

Explore the Bible: Justice Sought

June 15, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for July 4 focuses on Job 36:8-23.*

Over years of ministry, I have heard many stories of individuals who were suffering from various addictions and lifestyle choices that had brought them to ruin. Even in times of great distress, people talk about knowing God was watching over them, protecting them and calling them out of the wreck and ruin. God's promise to never leave or forsake us is kept even when we are going through struggles and trials.

Most will remember the famous poem, [*Footprints in the Sand*](#). The author speaks of a dream in which he was walking along the beach with God. There are two sets of footprints. The steps on the beach become an allegory of the person's life. When the poet noticed only one set of steps, he asked where God was during those times, which were filled with pain and sorrow. The response from the Lord: "During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

We all think we know what we want in life; we think things should always be fair and just. Fairness involves getting what we deserve or at least think we deserve. We associate these feelings with our view of God, insisting that God should be fair.

But our standards are not God's standards. We base what is fair and what we deserve off our capacity of understanding. Nevertheless, as Isaiah 55:8-9 remind us, God's view is different. God's thoughts are not the same as ours, nor is his understanding limited like ours.

Pointing to the real reason

Elihu comes on the scene a couple of chapters earlier as a brash young man with a message he must tell. Waiting his turn for the elder friends of Job to finish their conversation with Job in his misery, Elihu seeks a different approach. Elihu is the only character in the book who will point to the real reason for Job's affliction: God is allowing Job's piety to be tested. (Carol A. Newsom, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. III*, p. 230)

Elihu will try to correct the views about God that which have dominated the conversation up to this point. He will speak of God's superiority above all, justice, God's redemptive concern for those who have fallen into sin. In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revised Edition, Vol. IV*, p.874, Elmer B. Smick writes: "It is time for Job to see the hand of God in his suffering. God uses affliction to amplify his voice and thus obtain the attention of people."

The individuals seeking pastoral care that I mentioned earlier would often say that it took "hitting rock bottom for them to look up." Often it is in our greatest distress that we find we have no choice to seek the Lord with all that we are. Elihu wants to point Job to this truth.

There is nothing Job can do to shake off God's discipline. Rather, Job should continue to seek God and live—not "curse God and die," as Job's wife advised in Job 2:9. Elihu will give examples of people putting their faith in wealth to soften the blows of life (v. 19) or just continuing to do what is evil if God is already punishing (v.21). He also will advise Job to "listen to correction" (v. 10) and take care that "no one entices you" to "turn aside" from what the Lord will do for the promise of v. 15 will come true, "But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction."

Paul will speak about those going through suffering, commanding Christ followers to "weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15) How might Job's

response been different if his friends had truly mourned with Job for the duration of his suffering? Job's friends seem to be seeking justice, but only for themselves—wanting to justify that Job indeed has done something that deserves the “justice” he is receiving from God.

It is finally in the words Elihu we start to understand that the plans of God are not the plans of humans. That God is full of grace even in the midst of suffering, for he enters into suffering with us to sustain us and carry us. Without the Lord constantly being with Job, he would not have been able to withstand the great trials. Therefore, we can praise and thank God in the midst of the storms of life for we know that he is always with us—often carrying us through when we cannot walk on our own.

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