

When Fairytales Have the Wrong Ending

The Hush of Heaven – Part VIII

Job 15-17

Introduction

I recently watched the Disney animated movie *Happily N'Ever After* with one of my daughters. It had a very unpredictable story line – and that was the point.

In this movie, there was an old wizard in a tall tower who ran everything in Fairytale land. He had a set of scales, representing good and evil, which balanced all the events of that world. All the fairytales came true and everyone lived happily ever after.

- Cinderella married the prince;
- Sleeping Beauty woke up;
- Rapunzel let her hair down and the prince climbed up and rescued her;
- Little Red Riding Hood was rescued when the woodsman killed the wolf;
- Plus other happy fairytale endings.

The wizard made sure the scripts were kept in line and everyone followed the story line – all to keep the scales in perfect balance.

There was a problem, however, in that the wizard had two bumbling assistants. One day, he decided to take a vacation to play golf in Scotland. While he was away, his assistants managed to mess everything up. They allowed the scales to get out of balance and everything started going awry.

- Cinderella's mean stepmother became ruler of the universe;

- Sleeping Beauty's handsome prince finally arrived, but after he bent down and kissed her, he fell asleep too;
- Rapunzel's long hair caused her to lose her balance and fall out of the tower on top of the prince below;
- Little Red Riding Hood was eaten by the wolf;
- Plus other wrong fairytale endings.

It was a great movie!

It occurred to me that to many people, God is something like this old wizard. In their picture of God, it is His job to keep the scales of good and evil perfectly balanced and everyone on the script. If He should ever take a vacation, or much less, take His hands off the scales, everything would get messed up and the expected conclusions to everyone's fairytale would not come true.

I happen to believe this is the reality of many people's version of God simply because of the way they act when their lives do not turn out like they expect. Most people have an innate belief that if they follow the script and keep their nose clean, their shoes polished, and their pants pressed, life will deliver the right endings to every chapter. When this does not happen, God takes the blame.

One author imagined it this way: You are driving home from work after a terrible day at the office. In bumper-to-bumper traffic, the guy behind you smashes into you. You then hit the car in front of you, and it happens to be a brand new Porsche. [The driver is not happy!] You finally get everything documented by the police. But the Porsche owner is

so angry he threatens to sue you. When you finally do get home, you do not have any milk. The dog is hungry and he has been gnawing on cabinets. Your kids are misbehaving and gnawing on each other. The mail is full of overdue bills, and you are out of money. Then your wife tells you the doctor wants both of you to see him first thing in the morning. About then, you think, “Lord, what is going on?! And while I’m at it, where are You?” – and no answer comes. Tomorrow is worse than today. You are about to lose your job, your wife is sick, and the guy in the Porsche does sue you . . . and on and on and on.ⁱ

We can identify with a man I have come to deeply respect, admire, and sympathize with. By the time we arrive at chapter 15 in the book that bears his name, Job’s spirit is crushed, his eyes are red with perpetual tears, the days are leaving him more exhausted than ever, and those who have shown up only make things worse. And the person who does not show up; who is noticeably absent is God.

As you find your place at Job chapter 15, consider the fact that Job has followed the script; has done everything right, but the fairytale he had been living had taken a turn – it was coming to a different ending than he had expected.

More Wrong Counsel for Job

Job chapter 15 begins the second round of speeches between Job and his misguided counselors.

- In the first round, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar delivered speeches that basically claimed Job was in need of repentance.
- In the second round, all three counselors will speak again – and they will turn up the heat.

When Eliphaz spoke the first time, he began by being discretionary and diplomatic, but not the second time. This time, Eliphaz drops his gloves and comes out swinging. He is personally offended that Job has refused the counsel of these misguided men.

Look at Job 15:1-3.

*Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,
“Should a wise man answer with windy
knowledge and fill himself with the east
wind?*

*“Should he argue with useless talk, or
with words which are not profitable?”*

In other words, “How dare you, Job, ignore our wise, experienced wisdom?”

Continue to Job 15:4.

*“Indeed, you do away with reverence
and hinder meditation before God.”*

It is as if Eliphaz is saying, “Job, you’re ruining my walk with God by my having to hang around this trash dump and try to talk sense into you.”

Friends, in this chapter we find a graceless man offering counsel to a grieving man. He will only deepen Job’s wounds.

Donald Grey Barnhouse commented on this chapter that it is a sad fact that the tongues of professing Christians are often all too busy doing the devil’s work.ⁱⁱ

The counsel of Eliphaz:

- begins with offended pride – Job 15:2;
- is followed by insults – Job 15:3;
- includes pious condescension – Job 15:4;
- then adds a big dose of condemnation – Job 15:5-6.

