

Why Be Good? | The Book of Jōb

“The Standard Formula (Cycle 1)”

Job 4-13 (various)

5.5.24

1A) ^{4.1} *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, ² "If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking? ³ "Behold you have admonished many, And you have strengthened weak hands. ⁴ "Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees. ⁵ "But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; It touches you, and you are dismayed.*

^{4.12} *"Now a word was brought to me stealthily, And my ear received a whisper of it. ¹³ "Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, When deep sleep falls on men, ¹⁴ Dread came upon me, and trembling, And made all my bones shake. ¹⁵ "Then a spirit passed by my face; The hair of my flesh bristled up. ¹⁶ "It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; A form was before my eyes; There was silence, then I heard a voice: ¹⁷ 'Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?*

1b) ^{6.1} *Then Job answered, ² "Oh that my grief were actually weighed And laid in the balances together with my calamity! ³ "For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; Therefore my words have been rash. ⁴ "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, Their poison my spirit drinks; The terrors of God are arrayed against me.*

^{6.12} *"Is my strength the strength of stones, Or is my flesh bronze? ¹³ "Is it that my help is not within me, And that deliverance is driven from me? ¹⁴ "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty. ¹⁵ "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi, Like the torrents of wadis which vanish.*

2A) ^{8.1} *Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, ² "How long will you say these things, And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind? ³ "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right? ⁴ "If your sons sinned against Him, Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression. ⁵ "If you would seek God And implore the compassion of the Almighty, ⁶ If you are pure and upright, Surely now He would rouse Himself for you And restore your righteous estate.*

2B) Job: ^{9.27} *"Though I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my sad countenance and be cheerful,' ²⁸ I am afraid of all my pains, I know that You will not acquit me. ²⁹ "I am accounted wicked, Why then should I toil in vain? ³⁰ "If I should wash myself with snow And cleanse my hands with lye, ³¹ Yet You would plunge me into the pit, And my own clothes would abhor me. ³² "For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, That we may go to court together. ³³ "There is no umpire between us, Who may lay his hand upon us both. ³⁴ "Let Him*

remove His rod from me, And let not dread of Him terrify me. ³⁵ "Then I would speak and not fear Him; But I am not like that in myself.

3A) Zophar: ¹¹⁻¹³ "If you would direct your heart right And spread out your hand to Him, ¹⁴ If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents; ¹⁵ "Then, indeed, you could lift up your face without moral defect, And you would be steadfast and not fear.

3B) Then Job responded, ^{12,2} "Truly then you are the people, And with you wisdom will die! ³ "But I have intelligence as well as you; I am not inferior to you. And who does not know such things as these? ⁴ "I am a joke to my friends, The one who called on God and He answered him; The just and blameless man is a joke. ⁵ "He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt, As prepared for those whose feet slip. ⁶ "The tents of the destroyers prosper, And those who provoke God are secure, Whom God brings into their power.

^{13.7} "Will you speak what is unjust for God, And speak what is deceitful for Him? ⁸ "Will you show partiality for Him? Will you contend for God? ⁹ "Will it be well when He examines you? Or will you deceive Him as one deceives a man? ¹⁰ "He will surely reprove you If you secretly show partiality. ¹¹ "Will not His majesty terrify you, And the dread of Him fall on you? ¹² "Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes, Your defenses are defenses of clay. ¹³ "Be silent before me so that I may speak; Then let come on me what may. ¹⁴ "Why should I take my flesh in my teeth And put my life in my hands? ¹⁵ "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

This is our THIRD week in *The Book of Jōb*. The previous sermons are available on our app or website – I think you'll be helped by listening.

And LISTENING is a big part of our study today.

We should listen to people when they speak and we should listen to ourselves... Often times a person's core ideology will come out in his words even when he/she doesn't want it to emerge. G.K. Chesterton wrote of walking with a successful publisher and it came up in conversation that a mutual friend had some recent trouble and the publisher said, "He'll be alright – he believes in himself." And first Chesterton discerned the publisher's ideology and THEN he challenged him (actually wrote the book *Orthodoxy* Ch 1: "The Maniac" in response).

All of us have these central intellectual and philosophical commitments and oftentimes we don't even know we have these core beliefs... We may not even be able to articulate them, we just accept them. It's "where we're coming from". This is ONE of the many, MANY values in conversing...sitting down with people over coffee or tea or a Montecristo... sandwich to have a long-form conversation, a dialogue, a discussion – hopefully with more than one other person.

