

Job's Comforters - Lessons -5

Job 4 to 27

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We're in the book of Job and this evening I want us to do something rather adventuresome and that is to try to look at these features of Job's three friends as a whole and draw some lessons from them so we'd be looking at chapters 4 to 27 - not verse by verse.

The book is about faith facing facts - all the facts. And that means the fact that God may allow in his permissive will the godly to suffer. And here in the story we have a godly man battered by events and broken by sickness, bruised by the despair of his wife, bereft of comfort and bewildered by God's silence. The sudden shock of adversity is followed by the long hours of loneliness and reflection and anxiety. And that does happen to godly people - it happened to Job. So what are we to make of it? and what do people who suffer like this need of their friends? How may we help each other when our friends are going through experiences such as this?

Well as I said, chapters 4 to 27 contain the speeches of Job's three friends, we'll call them friends. Two of them speak three times and one of them speaks twice and after each of their speeches Job replies. All of them, Job included, are struggling with the problem and looking for answers to it. The question is why does God allow godly people to suffer? and the three friends are well meaning, a great deal of what they say is true, what they say to us is presented in the most sublime and beautiful language and the style of their speeches is very impressive. They're concerned about God's greatness, God's justice, God's wisdom, God's knowledge and as I say much of what they tell us is true. And yet instead of helping Job they wounded him, they stung him, they even on occasions exasperated him.

Well there are lessons here therefore for us of a negative kind. We are told here how not to behave when some of our friends may be going through very serious and awful trouble. Perhaps if we just looked at each of these individuals one at a time we could then draw together some lessons from what they were saying both of a negative and of a positive kind.

Don't be mystical when friends suffer

The first is Eliphaz and we read earlier on his first speech in Job chapter 4, he actually went on in chapter 5 to continue his speech and then in chapter 15 he spoke again and again in chapter 22. We can call this man the mystic. You've noticed that he draws attention to the way in which the knowledge that he was going to communicate to Job he believed it come to him. He spoke in verses 13 in chapter 4 and following about a word secretly being brought to him and his ear receiving a whisper "In disquieting

thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake.” and then as he’s in bed and having these visions in the night a spirit passes before his face and his body stood up “spirit stood still, I could not discern it’s appearance. A form was before my eyes there was silence then I heard a voice saying:” then the voice. So he’s claiming here to have received the knowledge that he was going to communicate from a spiritual experience a spirit had communicated to him the things that he was going to communicate to Job. He’s the mystic. It’s clear from chapter 15 and verse 10 I think that he was an older man he refers to that “both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, Much older than your father.” So he was an older man. At first he

speaks quietly and sensitively. He emphasizes things that are undoubtedly true. He speaks for example in chapter 22 and in verse 12 about the transcendence of God “is not God in the height of heaven? and see the highest stars, how lofty they are!” God is above and beyond, he is transcendent which is perfectly true. “is it any pleasure to the Almighty” he says in verse 3 of chapter 22 “that you are righteous? Is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?” He is above us all, He’s transcendent in His greatness and majesty and of course He is. And similarly, the universe is a moral universe. What he says in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 4 are true “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.” There is a moral universe before us and similarly divine chastisement is a reality and we know that to be true from other parts of scripture.

In verses 21 to 23 he speaks about divine chastisement “acquaint yourself with God and be at peace. Thereby good will come to you. Receive, please, instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty you will be built up. You will remove iniquity far from your tents”. And “the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver.” These are truths beyond dispute and one of the ways God chastens His children is to allow them to suffer and we do need to repent of our sins and none of us is perfect so we cannot say that we are beyond divine chastisement. All of that is true and Eliphaz the mystic draws attention to those truths but...but...he applies the truths wrongly. His application is wrong. Job’s sufferings he is arguing must be due to his serious and gross sinfulness. “whoever perished being innocent” “where were the upright ever cut off”.

