

May 28, 2006  
 Learning To Speak the Truth (In Love)  
 Proverbs 12:18 / Matthew 7:24-29 / Job 8:1-19

I was tempted to entitle this sermon: "When Good Friends Are Just Plain MEAN!" Because it's hard to believe that any person (especially a friend!) would ever say to another suffering and grieving friend, mourning the loss of his 7 sons and 3 daughters: "They got what they deserved."

And that IS what Bildad essentially says to Job, as we see in verse 4: (quote) "When your children sinned against Him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin." Or in contemporary terms, "They got what they deserved," or "They got what was coming to them." And we scratch our heads and ask: How could anyone be so callous and insensitive? It's just so mean-spirited.

Yet in spite of that, it would be unfair to write off everything Bildad says, simply because he said it in a callous and unloving fashion. Because whether we like it or not, there IS a sense in which what he said has an element of truth to it, even if the way in which he said it is callous, and the context in which he said it was totally inappropriate.

Job even admits that his words contain an element of truth in his response to Bildad in the very next chapter, where he says: "Indeed I know that this is true." (9:1)

So why does Bildad say it? Because by now, he's getting just plain FRUSTRATED with Job. Better yet, he's getting downright ANGRY with Job! WHY? Because as with most of us, our empathy or compassion often comes with a time limit attached!

*Most of us are willing to give others a "grace period" to work through their issues, and regain their bearings, and get their emotional and spiritual act back together after they have suffered some trauma or loss. But usually that "grace period" comes with an unspoken yet predetermined time limit—a few weeks—maybe even a few months (depending on how severe or traumatic their was experience was). And suffering people know when that grace period has ended, because eyes, and ears, and hearts that once listened and responded so empathetically, begin to respond with frustration, and aggravation, and even anger after months have passed and we haven't gotten over it yet.*

That's obviously the case with Bildad. His initial empathy has turned to frustration, and aggravation and comes out with a distinctively angry tone to it, as we see in verses 2-3, where he

says to Job: "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind." Or in modern day terms: "You're full of nothing but not air."

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And in the next verse we see it wasn't just frustration over the fact that it's been a couple months and Job hasn't gotten over it yet! It was also the fact that Job, by clinging to his integrity, denying any specific wrongdoing, and implying that what's happening to him is unfair, is essentially saying in a roundabout way that GOD is unjust! And Bildad will not put up with it!

In other words, Bildad feels that Job has not merely been voicing his pain and anguish, but has stepped over the line into BLASPHEMY! He has gone too far in Bildad's estimation and therefore needs to be rebuked, and God's honor and integrity defended. Therefore, he says to Job in v. 3:

***"Does the Almighty pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?"***

In other words, who are you Job—a mere human being—to even suggest such a thing?! That's what ticks Bildad off!

He hears Job (who though blameless was still a sinner just the same), voicing heresy! Having the audacity to question, or worse yet, slight the honor of God by suggesting that what's happening to him is not FAIR, and therefore, by way of implication, suggesting that God Himself was UNJUST to permit it.

Thus he can hold his tongue no longer, because in his mind Job has blasphemed, and must be rebuked for such arrogance, since it's NOT possible for God to be unjust! So like the Muslims roused to defend Mohammed's honor in light of the Danish cartoons a few months ago, Bildad also reasons, it's up to him to defend God's honor and integrity!

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And how does he defend God's honor? By hitting Job where it hurts the most—by telling him that what happened to his children was **NOT UNFAIR** or **UNJUST** in any way, but merely God giving them over to the due penalty for their sin.

Yet callous as it is to say such a thing to a grieving father who has just buried his 10 children, there is an element of truth to what Bildad says, as Job admits in 9:1.

