

JOB

CHAPTERS 11 – 14

Introduction

Job's three friends came to comfort him in his great distress and affliction. For seven days and seven nights they remained silent, commiserating with him. When they broke their silence and began to speak, their comfort turned to condemning.

Zophar is the third to speak. After his brief words to Job in chapter eleven, Job twice makes an observation about Zophar. He says, in 12:3 and in 13:2, "I am not inferior to you." Apparently Zophar thought himself superior to Job, and was seeking to comfort him from a position of superiority rather than one of sympathy.

You and I are often called upon to comfort others in their affliction and adversity. Do you comfort others with sympathy? Or do you do it with superiority?

Hopefully, it is with sympathy! Job eventually called his friends "miserable comforters."¹ You don't want to add to someone's misery; you want to be a source of ministry.

We'll see two things in these chapters:

#1 A Condescending Attitude
Makes You A Miserable Comforter

#2 A Compassionate Attitude
Makes You A Ministering Comforter

¹ Job 16:2

#1 A Condescending Attitude Makes You A Miserable Comforter

After sitting silently for seven days and seven nights, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar begin to address Job. They are each answered by Job. This cycle occurs three times, with the exception that Zophar doesn't speak a third time. Chapter eleven is the last address of this first cycle, and the first time Zophar speaks.

Job accuses Zophar of treating him like an inferior. He accuses Zophar of having a superior attitude. When someone with a superior attitude addresses someone they consider inferior to them, we say they are condescending. Condescending means *to descend to the level of one considered inferior; to lower oneself*.

It's easy to feel superior to those who are struggling, stumbling, or suffering. Sometimes the person has indeed brought trouble upon themselves; they are reaping what they've sown. But even then you are not to feel superior to them. The biblical exhortation "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"² is a strong warning against adopting a superior attitude, against being condescending. You are to go to others with meekness and in humility, knowing that "but for the grace of God, there go I."

Zophar felt himself superior to Job and spoke to him condescendingly. Let's identify in his speech the signs of a condescending attitude.

►► Being contentious is a sign of a condescending attitude:

Job 11:1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

Job 11:2 "Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be vindicated?

Job 11:3 Should your empty talk make men hold their peace? And when you mock, should no one rebuke you?"

Zophar prefaces his counsel with words that incite an argument. "You're nothing but a windbag, full of hot air" is the gist of what he says to Job. He makes it clear that he intends to rebuke Job.

² First Corinthians 10:12

To be sure, there is a place for strong, confrontational words in ministering to others. But even when called for, they are to be spoken with fear and trembling - - not in a way that provokes to anger, not contentiously.

▶▶ Being conclusive is a sign of a condescending attitude:

Job 11:4 For you have said, 'My doctrine is pure, And I am clean in your eyes.'

Job 11:5 But oh, that God would speak, And open His lips against you,

Job 11:6 That He would show you the secrets of wisdom! For they would double your prudence. Know therefore that God exacts from you Less than your iniquity deserves.

Zophar had come to a conclusion about Job's suffering: It was the result of unconfessed sin. The trouble with his conclusion was that it was wrong! He was too quick to conclude what God was doing in Job's life.

Being conclusive when the facts are unclear is arrogant. When you share conclusively what is not conclusive, you are condescending.

▶▶ Being casual is a sign of a condescending attitude:

Job 11:7 "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?

Job 11:8 They are higher than heaven; what can you do? Deeper than Sheol; what can you know?

Job 11:9 Their measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea.

Job 11:10 "If He passes by, imprisons, and gathers to judgment, Then who can hinder Him?

Job 11:11 For He knows deceitful men; He sees wickedness also. Will He not then consider it?

Job 11:12 For an empty-headed man will be wise, When a wild donkey's colt is born a man.

"Casual" can mean *not close or intimate*. Zophar's words are casual in the sense that his portrayal of God lacks intimacy and closeness; it's as if God is not uniquely interested in the lives of individual men - - only wicked ones whom He must punish.

God is not casual in His care for you! When you fail to represent Him to someone as vitally aware and involved in their trouble, you are condescending.

▶▶ Being cursory is a sign of a condescending attitude:

Job 11:13 "If you would prepare your heart, And stretch out your hands toward Him;

Job 11:14 If iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, And would not let wickedness dwell in your tents;
Job 11:15 Then surely you could lift up your face without spot; Yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear;
Job 11:16 Because you would forget your misery, And remember it as waters that have passed away,
Job 11:17 And your life would be brighter than noonday. Though you were dark, you would be like the morning.
Job 11:18 And you would be secure, because there is hope; Yes, you would dig around you, and take your rest in safety.
Job 11:19 You would also lie down, and no one would make you afraid; Yes, many would court your favor.
Job 11:20 But the eyes of the wicked will fail, And they shall not escape, And their hope; loss of life!"