We have already been told that Job was an upright man, but Eliphaz is saying you are not an upright man. The proof that you are not an upright man is that you are suffering, so your sufferings are due to your sinfulness. So God is punishing you Job for your sin, that’s the reason for your suffering, that’s the reason for your suffering, that’s the explanation of your difficulty. “Is not your wickedness great” he asks Job in chapter 22 “and your iniquity without end?” But we’ve been already told that Job is an upright and a blameless man. So according to Eliphaz Job is reaping what he has sown and he is terrible and a gross sinner and he must repent of his sin. That is why he is suffering and therefore the way to restitution is repentance, remorse and confession. He’s unable to see that what is true in some instances namely that the punishment fits the crime is not true in Job’s case. He can’t see that. He can’t bring that truth into his theological framework. For him godly people must prosper. The secret to prosperity is godliness and because Job is not prospering he cannot be godly.

That's his basic premise. Later on he becomes very critical and he says things particularly in chapter 15 that are quite unkind "Should a wise man answer with empty knowledge, and fill himself with the east wind? Should he reason with unprofitable talk" he's really demeaning and disparaging Job and he says things there that are quite unkind "Your iniquity teaches you, you choose the tongue of the crafty, your own mouth condemns you not I, your own lips testify against you."

He's being call us. He's being vindictive here towards Job and later on he even becomes childish "what do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not in us? Who do you think you are Job? Do you think you are in the right and we are in the wrong?" He is even full of himself in verse 17 of chapter 15 "I will tell you, hear me; What I have seen I will declare. I know the answers to your situation. Everybody listen to me" And there is very little compassion there in his voice. Well this is Eliphaz, He is the mystic. He has received the revelation from heaven. "the spirit has told me to say to you". He claims the authority of spiritual

experience. How often do we hear that today? The Lord has told me to tell you. I've received a vision, I've received a spirit from God, I've been told what your situation is. How often we've been told that in our modern evangelical world? The Lord has told me to tell you. I've received a word from the Lord. This is the Lord's word for you and for me. And people claim experience of the Holy Spirit in order to justify what they are saying. That is exactly what Eliphaz was doing and he was quite wrong. And Job knew he was wrong. The mystic claiming the authority of mystical experience and direct revelation from the spirit.

Don't be the intellectual historian when friends suffer

And then there is this second man Bil'dad. We are told about him in chapter 8 and 18 and 25. If Eliphaz was the mystic then Bil'dad is the intellectual. He's a scholar and he's a thinker and he's reflected on the meaning of life and he loves to read history. He says that in verse 8 in chapter 8 "Inquire, please, of the former age, and consider the things discovered by their fathers:" He's a historian and he loves to read history. So he claims the authority of the past for what he is going to say and he is theoretical man an intellectual man. Notice all the ifs in chapter 8 verses 4 to 6 "IF your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression. IF you would earnestly seek God and make your supplication to the Almighty, IF you were pure and upright surely now He would awake for you and prosper your rightful habitation". If, If, If.

He's the theoretician, he's the intellectual, he's the great thinker and for him God is just and God is righteous so that wickedness will be punished. It's as simple as that he says so in verse 11 to 19 of chapter 8. He's talking about the fact that all who perish, perish because of their iniquity. He puts it in beautiful language "Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds flourish without water? While it is yet green and not cut down, It withers before any other plant. So are the paths of all who forget God; and the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, Whose confidence shall be but off and whose trust is a spider's web. He leans on his house, but it does not stand. He holds it fast, but it does not endure. He grows green in the sun, and his branches spread out in his garden. His roots wrap around the rock heap, and look for a place in the

stones. If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, I have not seen you.” It’s his way of saying that God who is just and righteous must punish iniquity so that godliness would be reward he says that in verse 20 to 22 in chapter 8 “God will not cast away the blameless, He will not uphold the evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughing and your lips with rejoicing”. Only of course if you repent. Only if you acknowledge your great wickedness. “Those who hate you will be clothed with shame. And the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing.” But Job you’ve got to repent of your wickedness if you’re to experience any of that.