Look at Job 15:5-6.

*“For your guilt teaches your mouth
and you choose the language of the crafty.*

*“Your own mouth condemns you, and
not I; and your own lips testify against
you.”*

In other words, “Job, every time you open your mouth, you dig your hole much deeper.”

“Besides,” Eliphaz implies, “who do you think you are?”

Eliphaz, in his counsel:

- now resorts to sarcasm – Job 15:7-10.

*“Were you the first man to be born, or
were you brought forth before the hills?*

*“Do you hear the secret counsel of
God, and limit wisdom to yourself?*

*“What do you know that we do not
know? What do you understand that we do
not?*

*“Both the gray-haired and the aged are
among us, older than your father.”*

In other words, “We’re the veterans, Job. Look at my gray hair – I’m older than your father.”

Eliphaz is saying, “We are the original wise men from the east. And we’re not about to surrender our perspective on your pain.”

Understand that it was critically important to these three counselors that they win the argument;

that their diagnosis was correct. In fact, the diagnosis has now become more important than the patient.

Why?

Because if Job was not a sinner being punished by God, then the three friends' understanding of God was all wrong. Even worse, this meant they had no protection against personal suffering *themselves*. If obedience was not a guarantee of health and wealth, then what happened to Job just might happen to them.ⁱⁱⁱ

Therefore, it is critically important that Job “fess up”; that these three prove he is the sinner.

In other words, “We’ve got the wizard figured out. We know how the scales work. Job, you’re not getting the ending you want because you haven’t followed the script.”

“. . . your heart [has carried] you away...” Job 15:12

“. . . you [have turned] your spirit against God . . .” Job 15:14

“You can’t be a righteous man – this has to be your fault!”

Observations about wrong counsel

Let me make two observations about Eliphaz’s counsel and about wrong counsel in general.

1. First, wrong counsel wants to support its case more than it wants to offer comfort.

The counselor, the Christian who is advising, the leader or co-worker just has to win the argument. An unwise or self-centered counselor is more interested in their perspective than they are in the pain of the one they are counseling.

Eliphaz did not want to help Job as much as he wanted to be right. And when the argument runs out of logic or biblical support, do like Eliphaz – repeat yourself – only louder.

The inside story on preachers is: if you have strong points – yell; if you have weak points – pound the pulpit and yell louder.

2. Secondly, wrong counsel ultimately is self-serving and self-promoting.

What motive is there for serving God, if God does not pay up? Eliphaz is actually constructing a relationship with God that makes God the servant of man. Otherwise, religion is not worth it.

Eliphaz is playing into the very argument Satan brought up in Job chapter 1 when he told God, “Take

away Job’s family and his health and his fortune, and he’ll curse You to Your face.”

In other words, “Make his religion not pay up, and watch him take off. Take away his fortune, and watch him give away his faith.”

The real question is, “How do we respond when Christianity doesn’t seem to pay off?”

When obedience creates conflict or discomfort, how do we follow through with biblical commands?

We would like to believe that when we do the right thing, good things happen. Fairytales always have happy endings.

A simple illustration of the truth happened right in front of me a couple of days ago. I needed to pull into a lane of traffic that had stopped at a red light. I was leaving a store parking lot and there was almost enough room for me to pull in front of a lady sitting in the line of stopped cars. I needed a couple of inches. She waved me on with a smile, put her SUV in reverse, and backed into the car behind her.

It was a brand new Jaguar. People who drive Jaguars are really picky about their cars. They do not like dents and stuff like that.

I felt so badly for this woman. She had been kind and polite; she had done the right thing – and it had a bad ending.

Ultimately, our motive in doing the right thing is not so that good things happen, but is so that God will be glorified.

Jesus Christ challenged His disciples in Matthew 5:16,

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and . . .

. . . give you a raise

. . . elect you to the board

. . . put you on first string

. . . give you an “A” for good attitude

No,

. . . glorify your Father who is in heaven.

If counselors and counsel does not ultimately point us away from ourselves and toward the glory and honor of God, then chances are we will follow nothing less than self-serving, self-promoting, comfort-seeking, compromise-allowing, self-assuring counsel.

