

Be Spiritual

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to look back at Job chapter 4 and 5, the first dialogue between Job and his friends and it's Eliphaz the most senior of his counsellors that comes to speak to him.

Now you might be wondering about the maths of this a little bit because this is the fifth sermon we've done on the book of Job. I said we're going to do 12 and we're only on chapter 4 and 5. That's because we're going to take a slick, we're going to go a different pace from now on. Up till now you've kind of been in a highland single track road with passing places and we're going to hit the motorway now.

So we're going to be going much faster from now on through the book. So the first part was really bedding down the whole context and the narrative of the event.

And now we come into the kind of poetic dialogue between Job and his three friends and it's quite repetitive in some ways. It's kind of a spiral into more intense argument all the way through.

[1 : 06] And so we're going to take a look at each of the friends of Job and the emphasis they have and also Job's response. But we'll not be reading the whole book because this takes us from chapter 4 through to chapter 37.

So we'll not be looking at these chapters in great detail. We'll be picking and choosing some of them. But I do hope you'll still read the whole book because it does give you, as I've said, a flavour of what's happening in the end of the story is very important.

So we have here the after seven days of silence and them coming alongside and comforting Job in this way. Job responds and splurges out his feelings of depression and despair.

And that is what triggers Eliphaz to respond and to speak to him. And he comes with his own set of understandings of God.

And we see that throughout the arguments that they all have, the three friends of Job. What is it then? Briefly, what are the fundamental things that Eliphaz believes about God that he goes on to apply in the advice that he gives to Job?

[2 : 22] And remember, we're looking at counselling, we're looking at sharing truth, we're looking at suffering and the bigger picture of what God is saying to us in this book.

But what did Eliphaz believe? What lies behind his reasoning for what he says here? Well, very simply, I'm not going into any detail, he believes that God is sovereign, that God is in control of the situation, just sovereign God.

He believes that God is just. The fundamental argument that the Job's three friends have is that God punishes evil and God blesses or rewards good.

That is the very basic reality that they are arguing here. That God is a just God and that he always punishes evil and he always blesses good, even in the short term, so that when they see Job losing everything and not being blessed, they think he must have some unresolved and unconfessed sin that he needs to deal with before God.

God is sovereign, God is just and also they believe and he believes that God is merciful. The last section of chapter 5 particularly reminds us of that.

[3 : 38] They believe God is a merciful God, that he is a forgiving God and that as we sacrifice to him in the shadows of the Old Testament as they did, then that he would forgive.

Now these things he believed, God is sovereign, God is just and God is merciful. We have to consider that he believed it in an Old Testament context, that it was raw, that it was in shadows, that much of the outworking of that was kind of, it was like works based righteousness in some ways for them, that it was outwardly expressed.

It was embryonic faith but it was still genuine and real faith blurred possibly. But with these shadows, these Old Testament shadowy realities that he was living under, he didn't have all the

benefit of the Word of God and of the reality and the incarnation of Jesus and his life and death and resurrection and teaching that we have and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the way that we do. But nonetheless his trust was on this God in whom he had put his faith. We share these truths of God.

We believe God is sovereign, we believe God is just and we believe God is merciful. That is the revelation that is giving to us.

[5 : 03] And there's much that we can see in these chapters that we would, you know, if you had a highlighter pen you would look at in terms of, I agree with this, I agree with what he says.

This is right in terms of his expression and his understanding of the character of God. Look at 17 and 18 of chapter 5, we hold blessed as the one God reproves, don't despise the discipline of the Almighty for he wounds but he binds up, he shatters but his hands heal.

We'll find again and again as we work through Job that there are statements that the three friends of Job make that we understand and that we appreciate and that we would give our amen to.

But we are faced with tensions. We are faced with tensions as we look at this because as you read some of what Eliphaz says, you may say, well absolutely, I absolutely agree with that.

But yet we must take our agreement to the end of Job where God says to Job, three friends, I am angry with you because you didn't say what was right about me.