And in chapter 18 he actually becomes angry and resentful and accuses Job of great wickedness and in chapter 25 which is one of the most beautiful chapters in the whole book even though it is a short chapter, he indicates that he’s got the whole thing completely wrong. He utters great truths but he is quite wrong in his application. Listen to chapter 25 just six verses. “Dominion and fear belong to Him; He makes peace in His high places. Is there any number to His armies? Upon whom does His light not rise? How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman? If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight, How much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm? All true. But he is saying this to Job. To this man who is going through

torture and turmoil and bewilderment. All these great truths are true but the sermon is missing the mark. The application is wrong. Job is being thundered at. He is not being spoken to. Job is a case to be filed in the intellectual cabinet. There is no warmth. No sympathy here. Here is the theoretician, the intellectual, the historian drawing lessons from the past and the lessons are still the same. The punishment fits the crime, the crime, the punishment fits the crime. You have sinned Job, you’re being punished because of your sin, its as simply as that. And history proves it.

So we need to be careful about the weight and the authority that we attach to history. If we need to be careful about mystical experience demonstrating what we think is true we need to be careful too about history. Proving our own case because we can read history in our own way. Somebody said history is really historiography. That is to say history is all about the way in which people write it and the way people present it to us. And here is a man who is presenting history in his own way to prove his own case. That’s Bil’dad the intellectual.

Finally don't be the pragmatist when friends suffer

And then we move to the third man Zo’phar and he has two speeches in chapter 11 and again in chapter 20 and I suppose we can call him the pragmatist. He’s a practical down to earth man and a very dogmatic and harsh into the bargain. Allot of what he says likewise is perfectly true for instance in chapter 11 in verses 19 and 20 you cannot take exception to that. What he’s saying there is perfectly true. “You would also lie down, and no one would make you afraid, many would court your favour.” He’s talking there about the way in which Job would realize the blessing of true repentance and true contrition.

If only you would admit your sin, if only you’d put out your life before God and turn away from your iniquity, then, then “you could lift up you face without spot, you could be steadfast and not fear, you would forget your misery” and so on “You would

like down, and no one would make you afraid; may would court your favour, But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope - loss of life!.”

Now again, you see, in certain circumstances that’s true but it doesn’t apply to Job. It’s missing the mark again. He becomes angry with Job in verse 2 and verse 3 of chapter 11 “Should no the multitude of words your words be answered.? Should a man full of talk be vindicated? Should you empty talk may men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you? For you have said, “My doctrine is pure, And I am clean in your eyes” But oh, that God would speak and open His lips against you,” He wants God to putt Job right.

He’s angry with Job because Job was advocating his own innocence. And he claims to know verses 7 to 9 “can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven - what can you do? Deeper than She’ol - what can you know? The implication is I Do, I know, I’ve got the answers and I’m going to tell you what the answers are but you don’t Job. He speaks of Gods omniscience there. Let Job repent therefore and if he does blessing will follow. And in chapter 20 we have it so clearly presented to us there. The answer so far is concerned is this Job is an evil wicked man. He clearly hasn’t listened. This man so far he clearly hasn’t listened so far to what Job has been saying. It’s amazing to me that chapter 20 should follow chapter 19. Now that isn’t because I’m no good at maths. It’s simply because what Zo’phar says in

reply to chapter 19 is just plainly astonishing. You know the great climax of chapter 19 “I know that my redeemer liveth” those glorious words. Job been maintaining his integrity and his confidence in Christ though he had not yet come to know Him and see Him as we have. His great redeemer. That’s almost the pinnacle as it were of Jobs’ great cry of faith and confidence. Immediately its followed by Zo’phar in chapter 20. Telling him off. Rebuking him. Telling him he’s evil. What a response to the wonderful truths that Job has been expressing in the previous chapter. Well this is the pragmatist Zo’phar. Dogmatic, harsh and rather knowledgeable and supercilious into the bargain.