I need someone to listen to me and check my ideology, my core assumptions about life that I may not even know I have and hold... AND THAT is what we have here in the *Book of Job*. It's a long-form discussion and from it emerge the beliefs, the intellectual commitments and ideologies of the participants.

In the course of this poetic conversation, stretching over some 40 chapters, the assumptions of the speakers and listeners emerge. I'd like to look at ONE such assumption I'm going to call the "*Standard Formula*". Let's look at:

- 1) **The Standard Stated**
- 2) **The Standard Fulfilled**
- 3) **The Standard Re-Stated**

Before we LOOK at the Standard Stated, two short points about the book we're reading. First, it's poetry and has a lot of symbols and allusions and double-entendres and this means that we don't always know whether the speakers, especially Job, are speaking about one another or God Himself. The best way to look at is: Job sometimes speaks TO God as the One who stands behind his friends.

Second, the book is made up, primarily, of three cycles of discourse. Job kicks it off in Ch 3 (last week) and then each friend speaks and Job responds to each friend in turn. And since we're covering like ten chapters today, we printed it a little differently in the bulletin.

The first speaker is Eliphaz. We don't know anything about him. Some modern scholars have suggested that Job was an Edomite king and his friends were lesser kings and advisors to Job.

Eliphaz starts off cautiously – "*If I speak, will you bite my head off?*" And then, not waiting for an answer he launches out, "Who could be silent at a moment like this?"

He says, "Look Job... you've helped a lot of people over the years and now it's YOUR turn to be helped... so lose the impatience." And THEN, Eliphaz relates a VISION, a DREAM in which a fearsome spirit, a ghost appeared (like the Ghost of Christmas Past – *A Christmas Carol*). Eliphaz says the ghost had a message for Job (v. 17), "*Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?*"

Basically, he's saying, "Hey, Job! No one is perfect and I'm speaking of myself at this point... but... uh... it's too bad YOU didn't have that dream. You ARE in touch with your spirituality...aren't you, Job?"

Job answers, "ARE YOU KIDDING ME? That's all you got? I mean have you evaluated my situation at all? I lost my 10 children, my business and I'm covered in these excruciating sores (head to toe) AND WHAT'S WORSE: I don't know what I did to deserve it – God is punishing me. And you flaunt your super-spirituality and think THAT'S gonna help? MY SUFFERING WEIGHS AS MUCH AS THE SAND AT THE BEACH and if you think I'm gonna be calm and composed at this moment – you're CRAZY! God is shooting His arrows at me. Do you think I'm made of stone? Shouldn't I expect a little kindness from friends?"

St. Paul told the Colossians, *“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by... taking his stand on visions he’s seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind”* (2.18) Eliphaz is what Martin Luther called an *“enthusiast”*, a mystic. He shares his *“vision”* with you in an attempt to show you that he’s way more in tune to the unseen world than YOU are! Run from those people!

Then (readings 2 A & B) Bildad steps up. He says, *“Job, too many words, dude! Let’s agree that God is just – can we agree on that? Can we? HUH?”* And then in v. 4 (2A): *“Job, if your children have sinned against God, God has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful estate.”* (Job 8.4-6 ESV)

Bildad is basically saying, *“Job... your kids died because they sinned... and if YOU (who apparently let this go on) if you would humble yourself and repent; if you’re pure and upright – everything will return to normal and you’ll be happy as can be...”*

And Job replies (reading 2B) *“Uh... ok... I’ll just forget the pursuit of answers and smile... but you realize, Bildad, that’s only denial and it does nothing to tell me what I did to deserve this! I want to repent but...of WHAT? Even if I wash with acid I can’t clean up – God’s not a man that I could take Him to court...Where would I find an attorney?”*

Bildad, is so committed to what I’m calling the *“Standard Formula”* that he’s willing to say, *“Well, if your ten children died... I think we know who to blame – the KIDS! And their father who apparently didn’t pray for or teach them.”*

The Standard Formula is really coming out strong here – Job has to shape up because those who shape up live rich and satisfying lives with many years, many children and many things... And the people who lose all those things are obviously bad parents, bad children. C’mon, Job, this is *‘Sunday School 101’* – God helps those who help themselves! You’ve forgotten the Standard Formula.”