Eliphaz goes on for the rest of this chapter to deliver his own experience, which is another sign of poor counsel. He says in Job 15:17,

“I will tell you, listen to me; and what I have seen I will also declare;”

- The wicked are in pain all their lives – Job 15:20;
- They are riddled with anxiety – Job 15:22;
- They are terrified of death – Job 15:23;
- They regard themselves as invincible – Job 15:25-26;
- But their wealth will not last – Job 15:28-29;
- They will lose everything they have – Job 15:30;
- They will not leave an inheritance/legacy – Job 15:31-33;
- Their doom is certain – Job 15:34-35.

Eliphaz is obviously talking about Job in these verses. He barely camouflages his condemnation. In his view, and in that of the others, everything that has happened to Job is proof of this perspective.

So there it is Job! Bad people do not enjoy the fairytale – but good people live happily ever after.

Job’s Response

It is no wonder that Job responds, and I imagine him putting his head in his hands and saying, in Job chapter 16, verse 2,

“I have heard many such things; sorry comforters are you all.”

The word “sorry” or “miserable” could be translated, “burdensome”.

In Job 16:4, he says,

“I too could speak like you, if I were in your place. I could compose words against you and shake my head at you.”

In other words, “Let’s trade places and see how easy it is for you to take what you’re dishing out.”

- You climb into this hospital bed . . .
- You take my place in this unemployment line...
- Let’s exchange accounts and you take my place in bankruptcy court . . .

“Let’s exchange seats and see how easy it is for you to come up with obvious answers and simple reasons for trials and tribulations.”

One author said that sometimes we have to experience misunderstanding from unsympathetic friends in order to learn how to minister to others.^{iv}

If this is true – and it is – Job will one day be a first class giver of comfort.

At this moment, however, Job is not certain he will make it out of the pit of despair. He laments, in Job 16:6, regarding his emotional pain,

“If I speak, my pain is not lessened, and if I hold back, what has left me?”

He refers to his physical state in Job 16:7,

“. . . [God] has exhausted me . . .”

Socially, Job has become a desolate island, as we read in Job 16:7b,

“. . . You have laid waste all my company.”

Spiritually, Job is at his wits end. Notice Job chapter 17, verse 1,

“My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me.”

In other words, “There’s no way out . . . there’s no hope left.”

C. S. Lewis, in his book, *A Grief Observed*, wrote about his spiritual and emotional struggles after the death of his wife. He wrote with openness and candor in the same way that Job speaks in these verses in his response. Lewis wrote,

Where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, you will be, or so it feels, welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face; a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside; after that, silence.^v

The silence of God inspired rich truths from the sufferings of His servant Job. Those who suffer acutely tend to see more clearly.

You may have found this to be true in your own life. During the times of your greatest desperation, your mind has been most open to the word of God; your heart most tender to the Spirit of God; your life most available to the work and will of God. You have tasted the sweet fruit that accompanies sorrow.

You may remember in Job 13:15, Job made the incredible resolution,

“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...” (NKJV)

I was reading an article written by Jill Briscoe, the wife of Stuart Briscoe who pastored for many years. She was retelling the story of David, their elementary school aged son. Evidently he was going to be taken to a doctor’s appointment and was told by his father, “Don’t go to school on Monday. You’re going to come with me to get an x-ray.”

This was the length of the conversation that occurred on Friday. Monday came and David got into the car – his face white and drawn, his eyes wide with fear. Stuart said, “David, you’re not afraid, are you?”

He answered, “Of course I’m afraid, Daddy!”
“Why?”

Little David responded, “‘Cause I know what an execution is.”

Jill then wrote, “The amazing thing was that he actually showed up – and got into the car. Why? Because he trusted his father.”^{vi}

With this kind of child-like resolve, Job was willing to get in.

For one thing, his resolve is bound to a clear conscience. In Job 16:16-17, Job says,

“My face is flushed from weeping, and deep darkness is on my eyelids,

“although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure.”

“But Job, it’s not worth it – it’s not paying off; God is not paying up.”

Notice another amazing resolve in Job 17:9,

“Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to his way, and he who has clean hands will grow stronger and stronger.”

This is another way of saying, “I’m not giving up on my character. I’m not cashing in my faith. I’m going to hang on to the path that I know is right, even though it doesn’t seem to be working out.”

For those of you who identify with Job today – your presence at church today restates your commitment to Christ and the path of godly living; your presence delivers your resolve – you are going to hang on and you are also, like Job, going to look up.

Notice Job 16:19,

“Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my advocate is on high.”

Wow! We know, by way of further revelation, that our advocate is Jesus Christ who,

. . . always lives to make intercession for [His people]. (Hebrews 7:25)

The great missionary and pastor Robert Murray McCheyne once wrote, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”^{vii}

So keep looking up and keep holding on.

