JOB'S RESPONSE TO ELIPHAZ

Job 6&7

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About five years ago I had a stage where I would be listening to some beautiful music in the car, and I would just break out into sobbing. You may be wondering what was wrong with me? So did I, for a little while, till I realized I was acting perfectly normally, normal that is for a person whose father had died a few weeks before. I was going through the typical reactions of grief. There are now well known stages we go through when we grieve a loss, like the death of a loved one, or migrating to another country and giving up all your friends, or being robbed of something precious. The processes of normal grief work can involve stages of numbness and shock followed by questioning, depression, anger and eventually resolution. When we look at Job we can sense those same sorts of things. Job's loss, his grief was huge. He had lost all his possessions, all his children, his own health, even the sense of God's loving presence. In chapter 2 we saw Job numbed in silence for seven days, in shock and unbelief. That gave way to his outburst, his time of deep questioning, a search for meaning in his pain. Now, in chapters 6&7 we see that Job is getting angry. In these two chapters Job responds to Eliphaz, whose speech we looked at last week. What Eliphaz said to Job came down to "You reap what you sow". You are suffering, so you must have sinned. Repent and all will be fine again. Let's see how Job replies. READ JOB 6:1-7.

Job is not impressed with his mate. He says in effect: of course my words were impetuous. What would you expect when some one has suffered as much as I have? Job gives the imagery of a set of scales to demonstrate the magnitude of his suffering. On one side is his misery, and on the other, to counter balance it is sand- how much? "*The sand of the seas*"! Jobs says in effect: You think I act upset. Of course I am. God has shot at me with all his arrows. He is the master archer and has let fly a rain of arrows, whose

poison tips are tearing the life out of me. I am terrified. I'm like a walled city, surrounded by an enormous army ready to annihilate us. I feel like I am target practice for God. The God I love and worship, has reduced me to a thing, an object to be shot at. My God has done that to me. You think I carry on? Well of course I am. Does a donkey or an ox bellow if they have their food? Of course not! I'm not bellowing for no reason. Wouldn't you recoil at putrid food, wouldn't you gag at repulsive bland yuk? Well I am repulsed at my suffering, I bristle at what has happened to me! What Job is doing is to justify his initial outburst, his curse of the day he was born, his death wish. He ignores what Eliphaz has said as so unhelpful as not warranting a response. Job ignores him and goes back to what he had said in his first lament, namely: God please strike me dead! READ JOB 6:8-13

Job says his "*hope*", his "*request*" is that God would "*crush*" him and finish him off. His suffering is so bad that he wants it to end as soon as possible. And given his condition the only hope is in death. Now, understand that Job is acting from faith here. He wants to die but he does not contemplate suicide. He knows life is God's to give or take. And for God it would be so easy, like a woman snipping the thread as she finishes sowing a garment. Eliphaz may accuse him of wrong, but Job consoles himself that he has not "*denied the words of the Holy One*". And he does not want to. So God take me before my anguish, my anger, goes over the top and I blaspheme you! Take me God as your faithful servant. Job feels that if God takes him it would be a witness to the others that God has heard him and answered his prayer. Job will not repent. He has not denied God in the past, and he doesn't now. He is in fact turning to God. He is grappling with God, even in his frustration and anger. He is demanding God intervene, that God show himself and be involved with him. Here is the first sign of the movement in Job's thinking that will eventually lead him out of despair. But at the moment he sees no point in going on. He has no strength, no prospects, no power to help himself. Is he made of bronze or stone so he can just keep on going? Of course not! Lord, please, I am your faithful servant. Take me now and show me your love. Having expressed his deep longing to God Job turns

again to his friends and expresses his frustration and anger with them. READ JOB 6:14-23

