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Sitting With The Sufferer

Text: Job 2:11-13

The author Virginia Woolf wrote to a friend, “I read the book of Job last night. I don't think God comes well out of it.”

Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar visited him. Actually, four men came to visit Job, though the writer did not mention Elihu's presence

until chapter 32. The friends hear of Job's suffering and engage in two significant actions.

They

1. Leave their homes and journey to Job's place.

Comment [1]:

Visiting with Job was a deliberate act. They weren't in his neighborhood and decided to pop in. Sometimes, we must plan to go visit with a hurting friend or relative. Verse eleven says they made an appointment. We don't know how they got to Job, Did they walk? Did they ride on an animal or a chariot? They lived in three separate places, a significant distance from Job and from each other. Yet, they made plans to rendezvous

at Job's place. Sometimes we will need to inconvenience ourselves and spend some money and some time, all for the sake of another.

2. Sit in silence with him. It's the ministry of presence. They have questions and even some theories about why this is happening but stage 1 is simply sitting in silence. We need to do more of that. Christians have lots to say. We have verses we have memorized, philosophies we are eager to share, stories to tell and admonitions to deliver. Yet, the best ministry may, at times, be the ministry of presence. As the narrative

Comment [2]:

progresses, the friends will engage in some very heavy conversation with Job. It will get downright combative. But at first, they just sit with the sufferer. It has been observed that we have two ears and only one mouth that we might listen twice as much as we speak. I'm not sure we use our ears as much as we use our mouths.

Comment [3]:

Illus.

When Gardner Taylor's wife Laura died, he said that people came to him and uttered the cliches:

"She's in a better place."

"She's not dead. She's just asleep" and so on.

Dr. Taylor said that everything they said was true...just not helpful.

In this text, Job's friends resist the temptation to so quickly offer clichés, many of which would be true but not helpful.

Rather, they simply sit with Job.

Comment [4]:

Custom, as in Ezekiel 3:15? The writer does not tell us why the friends sat in silence for seven days. A week was the usual time of mourning for the dead (cf. Genesis 50:10; 1 Samuel 31:13;), so they may have been mourning for him as if Job was already dead.

Comment [5]:

They threw ashes violently upwards, that the ashes might fall on their heads and cover them - the deepest mourning (Joshua 7:6; Acts 22:23).

G. Campbell Morgan (An Exposition of the Whole Bible, p202):

*"In overwhelming sorrows, true friendship almost invariably demonstrates itself more perfectly by silence than by speech. And even in spite of the fact that Job's friends caused him sorrow by their words, they are more to be admired because what they thought concerning him they dared to say **to** him, rather than **about** him to others."*

Warren Wiersbe:

"Don't try to explain everything; explanations never heal a broken heart. If his friends had listened to him, accepted his feelings, and not argued with him,

they would have helped him greatly; but they chose to be prosecuting attorneys instead of witnesses."

Henri Nouwen:

More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets. It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working

directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them."

We sometimes think we fail at the ministry of comfort because we don't say the right thing. The truth is, sometimes we fail because we speak at all. Just sit with the suffering, the lonely, the grieving. Your presence may be a needed symbol and reminder of the presence of God, who meets us in our darkest hours.

Conclusion

The model for this kind of sitting with the suffering ones, is our God Himself. In Christ, God came to us, sitting with us

in our lost state and loving us in our alienation and rebellion. Let us imitate Jesus, who walks with us and talks with us and sits with us.

To the chatty ones among us: shhh!

To the ones who are more prone to silence, continue. I am sure Job wanted answers. Soon enough, spirited dialogue and argument will begin. For now... three silent friends..and one Present God.

Comment [7]:

Amen