The writer of Hebrews asked us to make the resolve of Job our own,

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(Hebrews 4:14-16)

Paul challenged Titus to,

[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the [apostles’] teaching . . . [that is] sound doctrine . . . (Titus 1:9)

This is the reason spiritual disciplines are not called spiritual delights. Though they produce spiritual delights, they come by way of spiritual disciplines. Prayer does not get easier, it gets harder. The spiritual battle for purity does not ease up, it heats up.

It is an entirely different sermon, but I must reference several items that appear in Job chapters 16 and 17. To me, as I read over these chapters again and again, there was the unmistakable fragrance of Good Friday.

We read in Job 16:10-11,

They have gaped at me with their mouth, they have slapped me on the cheek with contempt; they have massed themselves against me.

God hands me over to ruffians and tosses me into the hands of the wicked.

Can you see the crucifixion of our Lord in this? Look at Job 17:2.

Surely mockers are with me, and my eye gazes on their provocation.

Can you see Christ at the betrayal of Judas in Job 17:5a?

He who informs against friends for a share of the spoil . . .

This is our Lord before His own people in Job 17:6.

But He has made me a byword of the people, and I am one at whom men spit.

Literally, this is, “in whose face people spit”.

Job did not know that his own suffering would mirror in some ways the suffering of our Lord. He would indeed become a partaker in the sufferings of Christ, and also, as Christ came to liberate him from Paradise, a partaker in the victory of Christ over death and the grave.

So will we who believe in this suffering, dying, resurrecting, ascending, interceding Savior.

Application

Before we leave this episode in Job’s life, let me draw from this event several observations.

For those who are criticized:

- **Remain open**

There may be truth buried underneath harsh words and unkind thoughts. Learn from them if you can, and grow from it.

- **Keep alert**

Do not buy into personal criticism just because someone is selling it to you at half-price. Stay alert. There is a reason that Satan, your enemy, is known as “the accuser of the brethren”.

- **Stay focused**

Do not get sidetracked. Job held on to the anchor of his hope. He knew heaven would eventually vindicate him as having walked with God with clean hands and a pure heart.

Do not lose sight of the path. The devil will just as readily distract the believer or the local church as he will try to destroy them.

Remain open, keep alert, stay focused.

For those who comfort:

This episode between Eliphaz and Job is a good reminder that comfort is not dispensed in convenient doses like cough medicine. Opportunities come unannounced. How many opportunities do we pass

by? We are truly surrounded by people who silently, desperately need an encouraging word.^{viii}

My mother-in-law recently began dialysis treatments. I picked her up from the clinic the other day and she was telling me about all the people who come into that clinic to get hooked up to the machines three days a week. These people are all ages, all sizes, all races, all kinds of personalities.

There is the eighty-five year old who waves at everyone. There is the middle-aged couple who have just begun treatment. There is the sixteen year old young man who comes in with a chipper attitude as he responds to the others around him. Hooked up to the dialysis machines, three to four hours at a time, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon, this young man is there. I cannot help but wonder who knows at his school? Which students know the reason he slips off campus and misses the afternoon games? I wonder how many teachers know why he has to hurry out of the library or why his classes are arranged for an early dismissal three days a week.

Who has any idea of this subculture of sufferers? This is one of a thousand little worlds in which people live, day-in and day-out. Frankly, we would probably be shocked at the multitude and variety of sufferers in our midst even today.

Grace is always needed. Comfort is always welcome. A kind word; a handshake or a hug; even a nod of the head today in the hallway might be all someone will get this week that even comes close to a demonstration of care and grace.

Let us not forget, God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters. In fact, God’s comfort is never given, but is always loaned. God expects us to distribute it to others.^{ix}

For those who need comfort:

Let me give one closing word to those who need comfort; to those who have sat through this sermon and identified with Job. Let me leave you with this thought.

This is not the end of the fairytale. No matter how it seems to be turning out, this is not the end.

The truth is that the believer who has placed his life in the hands of God will indeed live happily ever after. Your Prince is on His way and He will set everything right; He will make everything new. So hang on to your character, to principle, to purity, to the ways of God, and keep looking up – the Prince is coming soon.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/10/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (Word Publishing, 2004), p. 138.

ⁱⁱ Steven Lawson, Holman Old Testament Commentary: Job (Holman, 2004), p. 133.

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, Job: Be Patient (Victor Books, 1991), p. 56.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 61.

^v Swindoll, p. 139.

^{vi} <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.

^{vii} Lawson, p. 147.

^{viii} Wiersbe, p. 65.

^{ix} Wiersbe, p. 65.