

Sermon by Bob Brown on Sunday AM 3/08/09
"Opportunity Knocks" - Job 11-14

As we continue on in the book of Job I want you to remember a few things that essential to understanding this book, first, Job is for most of the story sitting on a dung heap, outside the city, in terrible grief, extreme physical pain and complete financial ruin. Second, Job has three friends who have come to console him in his grief, but they are absolutely shocked not only at all he has been through, but his physical condition and what they see as his spiritually declining condition. Third, their understanding of the traditional view of God, makes them say things they have learned, with no apparent regard for Job' real condition.

I call this section "Opportunity Knocks" because you and I, like each of the main characters in this book, have a wonderful opportunity to hear God knocking on the door of our hearts to teach us valuable lessons as we study this wonderful book of joy. But so often, like Job's friends, in our own religious understanding, we try to prove how 'godly" we are. We take any possible opportunity to knock someone else for their biblical understanding. We do this with almost no regard for their personal feelings or with a view to helping them grow in their spiritual journey with the Lord.

For instance, we see in **Job 8:2**, that Bildad basically calls Job a "windbag" who is just blowing smoke! Now we see Zophar claiming that Job is a hypocrite, (**Job 11:4-6**). These friends are well-meaning, but they are wrong simply because they are just spouting off the traditional theology that they have learned. They are using what we call the doctrine of retribution, which is basically defined as:

- 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, because they live unrepentant.

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 are created.

To make his point stick more readily, Zophar, who is more than likely the youngest of the three and therefore the most inexperienced, also seems to be the most vindictive and arrogant toward Job. It's almost like he has something to prove. He says that Job calls himself "pure" before God; in actuality, Job only said that he was "blameless" (Job 9:20-21).

Job is in no way claiming to be "pure". The idea of Job being "blameless" in God's sight is something that God has already stated about Job, when He brought up Job's name in the first place! God recognized Job as a man of integrity (Job 2:3). If what Job is now going through were due to moral purity, then a lot more of us would be sitting on dung heaps outside the city, in tremendous pain and in total financial ruin.

For Zophar to call Job a hypocrite is a knock on his character and integrity. This is actually the trap with which Satan is baiting Job and Zophar is falling for it. Satan has accused Job of being a hypocrite, by telling God that if you give Job enough pain and suffering, he will curse you, because he only serves you because of your blessings!

Let me remind you again, that we have the distinct advantage here because we have read the end of the book of Job; that is why we can call it the book of joy! In the same way we have read the end of the Bible, we know how it ends; we win! The good news is the bad news was wrong.

We still have time to get our theology straight, to turn from our wicked ways of putting others down to look good, and to totally trust the Lord to show us how to live out the Great Commission: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:19-20)

We also must live out the Great Commandment given by Jesus Himself: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love you neighbor as yourself.*" (Matthew 22:37-39)

What Jesus has called each of us to do in our own lives and in response to others, is only accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. We call this sanctification. This is a doctrine which we need to know

and live; it is humbling and powerful at the same time, but essential in our daily lives. Sanctification is the process of being made holy, resulting in a changed lifestyle for the believer. It removes the pollution of sin and increasingly renews the sinner in conformity with the image of God.

Sanctification takes place in the inner life of a person, and gradually affects their whole being. It is a continuous process that we go through in this life. Plain and simple, it means that we think less of ourselves and more of Jesus.

When we look at Zophar, I want us to realize that he is not totally wrong in what he says. He has a good basis for his beliefs but he has very weak interpersonal relationships with others. *"Surely he recognizes deceitful men; and when he sees evil, does he not take note?"* (Job 11:11)

Let's park here for a moment and realize that Zophar is actually telling Job "You have to know that God knows you've been trying to deceive Him and everyone else all this time with your piety, when you have been living in secret sin!"

Please understand that Zophar explains very accurately that nothing is ever hidden from God, but he comes at this with the wrong assumption, that one size fits all! We sometimes do the same thing; we try to hide "secret sins" from others, hoping that God doesn't notice them. All the while we are judging others for the same faults we are trying sneak through. Knowing that your every thought is known to God but living like they're not is sheer hypocrisy.

I'm not going to spend time on Job's whole response this time, but rather I want us to focus on two main thoughts:

- How do we really compare with these friends, are we more compassionate and merciful than they are toward people that are going through a really rough time, or do we judge them for it, or worse yet, just ignore them?
- There are two key verses that are important to understanding not just what Job is feeling, but why he responds the way he does to both his friends and to God.

The friends are great guys, even noticeable to others around them for their good standing in the Temple, but they are a lot like the "rich young ruler" in the New Testament. They have a lot of biblical knowledge, they keep the Law, are faithful to God, but they just don't get it!

Job, on the other hand, has been getting it, up until now. He doesn't understand, as none of us would, what God means when He says, "*Then the Lord said to Satan. "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."* (Job 2:3)

What an awesome privilege to be known at the throne like this, but what an awesome responsibility goes with it.

Job's response to his friends and to God is one of absolute truth, which are the hardest kind to live out! Job says, "*Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.*" (Job 13:15) Even if this trial kills him, Job expects to be vindicated before God in person, no matter what his friends may think or say. What a man of great faith in a holy God, in the midst of horrible grief, extreme physical pain and total financial ruin.

Prayer: Father, when opportunity knocks on the door of our heart and life, may we truly express our gratitude to You, for Your friendship, Your love and Your salvation in our lives. When you bring us to help others, may we see them through eyes of grace and mercy, not the traditions of men. May we learn to stay as true as Job and as kind as Jesus. Allow Your Holy Spirit to always lead us honestly "love our neighbors" the way we say we love You. Thank you for teaching and loving us through this tough life by allowing us to experience Your absolute amazing grace. In the name of Jesus. Amen