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Sermon Notes

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## How Can a Man Be Righteous Before God?

### Job 8-10

One of the most encouraging texts is Romans 8:31:

***Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who can be against us?***

But what about the opposite? If God is against you, what then? How can we survive?

This morning, we're going to find Job moving from anger to a sense of despair... specifically about God as his legal adversary. The image is of Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe being his prosecutor in court. And what if that is the case? What then?

This morning, we will hear Job cry out, yearning for a **mediator**... someone who could lay a hand on both sides – both God and man. Someone who, Job thinks, would be able to advocate on his behalf and testify based on Job's essential innocence. A mediator who will say to Almighty God, "This man is righteous!"

However, in the goodness of God, we receive something far more amazing... a mediator who will give Job a perfect righteousness not his own, and advocate for Job's life on the basis of that righteousness! We will discover how a mortal man like Job, with all of his "normal" sinfulness can stand perfect in the sight of Almighty God.

## I. Bildad's Cold Doctrine (Job 8)

### A. Bildad's anger at Job

***Job 8:2 How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind.***

### B. Basic Doctrine: God Never Perverts Justice

***Job 8:3 Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?***

Bildad is right in two senses: 1) Job really is questioning God's justice, as we shall see; 2) God could never pervert justice... ever!

### C. Support: The Wisdom of the Ancients

***Job 8:8-9 Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned, <sup>9</sup> for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow.***

### D. Cold-Hearted Application: Job's Children Just Got What they Deserved

***Job 8:4 When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.***

Here is where Bildad errs... as he does with Job himself; just because someone dies doesn't mean they are guilty of some noteworthy sin. Or perhaps the opposite might be more accurate... if Job's children died because of their sin, it is likely that I deserve the same fate... because we are all sinners worthy of death!

***Luke 13:2-3 "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you all will likewise perish.***

There is a bitter insensitivity in Bildad here... as well as arrogance, because he assumes that Job's children were obviously extremely sinful without any evidence and he assumes his righteousness is sufficient to keep him alive.

### E. Counsel: Trust God and Plead With Him

***Job 8:5 ... look to God and plead with the Almighty***

F. Conditional Promise: God Will Restore You IF You Are Truly Pure

***Job 8:6-7 if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. <sup>7</sup> Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be.***

G. Conditional Warning: But If You Are Actually Wicked, You Will Perish Quickly

1. Bildad speaks of the wicked like a papyrus reed (that grows quickly, even to the height of 8-10 feet... but look how easily it is toppled
2. He mentions the hope of the wicked being as flimsy as a spider's web... that if one leans against it, it easily gives way

***Job 8:13 Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless.***

This is God's justices... he blesses the righteous, he crushes the wicked. So which are you, Job??

Now Job has to answer this!

He begins by conceding that Bildad's basic theology of God's justice – the law of retribution – blessings for the righteous, curses for the wicked... is true:

***Job 9:2 Indeed, I know that this is true.***

But... there is a problem: WHO IS RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD??

***Job 9:2 ...but how can a person be justified before God?***

Job could ask: If God finds fault with the smallest sin, then how can anyone survive... including YOU, Bildad?

II. Tracing Out the Dimensions of Job's Complaint (Job 9-10)

A. Job's Desire: To Take God to Court (as one translation puts it...)

***Job 9:2-3 “How can a man be declared innocent by God? If one plans to enter into litigation with him, he could not answer him, not even one time out of a thousand!”***

1. To DISPUTE with God... that’s Job’s desire... he wants to take God to court and win

B. Job’s Goal: To Stand Vindicated Before God and Man

1. When in 9:3 he asks, **“How can a man be just with God?”** the Hebrew means to be declared righteous, as after a court trial and a verdict has come down
2. He wants to WIN his court trial with God and walk out of the courtroom triumphant and completely exonerated

C. Job’s Problem: Almighty God is His Legal Adversary

1. He says, “If I were to stand before him in a courtroom, HE IS MY JUDGE as well as my PROSECUTING ATTORNEY!”
2. I could not answer God’s charges once out of a thousand times... I would be rendered silent
3. Amazingly, this is exactly what will happen at the end of the book, when God speaks to him out of a whirlwind