Finally Zophar speaks and basically he articulates the Standard Formula in its RAW *“if-then”* formulation: *“IF you would direct your heart right And spread out your hand to Him, IF iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents; THEN, indeed, you could lift up your face without moral defect, And you would be steadfast and not fear.* (11.13-15)

Then Job replies to Zophar and (seemingly) the others when he says, *“You geniuses! I’m just as smart as you are. And I HAVE prayed for my kids and I HAVE called on God and He HAS answered me and I HAVE been blameless – but you guys are ‘Monday Morning Quarterbacks’ sitting safely on the sidelines scorning my trouble and I’m trying to tell you: The Standard Formula doesn’t always explain why things happen – (reading 3B, v. 6) – “the tents of destroyers prosper and those who provoke God are secure and sometimes God brings THEM into power.”*

Job continues (last paragraph): “You men are misrepresenting God and lying. And you will give an answer for your lies. I thought I needed you but ‘your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes’... but I’m NOT gonna let you rock me – (last and famous verse) *“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless, I will argue my ways before Him.”* (Job 13.15)

It leaked out of all their comments. It seeped into the conversation in so many different ways. The idea that if people prosper, flourish and succeed, it’s because they deserve it and if people don’t, it’s because they’ve NOT obeyed God and thus do not deserve His rewards.”

Maybe Job had once believed it... no not maybe...certainly. Why do I say that? It’s because everyone believes in that “Standard Formula”. It’s part of what the New Testament calls the “elementary things of the world”. Here’s one usage of that phrase in Galatians CH 4: *“while we were children, we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons.”* (3-5)

While NT scholars don’t always agree on the meaning of that phrase (one word in Greek - στοιχεῖα) I think the least we can say is that it contains *The Standard Formula* – that IF we measure up THEN God will bless us and give us success.

You can’t help notice that measuring up means different things to different people. Here, we saw, “super-spirituality” in Eliphaz’ vision and in Bildad’s child-rearing and in Zophar’s neat and tidy philosophy – “Do THIS and LIVE – don’t do THIS and DIE”- this simplistic way of treating life and others and God that says, “God is basically like a genie – rub the bottle in just the right way and all your wildest dreams will come true.” Exercise righteousness, fashion righteousness, educational righteousness, driving righteousness, social-consciousness righteousness, organized garage righteousness: “do this (like I do) and live.”

St Paul told the Galatians – “The Law (God’s commands) was that exacting tutor that shows us how far short we all fall – it was not meant, so much, to show us how to get to heaven and how to live a deserving life but to show us that we all deserve to die...” AND YET, the Law is just and good and it DOES have to be kept.

And this Jesus Christ did when He became One of us. He lived UNDER the Law and He did that for ME (Galatians Ch 4) *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

Job asks in *reading 2B*, v 32 – *“For God is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, that we may go to court together. There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both. Let God remove His rod from me and let not dread of God terrify me. Then I would speak and not fear Him; But I am NOT like that in myself.”*

This is but one of many whispers of the Redeemer in Job, the One who came *“in the fullness of time”* to fulfill the Law and the Standard Formulation – He, Jesus Christ, really was pure in heart like Job never was – LIKE YOU NEVER WERE, like no other human being has ever been.

And he has become our Umpire – the perfect go-between for God and man. Job desperately stated, *“There’s no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both.”* But Jesus Christ IS just that – God and man, able to obey as a man – able to fulfill the Standard.

And this means that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ is ushered into a re-stated standard of life. We’re daily learning to be good NOT so we can get God’s blessings and get safety and get more STUFF. We’re learning to obey NOT like slaves but like sons: *“that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

And this motivational move (from slave to son) is really like a tectonic shift – it’s a massive earthquake in our motivational structure. *“Why be good?”* That’s our big question – title of the series. The satan asked God, *“Does Job fear God for nothing?”* (1.9).

If you could have all that you wanted... if you could sin as much as you want and know that: 1) You would not get caught and 2) Never suffer the consequences ...NO TROUBLE – what would you do?

If – on the OTHER hand – God gave an Umpire to settle the score – Someone to live and obey in your place and take the justice you deserved ...AND to adopt you a son, maybe, that grace would liberate you to obey from the heart and to love God for Himself, He, the essence, the source and fullness of truth, beauty and goodness...and you, His beloved child.