Here then are the three men. Eliphaz - the mystic, Bil’dad - the intellectual and historian and Zo’phar - the pragmatist and they’re all combining the same theme, they’re all bringing the same message. Now what do we make of that? I’m sure when you read the book of Job as you must have, you must have struggled as to well what are these men saying?. It sounds true what they are saying, it sounds correct, it sounds orthodox. They speak with such certainty. And yet at the same time we are perplexed because what they are saying wounds the man deeply and intensifies his sufferings.

NEGATIVE LESSONS

Beware of false claims to authority

Well I think there are these negative lessons we are to learn from, and the first is, we need to beware of false claims to authority. False claims to authority. One man claims the authority of a vision. I’ve received a vision, the spirit has told me what to say to you. The Lord has given me a word for you. An experience, a vision, a dream.

Well of course not all experiences are spiritual. No words come from God. Not all visions are from heaven. There are visions which we might call soulish dreams. They are experiences which are soulish, that they're not spiritual but soulish, that is to say they come from the psychic of a particular individual and from the psychosomatic unity. The body soul knowledge and experience of that individual. There are some people who are actually more mystical by temperament, more mystical by the way they're made. You have alot mysticism in certain parts of the world. You have such thing as Indian mysticism.

There are people who have a mystical way of living. But those vision, those mystical experiences are soulish. They're not from god at all. They're from the psychic, from the soul of the individual and we have to be careful that we don't claim for vision and experiences that are soulish the authority of the Holy Spirit. And we know of course the possibility of demonic deception. And of other spirits and the Holy Spirit giving people authority and telling people what to say. So we need to be discriminating and careful before we imagine it's the Holy Spirit speaking who is speaking to us.

The apostle Paul, I think gives us some guidelines there when he writes at the end of his second letter to the Corinthian church and you remember those wonderful and remarkable claims that he makes about himself in chapter 11 when he's advocating his own authority as an apostle against undermining and critical thoughts and comments and then he goes on to talk about visions and revelations of the Lord. And he says it is doubtless not profitable for me to boast I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord and then he speaks about the vision and revelation from the Lord he'd received 14 years before when he'd been

caught up into the third heaven into paradise. He hasn't spoken about it for 14 years to anybody. How much of a contrast that is to modern claims to spiritual experience. People can't, as it were, get off their seats before telling you about them. But here is a man who had and experience of God and he hasn't said anything to anybody. That's more characteristic of a genuine experience of God. There are other characteristics of it as well but that's one of them. He can't even speak about himself "I know a man in Christ". He doesn't claim any credit for this, "this was given to me, this was an experience that I didn't ask for, it was given to me, and it was given to me entirely by God's grace". So we need to be careful of false claims to authority and claims that people make, to be speaking in the name of the spirit, need to be carefully watched. Carefully analyzed. Is it the Holy Spirit?

Is it simply a soulish experience that people are talking about? or is it a demonic spirit? We need to be able to discern the difference. So the authority of visions isn't of itself of any great value. I remember the book "The Vision" written in the early 1960's by David Wilkinson in which he actually stated that certain things were going to happen. He claimed that he received this vision from God and he was speaking in a king of charismatic knowledge of God having communicated these truths to him, and in that book he told us things that were going to happen in the 1970's and the 1980's none of which has happened. But he claimed the authority of the Holy spirit and told the world about it and misguided and gullible Christians lapped it up. We need to be ware of false claims to authority and visions are one of them. Alot of visions, alot of experiences are soulish. I didn't go on the read the next verses this morning in

Ecclesiastes, if you were here this morning, we were quoting from the book of Ecclesiastes there, in a way in which the writer tells us to come into the presence of God with reverence and not to be rash with our mouths and to utter things hastily before God. And he adds in verse 3 in Ecclesiastes 5, a dream comes through much activity and a fool's voice is known by his many words. There are dreams that are simply the result of overwork and too much cheese in the night before we go to bed and we mustn't claim that they are from the Holy Spirit, it's ridiculous if we do.