***Job 40:4-5 "I am unworthy-- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. <sup>5</sup> I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more."***

4. It is vital for us as sinners to realize this... if God began recounting all the deeds and intentions of our hearts, recorded from the beginning of our days on earth, WHO COULD STAND???
5. But Job goes far beyond this... he speaks of God’s astonishing majesty as being his greatest terror... LOOK AT WHO IS MY ADVERSARY IN COURT... it is Almighty God, the Creator and Ruler of the entire universe! What chance do I have?

***Job 9:4 His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.***

Job portrays God in his DESTRUCTIVE power, not as Creator but as Destroyer:

***Job 9:4-7 Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? <sup>5</sup> He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. <sup>6</sup> He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. <sup>7</sup> He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars.***

This is like the language of the end of the world we see in Revelation:

***Revelation 6:12-17 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, <sup>13</sup> and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. <sup>14</sup> The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"***

How could a mortal man stand before such power and contend with him?

This is the same God who created the constellations... distant stars:

***Job 9:8-10 He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. <sup>9</sup> He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. <sup>10</sup> He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.***

A single one of his wonder could occupy our minds for the rest of the day... but he does more of those than I could study in my entire lifetime.

He is invisible... a hidden enemy is ten times more terrifying; we never know when he is going to strike:

***Job 9:11 When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.***

And, God is accountable to NO ONE!!! He doesn't have to answer to anyone for his deeds... ever!!

***Job 9:12 If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'***

6. Job 9:13... Rahab: primordial enemy, like a dragon that God slew to bring order to the chaotic universe; if God can handle those mighty enemies with such ease, what chance do I have?

***Job 9:14 'How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him?'***

Back to the original problem: I want to take God to court and argue with him, BUT I WILL LOSE!!

D. Job's Claim: I Am Innocent

***Job 9:15 Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy.***

***Job 9:20 Even if I were innocent, my mouth would condemn me; if I were blameless, it would pronounce me guilty.***

***Job 9:21 I am blameless***

This is exactly why he wants to dispute with God. He feels that these judgments from God that have overwhelmed him portray him as overwhelmingly evil... but he knows he's not!

So, Job feels checkmated.

E. Job's (Unspoken) Accusation: God is Unjust

1. Behind all these words is a growing sense that Job really feels that God is UNJUST and IRRATIONAL in the way he runs the universe

2. To some degree, Bildad is right... Job is subtly claiming that God is unjust in what he's done to Job... Job will openly assert it later in the book; in this complaint, he only hints at it
3. Basically, he is saying God acts as though "MIGHT MAKES RIGHT"... "Because I'm the King, that's why!!"

***Job 9:14-19 "How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? <sup>15</sup> Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. <sup>16</sup> Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. <sup>17</sup> He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason. <sup>18</sup> He would not let me regain my breath but would overwhelm me with misery. <sup>19</sup> If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty! And if it is a matter of justice, who will summon him?"***

4. If I summoned God to court, all that would happen is more of what has already happened... the mighty God would just CRUSH ME EVEN MORE, multiplying my wounds FOR NO REASON!
5. This is a latent charge of God's injustice... and he says God actually IS unjust in how he treats innocent people on earth:

***Job 9:22-24 It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' <sup>23</sup> When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent. <sup>24</sup> When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, he blindfolds its judges. If it is not he, then who is it?***

6. Wow... God is actually fighting on the side of the unjust tyrants of the world
7. In Job 10, he expands the accusation... as if God is actually cruel, enjoying the torment he has brought on him

***Job 10:3 Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?***

8. God KNOWS I am not guilty, and he also KNOWS that no one can deliver me from his hand

***Job 10:6-7 you must search out my faults and probe after my sin--<sup>7</sup> though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand***

9. And God continues to send wave upon wave of sorrow upon me... he is relentless against me

***Job 10:15-17 If I am guilty-- woe to me! Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction.<sup>16</sup> If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me.<sup>17</sup> You bring new witnesses against me and increase your anger toward me; your forces come against me wave upon wave.***

F. Job's Unfulfilled Solution: If Only I Had a Mediator!

***Job 9:33-35 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both,<sup>34</sup> someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.<sup>35</sup> Then I would speak up without fear of him***

IF ONLY THERE WERE SOMEONE... a deep longing

"Someone to arbitrate..." "Someone to lay a hand upon us both"

God doesn't have to listen to me or answer me... I have no standing, no place to compel his attention; but if there were someone who could stand between us, like an umpire or arbitrator...

