



Sunday School Lesson for January 11, 2004.
Released on January 8, 2004.

Study Job 9:32-35; 13:20-24; 19:25-27; 23:10-12. Integrity in Seeking God
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about 2000 B.C.
PLACE: Land of Uz

Job 9:32-35

32 For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.
33 Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.
34 Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me:
35 Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me.

Job 13:20-24

20 Only do not two things unto me; then I will not hide myself from thee.
21 Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid.
22 Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me.
23 How many are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin.
24 Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?

Job 19:25-27

25 For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:
27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

Job 23:10-12

10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.
12 Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.

Lesson Background

The book of Job is filled with intense dialogue, mostly between Job and his three friends (Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz). As if Job did not already have enough to deal with, his friends' basic contention was that he was suffering because of unconfessed sin. Instead of being an encouragement, the ones who came to comfort him caused him additional stress. Satan had already caused extreme suffering but now those in whom Job should have been able to confide only added to his suffering.

It is certainly understandable that Job would go through many different emotions. Not only was he physically tested beyond our imagination, but his emotional and mental limits were also tested further than any of us probably will ever experience.

Those who know the Lord well will often struggle through trials but eventually reaffirm their trust in Him. In this week's text we follow some of Job's reasoning as he moved from a state of confusion concerning his situation to a reaffirmation of his trust in God.

Desire to Plead a Case (Job 9:32-35)

As we come to Job 9, we find that Bildad has just accused Job of charging God with injustice (8:3). Bildad also contends that Job's children have lost their lives for their sins (8:4). This is fuel on the fire of Job's anguish. In this moment of great despair his friend essentially says, "Your kids got what they deserved." No loving father needs to hear something like that. Bildad insists that Job can right himself with God by becoming pure and blameless (8:6). This, of course, implies that Job has been otherwise. Now Job responds.

1. Why did Job express dismay over the fact that God was not a man (vs. 32)?

Job's response was that he recognized some truth in Bildad's statements but that he needed a court trial to prove his innocence (Job 9:2-3). Without that, how could he argue for himself before God? The reason he needed such a setting was that God was not a man as Job was (v. 32); so Job could not merely walk up to Him and question what was going on. If he could do that, he would be able to give a valid defense of his righteousness to God. As things were now, however, he had no way of defending himself.

2. Why did Job wish he could stand in court with God (v. 33)?

Furthermore, Job felt that he had no mediator to explain his side of the situation. The Hebrew word translated "daysman" (Job 9:33) means one who judges or decides a court case. This is a person who can listen to both sides and decide fairly on the merits of the arguments. If a mediator could just stand by Job and lay his hands on Job and God at the same time, there would be opportunity for settlement. Once God heard Job's appeal, surely He would relieve him of the intense suffering he was experiencing. Job's confusion continued to cause him frustration.

3. Job wanted to declare his case to the Judge of the universe. How is Christ similar to and different from a mediator (lawyer) who presents a case before a judge on another's behalf?

Job wants someone who can see his side of the story. Although unspoken, the idea of a mediator or arbitrator (some versions say "umpire") appeals to Job because such a go-between also can explain what has happened to Job from God's point of view. Job wants to give and receive information. But Job understands that no such mediator exists. The thought of someone placing his hand upon God and explaining His ways is, of course, ludicrous. Even so, that is Job's fervent hope (see also Job 16:19-21).

The great blessing of the Christian life is in knowing that the Mediator Job longs for has made Himself known. Jesus Christ is that Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is perfectly capable of representing us to the Father because Jesus is fully God (John 1:1; 10:30; 14:9-11).

We realize that no one stands before God as blameless. All people are sinners (Romans 3:23). No one meets God's standard of perfect righteousness. Thus, our view of our intercessor is different from that of Job. We do not need one who will present a call for justice on our behalf. Justice is precisely what we do not want! If justice were meted out to us, we would have no hope.

For those who accept Jesus as Savior He becomes the One who pleads our case in God's court. Unlike most earthly defense attorneys, Jesus admits our guilt to the court. But then He points out that He already has paid the penalty at Calvary so we can go free.

4. What kind of relief did Job believe would happen if God took "his rod away" (vs. 34, 35)?

Job felt that God's chastening rod was beating upon him, and it made him afraid of what was happening and what might occur next. If he could just face God in court and have a mediator appeal for him, he could ask God to take His rod away and the accompanying fear would cease. Until that happened there would be an uncontrollable dread that kept Job in tension. In fact, he said he was in a state of terror. Once again he referred to his desire to speak to God and no longer shrink back in fear of Him.

Job had to acknowledge, however, that he knew such a courtroom scene would never take place. He was going to have to live with his circumstances without any explanation from God and without relief until God determined to change things. He recognized that he was struggling badly, for he said, "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10:1,2).

