

Sermon- Grieving Well Part 1

Scripture: Job 3

Sunday, May 17, 2020

We have been going through the book of Job, starting with the purpose of the book which was to deal with the, “is God just?” question, right? Then as we got into Job’s story, over the last three sermons we looked at four characters, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and finally the mysterious character Elihu. While these guys get more and more critical of Job over time we examined some of the reasons why they did what they did so that we can do better at being a comfort to those who are grieving. I talked about the Jesus model of comfort which included weeping with those who weep, taking the “why” questions to God for them, not judging the sufferer and making sure we don’t make things worse, especially by saying things that are focused on making the speaker rather than the sufferer feel better. It is important to learn these lessons well because at such a time like this it is important for us to comfort well.

Today we are going to change gears and focus on the sufferer, Job. We are going to examine how he dealt with his pain. The end goal for us is to be able to learn to grieve well, so that we can be a witness to God even in our grief. Now if you read up on counseling you will find that people go through grief in 5 distinct phases. Now every individual and every grieving event has its own unique pattern but all go through some or all of these phases in their own way. These phases or stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Don’t worry you don’t have to remember all these just yet. It is going to take me at least two sermons to go through all the stages of grief. But at the end of it I am sure you will be able to remember it all 😊 Today, I will cover the first two stages, **denial** and **anger**.

We will start with the **denial** phase. When the messengers first came and told Job about the death of his children and the destruction of all his property, **Job** you may remember stood up, tore his clothes, shaved his head and fell to the ground in worship saying, ***“I came naked from my mother’s womb,***

and I will be naked when I leave.

The Lord gave me what I had,

and the Lord has taken it away.

Praise the name of the Lord!” This is a remarkable statement because what he is saying is that even though he just got the news that all his wealth, his animals, all the shepherds and all the farm hands and all of his children just got killed, Job’s immediate response was that God has the right to do whatever and that nothing has changed in his reverence for God. While it is great that Job’s faith at this point remains strong and unshaken, it also feels like no emotions related to the losses in his life have sunk in yet. It is almost like he is denying that anything has happened in his life. That is why this phase is called the “denial” phase. Often “denial” is the first phase of grief. But like I mentioned earlier, grief does not happen in a neat pattern. Often people go in and out or every phase multiple times in multiple ways before they are healed and come out on the other side of the long dark tunnel. But every time Job is in his “denial” phase he actually makes his strongest faith declarations. So for example in chapter 19 when he is so frustrated at Bildad’s scolding of Job, he says in verse 22 “must you persecute me like God does? And haven’t you chewed me up already?” and then three verse later he will say ***“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,***

and he will stand upon the earth at last.

²⁶ ***And after my body has decayed,***

yet in my body I will see God!^[b]

²⁷ ***I will see him for myself.***

Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.

I am overwhelmed at the thought!"

These are very beautiful faith declarations and yet it is like his lament about God persecuting him in verse 22 never happened. A few chapters later after more agonizing on Job's part, he once again "denies all this complaints" and declares in chapter 28, "God alone understands the way to wisdom".

There are some really amazing things about the way Job responds in his "denial" phase. But to really appreciate it, we have to look at how people who do not depend on God often deal with their "denial" phase. Well, a real common approach is people taking substances that help them to forget whatever happened to them. Some substances give you hallucinatory sensations so that for some time you live in some fantasy world where they can "deny" reality for some time. There is also a less common method that some people deal with crisis and that is by pretending that the negative thing never happened and continuing on as normal. There are stories of people who when a loved one died, instead of burying them, keeps them dressed up and seated in the room and they just go on living around them. Of course this is an extreme case but it is symbolic of many other situations where when people are overwhelmed by a crisis and don't know how to depend on God, the medicine of choice is "forgetting", "pretending" or "fantasy thinking". And the problem with not dealing with any phase of grief well is that you get stuck in that phase and ultimately can never move on with your life.