And that's what I'd like to speak to you about today—***the lost concept (in both our culture and the church at large) of the absolute holiness, and the infinite majesty of God, and what all that says regarding the due penalty for sin in light of who He is.***

It simply confirms the truth of what one saint wisely pointed out when he said:

*"We can often be the most wrong, when we are the most right."*

Or as Maurice Boyd put it:

*"Sometimes, sadly, the truth of our faith has been denied by the manner in which we have declared it... We have preached love lovelessly. We have declared the Gospel of grace gracelessly. We have spoken of the Divine mercy mercilessly, and have ourselves become a reason for unbelief."*

The Apostle Paul would agree. Which is why I believe he admonished us, when speaking as one believer to another (or even as a believer to an unbeliever) not merely to "Speak the truth," which can often be hard and offensive (as with Bildad's words), but to "Speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) which makes people more able to hear and consider them instead of reacting against them.

Often, it's NOT so much WHAT we say, as it is HOW we say what we say that makes people able to hear it. And that includes knowing WHEN to say it and HOW to apply it or WHO to apply it to.

Yet, regardless of the fact that it was totally inappropriate to even bring Job's children into the argument at this point in the book, it does not negate the fact that there is much truth in what Bildad says. Truth we must consider, lest we also begin to suspect God of being unjust, and begin to question His integrity as well.

And that's what I want us to consider today:

The sense in which his statement is true / why it is true and how it can serve not only as a rebuke to Job, but also as a corrective to some of the ideas we have inadvertently adopted from the world rather than Scripture.

So FIRST, let's consider the sense in which Bildad's statement is TRUE. He says of Job's children, "When they sinned against Him, He gave them over to the penalty of their sin." And in the ultimate sense, he's right. Had they been absolutely sinless it never would have happened—it couldn't have happened! Because if they had been absolutely sinless, God would have had no basis for even giving Satan permission to bring about their demise. God would indeed have been unjust for allowing Satan to take their lives, if they had been sinless.

But Bildad didn't even need to bring Job's children into the picture. Because he could have said the same for Job, or anyone for that matter. He could have said the same for you or me!

Because whenever any person dies, no matter how or when that death comes about, it is somehow, in some way, ultimately, God giving them over to the due penalty for their sins.

“The wages of sin,” says Paul, “is DEATH” (Rom. 6:23)—a “death” that is both spiritual and physical in nature. Every sin, therefore, according to Scripture, carries with it the death penalty! And only when one realizes that does they realize how absolutely blessed they are just to be alive!

Only then do they realize just how merciful and gracious God really is with us (and with all the innumerable masses of humanity), because we sin so incessantly, and often so grievously, and yet God in His great mercy does not give us over to the due penalty for our sin, even though He would be absolutely just, and totally right in doing so.

**LISTEN**: If the wages of sin is death, and you are here today (still alive and breathing) you have been graced beyond measure! Day in and day out for years! Whether you are a believer or an unbeliever—if you are not dead, you have graciously been kept from receiving the due penalty for your sins—the wages you have earned for every sin you have committed: WHICH IS DEATH.

You see, my friends, you HAVE been graced beyond measure! Because God, who is holier than to even look upon sin / God who created us that we might live to glorify Him / God who by virtue of making us has the right to demand our obedience, and sub-mission to His Lordship / God who has Sovereign Creator rights over us and could have given us over to the due penalty of our sin the first time we ever sinned (or any of the other billions of times we’ve sinned since then), has been UNSPEAKABLY MERCIFUL to us in even allowing us to live!

How ANYONE can even suggest that God is ANYTHING but merciful and gracious and patient beyond all measure, is beyond me! To believe otherwise could only be due to an ignorance of God; or an ignorance of sin and how offensive it is to the holiness of God; or an ignorance of the penalty God has decreed for every single sin.

Even if people didn’t do anything outwardly wrong, the inward antipathy they have toward His Lordship, or their failure to love Him with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is itself sin enough to make us worthy of death.

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Which brings us to our **SECOND** point: WHY Bildad’s statement is true. You see, though Job had not committed any particular, heinous “sin” (to make God in some tit-for-tat way, afflict him with all his troubles as his friends wrongly suggest), Bildad is right in this sense:

Job did NOT have any right to accuse God of being unjust. For even though he was blameless, he was still a sinner, and as a sinner God was justified in allowing Satan to afflict him as he did. In fact, as a sinner, God would have been perfectly justified in allowing Satan to buffet him even worse—if that can be imagined.