[6 : 14] So we have a tension. We have a tension between what they say, much of which we agree God is just, God is merciful, God is sovereign, and what God says to them.

It was that they misapplied that truth and there is a huge amount we can learn about and misapplying truth into situations that we find ourselves in either for ourselves or for others.

It's not that fundamentally they said what was wrong about God, although their emphasis might have been wrong, but certainly in their application of it to Job situation it was wrong and God was not happy with them.

So we're faced with that tension. But I think if we're thinking Christians, we are also faced with the tension that we live in a world where this is not their mindset.

They don't think of God in these, maybe they don't think of God at all. Maybe they don't believe in God, but even if they do believe in God, it may well be that they don't believe in a God who is sovereign, who is just, and who is merciful, the God that we believe in.

[7 : 19] And so it's important, and the God that is revealed, it's important for us to know what we believe and also to challenge those who don't know, who don't believe in God about the options.

If God isn't sovereign, then who is? If God isn't one who executes justice, who does?

If God is in merciful, who will be? And the reality is if you're sitting here this morning and you're not a believer, you're not a Christian, you may not verbalize it as such, but in effect you're claiming sovereignty over your own life.

You're the one who's making the decision about what's right and wrong and choosing justice, and presumably you're the one who thinks that inherently you're good enough not to need a Savior and not to need Jesus Christ.

And that is something that we need gently and respectfully to challenge people about, because many, I think many people don't think about these things.

[8 : 26] It's good and easy to throw God out of the equation of life and living. It's easy to be deceived into thinking and listening to the shallow arguments of who God is and who God isn't.

But it's important to challenge people on these areas of life and what they do with them and what they do with the living God. So there's tensions for us in our faith and there's tensions for us as we look at the Bible and as we look at what the end of the story is and what God says to these three friends of Job.

So let's take a look briefly at these two chapters which constitute the first of three rounds of arguments or speeches that the friends of Job make to him to advise him about his suffering and why he's suffering and what he should do about it.

What does Eliphaz advise? Okay? We're only going to be able to skim the surface really in this. But the title of the sermon is so spiritual and that is really what comes across from Eliphaz.

He's a really spiritual guy or at least he thinks he is in the advice he gives to Job. So what's the first piece of advice he gives? Well the first six verses of chapter four really give us the first piece of advice that he gives to Job in his struggles.

[9 : 56] He says to him basically, Job you've been a great counsellor to people. You've counselled people in this situation before therefore what's important for you is to take your own advice that you've given in the past.

Practice what you preach Job. That's what he says. He says you know you've really preached to others and you've helped them and your words have upheld those who were stumbling. You've made firm the feeble knees. But now it's come to you and you're impatient. Why don't you now take the advice that you've given to others to yourself? You know if you fear God and he's your confidence and integrity of your ways is your hope, then understand that.

Take that and preach it to yourself and that will help your situation. You've counselled others now heal yourself. And that's the first thing he says. Now that is for him, it's quite easy.

I'm not sure if at this point he's sympathetic to Job, whether he agrees that Job is completely innocent and that his hope is in his integrity. But he thinks that that will simply and quickly deal with the situation he finds himself in.

[11 : 02] Apply hope to yourself. And in the face of it that's decent enough advice isn't it? But it's hugely clinical and there's a lack of understanding of Job's own situation, which is clearly far worse than any other situation he had counselled himself.

So that Job would never have been counselling someone in the same situation as himself who had lost absolutely everything in this divine test that was going on behind the scenes in the life of Job. There was no real empathy for Job's situation and for his suffering. It was rather formulaic and rather simple. You know you've got good advice, you've given good advice, just take your own advice.

And I think we can learn from that in the way that we think of and treat other people who may be struggling and battling and who may be very wise and have given great advice in the past. But isn't it often the case we can see the needs of others more than we can apply it to ourselves. And sometimes our own situation makes it very difficult to understand and know exactly how to respond.