1. The effect would be to END Job's terror... to remove God's ROD of judgments from him ... to vindicate Job and set him free forever, peace with God at last
2. But this deep desire was unfulfilled... AT THAT POINT

***Job 9:35 Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.***

3. [But wait... the answer is coming!]

G. Job's Despair: I Hate My Life!

1. Job spend many words in these two chapters lamenting his very existence

***Job 9:21 "Although I am blameless, I have no concern for myself; I despise my own life.***

2. He notes that, though the individual days seem long because of his misery, his life is as fleeting as a swift runner
3. So Job can't just put a happy face on this and try to be optimistic

***Job 9:27-28 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile,' <sup>28</sup> I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent.***

4. So what's the use of even trying to clean himself up? What's the use of trying to wash his hands and rehabilitate his image with onlooking people?

***Job 9:29-31 Since I am already found guilty, why should I struggle in vain? <sup>30</sup> Even if I washed myself with soap and my hands with washing soda, <sup>31</sup> you would plunge me into a slime pit so that even my clothes would detest me.***

5. Amazingly, it is God who gave him life... meticulously knitting him together in his mother's womb

***Job 10:8-12 "Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? <sup>9</sup> Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? <sup>10</sup> Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, <sup>11</sup> clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? <sup>12</sup> You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit.***

This is one of the strongest pro-life passages in the Bible. In this tragic age of legalized abortion, we Christians believe that scripture is clear: life begins at conception, and should be protected in the womb... legally protected.

But Job's point is that the very God who formed him in the womb and showed him all that kindness – lavishing blessings on him in life by his kind providence watching over his spirit – is now

watching over him to detect his sin and crush him for it... so why did he ever create him in the first place??

6. Basically, Job just wants God to leave him alone and let him die

***Job 10:18-22 "Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me. <sup>19</sup> If only I had never come into being, or had been carried straight from the womb to the grave! <sup>20</sup> Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy <sup>21</sup> before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, <sup>22</sup> to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness."***

Notice how defective Job's view of death is!! We'll talk more about that in a later sermon, God willing!

### III. Four Great Lessons

#### A. Lesson #1: It Is Sinful to Dispute with God

1. Job wants to dispute with God... take him to court, challenge him, argue against him... fight him on behalf of his own blamelessness
2. This is such an extremely common thing in our world, especially during times of great suffering, that people don't really seem to know how wrong it is
3. In fact, I would argue that one of the central purposes of the Book of Job is to teach us to submit ourselves in the full abandon of faith especially in times of sorrow and trial, and not to see God as an enemy... to learn how to trust him completely, even if God is choosing to bring great suffering into our lives
4. So, we need to absorb this lesson and THINK AHEAD OF TIME how we should react when the trials come... that we make up our minds ahead of time not to dispute with God
5. God's ways will not always make sense to us... sometimes it will seem to us that God is unjust, or that his providential ruling of daily life is irrational and random... but it's not

6. We need to fix in our minds for all time that God is perfectly just... that his commitment to justice is forever made plain by the death of his only begotten Son on the cross