Job however does not resort to those easy ways that get you stuck in "nowhere land". Job's denial is a Godly denial, because his denial phase involves denying not the reality of his situation but denying that his situation has changed the most important aspect of his life and that is his relationship with God. Now even his relationship with God will change, and for the better but now is not the time to think about change, now is the time for Job to hold on to what has not changed. That is why Job chapter 1 ends with

these words, “in all this Job did not sin by blaming God”. You and I will experience the shock of tragedy at some point in life, if we have not already experienced it. Now in those difficult moments our minds will be struggling to cope with what just happened. Part of us will be busy trying to wish away whatever happened. If we absorb the lesson from Job’s life and focus not on the tragedy but on to the only thing that has not changed in our life (God) then we will do “denial” well. And when we do “denial” well, we will be able to move on to the next phase of the grieving process. When tragedy strikes it is not a heroic move but ultimately a therapeutic move to say that, “God gives and God takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord”.

That takes us to the next stage of grief, which is often “anger”. You see once we have affirmed what has not changed in our life, it is time to visit what just happened in all its brutal ugliness. And at that point, the emotion that often flares up is “anger”. Now remember, anger in itself is not sin. But anger is take-off point to sin if it is not carefully controlled. In Eph 4:26 it says, “***be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.***” That means do not stew in your anger but resolve it. When Cain was mad at his brother Abel, God directly speaks to Cain in Gen 4:6-7 and says, “***why are you angry?***”, “***sin is crouching at your door; you are its object of desire, but you must master it***”. So anger from a Biblical perspective needs to be resolved and mastered, not fostered but any means. When anger is not dealt with well as in Cain’s case, it does not end well.

Let’s turn our attention back to our grieving friend Job. After Job blesses the name of God at the end of chapter 1, the next time we hear from him is in the opening of chapter 3, which was read this morning. There he is clearly upset and angry about all the things that have happened to him. But how he handles it is really something to be in awe of. When people are angry, they want to direct their anger at someone. Sometimes angry people want to shoot the messenger, sometimes it is whoever is near by.

Sometimes it is people they did not like and would love to blame everything on. Sometimes angry people blame God. But the problem is, if you blame the wrong person for your problems, your problems will not go away, they usually become worse.

In Job's case he comes up with a unique solution for venting his anger. He blames the day he was born. And he is not hesitant about it either. He spends the whole of chapter 3, all 26 verses cursing the day he was born. He even curses the night he was conceived. He invites others to curse that day as well. And not just anyone but he calls on the experts in cursing, those who can rouse the Leviathan with their curses. 😊 The Leviathans are those gigantic sea monsters that we see only in the fossil record. When I was young I used to read "Tintin" comics and there was a captain Hoddock who was an expert at cursing 😊 His signature line was, "billions of blue blistering barnacles and thundering typhoons!" and then it got even more creative from there. I am not sure if any of you are familiar with those comics. But even though there was a lot of cursing, it was very clean. The intensity of the curses came from the creativity of the expressions. Clean and creative cursing 😊 That is the example that Job is leaving us as well. You can almost see Job thinking about where he can direct his anger. Kind of like someone wants to just discharge their firearm. Now you want to do it safely so you take it in your hand and you point it to this direction and think of the consequences and you decide against that and then you point it in that direction and that has a negative consequence as well and finally you find a way to make it as benign as possible out in an open field pointed to a clear sky and maybe just using a blank and you fire. That is what Job is doing here. He is angry but he does not discharge his anger at the messenger or his companions or his wife or even at God. He discharges his anger that the "day he was born". And in this way he safely gets his anger out of his system.

I think this is a great lesson for us. There may be things that grieve us and make us angry. But instead of directing our anger at whoever is close by and causing more

problems than we began with, we will do well to take Job's example and find a creative, benign target to vent our anger, something that is impossible to damage. If you can do that, that would be "mastering your anger" as God was asking Cain to do in Gen 4:6. Mastering your anger is a good way to get through the second stage of the grief and prepare you for the next stage which we will look at next week.

Remember to grieve well, we have to do each stage well. Today we looked at the denial stage and the anger stage. There are positive and negative ways to work on each stage that will either help us heal and grow emotionally and spiritually or we can be stuck in a broken place unable to move on and unable to be used by God to our fullest potential. I also want to mention that I have not titled this sermon "Grieving perfectly". We will make mistakes along the way. When we do we will have to become aware of them, ask for forgiveness and receive the forgiveness and grace that God makes available. Then we need to get up and continue our journey through life. I hope and pray that we will be able to "grieve well", even a little bit like Job, for the sake of our own health and for the sake for God's kingdom. Let us pray.