[12 : 20] So that's the first thing he says. He goes on in verses 7, right through to 21, he really goes on, or maybe to 17 particularly, he goes on to say something very interesting to Job.

The second piece of advice is from Eliphaz, I know God's mind for you. I know what God wants for you. In the first section he just says, remember was it the innocence ever perished or were the upright ever cut off?

He says, you know God only condemns evil job. That's what he's saying to you. That there'll be mercy for you if you confess this unforgiving sin that you must have in your heart.

Because this is so important because they have come, that Job's three friends have come. And if Job is innocent as he claims to be, that is that he's blameless and not hiding sin in his heart.

And yet he's still suffering. Then that blows out of the water their theology and their understanding of the way God acts. Because they see God acting absolutely good as rewarded, evil as judged and punished on the spot as it were.

[13 : 42] And they're concerned then if that's not the case, then they may have to suffer also in their lives. So he says, look God only condemns evil. But more significantly in verse 12, I think to 21, he says God has spoken directly to me about you.

There's this marvellous little section where he speaks about a word being brought to him stealthily. During the night, a spirit glided past my face, the hair of my flesh stood up.

It stood still, I couldn't discern its appearance. Then I heard a voice, can mortal man be right before God? So there's this advice that he gives which says, look, I know what God is saying to me for you.

God has spoken to me directly. I've got a direct line to heaven about your situation and I know what God is saying. Now that's a hugely challenging thing to say.

He's basically saying, I have God's mind on this for you completely and utterly. Because not only do I know about God and his past dealings, but God has spoken directly to me about it.

[15 : 05] There's no question that he thinks this is a message from God. There's no question that he's doubting or questioning whether it may be a malevolent spirit that's speaking to him.

God has spoken directly. Job, I know what God wants you to do here. I know you can't possibly be right before God, it's impossible and you need to confess yours.

And I have a message for you. Now there's a danger in that kind of council and that kind of advice to others where we would ever say, look, God has spoken to me directly about what you need to do. We have, I have the mind of God for you. God told me what you need to do. It claims infallibility, doesn't it? It's saying, well actually, you can't second guess this, you can't argue against it, you can't say anything because God has spoken to me.

And it can sometimes surely be seeking divine credibility for what we just think ourselves. I think as Christians, especially when we are giving advice to others, we need to think very carefully about what we say.

[16:24] We need to test the spirits. We need to remember that Satan comes as an angel of light and we need not to be deceived or insensitive. But we also need to be people who are open to God speaking to us in our lives as Christians because we have a relationship with them and we need to recognise that.

So a second piece of advice is, I know God's mind on this. His third piece of advice from verses chapter 5, primarily, and verses 8 to 27, the second half of it, is really just, job, take the medicine. Take the medicine, you're guilty. As for me, I would seek God and to God I would commit my cause and then invest 17. Behold, blessed is the one who God reproves, therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

He's made his decision, he's saying you're being disciplined for wrongdoing. Therefore just take the medicine, repent and then you'll receive, and he goes on to speak of all the good things you'll receive again if you repent, all the things the job has lost.

He kind of dangles it before job again and says, you'll get all this back if all you do is repent. And he finishes with that astonishing statement, you know, behold, this we have searched out, it is true here and know it for your good.

[17:47] Put it into practice. What we've said to you is absolute truth, just take the medicine, just do it, you know. And that's how he finishes.

We've looked into this, this is the truth, just do what we say here, repent and be done with it. And it's strange, you know, because he does speak of the mercy of God in these verses and he speaks about what God does for those who repent and turn away.

And that's true, but he's misappropriating the situation. He's taking the beautiful jewels of God mercy and he's flinging them at job in a handful of mud. Because he has misunderstood job situation.

He's making assumptions about unconfessed sin, he's judged the situation that job finds himself in wrongly.