Beware of false authority of reason

And then if there's the false authority of visions, there's also the false authority of reason. That old witch of "Lady Reason". That's the way Luther spoke of reason and he wasn't disparaging reason as such, he was simply saying that reason needs to know her place and scholarship while its of value cannot pontificate because very often theoretical knowledge is theoretical and its clinical and its unrelated to reality but the intellectual has a problem. The intellectuals' problem is intellectual pride and that was part of the difficulty that Bil'dad himself had to content with and we need to be careful about the authority of reason and people who claim the authority of reason.

You know the assured results of biblical criticism. I'm still old enough to remember reading books about biblical criticism in which you heard those kind of sentences. The assured results of biblical criticism. Biblical politics, they had decided for example that there was no such thing as one Book of Isaiah, there was three authors of Isaiah. They had decided that this verse in Isaiah was not Isaiah and that verse was Isaiah. I remember one of my lecturers in university going through the Book of Isaiah and telling us all Isaiah wrote that and he didn't write this and he wrote that and he didn't write that and he went through the Book of Isaiah with a pair of scissors and he told us exactly what Isaiah had said and what he hadn't said. And I remember in a lecture asking him how he knew. I shouldn't have asked the question - I got an ear bashing. I was really told what a fool and a nincompoop and a tyrant I was for even questioning the authority - the Pope had spoken, the oracle had spoken and all the students had to bow down in reverence at his feet.

Well now we need to be careful about the authority of reason. Reason is a great gift from God as indeed genuine experience can be a great gift from God and the last thing I want to do to say that there aren't genuine experiences of God, the Holy Spirit, there are. And reason is a beautiful and a precious and a valuable thing that God has given us but its a bad must to a good servant like fire it has to be kept in its place. It helps to answer the question how we think but it doesn't help us to answer the question what and why. We really need to keep reason within its place. The authority of reason that can be a problem sometimes and we need to be just careful about it lest is unrelated to the authority of scripture.

And then you know the third man - the pragmatist. The practical man, the man who learnt from experience, who had his feet on the ground as it where, the man who worked with his hands. I remember the old saying in Britain, did you have here in Australia? the answer lies in the soil. The agricultural answer, the man who knows a little bit about nature and about working with the soil. There used to be a programme in Britain and the answer of the pragmatist, the agriculturist was always the answer lies in the soil.

Well, again you see this can be dangerous. The practical commonsense approach maybe wrong. The know-it-all approach in which the practical man who's seen life and understood a bit more about life than the children who know very little about life. Well he could easily come the Doctor, you see, and everybody else well they're the patients, poor patients, he's the school master, he's the professor, everybody else they're the students in the class and you listen to the authority, the oracle.

Commonsense is a wonderful thing, great gift. It's lacking very largely today because nowadays have to be told in almost minute detail what to do in every situation as if they haven't got the commonsense to work it out for themselves. Commonsense is a very valuable thing but again it can be dangerous if it becomes the authority. So we need to be careful, that the first negative lesson about false claims to authority. They maybe wrong dispute their claims. People sometimes are too correct. They know too much. I object to Christians said Aldous Huxley, they know too much about God. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

Be careful about having a partial understanding of great

And then, if that a negative lesson, there's another one. The negative lesson of being careful about partial understanding of great truths. We can get hold of one aspect of a truth and divorce it from the whole picture and it's always dangerous to do that. Isn't it true, for instance, that sin will ultimately be punished. That there is moral retribution, in a moral universe, that God is the judge of all the earth and He will do right - of course. But sometimes the ungodly prosper. Sometimes the righteous suffer. Psalm 73 is a beautiful Psalm in which the Psalmist struggles with that. Why do the ungodly prosper? They're fat and sleek And why do the righteous, why do they suffer? The ungodly don't suffer rather and the righteous suffer. What's the explanation of that?

