godly die NOT having received all the promises (Hebrews 11:13-16); the wicked die NOT having received all the punishments (Romans 2:4-7)

V. Applications

A. How to Counsel Yourself

1. Two categories of sins...
 - a. **day to day sinfulness**
 - b. **massive, life-altering sins**: like David's adultery
2. If you are suffering, ask the Lord to search you and show you your sins

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

3. If you know exactly why you are suffering, that there is a direct correlation between the suffering and some massive sin, then

humble yourself under God's hand and let him lead you through deep and thorough repentance

4. If not, bear patiently the Lord's discipline... God is purging you deeply and preparing you for fruitfulness in this life and glory in heaven

B. How to Counsel a Suffering Friend

1. Ministry of presence... ministry of silence
2. Ministry of listening... ministry of prayer
3. Don't force your theology to fit like a square peg in a round hole
4. Be humble about your own sins
5. Point them to Christ
6. Point them to heaven
7. If they do confess sin, point them to the cross and confession and cleansing which the Lord alone can do
8. If they don't confess sin, it is quite possible they are suffering like Job—God's providence is arranging them and working on them

C. How Faith in Christ Addresses the Deepest Needs

1. The cross of Christ is the answer
2. He suffered infinite woe on the cross... yet he was perfectly innocent
3. Substitutionary atonement

1 Peter 2:22-24 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed

4. Trust in him!!