And we can learn also, can we not from that, as we so often make judgments about other people and as we seek to bring counsel to other people, that there must always be, what there clearly isn't here, there clearly isn't any self-reflection about God dealing with elephants in his own life.

[18:59] But neither is there much humility or empathy or respect for job situation. And there's a claim of infinite wisdom and a theoretical spirituality.

This guy knows his God, theoretically. He's wise, he's one of the great wise men of the day. And he knows about the character of God as it were, kind of in theory.

But he misapplies it to the person of job. James Dobson, the guy who writes about child parents and child Christians and how he discipline your children and all these things, he says that he had four theories of child rearing and no children.

And then he had four children and he had no theories of child rearing. And that's often the way, is that we've got great theory. We know how it ought to be done, as it were, until we find ourselves in a situation where it needs to be applied practically and where we need to think about others and the needs of others.

And sometimes the theory we have needs to be adapted and changed. Not the principles and not the truths, but they need to be applied sensitively and graciously into the lives of others, knowing about their circumstances.

[20:18] You know, we can take truth of God and we can misapply. Can I give you a classic free church example, historically, traditionally, doctrinally, is that we take, some will take the truth of the election of believers, those who are chosen to believe and take that election, which is a biblical truth, and they will take that truth which they have heard and purpose and they will use it to not believe because they will say, I'm not chosen and I can't do anything until God touches me.

Now, it's true and it's false, isn't it? Because nowhere in the Bible are we given that reason for not coming to Christ. And you stand before Christ on the day of judgment and say, well, I didn't know if I was elected, so I just waited to find out.

God will say, that is not a justifiable reason for staying away from the offer of grace which was there for you with my arms open wide. Whoever will come to me, I will not turn away.

And so it's truth, but it's misapplied and it's misapplied in a twisted way to justify unbelief and staying away from Jesus Christ and God. So truth and applying that is hugely significant.

And I think that's one of the things we find in the council that Job has given, the sensitivity we must have to these things. So taking that knowledge, I just want to finish in the last few minutes with looking at some of the staggering paradoxes that come across from the questions, at least some of the questions that Elie Fass asks in these chapters.

[21 : 56] Questions that point beyond his own knowledge and point towards the wider truth. I think it's very important always to look at the wider truth in Job, not just the wider truth of Job, but the wider truth of biblical revelation.

There's three vital questions which takes us in many ways beyond this passage into maybe realms that we're more familiar with.

First of all, in verse 7 he asks the question in chapter 4, remember who that was innocent ever perished. I think it's rather a clunky translation that you have here in the ESV.

I think the NIV puts it much better, which says, consider now who being innocent has ever perished. So that's his question. That's the question he throws out. You see, and he's taking the purity of God's justice and saying, you know, God's justice demands that the innocent are rewarded and that it's only the guilty who are punished.

Who that was ever innocent perished or was judged? And the question is, yes. Absolutely yes, it's the genius of God's salvation.

[23 : 14] In Jesus Christ there was somebody who was innocent that perished on her behalf.

That's the glorious truth of the gospel that dovetails and brings together at the foot of the cross righteousness and mercy that they kiss there because God's divine justice is met and his mercy is outworked at the cross because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was innocent, yet he died.

He was judged, and he was judged unjustly and suffered greatly though he was innocent. And you know mercy although he was innocent and experienced hell though he was innocent because he was doing it in our place.

Because he loves us, because we needed rescued and because we can't be innocent before God because we are sinners. And so this question begs forward into the New Testament, the reality of Jesus Christ who died and who rose again, satisfying divine justice and defeating the power of evil. So that you and I today as Christians are claiming not our own innocence but his. Our justification for God is that we are covered in the righteousness and the innocence of Jesus Christ.

So that we will not perish, so that we will not die. So in God's eyes we are as innocent. That's great truth. That's important and valuable and great truth.

[24 : 51] Beyond the understanding of men and angels, I don't think the angels had any concept of what Jesus Christ would come to do, nor indeed do I think Satan did, even at this point.