All God does in the case of Job is simply lift the hedge of His gracious protection, and allow Job to experience, in a small way, only a small part of the due penalty for his sins.

**And hear me well, lest you think I'm contradicting what I've been saying from the beginning of this series on Job!** I repeat again that what happened to Job was NOT the result of any "particular" sin! But on the other hand, since ANY sin—(regardless of how small it may seem to us)—when it's committed against an infinitely holy and majestic God, is deserving of infinite and endless punishment.

In that sense, Job's problem is NOT that he thinks he doesn't deserve what's happening to him. It's that he doesn't think he's any MORE deserving than any other sinner (including his 3 friends)!

He's ***NOT*** questioning God's justice (in the sense of thinking that he as a sinner doesn't deserve what's happening to him). But rather, he's questioning why it's ONLY HAPPENING TO HIM, when everyone else is just as sinful (or even more sinful than he is), and thus equally deserving of such an affliction!

You see, the one thing I can NEVER do, is suggest is that I'm not deserving of whatever suffering comes my way. In light of all my innumerable sins, I cannot do it! I CAN suggest I'm no more deserving of it than any other sinner, but I CAN'T suggest I don't deserve it. I do, regardless of what it is that comes my way.

And this is why: Because even the most minute sin, when committed against an infinitely majestic and holy God, is thereby worthy of infinite and endless punishment.

*"A crime," says Jonathan Edwards, "is proportionately more or less heinous as a person is under greater or less obligation to honor the other person. The fault of disobeying another, is greater or less, as one is under greater or less obligation to obey him. And therefore, if there be any being that we are under infinite obligation to love, and honour,*

*and obey, the contrary towards him makes us infinitely faulty... God is a being infinitely lovely. He has infinite excellency and beauty. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty and glory, and therefore He is infinitely worthy of honour—infininitely exalted above the greatest potentates on earth, or the highest angels in heaven....So that sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, is a crime infinitely heinous, and thus deserving of infinite punishment."*

In fact, THAT is the reason why, "God will punish those who do not know Him, and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, with a punishment of EVERLASTING destruction" (II Thess. 1:8-9). Because sin against an everlasting and eternal God is worthy of everlasting and eternal punishment!

Not annihilation on the Day of Judgment, as some wrongly teach. And not simply the termination of life at the point of death, as others wrongly teach. But eternal punishment. Everlasting punishment. Infinite punishment. Because every sin is an act of cosmic treason committed against an everlasting and infinitely holy God!

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And **LISTEN**: No one knew that better than JESUS, who having been at the Father's side, and having seen His infinite grandeur, and holiness, and glory firsthand, knew of our infinite obligation to obey and honor and love such an infinitely worthy God—which is precisely why Jesus spoke of eternal and ever-lasting punishment in hell more than anyone else in the whole Bible!

That's also why Jesus death for sin had to be so excruciatingly painful—because he was paying the penalty for sins committed against such an infinitely holy God. Sins against me would be worthy of little more than a slap on the wrist because I'm finite and sinful myself, but any sin against a sinless and infinite God is worthy of infinite punishment.

In fact the only way to hold to those other positions (termination, or annihilation) is to so trivialize sin, or so trivialize God, that we make a sin against Him to something of little or no consequence—a concept that is not only rampant in society, but has even permeated our thinking in many sectors of the church. To Bildad's credit, it's something we could never say of him.

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Which brings us to our **LAST** point. How it is that Bildad's words can serve as a corrective to us as well, for inadvertently adopting the views of the culture around us, rather than holding to the teachings of Scripture.

You see, the Suffering of Job (or the “Problem of Evil” as it’s now called) has really only become a problem for people in the church within the last 150 years or so.

You know why? Because only in the last 150 years or so, has the overall cultural view of God, and the overall cultural attitude toward sin (both inside and outside the church) become so pitifully trivial, that we now feel totally justified (as C.S. Lewis phrased it): “To put God in the Dock” (the “dock” being the British courtroom equivalent of the American “witness stand”). Contemporary man, now feels totally just putting God on trial for being unjust in allowing the things he does.