Well, God allows the unpredictable and we must take that on board. We don't know everything and we don't know why. And we mustn't pretend to be experts. Therefore, whilst it is true that there will be ultimate retribution for sin and wickedness. In Job's case, his sufferings were not due to his gross sinning. So that truth of moral retribution in a moral universe, though it is true ultimately in Job's case didn't fit the facts. It wasn't actually happening in his case. So we need to just include a theology of suffering as well as of healing into our thinking. We need to include the unpredictability of life and we need to remember that we don't have all the answers to all the questions. I don't know whether any of you have ever read the excellent little book by Gaius Davies called "Stress". Gaius Davis was Consultant Psychiatrist at Kings College Hospital in London for many years and he's written some excellent books.

That's one of them on stress. A committed Christian. Gaius lost a daughter, beautiful girl, highly intelligent girl and she died of cancer at the age of 17 and he was broken hearted as you could imagine and his Minister at the time was Dr Lloyd Jones about this bereavement, this sadness in his life and Dr Lloyd Jones said Gaius whatever you do, don't ask why. Gaius said it was the most helpful thing that anybody had said to him throughout that experience - don't ask why. Dr Lloyd Jones knew Dr Gaius Davis. He knew the torture, the anguish that he was going through and he gave

him exactly the right advice that he needed - don't ask why. He wasn't ready. He wasn't ready for people to come in and explain the mysteries of divine providence and even if they had he wouldn't have understood them. So we need to be ware of partial understanding of great truths and we need to just suspend our judgment before we start to make ultimate statements.

You need to beware of speaking for God wickedly

And then there's a third negative lesson and it's this. We need to beware of speaking for God wickedly. That's how it's put in chapter 13 and verse 7. "Will you speak wickedly for God". This is Job now in response. "Will you speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for Him?" Claiming to speak for God but they were speaking wickedly. You see they were saying that the transcendent God didn't care. But the transcendent God did care. They were saying the just God, the Holy God was punishing Job for his sin, but the just and Holy God was not punishing Job for his sin. They were saying that the inscrutable wise and knowing God was really bringing upon Job the consequences of his own sin and that Job couldn't hide from Him, but Job wasn't trying to hide from him. In other words, the men, these three of them, were speaking for God wickedly. They were taking truths that are true about God but they were speaking them wickedly. The wrong way. So they were using the transcendence of God to brow-beat Job. The justice of God to intimidate Job. The wisdom to make Job appear that he was running away from God which he wasn't doing anyway.

We need I think to draw near to God and we need to draw near to people who need our help and our support and this is what they should have been doing - but they weren't. They spoke for God wickedly. It wasn't just foolishly - it was wickedly.

Don't beat people with the truth

And there is another negative truth, and it is this, well I've really already suggested it in a way. We should beware of using truth with which to beat people. This is really what they were doing. They were taking a truth about punishment and sin and they were using it to beat this man. "You have instructed many" said Eliphaz. "Your words have upheld those who were stumbling, but now it comes upon you and you are weary. It touches you and you are troubled." "You've given advice and counsel to other people but now it's happened its happened to you - look at you. Can't you take your own medicine." They're using the truth to beat this man. Chapter 11 verse 6 is perhaps the cruelest thing that any of them said to Job. I think it probably was the cruelest thing. Verse 6b "Know therefore" says Zo'phar "that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves." "All that you've experienced, all the punishment" in terms of what these men were saying "that you've experienced Job is actually less than you deserve.

Everything that has happened to you is less than you deserved. You deserve more than that. You are so sinful that - well- God ought to have punished you even more severely." How cruel. That. How cruel that was. Here Zo'phar, Bil'dad and Eliphaz they're tempting Job all the time to think of God as a pitiless, cruel, torturer - because Job knows he is innocent and yet he is suffering but if they are right, well he may as well curse God and die because there's no morality, there's nothing of any meaning left in the universe. They're using truth to beat this man down with and we

should never, never do that.

POSITIVE LESSONS

Think before you speak

Well then, just a couple of positive lessons. Obviously the first is to think before we speak. Sometimes we're too quick, we say too much. Empty vessels. Remember the old proverb - "Empty vessels make the most noise". We should think before speaking.