But he fully understood what God was going to come to do in Jesus Christ. Do the innocent ever perish? The answer is yes, but it was just.

But then he asks in verse 17, this is the word he was given by the spirit, this ethereal spirit that came to him during the night. And this was this amazing revelation he got from the spirit.

Can a mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his maker? And it may well have been that the spirit, that elephants took to be a spirit of God, was actually a malevolent spirit.

And it was throwing out this question, it was really at the very heart of Satan's accusation against God right away, which was, you know, give up a job. There's no way any human beings can be right before God.

[25 : 58] They've let you down once, they'll let you down again, because he didn't appreciate God's salvation and God's mercy and the faith that Job had been given. Can a mortal man be right before God?

Elephaz asks. And again we say yes, yes, yes, we can. We absolutely can be right before God, because we have a bought innocence.

It's not our own, it's a gift, it's bought with the precious blood of Christ, but it's offered to us freely, and that is where our hope lies.

You know, so all the questions of the evil one who says, you know, you can't be a believer, you can't possibly be right before God, none of these things that are true of you, just give it all up. We battle back and say, yes, we can be right before God. There is hope for humanity. And we somehow need to get that across to people. And we need somehow to gain their respect so that they hear and understand and know that we're not judging them, that we're not casting stones at them, that we are those who have come to recognise the glory and the gift of God.

[27 : 11] I'm doing a funeral on Tuesday for an old lady who had, as far as I know, no real church connection. I married her, did the marriage ceremony for her daughter in the summer, and they have no real church connection.

And so you've got a funeral in a crematorium, maybe 50 or 60 people. None, as far as I'm aware, and I'm not judging that everyone there will not be kissing, but from my interaction with them so far, of people who have no background in the gospel or in truth or in the Bible, pray that somehow I will get across to them, the beauty, but also they need for them to think beyond this life and what they're doing and their own inherent goodness and the naturalness as if life and death just happened, to somehow point them to Jesus that is true and challenging, but doesn't come across as judgmental or holier than now, or unreal.

It has to be real for them, and they have to respect the truth to hear it. And will you pray that somehow they will? I've never been able to do that. In all my years of doing these kind of funerals, it's never been something that funerals seem to be things that people go to and just switch off. And it doesn't matter what you would say, it doesn't seem to meet them at their point of need. And we need to wrestle with how we bring the gospel to people who have no background and no knowledge and no understanding and no thought process in their living.

And that'll apply to most of the people you work alongside, and you study with. We get the gospel into their hearts, and right. So, do the innocent ever perish? Can a man be mortal before God?

[29 : 13] And in chapter 5, verse 1, the third question with this to finish, call now, is there anyone who will answer you? Is there anyone who will answer you?

Eliphaz is asking that because he thinks God will not answer Job in his current condition. Because he needs to change.

Because he's suffering justifiably. And yet he's not. He's suffering as an innocent person, as in one who's not harboring secrets in.

So the question is for us call now, who will answer? Well, because of Jesus Christ, in our sufferings as believers, as we take and apply our needs and our despair and our depression, we will and can cry out because he will answer.

We have that guarantee. Even when it all seems darkness and it all seems like silence, he is there and he may be delaying his answer, but he will answer and there is a purpose.

[30 : 24] And that's surely one of the whole reasons behind Job is that we get the end of the story and we're not just plunged and left with a story that's incompleated and God's dealings being incomplete.

Now there's various different verses in New Testament, some of which I refer to in the questions. The questions went out with a bulletin sheet today. And even if you can't make the city group Wednesday, because we'll discuss them on Wednesday night, I think it's good to reflect on these questions on the basis of the sermon and think more about it and pray more about it and consider what God is saying and taking it further than the sermon can do.

But we know from many texts in the New Testament, from many teachings in the New Testament that Christians are called to suffer. We share in the sufferings of Christ and he suffered and so do we.

