

Ask Away – January 15

- 1) **If Job spoke what was right about God, then why did Job “repent in dust and ashes”? (Job 42:5–7). Is Job’s repentance related to God’s question: “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?” (Job 40:8).**

On January 13, I offered a defense of Job in response to Elihu’s accusations. Yet as much as we may want to vindicate Job, we have to take God’s criticisms seriously (cf. Job 38:2; 40:2, 8). If God felt Job had left Him in the position of being unjust, then we must wrestle with the text until we understand where Job went wrong. To do this, let’s think back on Job’s interaction with his friends.

When Job’s friends accused him of sin, they put him on the defensive and forced him to make the case for his integrity. When they insisted that God had been just to destroy his possessions and kill his children, they compelled Job to argue that God had not given him justice. This set the stage for Job to speak as though he thought he was more righteous than God. All this, combined with Job’s physical pain and anguish, led him to say some pretty harsh things:

- “So who am I, that I should try to answer God or even reason with him? Even if I were right, I would have no defense. I could only plead for mercy. And even if I summoned him and he responded, I’m not sure he would listen to me. For he attacks me with a storm and repeatedly wounds me without cause. He will not let me catch my breath, but fills me instead with bitter sorrows” (Job 9:14–18 NLT).
- “Innocent or wicked, it is all the same to God. That’s why I say, ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’ When a plague sweeps through, he laughs at the death of the innocent. The whole earth is in the hands of the wicked, and God blinds the eyes of the judges. If he’s not the one who does it, who is?” (Job 9:22–24 NLT).
- “You gave me life and showed me your unfailing love. My life was preserved by your care. Yet your real motive—your true intent—was to watch me, and if I sinned, you would not forgive my guilt. If I am guilty, too bad for me; and even if I’m innocent, I can’t hold my head high, because I am filled with shame and misery” (Job 10:12–15 NLT).

Now, some of what Job said can be excused by understanding that he was expressing how he *felt* at the time. It felt like God didn’t care, it felt as though God was out to get him, it felt as though God had blessed him in the past only so He could snatch it all away and leave him in despair. All of us have been there. We’ve all said things that expressed, not our core beliefs about God, but how we felt at the time.

That being said, I think the statements above reveal Job’s error: *he was drawing conclusions and making pronouncements about God on the basis of the current state alone*. Think about it: up to the point where God came in the storm, it was true that God had denied Job justice. God had destroyed Job without cause (Job 2:3), God had

been silent when Job called out for help, God had given him over to the hands of wicked men, God had not punished those who had stolen his possessions, and God had turned cruel to Job (Job 30:21).

But that wasn't the end of the story! God wasn't finished! To me, this is one of the big lessons from Job—we don't know everything that's going on. God is working things out on a much larger scale than we can see, and we often don't get enough data to make sense of all that's happened. This means ***God should never be judged until He's finished His work***. That's the error Job made. He passed judgment on God before God was finished. Thus Job spoke rightly about God in that he correctly refuted his friends' view of God, but he ended up leaving God in the wrong when he made premature conclusions about God's working in his life. How many of us have done the same thing?

In a way, Job's life is a microcosm of the entire history of the world. Right now, it may seem as though the wicked triumph and the innocent perish. Right now, it may seem as though Satan and his demons hold sway over the earth. Right now, it may seem as though our best efforts are doomed to fail and there's no use trying. But God isn't finished! When His judgments are complete and the end of the story has been told, we'll look back and say with wonder that all His works were good and all His ways were just!