

When Silence Is Not Golden  
Job's 3<sup>rd</sup> Response to Eliphaz  
Job 23-24

My friend, John Stoner, would often come home after a busy day at work. With a cup of hot coffee in hand, he greeted his wife with a hug, a kiss and "Hello." Then finding a quiet spot away from people, he might sit for an hour in silence, reflecting on the day, relaxing and talking silently only with God. This is when silence was golden for John.

Job feels no need for silence. In fact, silence was not golden to Job. As soon as his "friend," Eliphaz, took a breath from his accusatory diatribe, Job jumped in with his tongue flopping and his lips moving. Silence was not golden to Job, especially the silence he was receiving from God.

As we move through chapters 23-24, Job asks a question of his friends and God, that are more accusations than searching for truth. He starts by asking a basic question.

**Where Is God (23:1-17)?**

"Today also my complaint is bitter;  
my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.  
<sup>3</sup> Oh, that I knew where I might find him,  
that I might come even to his seat!  
<sup>4</sup> I would lay my case before him  
and fill my mouth with arguments.  
<sup>5</sup> I would know what he would answer me  
and understand what he would say to me.  
<sup>6</sup> Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?  
No; he would pay attention to me.  
<sup>7</sup> There an upright man could argue with him,  
and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.  
<sup>8</sup> "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there,  
and backward, but I do not perceive him;  
<sup>9</sup> on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him;  
he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.  
<sup>10</sup> But he knows the way that I take;  
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.  
<sup>11</sup> My foot has held fast to his steps;  
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.  
<sup>12</sup> I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;  
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.  
<sup>13</sup> But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?

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so a person sharpens his friends  
— Solomon*

What he desires, that he does.

<sup>14</sup> For he will complete what he appoints for me,  
and many such things are in his mind.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore I am terrified at his presence;  
when I consider, I am in dread of him.

<sup>16</sup> God has made my heart faint;  
the Almighty has terrified me;

<sup>17</sup> yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,  
nor because thick darkness covers my face.

Although not stated directly, we find Job's questions scattered throughout this chapter in verses 3, 8, 9 and 17. "Oh, that I might know where I would find Him." His desperation to find God leads Job to go forward and backward, to look to his left and his right. Yet, in all his searching, he does not find God. God is silent and Job desperately wants to have a conversation with God.

What would Job say in this conversation? Assured that God would listen to him, he would lay out his case before God, like an attorney standing before the Supreme Court lays out his case for the justices (4-7). God would listen to him attentively. He would pay attention as this upright man laid out his defense before the Judge (6-7). At last, God would understand Job's position and Job would understand God's position (5) leading to an acquittal for Job. Relief at last would find its way to Job's life.

Job's one glimmer of hope surfaces for a moment in verse 10. "There are three noteworthy items of faith here: (1) Job believed that God knew his situation; (2) Job believed that God was testing him; (3) Job believed that he would emerge a better man."<sup>1</sup> Job believed that he would come through this terrible time of life and emerge on the other side in the grace of God. The suffering would stop. God would restore Job.

Comforting himself with those thoughts, Job explains his reasoning. Picturing his life as a journey, he proclaims that his feet have not left the path to God (11). Unlike Pilgrim in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Job does not take short cuts in his journey. Like the Psalmist, Job treasures the words of God in His heart (12; cf. Psalm 119:11). Job understands God's concepts and precepts. He orders his life around God.

Job's desire to approach God is not with familiarity. He will not throw his arm around God's shoulder and say, "Let's talk this out over a cup of coffee." No, he would never think of or approach God in this manner. In fact, terror grips Job's heart as he contemplates what this moment might be like as he talks with God (15-16). While his mouth spouts bold statements, his heart pounds against his chest cavity in dread of being in the presence of Almighty God.

Yet, this terror will not stop him from having his say (17). He does not know what terrible surprises may await him, but he will press forward to have "his day in court." He will not keep silent. He has questions for God.

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<sup>1</sup> Alden, R. L. (1993). [Job](#) (Vol. 11, p. 242). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

### Why Is There No Justice (24:1-12)?

“Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty,  
and why do those who know him never see his days?

<sup>2</sup> Some move landmarks;  
they seize flocks and pasture them.

<sup>3</sup> They drive away the donkey of the fatherless;  
they take the widow’s ox for a pledge.

<sup>4</sup> They thrust the poor off the road;  
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, like wild donkeys in the desert  
the poor go out to their toil, seeking game;  
the wasteland yields food for their children.

<sup>6</sup> They gather their fodder in the field,  
and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man.

<sup>7</sup> They lie all night naked, without clothing,  
and have no covering in the cold.

<sup>8</sup> They are wet with the rain of the mountains  
and cling to the rock for lack of shelter.

<sup>9</sup> (There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast,  
and they take a pledge against the poor.)