Many of God's children have gone through such difficult circumstances that they have wondered what God could possibly be doing. A recent comment from a family man who had lost his job and was being forced to sell his home for a smaller one was "I know we're supposed to keep praying and trusting God, but sometimes I wonder if He's listening." In his case he had been unable to find another job, and no one had yet shown interest in buying his house. The financial picture was continually becoming gloomier.

God does not neglect His children, even though it sometimes may seem that way. As Job's life will reveal, God always has greater purposes than we can realize from our perspective.

5. Why did ancient people associate divine blessings and curses with their behavior?

From the beginning of time people have associated divine blessings and curses with their behavior (John 9:1, 2). In this regard, ancient people see things such as droughts or fires as divine punishment for evil. If one reads the entire book of Job, it seems that Job's friends are trying to persuade him that some evil in his life has brought about his suffering. Jesus opposed this kind of thinking in Luke 13:1-5.

We should also remember that while there are indeed built-in consequences for many sins, not everyone who sins will automatically suffer those consequences. Some people smoke and never get cancer. Indeed, Bible writers noticed that evil people seemed to prosper while decent people suffered (Ecclesiastes 8:14; Jeremiah 12:1; Malachi 3:14, 15). This is all part of living in a fallen world where God has allowed free will.

The Bible does speak of God's correction or chastisement (Psalm 89:32; 94:12; Proverbs 3:11, 12; Lamentations 3:1). God's punishment can be an act of loving discipline (Revelation 3:19). Parents know that correcting children is not always easy, but is a necessary part of their upbringing. Repeating Proverbs 3:11, the writer of Hebrews 12:5 reminds us that we are not to take the Lord's discipline lightly. God is not anxious to punish us. He is not "quick with the whip." His discipline and correction are for our benefit (Hebrews 12:6-11). It is to keep us from further damage and eternal harm.

But remember: Job is not being punished. However, Job thinks that that is what is happening. His incorrect assumption adds to his misery and frustration. Do we ever fall into this same trap?

Job's Appeal
(Job 13:20-24)

6. What two requests did Job have for God (Job 13:20-22)?

In Job 12 and 13 we find Job responding to Zophar (Job 11). Zophar has been rather harsh with Job. Like the others, Zophar seemed to believe that if Job is suffering, he must have sinned. The first time Zophar spoke, he accused Job of lying and mocking God (11:3). He said that if God did speak, He would in no uncertain terms set Job straight in his thinking (v. 6). Furthermore he said that God was actually doing less against Job than he deserved! Job displayed some sarcasm when he answered, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" (12:2,3).

After reiterating some of the things he understood about God, Job began to address God directly. He had two specific requests for God. First, he was terrified because he realized that God's hand was against him, so he asked that God withdraw it and thus allow him some relief. The Hebrew word for "dread" (Job 13:21) is often translated "terror" in the King James Bible. His fear of God went far beyond reverence or respect. In light of the lack of peace in his heart, his request is not surprising.

His second request was that God call to him and give him opportunity to speak for himself; or, if God preferred, Job would speak first and God could respond to him. Either way would give Job an opportunity to defend himself and seek to find out what God intended to do with him.

7. How did Job express his frustration about God's silence (vs. 23, 24)?

Job's first question for God was "How many are mine iniquities and sins?" He amplified the question by saying to God, "Make me to know my transgression and my sin." So far all he had heard regarding this was the accusations of his friends, but they had not named any specific sin. They had spoken in generalities, telling Job that God would not be allowing him to suffer so badly if he did not have secret sins in his life. They had implied that Job was not as godly as he wanted everyone to think.

As Job asked about the number of his iniquities and sins, perhaps in his mind he was thinking that the severity of the judgment he was experiencing indicated a huge total. If not, his experience certainly did not seem fair. Job was willing to have God enumerate his sins for him so that he could understand why his suffering was so great. It appears that he was still thinking in terms of a courtroom scene where he as the defendant could ask for an explanation of the charges against him. He would certainly confess anything proved against him.

Job's second question was "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (Job 13:24). He felt that God was completely ignoring his repeated pleas for understanding. It was the kind of silent treatment only an enemy would give. This was severely testing Job's faith. Job's devotion and faithfulness to God surely made him God's friend, not an enemy. Sometimes God remains silent through our repeated pleas to Him. It is in times like that when our faith is tested the most. How much easier it would seem to be if He always gave quick answers.

Job's Assurance
(Job 19:25-27)

8. Where did Job find reassurance when his three friends continued to accuse him of being ungodly (v. 25)?

After Eliphaz's second speech (chap. 15), Job responded by saying, "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all" (16:2). Later he said, "Surely mockers are with me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility" (17:2). Obviously, Job was not receiving any reassurance from his so-called comforters.

