

Sermon by Bob Brown on Sunday AM 2/22/09  
"Friendly Fire" - Job 4 - 7

In chapters 1 & 2 we meet Job, a righteous man of whom God Himself said, "There is no man on earth like him; he is blameless and upright; a man who fears God and shuns evil." (Job 1:8). Here God puts Job's character and integrity on the line, but we also have to see that God is putting Himself on the line as well. He is both the Creator and Protector or He is not!

In chapter 3 we see Job as a tremendously suffering servant, who curses the day of his birth, wanting to die, and even questioning God's wisdom in his life.

Now we meet these three friends of Job, men who have traveled great distances at their own expense, just to be with their suffering friend; they were in no way prepared for what they were to find. The situation of Job is far worse than they could imagine or even comprehend, and the things that they speak to him prove they were not prepared for a theological debate on human suffering and the justice of God. Most of us aren't prepared for that!

But someone has pointed out that three things can be said in favor of Job's friends:

- They came to visit Job when he was sick and hurting.
- They remained silent a whole week, as he suffered.
- When they had something to say about Job they said it to his face, not behind his back.

However, not everything they said was on the positive side. They actually failed in what they came to do; they were lousy comforters and counselors!

But what they are now speaking to is what they have just heard from Job. We are very fortunate that we can look back and look ahead and see what none of them can see at the moment: the hand of God in all of this.

Chapter three is such a pivotal chapter; it shows us how Job's mind changed as his pain intensified. In the first two chapters Job is shown as patient, humble, reverent, faithful and confident that God is in control of his life.

In this next section, (chapters 3-31) Job is shown as impatient, proud, defiant, and fearful and in a state of doubt and despair as he protests most everything that is done and said.

And even though his friends were ill-prepared to handle Job's situation personally or theologically, they felt that they could not remain silent; anyone who makes such cursing, thoughts and challenges about God must be answered.

What Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are saying to him is what their own theological understanding is about what is called the doctrine of retribution. The doctrine of retribution is like this: God gives a good life and blessings to those who live in righteousness because they deserve it. But God brings death, suffering and misery to the wicked, for the way they live in being unrepentant.

Before we are too hard on these guys we have to remember that up until a little over a week ago in Job's life, he believed the same thing. Maybe some of us do as well! But the suffering of a righteous person causes us to rethink many things. We all tend to show more mercy and grace when we realize just how much mercy and grace we have received from the Lord Himself.

While this doctrine is ultimately true, we have to be very careful not to think that it can be applied in every situation in exactly the same way. God's ways are very deep and complex, because He works within the framework of signs, wonders and miracles. God is not confined to the finite in which we were created.

Please keep in mind as you read through the many words of Job and his friends, their ideas and their theological beliefs, that it is absolutely futile to try to explain God's ways using human reasoning. No matter how righteous or self-righteous we are, "*God's ways are not our ways.*" (Isaiah 55:8).

Eliphaz begins by complimenting Job while at the same time asking him, if we speak will you be impatient, meaning, please don't take offense at what I'm about to say, but I can't let you get away with what you have been saying about getting punished unjustly. In the worldly scheme has anyone ever gotten away with sin? It is this doctrine of retribution coming out of

Eliphaz who basically says, *"God does not punish the innocent, but the evil people get what they deserve."* (Job 4:7-8)

Then in verse 12 he has this hair-raising, mind-blowing, mystical experience which he uses to add credibility to what he is telling Job that all men are sinners and may just die senselessly.

Eliphaz gets to what he wants to say, *"But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would lay my case before him."* (Job 5:8) The final dig comes in verse 17: *"Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty."* The idea here is that if Job will just repent of his sin, God will forgive him and get things back to normal.

Just how normal can life ever be for a man who has lost all ten of his children, and whose wife is in such agony and so filled with grief that she wants to turn and run from God? But then Eliphaz says when you have repented, *"...you will be secure, have an abundance of wealth and your children and descendants will be many."* (Job 5:25)

*"We all agree and have come to the conclusion that when you repent of your sins and start living right, this will all be made true in your life; so hear our words and just do it."* (Job 5:27)

How exactly do you think you would respond to words like this from your friends? This is really friendly fire; the words have been shot out, and there is a lot of hurt. That hurt will only be multiplied when the full truth is known.

Job's reply to Eliphaz is spoken from his world of hurt, grief and pain, but even after hearing the elder spokesman from the group first, he still wishes that God would just take him and put him out of his misery. Job says, *"A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty."* (Job 6:14)

Here's where we can jump in and say that we can relate to what is happening. All of us at one time have probably felt let down by God and then felt that others thought everything was our fault. That if we would just do "the right thing" everything else would fall into place again. But no one really knows what that "right thing" is, we can only speculate, based on what we have been taught and what we think.

Job is caught in a vicious web of what he knows of God, what his friends know of God and who God really is. He knows that if he can just die, he will be at peace, free from all the grief and pain, but he wants to do it God's way. He is starting to see God through new eyes, the eyes of pain and suffering, and also the eyes of mercy and grace. The grace is flowing from God, not his friends, who are more than willing to tell him how much theology they know, and how it can help him at this time of unclear thinking in him.

Andrew Blackwood Jr. wrote in his commentary, "Job's three friends were well-intentioned, thoughtful men who spoke too soon, said too much and said the wrong things."

So Job continues to speak to God in their hearing, his words and thoughts still border on the depressing side, but his faith will soon be built up, because of the faithfulness of God. God has always been faithful, He will always be faithful and He is always closer than we think He is.

Like Job, our character and spiritual life will be built, even in trials and terrible adversity, when we continue to live in integrity before a holy God and an unholy world. The apostle Paul expressed what Job, in his limited understanding was getting, "*For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain.*" (Philippians 1:21).

Our protection in life today is God Himself, our hedge is the Holy Spirit, and our life is Jesus. If we live in Him and for Him, even the tough times can be learning experiences for us.