

DO WICKED PROSPER? (Scripture: Job. 20:4-8)

*4 Do you know this from of old, From the establishment of man on earth,
5That the triumphing of the wicked is short,
And the joy of the godless momentary?
6 Though his loftiness reaches the heavens, and his head touches the clouds,
7He perishes forever like his refuse; Those who have seen him will say, Where is he?
8 He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him; Even like a vision of the night he
is chased away.*

Introduction: An interesting argument emerges out after Zofar's remark about the wicked people. Job's reply is more like our thoughts sometimes. The wicked seem to have a more stable, healthy, prosperous living in this world. Their families seem to multiply with many children, and they are like arrows for their father! What is going on? Chapter 20 and 21 are good thought-provoking chapters. Meditate on these two different perspectives. 21 is a longer chapter. I may not read all the texts. Try to read as I speak about it.

*Job:20:4-8.4 Do you know this from of old,
From the establishment of man on earth, 5That the triumphing of the wicked is short, And
the joy of the godless momentary?
6 Though his loftiness reaches the heavens, and his head touches the clouds,
7He perishes forever like his refuse.
Those who have seen him will say, Where is he?
8 He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him; Even like a vision of the night he
is chased away.*

We just read this passage as our Scripture reading. Zophar brings out a well-known theology which can be found abundantly in book of Psalms and Proverbs. The wicked is like a grass here today and gone tomorrow. He comes out so fast and so strong like the weed. He blooms quickly, and spread his seed, then he just disappears totally. He rises to popularity so fast, and one day he just disappears. No one remembers him. They are like a fleeting dream, brings horrors to us, then they disappears. He becomes a refuse forever. The philosophy of Middle eastern thinking was if a so called righteous perishes like this, then that person may not be righteous at all, and he may be most likely, a wicked person.

But Job says in chapter 21, that wisdom about wicked perishing is not true always! Let us hear what Job has to say about the wicked. Sometimes, I wonder like that also!

*Job. 21:7-10.7 Why do the wicked still live,
Continue on, also become very powerful?
8 Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring before
their eyes,*

*9 Their houses are safe from fear,
And the rod of God is not on them.
10 His ox mates without fail.
His cow calves and does not abort.*

Zophar insisted that wicked ones will be cut off quickly. But Job disagrees with that logic, and he says that wicked actually continue on, and become very powerful! While The proverbial wisdom in those days was that the children of the wicked will become poor, and they will be wiped out completely. It was true in Job's case, and that's why the friends of Job kept saying that Job had done something wicked, and he needed to confess.

So now, Job proves that argument is not a valid one because he knows for sure that many wicked thrive and prosper, and their children are well established, and the wicked live long enough to see their offspring well established right before their eyes. Their houses are well protected, and Job says that he does not see any God's rod of punishment on them. Their animals seem to be blessed, and they multiply like everyone else's. Just Because they are prosperous, should we assume that they are righteous? That is indeed false logic!

*Job. 21:11-13. 11 They send forth their little ones like the flock, and their children skip about. 12 They sing to the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the flute. 13 They spend their days in prosperity,
And suddenly they go down to Sheol.*

The wicked also sing, dance, and rejoice at the sound of the flute. They also enjoy their lives and their wealth like the righteous. But they go suddenly to Sheol just like the righteous. Death comes to everyone. There are no exceptions. Death does not discriminate rich or poor, wicked, or righteous, healthy, or sick! It tries to swallow everything that swirls around its way! So, we cannot judge somebody, if they are righteous or not, through what they have or have not!

Job. 21:14: 14,15.

*14 They say to God, Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways.
15 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, And what would we gain if we entreat Him?*

The wicked are indeed blasphemous, and rebellious. They are so proud; they mock at the very existence of God. They feel that God is a pigment of one's own imagination, and there is actually no God at all. They laugh at the very idea of God! They feel that they have nothing to gain by entreating Him. They boldly tell God to depart from them and they will not serve Him nor obey any of His commandments. They always think in their heart, what can He do to me? These kind of arrogant people indeed provoke God, and it is a terrible thing to fall in the hands of an angry God! That will be a day of horror for them!

*Job. 21:19-21 19 You say, God stores away a man's iniquity for his sons. Let God repay him so that he may know it.
20 Let his own eyes see his decay And let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.
21 For what does he care for his household after him, When the number of his months is cut off?*

Job's friends believed this way:

If the wicked does not suffer in their lives, then their children would suffer unto 4th generation? God will punish for their iniquities up to 4th generation. (Exodus. 20:5). But Ezekiel 18:2 modifies this verdict.

"fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'?"
Then Ezekiel elaborates the new verdict:

Ezekiel. 18:19;20.

*19 Yet you say, Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity? When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.
20 The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.*

Prophet Ezekiel's Conclusion: Everyone must bear their own punishment for their own sins.

Jesus also said the same thing. When the disciples asked Him why certain Galileans were put to death, Jesus answered, you will also perish likewise, if you do not repent. (Luke 13:1-5) In other words, the soul that sins will die, because wages of sin is death. Then Jesus told them a parable.

Luke 13:6-9

*6 And He began telling this parable: A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.
7 And he said to the vineyard-keeper, Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?
8 And he answered and said to him, Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer.
9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down."*

It gives us a clear answer here. God does not punish the wicked swiftly because of His mercy and patience.