Job's reassurance came from his knowledge of God and especially the fact that God is a living Redeemer. Job had just expressed the wish that his words could be written down in a book and engraved on a rock with an iron pen so that they would endure forever (Job 19:23,24). Little did he know at that time that God was going to do exactly what he wished. Today, many centuries later, his words remain! This was followed by Job's declaration of faith. It was this faith that gave him the strength he needed to endure his trials.

Even though Job had felt that God had acted against him, he knew his only hope was in God. Along with all his attempts at reasoning, he wanted succeeding generations to know that he never lost his faith in God. What he was going through was not going to last forever, but he himself would. He had enough understanding of God and eternity to know that the living God would someday stand on the earth and vindicate His children. The court would convene, and Job would be pronounced justified.

9. How do we know Job had some understanding of eternal life (vs. 26, 27)?

"Faced with death and decay, Job still expected to see God-and he expected to do so in his body. When the book of Job was written, Israel did not have a well-developed doctrine of the resurrection. Although Job struggled with the idea that God was presently against him, he firmly believed that in the end God would be on his side. This belief was so strong that Job became one of the first to talk about the resurrection of the body" (Life Application Bible, Tyndale).

Where did Job learn his theology? Somehow he knew that his life on earth was to be followed by a life with God in a new body. He knew his skin was going to be destroyed. As he suffered he saw that literally happening before his eyes, but he seemed to be thinking of death here. We cannot know exactly what he referred to when he spoke of seeing God in his flesh after his skin was destroyed. Was he thinking of a resurrection body? Was he thinking of the moment of death? Whatever he meant, he knew he would see God.

The personal assurance Job had in his heart concerning seeing God face-to-face should remind us that this is a central teaching of Scripture. No matter how difficult are the circumstances we face, they are temporal. One day we will see God, and "the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace" (Lemmel, "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus").

10. If you were to write an autobiography, would a reader be able to say of you, "This person really lived life with eternity in mind!" Why, or why not?

Ideally, every aspect of our lives should be lived with "the afterlife" in view. We are always in the shadow of eternity!

We begin to develop an eternal perspective when we realize that so many things we do have eternal implications. Each day is full of choices, and the choices are not always clear as "good" and "bad." Sometimes the choices are more like "good," "better," and "best." Those having an eternal perspective will make different choices from those who don't. Even if we don't write an autobiography, people will be able to "read" our perspective in the choices we make.

Job's Trust
(Job 23:10-12)

In chapter 22 we find Job confronting the arguments of Eliphaz. Eliphaz has accused Job of social injustice, of being rich and exploiting the poor (22:6-9). He also seems to accuse Job of treasuring his gold and silver more than he treasures God (22:23-26).

11. What did Job say about what he would be like after his trials (v. 10)?

Job turns Eliphaz's accusation on its ear. Job does not treasure precious earthly metal, but he wants to be seen as a treasured asset in God's eyes. Job knows that God treasures faith. Job may not understand why he is suffering, but he believes that God will, in the end, acknowledge his ultimate faithfulness.

12. How do we know Job maintained his integrity during his trials (vs. 11,12)?

An elderly pastor used to tell his assistant that his greatest desire was to finish well. By that he meant that he knew of many servants of the Lord who at some point in their lives failed God and had to leave their ministries, and he did not want that to happen to him. We continue to hear of failures in the Lord's service, and it always causes a renewed sense of grief. It is not just men and women in full-time ministry who can fail, though. Any of us can fall into sin.

Though Job had gone through the depths of trial, he knew in his heart that he had maintained his integrity. Following moments of despair and doubt, he always returned to his confidence in the Lord and His ways. He knew he had never departed from the commandments of God by turning aside to worldly actions or attitudes. He had managed to stay free of bitterness against God even in the darkest times. Above all else, even food, he treasured the words of God's mouth.

Integrity is missing in much of the world today-and not just in the business and political world. We as believers must renew our determination to stay true to our God no matter what we face.

CONCLUSION

We do not always understand why suffering is part of the Christian's life, but we do know that it has a way of refining our character and building our faith in our Lord. When all our resources are gone, all we have is our Lord with us. It is then that our trust in Him can really grow.

Job sought the Lord in his trials. We should follow his example so that we can draw closer to God during our difficult times.

PRAYER

Father, increase our faith! Help us endure even when we do not understand. Help us remember your fairness, even when things seem unfair. When we are tempted to complain about life, remind us of the unfairness of Jesus' sufferings. May we trust you more. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Life's trials must not compromise our integrity in seeking and acknowledging God.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Our lesson next week deals with the believer's testimony in the world. We understand the importance of this by looking at Job's life again. Study background Scripture: Job 27:1-6; 31.

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