

**Job 20: 1 – 21: 34; “The Knowledge of God’s Ways”, Sermon # 31 in the series –
“Remember to Magnify His Work”, delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 7th, 2023, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In order to lead you into the truth of what I believe will be profitable for our consideration this afternoon, before we partake of the Communion, I want to draw all that I will say from verse 14 of Chapter 21, where Job is describing why it is that the wicked say to God – Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. He says that it is because their earthly ways in many cases seem to prosper without God. This is why Job says in verse 15 that they say – Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him? All of us who know the Lord, and would become more like Christ, I am sure that we do desire the knowledge of God’s ways. And so, it will be important, if we would understand God’s ways better, that we see –

1st of all – Zophar’s terrible misconception of God’s way.

It is a terrible misconception of God’s Justice. He places Job under God’s judgment in his speech to him. In these verses of chapter 20 that I just read for you, we find Zophar saying that Job was making him feel anxious in his thoughts. He felt turmoil inside of him as he heard the rebuke that Job was giving to him, and to Eliphaz, and to Bildad. He called it – The rebuke which reproached him. He says, therefore, that the spirit of his understanding would cause him to answer. This leads me to say that sometimes we as Christian people may think that we understand why another Christian person is going through a trial, when really, we do not.

Zophar’s speech in chapter 20 proves this. What it proves to us is that it is very possible sometimes, for a Christian to not really understand God’s ways. You may actually desire a greater knowledge of God’s ways, but because of misconceptions that you have about the ways of God, you fail to bring comfort to the person who you are trying to minister to. You show them what you think is their sin, but in doing so, you show them no mercy. And God knows that you will need to come to a better understanding of Him to do this. He will therefore watch you as you try to minister in this wrong way, and He will bring you to the place where you will be taught His better way. That is, His better way of learning how to comfort and encourage another Christian going through a trial.

Remember the words of God through the prophet Hosea in Hosea 6: 6 – “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” “And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Sometimes it may take us a while to learn God’s better way. Remember when the Lord Jesus said to the self-righteous Pharisees in Matthew 9: 12 – “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’” “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance?” I hope that you will understand that God is a God of Justice. But I hope also that you will see that He is a God of great mercy and compassion as well.

But here in this book of Job, we find these 3 men who are supposedly Job’s friends, taking justice into their own hands to judge Job according to appearances. They each took their turn trying to bring Job to conviction of his supposed sins. They all thought that his sins had brought about this calamity of God’s having taken away all of his children, and all of his possessions, and even his health. They didn’t know exactly what sins that he had committed, but they were sure that it must have been some great wrongdoing or some secret unconfessed sin which had brought him to this awful state that he was in. It will be evident by the end of this book that they should have been quiet, and simply have sympathized with him, and prayed for him.

But see here in this chapter, that Zophar felt it was his duty to attempt to bring Job to repentance even though neither he, nor his friends knew exactly what his sins were. And so Zophar says that he is troubled by what Job had said before to Bildad and Eliphaz. They all were more concerned about making a point, than they were in ministering true comfort and encouragement to Job. But more particularly, I want you to see that Zophar’s description of wicked men, and God’s judgment and justice, in this chapter is only partially true. He only gives a partial view of God’s justice to Job, and not a complete view. He says to Job in verses 4-7: “Do you not know this of old, since man was

placed on the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?” “Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches to the clouds, yet he will perish forever like his own refuse; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’”

Yes, we can say that there is some truth in what Zophar is saying here. It is true that compared to the length of eternity which is coming, that the triumphing of the wicked which is short. And yes, it is true that the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment. When such a comparison is thought of, of the length of eternity which is coming, and the shortness of a man’s having pleasure in sin, we know that Zophar was right in this. But we have to pause here, and ask ourselves – Why was Zophar saying this to a godly man who was going through what Job was going through? It was because he thinks that Job has been haughty in his words, and that Job was not acknowledging his sin as he should have. And so he truly believed that Job would perish forever like his own refuse if he kept trying to defend his own integrity.

