

Job:

My theology was perfect... A few months ago. It was tidy, buttoned-up, and irrefutable. It matched that of my close friends. All of us were rich, all of us were sure that we were right. In fact, my theology matched that of many, many people throughout the centuries... and many, many, *many* people of your day.

The nice thing about my theology was its simplicity. It exactly matched my life experience. And, that was its final proof of being right. It matched my experience and the experience of my friends.

Here was my entire theology in a nutshell: God blesses the righteous, and God punishes those who do wrong. So, if you are rich, you must be righteous. The richer you are, the more righteous you must be. If you are poor, you must have done something wrong. The poorer you are, the worse your deeds must have been. If you've done something wrong, you might fix it quickly by making a sacrifice to God.

How about that? It might sound silly to you, but I bet you've believed that same theology, at some point in your life, maybe even now? Especially if you happen to be rich in money or family or health. Rich people tend to like this theology. And by rich, keep in mind that on a world scale, less than 3% of the American population is considered poor.

I was the perfect example of this rich is blessed theology being... correct. I was the most righteous man in the world. Really. Even God said so. And I was the richest man in my known world. Really. The one data point that I was absolutely sure of aligned with my theology. God rewards the righteous and punishes those who do wrong.

Forty-two seconds! My bulletproof theology was shot down in less than a minute! Forty-two seconds was the amount of time it took four messengers to deliver the news that I had lost everything dear to me, except my wife and health. And, I lost my health soon after that.

This is how I knew, beyond a shadow of doubt, that my theology must have been wrong. I had not changed one iota of my behavior! Nothing I did caused my blessings to turn to calamity. I didn't know where my theology had gone wrong, but I absolutely knew one thing...it was wrong. I didn't know what theology was right, but I did know mine had a flaw. Or at least, it was so incomplete as to be wrong.

Therein was my big problem. If my theology was wrong, and I didn't know what was right, how could I fix my problems? And I really wanted my problems fixed. My wife and I were destitute, I was in debilitating pain, and all of my children were dead. I wished I had never been born.

Then, my three best friends showed up. I expressed that same sentiment to them. They could take one look at me and know that my wish was an expression of truthfulness. I wished I had never been born. In their love for me, they tried their best to help me. The big, big problem? Their view of the world was one I knew to be wrong. My friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Wrong. All wrong.

You should read my book. The book of Job Chapters Four through Thirty-One to enjoy possibly the most eloquent debate in history, but I will give it to you in a summary fashion.¹

Eliphaz: Obviously, you've done something terrible.

Me: No, I have not.

Bildad: Yes, you must have!

Me: No, I did not.

Zophar: Clearly, you have.

Me: Clearly to me, I have not.

Eliphaz: Of course, you have!

Me: Of course, I have not.

Bildad: Don't be silly. You've done something awful.

Me: Nope.

Zophar: There is no other possible explanation.

Me: I don't know what it is, but there must be another explanation.

Eliphaz: This is ridiculous. You obviously have done something wrong!

Me: It is ridiculous that you keep insisting I have. I know I have not.

Bildad: We can't reason with you. You are impossible.

Me: In the most articulate way possible, I'm telling you that I did not do anything wrong.

As you can imagine, the repetitive dialogue came to an end. They thought they were right, because they could not imagine they could be wrong. And, they thought I was righteous in my own eyes, but not in reality.

¹ Taken from *Notes on Job*, by Scott L. Johnson

While we were talking, our young friend Elihu showed up. The more he heard our dialogue, the more frustrated he became. He knew I was wrong, but my three friends had been incapable of refuting my position. So, with the multitude of words and certainty of youth, Elihu tried to refute my position. As you can guess, he made a mess of it. Like my three friends, a lot of what he said was true, but there was a hidden flaw in his thought process.

We sat in absolute silence and frustration. They could not imagine how I could refuse to accept their point of view. In their minds, their wealth and health proved that they were wiser and more righteous than me. In my mind, their wealth and health made them so prideful that they could not see the possibility they could be wrong.

I knew they were wrong, but I did not have a solution to my distress. They felt so sorry for me, and I felt so sorry for them. And...I felt sorry for me. And for my wife.

Satan:

The Bible does not say what I am doing while all this is going on. But...you can imagine that I am gloating and planning, practically celebrating. Job is almost ready to give up on God. I can sense it. I am about to win my contest with God!

Job's friends played right into my hands. They won't be able to convince Job that he is wrong, but I believe they will be able to inject doubt into his mind. Once the doubt starts, it won't be too long before it grows; he begins to doubt his faith in God. Blaming God will be only one small step away.

I know that I will win from here because Job and his friends are asking the wrong question for the wrong reason. And, nobody is there to point that out to them. They think that if they understand the reasons why Job has misfortune that they can easily fix it. That is wishful thinking and an unrealistic belief in how much control they have!

And, they think there is a *simple* reason for why Job has had these tragic things happen to him. They have to believe there is a *simple* reason, otherwise it is unlikely they can fix the problem, and they all want the problem fixed.

But, the problem of pain and suffering is not simple. I've got more fingers than you, and I don't have enough fingers to count all the many causes of pain and suffering. Let's see, there is (brightens up) me! People cause their own pain and suffering more often than they know. Other people cause it. It's the nature of life as God has designed it. Where you are born, your family, your community, relationships, those sorts of things. Aging. Disease. Natural disasters. There are so many causes that it's actually pretty amazing that there is not more pain and suffering in the world.

And then there is the big one that nobody wants to admit. Sometimes God allows pain and suffering to occur for reasons known only to him. Might be for someone's good, someone else's

good. And my least favorite, the one humans just cannot grasp; so God will be glorified through the pain and suffering.

In fact, this whole experience with Job has taught me something. I can use pain and suffering to keep people from glorifying God! Doubt him! Blame him! Why didn't I think of that before?

Just a few more hours, and I will show God how Job blames God for all his troubles. Job blaming God. Nothing can derail this from happening. I am in complete control.