We share in the sufferings. In fact, we are told that we may complete his sufferings. And part of that, the answer is that because he suffered innocently and responded because he knew of the joy that was set before him, so we have to respond in a certain way to suffering that points people to Jesus also.

That makes them realize that our hope is in more than just this life, the even in darkness and depression that we can hold on to the faith that we have because we know that this is not the end.

[31 : 52] This is not the end of the story and that there is a future hope. But we will also face sufferings sometimes because Colossians 3.5 says we are putting sin to death.

That is painful. And we will suffer as we do that by being self-denying and self-controlled in our lives. We will also suffer because we are in a society where God's justice is delayed because he is sovereign.

And therefore we will be victims of injustice and we will suffer because of that. We will suffer specifically because we are Christians because the opposition of the enemy in his death rows is violent and strong against those who put their trust in Christ.

And sometimes we will also suffer because we are deliberately battling against and rebelling against and denying the God whom we serve.

And there will be and can be as Eliphaz says here the hand of his discipline and love. But we are to seek to reflect his joy and reflect the strength and courage and supernatural ability that we get to overcome in his grace and in his strength.

[33 : 25] Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was before him endured the cross despising its shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne and high.

So as we close, let us be people who pray for deeper understanding of God so that we don't have him in our pocket and think, you know, I have the ABC, I have his completed word, I know all about God.

I find the more that I study and learn of God the less I feel I know. And I do believe that we should be humble, we should worship and we should be sensitive in our knowledge and search for the mind and will of God.

May we have a deeper understanding of God, not only of God but of other people and their counsel. May we be with them.

Don't shy away from them. You sometimes look at this and you think, well, you know, Eliphaz and others said all the wrong things. I'd rather just not be there because I'm scared of saying the wrong thing. And we all feel that.

[34 : 40] I certainly feel that often. But let us not shy away from people, but may we also not offer simplistic, cold solutions to their suffering and to their need.

May we reflect the grace of Christ and the love of Christ by coming among them. And also a deeper understanding, not just of God and of others but of ourselves.

As we give counsel to others, it's always good to self-reflect. It's always good to look at your own life before giving any help and advice. It's always good to see what God is doing with you and to consider your own responses and to be patient and joyful and trusting and hopeful in the way that you think of and deal with and counsel others, which we are all called to do in our Christian lives as we are not called to be islands.

Amen. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father, in heaven we pray that you would teach us more about yourself. We thank you that we know a lot more than Eliphaz knew and in many ways it makes us more culpable for how we act and respond and react.

We would not be too hard on the three friends of Job with their knowledge, but we do know that what they did know as you judged them with a degree of anger and a desire that they repent and turn from their wrong understanding.

[36 : 23] May that be how we live our lives, that we would be people ready to confess our wrong understanding of God, because so often we claim the place of sovereignty.

We claim to be the ones who know better than God what is right and wrong. And we accuse God of being unjust ourselves. And forgive us, Lord, when we cast people aside with judgment, with wrong judgment, and we are unmerciful or unsympathetic, we pray that we would know the difference between mercy and also between good and biblical rebuke and advice and help.

And Lord, grant us humility in all that we do to learn from Job. Remind us that many people in our congregation are suffering in different ways.

May we not be indifferent, may we not be distanced, may we not blame others for maybe not recognizing the needs that there are, but may we take on board ourselves the responsibilities that you weigh in our shoulders to be part of the flock and to know that close love and friendship and accountability that belongs to the people of God.

We pray particularly for any who may not be Christians today, who may be hiding behind different reasons, sometimes practical, sometimes intellectual, sometimes theological for not coming to put their trust simply in Jesus Christ for time and for eternity, the author of life from whom they are separated.

[38 : 19] Lord, may they come to the foot of the cross and confess all their lack of knowledge but their trust in the one who said he came, the innocent for the guilty, to become the one who is punished as guilty in order that we might become innocent before God.

We ask this and plead for it in Jesus' name. Amen.