This was a very unkind and unloving thing for Zophar to have done, to have spoken in this way. But I want you to see that as you look carefully at what Zophar says in this whole chapter, there is nothing mentioned here about the goodness and mercy of God, or the faithfulness and patience of God in His dealings with His people. Zophar speaks only of the justice and judgment of God. He simply refuses to believe that Job could be going through what he is going through, and still be a righteous man! And so he lays it out before Job, as to what will happen to such a wicked person. He does not mention that he is specifically referring to Job, but he implies it.

Verses 12-15 are a good sample – “Though evil is sweet in his mouth, and he hides it under his tongue, though he spares it and does not forsake it, but still keeps it in his mouth, yet his food in his stomach turns sour; it becomes cobra venom within him.” “He swallows down riches and vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly.” This was certainly not the right way to help Job in this awful time of trial and difficulty that he was going through. This is the great problem that many people, even sometimes Christian people have, when they see a godly person going through suffering or calamity. They think – What has this person done, that God would bring this kind of judgment against them? Surely, even though they claim to be righteous, they are not! And so, that Christian thinks that he must remind them of God’s justice.

Now it is most certainly true that God is going to punish the wicked some day at the time of the Last Judgment. And on that great day, God will clothe Himself in garments of very austere justice, and sit to judge the world in righteousness. In regard to all the wicked people who have ever lived, those who did not repent of their sins and did not believe in Christ, they will be consigned to hell forever. All sin, all hypocrisy, and all wickedness will be brought to light, and eternal punishment will be their portion. But in respect to our being judged before the judgment seat of Christ, what we as Christians must be very careful about, is judging matters in the present, as though we know what is taking place in another person’s heart and life.

And especially we must be careful in regard to judging fellow Christians as though they are wicked because they are going through a very difficult trial, or because they have somehow caused us to go through a very great trial because of their trial! We consciously need to remember that it will be the Lord Jesus, the Man whom the Father appointed, who will judge the world in righteousness in that Day. His eyes will be a flame of fire, and there will be nothing that He will overlook. One of the more important things that He will evaluate will be how we as Christians have treated one another. He will see all the good and all the bad things that we will have done; what we have confessed as sin, and what we have not.

But much of how we will be evaluated for, as to our reward, will be according to whether we really tried to help other Christians, or encourage them in the midst of their trial. It is simply not true, that if a Christian is going through a calamity that it always on account of his or her having sinned in some way. That is one of the greatest lessons of this book! Let us understand this. And the situation, indeed, may be just the opposite from what we think, as it was here with Job. It is imperative that we as Christian people show forth the fact that we do indeed, “desire the knowledge of God’s ways”.

2nd – We see that Job shows Zophar that God’s ways are mysterious in this life.

(Chapter 21: 1-26)

Let me read to you the first 9 verses of Job 21 to you again. “Then Job answered and said: ‘Listen carefully to my speech, and let this be your consolation.’ “Bear with me that I may speak, and after I have spoken, keep mocking.” “As for me, is my complaint against man?” “And if it were, why should I not be impatient?” “Look at me and be astonished; put your hand over your mouth.” “Even when I remember I am terrified, and trembling takes hold of my flesh.” “Why do the wicked live and become old, yes, become mighty in power?” “Their descendants are established with them in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes.” “Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.”

So, what Job is saying here is that, according to his observation, the wicked do not always suffer trials, nor do they necessarily come to any untimely and painful end, in this world, as a result of their sins. Indeed, he says, it is often just the opposite. And so he asks – Why do the wicked live and become old, yes, and become mighty in power? It is because the rod of God is not upon them. This is a very great truth for us to take in, indeed! The truth of the matter is, that God does discipline His own children, His own people, because he loves them. And He lets the wicked go on in their sins for a time, but eventually He will deal with them too, both in this life, and at the Last Judgment. The righteous He loves. And so the Lord Jesus says to the church in Laodicea it says in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 19, – “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”

God was loving Job and yet he did not know it. He says, look at me and be astonished. And well Zophar might they be astonished. For Job probably looked particularly bad at that point, in having boils all over his body. He was saying to Zophar that the wicked don’t usually go through all that he was going through as a righteous man. This was why he was terrified and trembling. He didn’t feel that he could go on living. He did not know why God had done these things to him. But he knew that it was the Lord’s rod upon him.

