



Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast

October 23, 2022

“The Book of Job: Part II (A Play in Five Acts)”

Job’s First Lament: Do We Hear Wisdom?

Last week we read the “first act” of Job, chapters 1 and 2, and heard Job’s lament at the end of Ch. 1:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” (NIV)

We can’t be sure if Job was acknowledging a basic fact of life and was able to find meaning in his suffering. But we should begin to reflect on the Book of Job’s “wisdom” lessons. It is a fact of life that sudden tragedies in our lives cause us to reflect about the way we are living. What are the important things in life? Are we spending too much time on trivial or worse, destructive activities? How does our faith inform our actions? For now, *let’s assume Job is not at that place at this point in the story, but the “play” is not over yet.*

Job, End-to-End

One way to better understand the Book of Job is with a brief summary of the basic plot, considering Job a five-act play, with unequal parts:

- Act 1 - Prologue (chs. 1-2): we meet “The Accuser,” Satan, who questions Job’s faith in God. Satan is allowed to inflict terrible tragedies on Job. Having lost everything, Job maintains his faith, and is comforted by three friends.
- Act 2 - Dialogue with Friends (chs. 3-31, *especially chs. 3-11): a telling series of three back-and-forth conversations between Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, one at a time. The friends insist, in various ways, that Job must have done something wrong to have deserved his punishment.
- Act 3 - The Elihu Speeches (chs. 32-37): the arguments between Job and his friends stop and a young man who overheard the conversation, Elihu, appears and in a series of speeches, defends God’s justice.
- Act 4 – The Divine Speeches (God’s appearance) (chs. 38.1-42.6): God appears and questions Job’s complaints. After all, where was Job when earth was created? Can he after with God-like power? Job acknowledges his ignorance.
- Act 5 - Epilogue (chs. 42.7-42.17): God rebukes the three friends for not having told the truth about God. Then God intervenes on Job’s behalf.
- [Note: This is a *very* brief plot summary!]

“If you are suffering, you must have sinned!” – Wisdom to Get Right with God

In chapters 3-11 we see the first back-and-forth between Job and his friends, Job declaring his innocence, his friends maintaining Job has sinned and that is why God is punishing him. These chapters give us insight into the next two cycles of dialogs, the second dialog chs. 12.1-20.29, and the third dialog chs. 21.1-27.23. Throughout the cycles of speeches, we will see Job’s evolving expression of pain and faith, and the three friends presenting counter arguments. Let’s look at some key points in the first cycle of speeches. You will note that sometimes the two parties conversing do not listen to each other!



Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast

October 23, 2022

“The Book of Job: Part II (A Play in Five Acts)”

The First Cycle of Speeches in the Book of Job

- Job: [We immediately enter into the drama, as Job’s suffering is so intense, he wishes he were never born:] “Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep.” [3:11-13]
- Eliphaz: [Eliphaz regards Job as a righteous man and urges him not to give up, to lose faith:] “Is it not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?” [4:6]
- Job: [Job weaves his own death-wish with his experience of the futility and misery of human life in general:] “Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a laborer?” [7:1]
- Bildad: [Bildad straightforwardly tells Job suffering is due to sin and urges Job to repent and pray to God:] “How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? ... If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself to you and restore you to your rightful place. ... See, God will not reject a blameless person.” [8:1-6,20]
- Job: [Job’s strongest statement of his powerlessness and belief that God’s attention in the past was not due to grace but God trying to find fault in Job, and that now God is ignoring his plight:] “[God] who does great things beyond understanding, ... Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him. ... If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe he would listen to my voice.” [9:10, 11, 16]
- Zophar: [Zophar is the least sympathetic of Job’s friends. He flatly tells Job that he is suffering because Job is a secret sinner and really doesn’t understand God’s ways. Job should listen to what God has to say:] “But O that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For wisdom is many-sided. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.” [11:5-6]

What questions do we have about these speeches?

The three friends are using the logic that: “if you are suffering, you must have sinned.” It’s your fault, period. Job does not fault this logic, but continuously claims innocence. We read in the next chapters of Job that he wants a “trial” with God present, but not as a judge, so Job can prove his innocence. The questions for us are: “How do respond to others’ suffering? How do we show empathy without judgement? How do we respond to our own suffering? Can we believe that our suffering is not punishment?”

God, grant us the serenity and grace to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference! May it be so. Amen.

Let us keep in our prayers: recovery for Keith, Mary, and Sally; for Elizabeth’s health; thanks for Dawn’s, Margo’s, and Bill’s renewed health; pray for ourselves as we continue to seek and live by Divine Wisdom; and end to the rancor in our country. Lord, hear our prayer!