Let me go back to Job 21:19-21 again. It is an ambiguous passage. It seems Job is repeating his friends' words. The friends seem to say that if the father does not receive the punishment, let sons receive the punishment, but the father should see that

punishment with his own eyes and writh in pain! So the father's life should not be cut short. He should live long enough to see the consequence of sin through his children.

In King Hezekiah story in 2 Kings 20, he was to be punished by invasion from Babylon. But it would come during his children's time, and he would not see the calamity. When Hezekiah heard that prophesy he rejoiced and said, oh that's cool! (Good). So, king Hezekiah never received any punishment in his lifetime.

So, was God unfair in not punishing Hezekiah? We need to get this important lesson in our thick head and remember it always: GOD IS GRACIOUS TO WHOM HE IS GRACIOUS. Period!

Since when we became the advisers of God, and tell Him what to do, and how to respond, and when to do it? Why is the clay trying to dictate the potter how everything should be molded. This is a laughable matter indeed!

Job. 21:23-26.

23 One dies in his full strength, Being wholly at ease and satisfied; 24His sides are filled out with fat,

*And the marrow of his bones is moist,
25While another dies with a bitter soul,
Never even tasting anything good.*

*26 Together they lie down in the dust,
And worms cover them.*

We focused on a very tough topic, and this is the conclusion Job derives out of it. Both wicked and the righteous, they both die. The wicked die in his strength, his skin so smooth, so handsome, with wholesome, attractive body. At the same time, a righteous man or a missionary may die with bitter sorrowful life, with skeleton bones, with no cheek at all, and they both hit the ground with no discrimination. Together they lie down in the dust, and worms cover them!

What a sobering thought! Everyone faces the same fate - death! You could see now that Job had switched back to his old tune about death, no hope beyond death. It really makes us wonder if it was the same person who spoke with full of faith, and said, my redeemer lives, and from my flesh, I will see God! (Job 19:25)

Job. 21:27-30.

27 Behold, I know your thoughts, And the plans by which you would wrong me.

28 For you say, Where is the house of the nobleman, and where is the tent, the dwelling places of the wicked?

*29 Have you not asked wayfaring men,
And do you not recognize their witness?*

30 For the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity; They will be led forth at the day of fury.

Job rebuked his friends vehemently. I know where you are coming from. I know where you are going with your thoughts!

When an employee opens his mouth to talk about an issue, an experienced boss may know exactly where he is going, and what he wants him to do.
eg. Prisoners asking favors, and the stories they come up with! While they try to explain their problems, the staff has the answer ready to be given to him.

Job was alert to know that his friends were pointing out the demise of his children and the depletion of his wealth to prove that Job did something wrong in his life, and that is why God was punishing him!

Before they said anything, Job says that they may think that the wicked man's house is gone because of their sins. Instead of saying wicked man, Job sarcastically used the word, Noble man, or Prince in a sarcastic, negative manner. But on the contrary, the wicked people seem to be thriving. Job encourages his friends to talk to those who travel a lot. They know about various nations and cultures. They could tell them about the wicked people everywhere, how rich they are, how prosperous they are, how healthy they are, and how well settled their children are! We cannot judge a person by outward circumstances in this world.

But there will be a day of reckoning for them reserved by God. They will face the fury of God at that time, and their calamity.

As you can see, the conversation gets heated up. Let me stop with this final passage.

Job. 21:31-34.

31 Who will confront him with his actions, and who will repay him for what he has done?

32 While he is carried to the grave, Men will keep watch over his tomb.

33 The clods of the valley will gently cover him; Moreover, all men will follow after him, while countless ones go before him. 34 How then will you vainly comfort me, For your answers remain full of falsehood?"

Who shall declare his way to his face? rather, **who shall denounce? i.e.** Who will be bold enough to tell the rich and powerful man that he is wicked? that his "way," or course of life, is altogether wrong? And who shall repay him what he hath done? Who will prosecute him in courts to punish the wicked? He seems to enjoy complete freedom to carry out his wicked ways, and no one to check him. He buys the judges with his power; the politicians are in his pocket. Who can stop him? Will God stop him? When?

Job asks a very pertinent question! Who can confront these powerful, wicked people? Who can really punish them?

When the wicked one dies, there will be a huge procession to carry him to his rich tomb. There will be people to take care of that area and keep it clean. The soil and grass will be well kept, and manicured, and many people will visit there even after he is dead and

gone. They will keep piling flowers on that wicked person and remove the snow from his grave, as though he may shiver in the grave because of it!

Basically, Job was saying that wicked do live luxuriously and enjoy life for a long time, and they are worshipped, and revered even after they are gone! Job's friends did not understand that, and they became indeed sorry counselors because they judged him falsely. They always identified human suffering and tragedy with sin and wickedness.

What can we learn from this important conversation between Job and his friends today?

Conclusion:

1. Do not judge by what people have or have not. Judge by what they do.
2. It is possible that the righteous may be poor, and the wicked may be very rich and prosperous.
3. We do not know how God punishes someone. Let us not come to any conclusion one way or the other.
4. God will not let the wicked get away. He will execute His judgement in this life or beyond death.
5. God does not smite the wicked immediately because He wants him to come to his senses and return back to Him. He is just giving him extra life hoping that he would come to his senses one day like the prodigal son and return back to his Creator.
6. Let us not accuse falsely like Job's friends. Let us not judge the book by its cover

Let us examine ourselves and repent of our short comings.

Daniel Israel

11.15.20

pastor@acts242church.org