<sup>10</sup> They go about naked, without clothing;  
hungry, they carry the sheaves;

<sup>11</sup> among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil;  
they tread the winepresses, but suffer thirst.

<sup>12</sup> From out of the city the dying groan,  
and the soul of the wounded cries for help;  
yet God charges no one with wrong.

Where is God’s justice in this life? Why is the court not open? Why isn’t the Judge seated? Why isn’t the Judge hearing these cases of injustice? Why aren’t judgments being handed down? Why the silence?

Yet today, people continue to ask questions such as these. Where is God in this mess? If He exists, why is He silent? Why doesn’t He address these issues? What did these people ever do that was so bad to deserve the war, the famine, the pestilence, the pain, the dying? What did I ever do to deserve these tragedies in my life? Why doesn’t God talk to me?

Beginning in verse 2 and moving through verse 12, Job lists injustice after injustice.

- Thievery
- The oppression of the fatherless and widows
- The poor thrust aside
- Parents forced to act like animals to care for their children
- Poverty stealing the clothes, the habitats and the food of the poorest poor
- The rich guarding their massive wealth and refusing to help those in need

In listing these oppressive acts by others, Job is comparing his righteous life to that life that he was never, nor would he ever, allow himself to get involved. This is his way

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of saying, "I am not guilty."

### **Why Do These Atrocities Take Place (13-17)?**

This question, Job can answer.

"There are those who rebel against the light,  
who are not acquainted with its ways,  
and do not stay in its paths.

<sup>14</sup> The murderer rises before it is light,  
that he may kill the poor and needy,  
and in the night he is like a thief.

<sup>15</sup> The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,  
saying, 'No eye will see me';  
and he veils his face.

<sup>16</sup> In the dark they dig through houses;  
by day they shut themselves up;  
they do not know the light.

<sup>17</sup> For deep darkness is morning to all of them;  
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.

The murderer, the adulteress and the thief rebel against the light of God's revelation. They do not know God's ways. They do not follow His path on their journey (13). Darkness is their standard for living (17).

In answering the question as to why these terrorists can perform their oppressive acts and do them without the fear of reprisal, Job subtly exonerates himself before God. "My feet have never left your path. Your law is like food to my stomach" (23:11-12). "I am innocent of all these evil deeds. Why am I being punished for something I didn't do?"

### **What Will Become of the Wicked (24:18-20)?**

"You say, 'Swift are they on the face of the waters;  
their portion is cursed in the land;  
no treader turns toward their vineyards.

<sup>19</sup> Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters;  
so does Sheol those who have sinned.

<sup>20</sup> The womb forgets them;  
the worm finds them sweet;  
they are no longer remembered,  
so wickedness is broken like a tree.'

Eventually, the wicked are pushed from the land to the sea where they have no real home (18). Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, likens them to "scraps of wood floating on the water – useless, cursed junk, good for nothing." Death awaits them (19). No thought of them remains after living a life of crime (20). To be forgotten is the ultimate insult and punishment in life. While they might not receive punishment for their sins in this life, in the end, wickedness will be broken "like a tree." We can be assured of this.

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## Will the Wicked Prosper (24:21-25)?

“They wrong the barren, childless woman,  
and do no good to the widow.

<sup>22</sup> Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power;  
they rise up when they despair of life.

<sup>23</sup> He gives them security, and they are supported,  
and his eyes are upon their ways.

<sup>24</sup> They are exalted a little while, and then are gone;  
they are brought low and gathered up like all others;  
they are cut off like the heads of grain.

<sup>25</sup> If it is not so, who will prove me a liar  
and show that there is nothing in what I say?”

Appearances can be deceiving. We’ve all heard the adage, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Dig deeper. Go beyond the outside appearance. Look at the entire picture. In verses 21-23a, it appears that God is giving these criminals free reign over the righteous. It appears that way. Yet, God has His eye on these reprobates. They will not get away with murder. Like all others, their works of unrighteousness will cease to exist. Justice will come to bear upon them (24).

But why doesn’t God act now against these murderers, adulterers and thieves? Why is there no justice? Why is God silent?

As I stand on the plains of north central Wyoming, I can see for many miles around me with an uncluttered horizon meeting my gaze. Even climbing to the heights of the Big Horn Mountains just west of here, I can see further and further. However, I cannot see all the way around the earth because the earth is spherical. Eventually the curve of the earth prevents me from seeing God’s entire creation.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 answers the question as to why injustice appears to reign with no answer from God. Solomon says,

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end. (New Living Translation)

As much as we yearn to know and see everything that God sees, God did not design us to understand eternity. God did not design us to know everything. God designed us to trust Him, to believe that He is in control when everything around us seems to be out of control. As Francis Schaeffer said, “He is there, and He is not silent.”<sup>2</sup>

We want all the answers now. But God is often silent. Perhaps, His silence is indeed golden.

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<sup>2</sup> Schaeffer, Francis A. *He is There and He is Not Silent*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972.

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