In the previous ages, when the Bible had more sway over people’s thinking, anything that came man’s way was seen as his “just deserts”— the wages of his sin, so to speak. He deserved it. It was his due (actually it was LESS than his due, regardless of how severe it was).

Being a willful sinner, man was worthy and deserving of infinite punishment for his innumerable offenses against a God who was worthy of infinite honor, absolute obedience, unquestioned submission, and wholehearted, uninterrupted love, worship and adoration.

**But not any more!** We now tend to believe we deserve to be spared from all suffering. It’s our right! God owes it to us! I even see this attitude in reference to evangelism. Contemporary people have a hard time thinking forgiveness is a gift reserved for those who believe in Jesus, because they FEEL everyone deserves it—at least anyone who merely tries to live a fairly decent or “good” life!

After all, they say, “people are basically good.” They try hard, but being human they sometimes mess up, and therefore it’s only right that God would forgive their mistakes. Right? Isn’t sin just a “part of being human”?

“After all (as the saying goes) no one’s perfect. That’s why we put erasers on pencils!” God understands our fallenness! As Voltaire once mockingly taunted, “God will forgive, that’s His job.” And though others are not nearly so crass in verbalizing it, I do find it astonishing how many people (even in the church) tend to feel that way. That God should, or will, eventually save everyone!

The argument goes something like this:

*“Man is basically good at heart, and yes he sometimes messes up, but if God was really merciful, He would understand and forgive anyway. And since you say He doesn’t, and will actually judge people and send them to hell for their sins, that means He is mean and unworthy of our attention, trust or adoration.”*

Yet what is the truth? What does the Bible teach? It teaches that:

***“Man, being sinful (and willfully disobedient towards God both by nature and by choice), is deserving of eternal punishment in hell ten times over for all his offenses against such an awesome God. Yet the rightfully offended God, being unspeakably loving, and merciful beyond imagination, has graciously chosen to offer salvation to all, and actually reach down in kindness to save many.”***

It is only the trivialization of GOD, and with it the trivialization of SIN, that causes us, and so many others, to think we can “Put God in the dock” or “On the witness stand”, so that we as human jurors can bring our charges of injustice against Him, and demand that He answer for not intervening to stop such things from happening.

You see, although Bildad’s comment is totally inappropriate in the context, Job knows that in the ultimate sense it is true. And we also need to see that it is, lest we risk being “closet heretics,” who can (like the world) convince ourselves, that because people are basically good, the suffering that comes their way is therefore undeserved and unjust—meaning that God Himself is unjust and therefore owes us an apology.

Or worse yet, that God should be PUNISHED for ordaining, or allowing, the things He does. Silly as I HOPE it sounds, to suggest that GOD IS UNJUST is to suggest that He should be PUNISHED.

Which brings me to reiterate my initial point: We must hold to, and at the appropriate time, and in the appropriate way declare the truth—even if it’s unpopular truth.

In fact, in my office I have a saying by Martin Luther glued to the lectern upon which I go over my sermons (actually I have 5 or 6 from him and others)! (Sayings I look at before entering the pulpit each Sunday morning.) Luther’s goes like this:

***“If I profess with the loudest voice, and clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the Devil are at the moment attacking, I am not professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is tested, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”***

He’s right! But that is NOT to say I can be insensitive in the way I declare it, or how I apply it, or the context in which I use it, or the attitude with which I share it.

As one of my seminary professors once said:

“If you preach the torments of hell (and occasionally you must because it’s there)  
you better do it with tears in your eyes.”

(He mentioned hearing a sermon on hell where the preacher was actually smiling through the whole sermon, and even seemed gleeful at points, while talking about the damnation sinners—something we should never do.)

Boyd is right:

“Sometimes, sadly, the truth of our faith has been denied by the manner in which we have declared it...”

**Don’t let it happen.** The biblical admonition is not merely “Speak the truth.” It is “Speak the truth in love.” To speak the truth in such a way that people sense our love for them as we share it with them—even if it’s hard, hard truth that we’re sharing—lest we violate one biblical admonition, while fulfilling another!