Job has calmed down a bit now, what he says is a bit more reasoned. But his anger and frustration with his friends are clear. He feels they have really let him down and he tells them straight. A friend is someone who sticks by you, no matter what. Even if it seems he has given up on God, even if he should curse and lament and carry on like Job. That's precisely when we need the devotion of friends the most. In despair we say strong things, we can rant and rave and even blow up at God. But that doesn't mean we have given up on God. That's the time we need to be carried along by friends. But says Job of his three friends they are like the creeks and rivers in the outback-totally unreliable for water. One minute there's a flash flood, water everywhere, then there's nothing. Precisely in the heat, when you need the water most there's nothing there. That's what you guys are like says Job. You're all over me when all is good, but now that I'm really suffering, you back off. When I need you the most you're afraid to come near me. Job implies that they fear that what God has done to him and God will do to them. Stay away from the sinner. Job says you treat me as if I'm this bloke who is after your money. I have noticed how when someone is seriously ill that friends find it so difficult to visit them. Its been said to me that people have avoided their ill friend because they see their own mortality, we see what could just as easily happen to us, so we cope by avoiding and denying. Just like we avoid the person who always wants to borrow money from us, as Job puts it. Something else we should realize here is that in the grief process when the shock passes and anger sets in, there can also be resentment for what's happened, and those feelings of resentment, the anger, can be vented at those who are nearest, particularly from those we expect the most love and loyalty. Often that anger is unfair, as many of us have felt it. But there are times, like here with Job when the anger is valid. We fail a friend in their hour of need. But even though Job expresses his frustration and anger at his friends, he still needs their support, their input. READ JOB 6:24-30

We see a dramatic change of mood here, as depressed people are want to do. Job is asking for sympathetic guidance. He is willing to be taught, he says, but please be wise, offer gentle instruction and do not be like fierce lawyers trying to argue his guilt, getting him to confess his big sin. If they are gentle Job says he will be silent, and attentive and they can help him get over his feeling of alienation from God. The friends might find this change in attitude strange given that Eliphaz has already given what he thought were wise words. But Job is pointing out that actually what Eliphaz said was hurtful, that Job was not really listened to, his words seen as a load of wind. He is saying listen to me guys. Really hear what I'm saying, because then you'll really understand what's going on for me and you can give proper advice. At the moment I feel you are like lawyers using the judicial system to your own advantage and squeezing everything you can out of me (27). Don't be so condescending, but come to my level and understand me. At least, look me in the eye. Don't turn your face away, because you reject what I say, because you can't stand the sight of how I look with this shocking illness. When you do that you reject what I say and you reject me. Sit with me, look at me, look me in the eye and you will see that I am not lying. I am not lying when I say I have done nothing wrong. That is my whole struggle. I love the Lord, I have been faithful. Yes, of course I am a sinner, but I haven't done anything I know that I deserve to have my life so totally ripped to shreds. Perhaps the three friends are not looking at him or appreciating what Job is saying. Because in the rest of Job's response here he ignores his friends and speaks to God, he laments, he complains and aims his anger at God. READ JOB 7:1-10

Job complains to God that all human beings have it hard. For all the hard work, the reward is a small wage if you are free or a brief chance to relax if you are a slave. But Job complains that his situation is even harder. He doesn't even get the meager reward others do. He has months of futility. He can't even relax at night because he tosses and turns, unable to sleep, wishing it was morning. In the morning he discovers worms have bred in his

sores. During the long nights memories of his past make him sadly realize how quickly his days are passing. The speed of life is like the rapid movement of a weaver's shuttle. Soon the cloth is finished and the cord is cut; life is soon over. The tired labourer can hope for something sweet at the end of his long day, but Job has no hope for any pleasant moments. That is so tragic, isn't it? Desire for life is a basic human drive that finds its reward in the pleasant moments, the wonderful meal with the family, the sunset at the end of the day, the relaxing time and laughter with friends. All Job wants is a few moments of the joys of normal life before he dies. Job in verses 7-10, in a sense has a backhanded plea. He reminds God that life is short, but a breath. He just wants God in his grace to give him a little pleasure again. Job basis his plea on the fact that God will lose out if Job, his servant dies. (8)"…*you will look for me, but I will be no more*." He will have died as quickly and quietly as a cloud drifts across the sky and vanishes. It disappears without a trace, never to return. That, says Job, is what human life is like, transient, insubstantial. Job is reminding God that his situation is extremely urgent. Stop hiding God, come out and show yourself, because my life is now utterly worthless and will soon pass with no lasting meaning. Job, realizing what he has just said, vents his anger at God.
READ JOB 7:11-21