***Romans 3:25-26 God presented him as a propitiation, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.***

7. Far bigger problem for God than how he would appear unjust if he brought suffering into the lives of sinners was how he could bring sinners into the life of heaven... on what basis could he simply forgive their sins and still be just
8. Christ's death on the cross shows how committed God is to justice... he would rather slaughter his only begotten Son through crucifixion than allow sinners like us into heaven without addressing our sins
9. So, when we suffer some losses—the loss of material wealth, or of precious loved ones or of our health—we should banish forever from our minds any anger or determination to dispute with God concerning his justice
10. Because we really are sinful, not pure and blameless
11. We tend to compare ourselves with others and think, “I’m not as bad as this guy” or “I’m better than that guy”... we flatter ourselves that way
12. When we consider our sinfulness here on earth, we should not compare ourselves to other sinners but think about God’s perfect holiness and his standard, and Judgment Day when we will stand before him and we will not be able to answer once in a thousand times any accusations he might make
13. So if this is true, on what basis would be DISPUTE with God or MURMUR against God or complain or accuse him?
14. Yet, it seems everyone is at one time or another ready to dispute with God and argue with him and charge him with wrongdoing...

even really good people do this... even the godly prophets, like Jeremiah did it—he said God had deceived him (Jer. 20:7)

15. We should set it in our minds ahead of time that it is actually MONSTROUS to dispute with God, to seek to take him to court, to demand an explanation from him of what he's done with his own things... and everything in the universe is his own thing
16. When people get angry at God, they treat him like he's their valet... they yell at him and demand an answer from him, forgetting our own sinfulness
17. The fact of the matter is, even if we closely examine ourselves, we miss 99% of our sins and vices and failings
18. David said

***Psalm 19:12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.***

19. In the end, Job quieted himself and humbled himself and repented of his disputing with God and questioning God... let's do that now, ahead of time, and determine with God's help never to question him again

#### B. Lesson #2: Christ is Our Perfect Mediator

1. Job yearned for a mediator... that is the highpoint of his lament

***Job 9:33-34 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, <sup>34</sup> someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.***

2. Job ended that yearning with despair... there was, he thought, no one for him
3. But now, there IS a mediator... Jesus Christ!!

***1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all***

4. The incarnation of Christ, the perfect GOD-MAN—enables him to be the perfect bridge-builder, the high priest, to stand between us both

5. He understands our weakness and our temptation... he experienced all of it, but perfectly

***Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.***

6. But Jesus is a far superior mediator than the one Job wanted!
7. Job wanted someone to vindicate him before God on the basis of his own blamelessness
8. But Job was a sinner, as he acknowledged plainly at the end of the book... so his righteousness would never have been enough for God to allow him into heaven
9. Jesus is a mediator who won a perfect human righteousness by his flawless life under the Laws of God... and then CREDITS that righteousness to us BY FAITH
10. Then he pleads the merit of that atonement at the right hand of God on our behalf
11. And he represents God to us by speaking God's final word to us... telling us "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" and then works that for us and in us
12. This mediator, by his bloody death on the cross, takes God's wrath away from us so that his rod will never terrorize us again

Job said:

***Job 9:34 someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.***

Christ accomplishes this! The terror of God's wrath is gone forever!

***Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***

***Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***

### C. Lesson #3: God Is For Us, Not Against Us

1. Job's lament in Job 9-10 spins out from a consistent perspective of God is AGAINST ME... God is my ENEMY... God is hunting me down to destroy me
2. But in Christ, God is FOR US...

***Romans 8:31-32 If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?***

### D. Lesson #4: God's Majesty Is Our Delight, Not Our Terror

1. Job discussed in awe and wonder the power of God over creation... the God who can shake the pillars of the earth and stop the sun from rising and cause the stars to fall from the sky...
2. Job stood in awe of the majesty of God in being so far beyond all accountability, the God who cannot be stopped from anything he wants to do, and never has to explain to anyone why he has done it
3. Job discussed the meticulous care of God in knitting his body together in his mother's womb... the wisdom and intelligence of God in making his body in that secret place
4. Job noted the ways God had lavished blessing on him by his kind providence
5. But since Job felt God was against him, none of those majestic attributes brought Job any comfort... actually, God's infinite perfections were a source of terror to him... God's omnipresence enabled him to hunt Job down, and God's omnipotence was unleashed to crush Job to the dust
6. But in Christ, all of God's attributes are turned in our favor... we can celebrate all the perfections of God... both now and in eternity!