This is why we read the exhortation in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 4-6 that says – “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’” And he says, then in verse 7 – Why do the wicked live and grow old, yes, and become mighty in power? This was a great mystery to Job, and we ought to consider it a great mystery as well. God could cut them off, but many times He does not.

Why? Because He is Patient, and Good, and Kind. It is a mysterious thing, but sometimes God does let wicked men go on and on in their sins, and He does not immediately take them away. If we think of some of the wicked men in the Bible, such as Ishamel who lived a long life and had 12 of his sons become princes, it is a good example. Also Esau, Jacob’s brother, who had whole race of kings and dukes that came from him. We can only conclude that God is very kind even to evil and ungrateful men.

It is not, however, for us to envy such wicked rich men, like Asaph did when he penned Psalm 73. He said – “Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.” “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.” “For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” “For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.” “They are not in trouble as other men.” “They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued as other men....” Asaph says in verse 13 then, “Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.” “For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

It is all too true that God’s ways are mysterious in this regard. But he goes on to say in verse 16 – “When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me – Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.” “Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.” “Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!” Job knew this truth, for he says in verse 13 – “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.” “Yet

they say to God, ‘Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.’ ‘Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?’ It will be good for us now to reflect upon the love of God for us.

3rd – Job could only be comforted with the comfort of Christ.

(Chapter 21, verse 34)

I hope that you can see here that Job could not be comforted by Zophar’s empty words concerning God’s ways, because there was nothing in them of the comfort of Christ. We have come to the table once again to remember the love of God the Father in the giving of His only begotten Son. We have come to remember the love of God the Son our Savior, Shepherd, Lord, and Friend, in His laying down His life for our sins. We have come here also to remember the love of the Holy Spirit, the One who indwells us, and who teaches us to know Christ better. In our hearts we should understand that the knowledge of God’s ways is the very best knowledge. I want to remind you of the words of verse 34 – “How then can you comfort me with empty words, since falsehood remains in your answers?” Zophar couldn’t comfort Job because his words were empty words, and there was falsehood in them. His speech to Job was truth misrepresented, and truth misapplied. Therefore there was falsehood in his words.

Let us study not to do this to our friends, our Christian brethren, and others. Let us rather study to see how we can bring real substantial comfort to each and every brother or sister who is going through trials or difficulties. How can we do this? Well, the comfort that I am speaking of is mentioned in Philippians chapter 2, verses 1-4 – “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

You can see here where real spiritual and tangible comfort comes from. It comes from Christ. It is the comfort of knowing the reality of His love towards us in His laying down His life for us. What flows out of that love of His for us is our knowing the reality of God’s affection and mercy towards us continually, each and every day. What flows out of our having fellowship with Him through the Spirit, is that you and I as Christians have real joy in knowing and following Jesus. And this becomes very practical in that having this joy of knowing and walking with Christ, we can be like-minded with our brethren in doctrine and like-minded in what we want to do to glorify God and our Lord Jesus Christ together in our walk with Him and our work for Him.

We do not need to do anything through selfish ambition or conceit or strife, but in lowliness of mind we can esteem other people in our church here, better than ourselves. We can look out for their interests as well as our own. The next few verses in Philippians go on to tell us how. Verse 5 – Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men.” “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

This is what we remember now. So let us receive the due impression of it. It was on the cross that Christ satisfied the justice of God on Job’s behalf. He satisfied the justice of God by going to the cross as a righteous Man in our place. He satisfied the justice of God by bearing the punishment due our sins in our place. Because of this we have the comfort of Christ to ourselves and also to give to other people who will believe in Him. May we have the mind of Christ in us, and may we be His servants, and grow in our faith and our obedience to Him. If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we will be exalted in due time. But in the interim, we will learn to comfort others with the comfort which we ourselves have been comforted with, in Christ.

