

Study 2: Job 3-27 – Life is never that simple

Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could.
Somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something good.

Many of us probably recognize those words from *The Sound of Music*. Do you remember the scene? Maria is back after having run away, all the children are happy again, Captain von Trapp has called off his engagement to the Baroness, and Maria and the Captain have finally declared their love for one another. All is well with the world. And Maria sings that somewhere in her youth or childhood she must have done something good to deserve this moment.

Is that the way life operates? That if we do good things, then good things will happen to us; and if we do bad things, bad things will happen to us? Many of us instinctively think so. When something goes wrong, often our first response is, “What have I done to deserve this? Am I being punished here for something?” But is that the way life works? That is the question we’ll be investigating in this study.

Read Job 2:11-13.

1. What do Job’s three friends do in response to his suffering? What does this tell us about his friends?

Read Job 3.

2. What does Job say to his friends about his own suffering? How does this compare with what Satan predicted in 2:5?

In one sense, the structure of the book of Job simply mirrors life. In a chapter and a half, Job loses everything, but then for the next 30 chapters there is endless soul searching, grieving, arguing and wondering why. This echoes reality. It can take a five-minute phone call to bring your whole life crashing down, but the grieving and confusion can go on for months, if not years.

Unfortunately, it is at this stage of the book that many readers lose interest, for as the discussion between Job and his friends develops it becomes somewhat repetitive and (to us) longwinded. The developing pattern is that Job’s three friends each take turns at explaining to Job why it is that he is suffering.

For the remainder of this study, we will be dipping into some of the things that Job’s friends say. We’ll wait to consider Job’s responses in our next study.

NOTE: You may wish to divide your group to look at different speeches. E.g. 1 group look at questions 3-7 and another group cover questions 8-11.

Read Eliphaz’s first speech in Job 4-5.

3. How would you describe the tone of Eliphaz’s speech? Is he supportive? Cruel? Caring? Understanding?

4. What does Eliphaz think is the reason behind Job’s sufferings (4:7-8)?

5. Why is Eliphaz so confident about his assessment of Job (4:12-16)?

6. What is Eliphaz’s advice to Job (5:8, 17)?

Read Eliphaz’s last speech in Job 22.

7. Is he still saying the same things?

Read Job 8:1-7.

8. What does Bildad think is the reason behind Job’s suffering?

9. What does Bildad think Job should do to restore his blessings?

Read Job 11:1-20.

10. What is Zophar's assessment of Job (1-6)?

11. What does Zophar think Job should do to restore his blessings (13-20)?

Summary

12. Looking back over the advice of Job's three friends:

a. What do they have in common?

b. In what ways are they different?

You almost expect Job's three friends to break out into a variation of the song mentioned earlier: "nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could. So somewhere in your youth or childhood, Job, you must have done something wrong."

The frustration for us, the readers, is that we know Job's friends are wrong. Ever since the very first verse of the book, we have known that Job is a blameless and upright man. We've heard it from God's own lips when he was talking to Satan (1:8). What this alerts us to is the fact that

suffering can happen to anyone, even those who don't deserve it. In this fallen world, sometimes even the innocent can suffer.

Job's friends have failed to appreciate this because their theology is too neat, and their view of God **too small**. In the end their counsel, though well meaning, is both naive and cruel.

This of course raises the issue of why God allows this to happen. However, we must not forget that the book of Job is most interested not in why seemingly undeserved suffering happens, but in how to respond to God when it happens.

13. Read 1 Peter 2:19-23. How did Jesus respond to unjust suffering?

Implications

(Choose one or more of the following.)

- What can we learn from Job's friends concerning helping each other through suffering?
- What do you think it means to "entrust" yourself to "him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23)? In what practical ways can we help each other do this.