“Cursory” means *superficial*. Zophar’s words were cursory and superficial. He had reduced God to his neat little formula, and he was forcing Job and his sufferings into his formula.

God is deep; His dealings with you are deep. Avoid superficial comments - - they are condescending.

Contentious... conclusive... casual... cursory... When these words describe your comments, you have a condescending attitude; you are a miserable comforter.

Instead,

#2 A Compassionate Attitude Makes You A Ministering Comforter

Job has a lot to say in the next three chapters. He does what we are lately calling *venting*. He vents his feelings. As he does, we will discover from a sufferer’s perspective how he might better have been ministered to, how he would have been comforted.

The first thing you learn, in chapter twelve, is that:

▶ Answers aren’t as important as awareness:

Job 12:1 Then Job answered and said:
Job 12:2 "No doubt you are the people, And wisdom will die with you!
Job 12:3 But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?"

Job tells his friends that they weren't telling him anything new, anything he didn't already know. It wasn't answers he needed; it was awareness of his suffering, of his sorrow. In this they failed, as he points out in the following verses.

Job 12:4 "I am one mocked by his friends, Who called on God, and He answered him, The just and blameless who is ridiculed.

Job 12:5 A lamp is despised in the thought of one who is at ease; It is made ready for those whose feet slip.

Job 12:6 The tents of robbers prosper, And those who provoke God are secure; In what God provides by His hand.

Verse five is better translated, "Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping (NIV)." His friends didn't take time to be aware of Job's real situation - - that his suffering was not the result of sin. Thus their answers were wrong!

Job 12:7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;

Job 12:8 or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you.

Job 12:9 Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?

Job 12:10 In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:11 Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food?

Job 12:12 Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?

Even animals had better awareness of suffering than Job's three friends! They knew it was the prerogative of God to allow suffering; they didn't blame themselves for it. Suffering isn't always because of your fault.

Job 12:13 "With Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding.

Job 12:14 If He breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt; If He imprisons a man, there can be no release.

Job 12:15 If He withholds the waters, they dry up; If He sends them out, they overwhelm the earth.

Job 12:16 With Him are strength and prudence. The deceived and the deceiver are His.

Job pointed out that he knew more about God than his friends did. Again: It wasn't answers he was looking for from them; it was awareness.

Job 12:17 He leads counselors away plundered, And makes fools of the judges.

Job 12:18 He loosens the bonds of kings, And binds their waist with a belt.

Job 12:19 He leads princes away plundered, And overthrows the mighty.

Job 12:20 He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders.

Job 12:21 He pours contempt on princes, And disarms the mighty.

Job 12:22 He uncovers deep things out of darkness, And brings the shadow of death to light.

Job 12:23 He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them.

Job 12:24 He takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth, And makes them wander in a pathless wilderness.

Job 12:25 They grope in the dark without light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

God is Sovereign; He does what pleases Him. His Sovereignty is all the answer Job needed.

What he needed from his friends, and what he didn't get from them, was awareness - - understanding, identifying, coming alongside awareness that rejoices with those who rejoice and that weeps with those who weep.³

A compassionate attitude is revealed when you realize that awareness is more needful than answers; it makes you a ministering comforter.

The second thing you learn, in chapter thirteen, is that:

▶ Platitudes aren't as important as presence:

Twice in chapter thirteen Job suggests that his friends ought to have remained "silent"⁴ and "hold [their] peace."⁵ He tells them to "hear"⁶ him and to "listen"⁷ to him. He calls their words "platitudes"⁸ - Idle, shallow remarks.

Job 13:1 "Behold, my eye has seen all this, My ear has heard and understood it.

Job 13:2 What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you.

Job 13:3 But I would speak to the Almighty, And I desire to reason with God.

Job 13:4 But you forgers of lies, You are all worthless physicians.

Job 13:5 Oh, that you would be silent, And it would be your wisdom!

They would have comforted him with their presence more than with their platitudes.

³ Romans 12:15

⁴ verse 5

⁵ verse 13

⁶ verse 6

⁷ verse 17

⁸ verse 12

Job 13:6 Now hear my reasoning, And heed the pleadings of my lips.
Job 13:7 Will you speak wickedly for God, And talk deceitfully for Him?
Job 13:8 Will you show partiality for Him? Will you contend for God?
Job 13:9 Will it be well when He searches you out? Or can you mock Him as one mocks a man?
Job 13:10 He will surely rebuke you If you secretly show partiality.
Job 13:11 Will not His excellence make you afraid, And the dread of Him fall upon you?
Job 13:12 Your platitudes are proverbs of ashes, Your defenses are defenses of clay.

These men were misrepresenting God - - His nature, His character, His compassion. It is better to say nothing about God than to say something that is contrary about Him. In those times when you are struggling to see the goodness of God in someone's suffering, know that He *is* good and keep your comments about Him gracious.