Job is not going to keep a meek silence. He is angry and he speaks his mind, without restraint. What he is suffering goes to the depths of his being and the only way to release his feelings is via his mouth. No, Job will not be quiet! He has a go at God. Sarcastically he asks God why God has put a guard on him, as if were the sea, or some sea monster, some cosmic foe that God is afraid of. Is that why you treat me so harshly? Job wishes he could lie down on his bed and get some peace, but in the middle of the night he is woken, sweating, delirious, frightened by dreams sent by God. Other times he is woken by such severe coughing fits he feels he is about to choke to death. Frankly, he says to God I wish I did choke. I prefer "*strangling and death rather than this body of mine*". Job feels that life is meaningless, so unfulfilling, that it's punishment enough without the

underserved suffering he goes through. "*Let me alone*" he says to God, stop hounding me and let me have a few good days before I die. In verse 17 Job is so frustrated at God's hostility that he makes a parody/perversion of the words of the psalmist "*What is man that you are mindful of him*". The psalmist marvels that a great God pays attention to a human being, and keeps his loving eye on him, and surrounds him with his care. But Job turns this concept inside out and feels God's vigilance as unrelenting oppression. He feels God is watching for every little mistake, punishing his tiniest flaw. Job wants God to look away, give him space. He says God is so intense in his gaze Job can't even swallow his spittle in peace. Job ponders what effect any sin he might have done could have on God. After all God is so powerful and man so puny what could so affect God that he feels compelled to devastate that person. "*If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O Watcher of man*?" *Watcher of man* refers to God's divine oversight and protection, but Job uses the title with scathing sarcasm, because God's constant surveillance causes him so much agony. Job just wants to know why God cannot pardon his offences and forgive. Then he can be released from his burden and die peacefully.

I think the strength of Job's anger can leave us feeling rather uncomfortable. Aren't we supposed to grieve quietly, trusting in God? We need to be careful to recognize that anger is part of the grieving process for those who have suffered terribly. Don't be surprised at it. Perhaps we have felt the bad end of an angry outburst as we have tried to comfort some one grieving. The emotion of anger is, itself, not wrong. It is an expression that something is not right, either because we see a grave injustice, or because a remark has kicked in a guilt feeling. The bible describes God as being angry. And Jesus, when he cleared out the temple was really angry, nostrils flaring and all. But there is a fine line between anger that is brutal and destructive and anger that can be used creatively. Jesus' anger was for the honour of his father and the place of the temple for prayer and worship. Job's anger is energizing and helpful. The opposite of love is not anger but hatred or indifference. Job is not indifferent to God. Job has not put away his faith,

or come to hate God. Job knows that God is all he has, God is his life, what God gives he has. The anger is an expression of faith, as he grapples with God, as he openly expresses his pain, his fear, his suffering, his confusion. We will see in the end that his anger energizes Job, it makes him struggle and hang on to God, and in the end God vindicates him.

Job at the end asks God to pardon him. The Hebrew word 'nasa' means "to bear'. That is, the burden of guilt by an offender is carried by another. Job in desperation, in anger, begs for God to pardon. He did not know that God would answer that prayer by himself being the burden bearer. In Jesus, God's son, we have one who bears our burdens, who paid for the guilt that is ours. Job's suffering is enormous, like the sands of the seas he says. But even his suffering pails into insignificance in comparison to what Jesus bore in hell. Jesus, too, experience God's dark side, being utterly rejected. But through it has come grace, so all who believe might be pardoned. Be a friend to those who suffer. Look them in the eye and hear their story. And get angry, real angry, that there is suffering in the world, that there is so much wrong because of sin. Get angry and channel it, be energized to do something. Cry out to God for mercy. Stand up for justice. Tell the neighbour about Jesus. Christ is the only hope we have. With him there is forgiveness and life. Without him, life is indeed a fleeting, meaningless nothing.