

Riding the Roller Coaster of Misery:
Job's Second Response to Eliphaz
Job 16-17 (Part 1)

Roller Coasters! You love to ride them, or you don't. There is no middle ground with roller coasters.

As a young man, I loved to ride these instruments of terror. The exhilaration of climbing to the top of peaks only to experience the sudden plunge over a precipice at high speeds stopped my heart as I experienced the thrill of terror. Around twisting corners that whip your neck from right to left and back again, the coaster jerked us around like rag dolls as we held on for dear life. The fear of the coaster jumping the tracks met us at every sharp curve. Finally, the last descent slowing to a stop at the bottom of the terrifying ride brought only one thought. "Let's do this again!"

I have no doubt that Job did not enjoy his miserable roller coaster ride. He repeatedly experienced the highs and lows of hope and despair. On numerous occasions he begged God to stop the coaster and let him get off. How did he get here in the first place? As so many people say today, "I didn't sign up for this." More than anything else, the roller coaster brought terror, pain, hopelessness and misery to Job's life.

At times in our lives, we may be able to identify with Job. "What, God, did I do to deserve this death defying, terrifying ride? Where are you, God, when I need you the most? How long, O Lord, will you leave me as a prisoner with no hope of escape? When will the ride end and I can get off this roller coaster?"

Whether we find ourselves in the midst of a heart-wrenching divorce, the unbelievable pain of the death of a child, the daily struggle with disease, or the fear and helplessness of the loss of a job, our questions seem to be, "How will I get through this? When will things be normal again?" The roller coaster ride seems to last so long that we lose track of the idea of "normal."

Today, listen to Job as he rides the roller coaster of despair and misery one more time around the track. As you read, draw parallels between Job's life and some of the instances of your life when you may have felt those mixed feelings of despair and hope? How did you respond? How might you respond differently after having read about Job and meditating on his walk with God?

Those "Comforters" (16:2-3; 17:3-5)

When calamity strikes, usually someone steps in to put an arm around us. As the news of our disaster spreads, others begin to reach out to us with heart-felt words of solace and comfort. Eventually, a well-intentioned friend or relative begins to tell us what to do and how to handle our dilemma, advice that we did not seek nor are we ready to accept.

Job has three such friends. Eliphaz the Temanite is one such friend. While Job sits in the middle of his ashes, illness, depression and misery, Eliphaz speaks up with his

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So a person sharpens his friend.
-- King Solomon*

analysis and solution. Job must repent of his sin. When God sees that repentance, He will bless him again. Eliphaz offers Job the carrot or the stick. This is a classic case of the theory of retribution.

Job, taking his time, responds with two statements and a question.

First, he says to Eliphaz, “You are full of hot air” (16:2-3). That’s my paraphrase. His words are like the empty wind that constantly blows across the northern plains of Wyoming. Filled with nothing but dust and dirt, the winds blow and blow and blow, stinging us with each exposure to its force. In short, Job says, “Eliphaz, you are a miserable comforter.”

Have you ever met anyone like this? They always have all the “right” answers. Ready with their advice for any situation, they boldly proclaim to you the way of escape, although they’ve never been in your shoes. How did you respond to them? What lessons can you take away from those situations that will enable you to help others?

In the second statement, Job says, “Let’s trade places.” You don’t find these words in the text, but you find the thought as you listen to Job in 16:4. “I could say the same things if you were in my place. I could spout off criticism and shake my head at you” (NLT). “Let’s trade places and see what you would do and how you would feel.”

As we walk through life’s valleys of misery, we tend to believe that no one understands our pain. Consequently, when untimely words of advice slip from the lips of uninvited counselors, we feel more hurt and confusion. Yes, when others shift from comforter to adviser, we may tend to say emphatically, “Be quiet and leave me alone! You don’t understand my pain!” Perhaps those that wallow in misery are correct. No two situations are the same. The levels of pain vary from person to person and circumstance to circumstance.

As Job listens to those that comfort and advise him, he asks a poignant question, a question that may cross our minds when we find ourselves in distress. “Does anyone truly care enough to stand up for me and help me?” (17:3-5). Feeling as though we are trapped on an isolated island, we shout out, “Enough of the talk! Someone do something to help me. Someone do something to take the pain and the anguish away.”

“Will you find me another job, immediately?”

“Will you restore my family so that we won’t be torn apart by this terrible divorce?”

“Will you bring to life my dead child, my baby?”

“Will you take the pain away that keeps me in constant agony day after day after day?”

“Will you make me young again so that I don’t have experience the loneliness of growing old?”

In the end, those that come to comfort us, to advise us, overstay their welcome. We would gladly trade places with them.

What can we do to relieve the pain, the agony, the despair, the loneliness, the misery of those experiencing tragedy? We certainly cannot trade places with them.

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Silently, we can be present to walk along side of them through this valley, Silently, we can entreat God on their behalf, praying for them that God will grant them strength, comfort, peace and reliance upon Him. Silently, we can look for opportunities to perform acts of kindness for people in despair and misery. Silently, we can wait with them until God brings them to the end of the valley of death and shows them His light of mercy and grace, until God ushers them into His banquet hall prepared for them (Psalm 23:5). Silently.

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