Be genuine in our concern for one another

And then the second is that we should be genuine in our concern for one another because we're not experts and we don't know and none of us is immune in any way from suffering and from sickness and from the kind of things that happened to Job. So our responsibility ought not to be as it were concerned about our own status and what we think and how we come into the situation with our words of counsel and help in a patronizing kind of way but how concern ought to be for the people, the persons to whom we are ministering and with whom we are seeking to share and to sympathize and that means imagination. That means trying to put ourselves into the shoes of other people so that we can imagine what it must be like for them. I don't know whether these three men did that. They ought to have when they sat in silence with Job but they seem not to have been able to do it. Genuine concern means imagination and putting ourselves into the position of other people.

Warm towards others without being possessive

And then a third positive lesson, I think is that we should be warm towards other people without being possessive. That is, I mean to say, helpful but respectful. Not judging. Not standing over people. Discriminate certainly but accept the person. Accept the man. Accept the woman. We may not know all the answers, we may not understand all that's going on here. We may just have to hold our tongues and not say too much but Oh, Oh to show concern and love and sympathy towards the person. That's not always easy to be warm without being possessive because very often when people are warm and outgoing and caring they want to possess.

They want to put their arms around a person so that somehow or other the person fulfills a need in them but that is not what real care is about. Warmth is one thing, possession is another. It's like it in a family. A warm mother must not be a possessive mother. The parental love, the care that a mother bestows upon her children, or the father for that matter, ought not be kind of possessive love that can stunt the person's development. So we need to be warm without being possessive. That's a positive lesson.

Be with people

And I think the most important thing of all is that we should stand with people. Just be with people. Just to be there. Not aloof, not stand-offish, not embarrassed to visit, embarrassed to speak to them because we wouldn't know what to say but to just be with them. The gripping of a hand, a warm handshake, an arm on the shoulder,

just a tear that flows from the eye when people are going through it - that says a great deal. Just to be with people. Stand along side them at their side, to feel for them. To be like Christ, Emmanuel - God with us.

Isn't that the whole story of the incarnation. Isn't that really what the New Testament is saying to us so loudly and clearly. Jesus is our Emmanuel. Jesus is God with us. He didn't stand aloof from us. He didn't build up a throne within the sky and shout down at us. He came right into our life, into our world. He trod this earth of ours. He breathed in the dust that we breath in. He touched the earth that we touch. He stood along side sinners. He did so in the river Jordan when he was baptized by John - the Baptist. He was with them, not as one of them but with them. And with them, of course, supremely and wonderfully as their sin-bearer. With them as their Saviour. With them as their Redeemer. Christ came to where we are and because He came to where we are we can now be taken to where He is. That's the message of the Gospel.

To me the great positive lesson that comes out of the way in which these three people handled Job or mishandled him. Instead of just coming to where he was and just standing with him. They were over and above him and aloof and indifferent and uncaring. Thank God that our Saviour isn't like that. Thank God that Jesus didn't treat us in that way. If he had given us what we'd deserve, then we should have perish, all of us, not one of us would be a child of God. Not one of us deserves the lest grace, let alone the marvelous grace of God. But God is the God of all grace and so Jesus sort me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God and He to rescue me from danger and to pose His precious blood. The great message of the Gospel is that God is with us - with us. Not over us like a tyrant.

Not about to kill us and destroy us like a Judge. He's already judged sin. He's already dealt with it's consequences in the cross of Jesus so He is now with us as our Saviour, as our Father. As the one who loves us remorselessly, invincibly, inexhilarably., eternally. Oh, love that will not let me go. That's the kind of love that Christ has shown to us and that these three should have shown to Job but didn't. Well, may God fill our hearts with that kind of love - Calvary love. The love of a saviour who seen the woman taking in adultery and has compassion for her as the others are ready to kill her and remember says to her those wonderful words - "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" - that's the grace of God and there's nothing like it in the universe. It's the most wonderful and precious thing of all. God has not given us our deserts. He's lavished His grace upon us and we likewise are meant to do the same. May God help us to do so.

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