



LIFE NEWS

God WITH BIG SHOULDERS

by Jeremiah Shawver, Youth Pastor
parksidevisalia.org

Last week, I had the privilege of spending the better part of two days in a seminar on Job. We translated a large portion of the book from Hebrew and discussed different parts of the book of Job. This book gives us some insight into Job's suffering. We are given a picture of God in which He is in control and hears our complaints no matter how harsh.

We are introduced to a man in the land of Uz; he is the greatest man in the land and has a great number of kids and livestock. Not only is this man prosperous, but we are told that he is blameless and upright before God. We then find ourselves in the presence of God; a divine contest is put forward in which God suggests the testing of Job. By the end of chapter 2, Job is left with no children, camels, donkeys, oxen, and a wife who tells him to curse God and die. We are left at the end of chapter 2 with Job and his friends mourning and sitting in silence.

The following chapters begin with Job cursing the day of his birth, wishing he had not been born so that this suffering would not have come upon him. He expresses this feeling, and contrary

to what we might expect, Job does not turn to hope in his salvation; he simply expresses his despair to his friends and to God. It is some of the rawest emotions we see expressed in scripture. Psalm 88 – in which the Psalmist ends in the despair of his lament - may be the only other place where this type of lament is expressed without the light of hope seeming to be present.

Beginning with Eliphaz, the friends of Job attempt to explain the suffering of Job through a theory of just retribution. Just retribution is the idea that temporal suffering is the result of sin against God. It reminds us of the disciples in response to the man born blind when they ask, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" (John 9). Each friend implies to Job, (who we know from the introduction is blameless) that he has sinned in such a way that God must punish him. We, as the readers, know this is not the case. Job responds to each friend in stronger and stronger ways, even calling God to a court case that he knows God will win. Yet, Job continues to bring his lament to God.

The book ends, as you likely know, with Job's final speech and God responding. God tells Job

that He is the creator of the universe and in control of even the great beasts of the world – interestingly, God does not tell Job of Satan coming to test him. After Job responds by saying he spoke of what he did not understand, God uses the following verses to address Job's friends:

“After the Lord had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. Now take seven bulls and seven rams, go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. Then my servant Job will pray for you. I will surely accept his prayer and not deal with you as your folly deserves. For you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”

Job 42:7-8

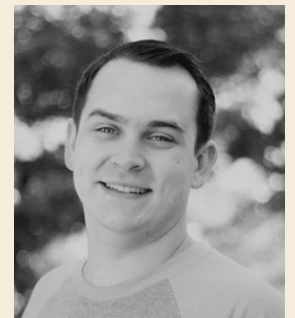
Job's friends do as God tells them. Job prays for them and is restored. It is interesting here that God says of Job that he has spoken the truth about God. In his lament and struggle, in his appeal to the justice and goodness of God, Job spoke the truth about God.

As we discussed Job, I was reminded of a lesser-known nickname for Chicago – the “city of big shoulders.” Chicago earned this nickname because of the blue-collar workers who took joy in manual labor. They were tough. This is, in some ways, the view Job gives of God. He can bear the pain and laments of Job; he is the God with big shoulders. This is clear throughout Job and the book of Psalms. The Psalmist and Job give us an example to follow when we find ourselves suffering.

In the moments when I have gone through suffering, I have found myself tempted to speak as the friends of Job, to try to understand how I have sinned so that God is punishing me. In some cases, sin causes our suffering, but Job makes the case that this is not always the case. In other

cases, I may try and protect God from my complaints as if he does not know my every thought. As I consider these tendencies, I am reminded that the picture of Job and of scripture is that God has big shoulders.

Peter tells us to cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Just like Job, we may not get an explanation of why our suffering occurred, but we can trust the sovereignty of God over all creation, and that our anxiety and pain is not too much for God. My encouragement from the book of Job is to trust the big shoulders of our God, that no matter what complaint we have, He is big enough to hear us and take care of us.



Jeremiah Shawver, Youth Pastor
Email: Jeremiah@parksidevisalia.org