Job 13:13 "Hold your peace with me, and let me speak, Then let come on me what may!
Job 13:14 Why do I take my flesh in my teeth, And put my life in my hands?
Job 13:15 Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.
Job 13:16 He also shall be my salvation, For a hypocrite could not come before Him.
Job 13:17 Listen carefully to my speech, And to my declaration with your ears.
Job 13:18 See now, I have prepared my case, I know that I shall be vindicated.
Job 13:19 Who is he who will contend with me? If now I hold my tongue, I perish.

Job is so confident in the love of God that he is willing to complain before Him. The worst God could do would be to "slay" Job; if God did, it would be Job's "salvation."

The remaining verses of chapter thirteen are a prayer of Job's directed to God:

Job 13:20 "Only two things do not do to me, Then I will not hide myself from You:
Job 13:21 Withdraw Your hand far from me, And let not the dread of You make me afraid.
Job 13:22 Then call, and I will answer; Or let me speak, then You respond to me.
Job 13:23 How many are my iniquities and sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin.
Job 13:24 Why do You hide Your face, And regard me as Your enemy?
Job 13:25 Will You frighten a leaf driven to and fro? And will You pursue dry stubble?
Job 13:26 For You write bitter things against me, And make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.
Job 13:27 You put my feet in the stocks, And watch closely all my paths. You set a limit for the soles of my feet.
Job 13:28 "Man decays like a rotten thing, Like a garment that is moth-eaten.

I don't recommend this kind of complaining to God. But it is comforting to know that God allows it without rebuke. He knows that you are but dust; He knows your frailty. It is always amazing to note

that, when God recounts the lives of His saints, He overlooks their failures and emphasizes their faithfulness.

People don't need your platitudes about God; they don't need your shallow, trite remarks. They need your presence with them. There is a power in presence when it is genuine and heartfelt.

The third thing you learn, in chapter fourteen, is that:
▶ Happiness isn't as important as hope:

Job's three friends all encouraged Job to repent so that he could have restored fortunes in this life. They wanted him to be happy; but he needed something more than happiness. Happiness is too fleeting; he needed hope.

Job's comments to God in chapter fourteen are a curious mixture of hopelessness and hope. His heart is revealing to us that he needed his friends to offer him hope.

Job 14:1 "Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble.

Job 14:2 He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue.

Job 14:3 And do You open Your eyes on such a one, And bring me to judgment with Yourself?

Job 14:4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!

Job 14:5 Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.

Job 14:6 Look away from him that he may rest, Till like a hired man he finishes his day.

Job 14:7 "For there is hope for a tree, If it is cut down, that it will sprout again, And that its tender shoots will not cease.

Job 14:8 Though its root may grow old in the earth, And its stump may die in the ground,

Job 14:9 Yet at the scent of water it will bud And bring forth branches like a plant.

Job 14:10 But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last And where is he?

Job 14:11 As water disappears from the sea, And a river becomes parched and dries up,

Job 14:12 So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, They will not awake Nor be roused from their sleep.

Job knew he would rise from the dead; he says as much in verse fourteen, coming up. Here he is answering his friends' concern for his earthly happiness. Life is brief; if you have happiness in this life alone, where is your hope? He needed for them to speak to him of heaven, of future reward, of the certain confidence of eternity.

Job 14:13 "Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, That You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!

Job 14:14 If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait,
Till my change comes.

Job 14:15 You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands.

Job 14:16 For now You number my steps, But do not watch over my sin.

Job 14:17 My transgression is sealed up in a bag, And You cover my iniquity.

Job knew his “change” would come - - that God would appoint him a “set time” to live on earth, then “call” him forth from the grave. How he needed his friends to reinforce this hope! It is difficult to hold on to heaven when everything on earth is slipping away.

Job 14:18 "But as a mountain falls and crumbles away, And as a rock is moved from its place;

Job 14:19 As water wears away stones, And as torrents wash away the soil of the earth; So You destroy the hope of man.

Job 14:20 You prevail forever against him, and he passes on; You change his countenance and send him away.

Job 14:21 His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; They are brought low, and he does not perceive it.

Job 14:22 But his flesh will be in pain over it, And his soul will mourn over it."

God was allowing Job’s suffering. Job felt as if he were a mountain being eroded by the torrents of the flood of his suffering. In this life he was lacking hope. He needed to look beyond this life... But no one was helping him to lift his gaze heavenward. His friends were only concerned about his happiness here and now.

Happiness isn’t as important as hope. When you hold out hope - - hope of eternal life, of the resurrection from the dead - - you are a ministering comforter.

Conclusion

So you’ve seen the signs of a condescending attitude:

Being contentious... being conclusive... being casual... being cursory... Avoid them and you will not be a miserable comforter.

Instead, have a compassionate attitude:

Know that answers aren’t as important as awareness... that platitudes aren’t as important as presence... that happiness isn’t as important as hope.

Then you’ll be what Job’s friends weren’t:

You’ll be a ministering comforter.

