

Sunday August 15, 2021
 Lesson 11: Protest
 Scripture: Job 19: 1-27

Context:

This week we continue our last section of the unit Respond with a focus on themes in the book of Job, found in the Old Testament. This week's theme is on Protest and the refusal to be content with letting injustices continue unimpeded. Our focus will be on Job's conversation with his "friend" Bildad the Shuhite as Job reflects on all the atrocities he has faced and the infliction of pain he continues to receive.

We last left Job having a conversation with his wife on all the calamities to plague him. Today's conversation comes in the midst of a visit from Job's "friends." The term friends is placed in quotation marks as the individuals struggle with presence and appear to be more focused on assessing the situation and telling Job how he only has himself to blame in the midst of these episodes.

Job decides to respond to Bildad and name how he truly feels. At this point, Job has come to feel he is totally abandoned by friends, relatives, servants, family, and God – anyone who might perform the customary office of "kin redeemer," someone who will help him feel made whole again.¹ Yet even now, the one body which might have given him comfort, is also collapsing. Job is looking somewhere for hope to come and redeem him.

Throughout the discourse, one can see how Job is in some ways pleading with his friends to see the injustice and hear him out. He asks them to hear his words and see the weight of them. They have looked at Job, interpret it in retributive terms, inflate it, and press it against him as a massive weight for his moral condition.² Instead, Job wants them to have pity for him as he feels he has been treated unfairly.

Job pays specific attention to Bildad's allusion to the net of God's judgement on the wicked. Job takes him back on this phrase, suggesting that even the innocent might get caught up in the net.³ Job does not attack God, yet instead tells his friends he needs their support and holds no punches as he claims his closest friends have turned against him.

For Job's mindset, there is the overwhelming perception God and his friends have abandoned him. Both parties should have supported him, giving him help when he appealed to receive it. Yet for whatever reason, both have worked in tandem to be Job's adversaries and he is now alone. Even his own body betrays him. The injustice of it all needs to be addressed and Job's tune now turns to holding his friend accountable for the transgressions committed.

¹ Janzen, Gerald J., "Job," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 131.

² *Ibid.*, 132.

³ *Ibid.* 133.

Application

The word “Protest” means various things to people. Some imagine a formed protest as people assemble with signs in public spaces to raise their concern over policies or issues of power. Others see protest as adding one’s name to a list of concerned individuals about things ranging from people holding positions of power to changes in time of worship services. The word “protest” takes us to places where even the most subservient individuals may occasionally discern a nudge to stand against the status quo.

Today we read of a different protest. Job has watched the mounting calamities in his life and receives his friends, those who are supposed to care for him. Yet his friends missed the memo of keeping their tongues, knowing when to listen, or just leaving because Job was not in the mood to receive visitors. Instead, his friends decide to lecture him on how he got to this place.

For the first time in our lesson, we see Job protest how all these things are unjust and unfair. He has been abandoned by God if their logic is to hold up, and now he has lost them. His declaration flies in the face of friends who think they have all the right answers. These protests are Job’s way of bargaining and claiming his story before it is overtaken by others who would rather not deal with the pain.

If you’ve been around long enough, you’ve had to deal with protests as well. Maybe you were not at the state capitol demanding justice, but you’ve had your own protests before God and others about the twists of life which are just not fair. We’ve all had protests, a normal experience in the human condition.

When we read this story though, we can find we sit on different places when it comes to protesting. At times, we’ve probably felt like Job. We have had things happen to us which are not fair. Maybe like Job, we’ve lost someone we’ve loved. Or maybe like Job, our bodies have given out on us and we are frustrated. Perhaps, we’ve even had our jobs taken from us due to manipulative people or unfair budget cuts where we had the shortest tenure.

The phrase “life’s not fair” is one to come from all our tongues and there is nothing wrong with uttering those words. We all need a place to process our protests, to name the things unjust in this life. Sometimes there are things we can do like name injustices in our society or even protest if we’ve been treated unfairly. And yet other times, like Job, we need to name our protests just to get them out of our system.

The prayer for when we name these protests though is we will find “friends” unlike the ones we read of in Job. If we are honest though, we’ve all found those friends who have solutions for every problem, and they will tell us what exactly we need to do. And we groan just a little louder of how now everyone really has abandoned us.

Yet at other times, sometimes some of us might need to admit we find ourselves as the “friend” who misses the point. We might move into savior mode and believe our friend just clearly cannot see as we do. So, we move into fix-it mode, telling them how they ended up here and ignoring the fact of how perhaps our friend just wanted someone to sit with them in the pain and be with them. There is power in listening to someone protest and finding the courage to deeply listen allowing the person to name something they may not want any other person to know.

Job’s story reminds us of how at times we will need to protest in life, maybe even protesting to God about the injustices we see all around us. God gives us the space to do so, granting us the opportunity to cry out. Protesting is not something relegated to the

public square of the American democracy; a protest can come from the desperate person pleading to God on their knees in their bedroom.

Yet the story also provides a cautionary tale on our protesting and when others protest. We can be like Job's friends who miss the point or we can be the friends who can sit in the ambiguity learning to listen and allowing our loved ones to protest in the ways they know best. And hopefully we can find the friends who allow us to protest and name our pain, being transformed by the vulnerability present.

How do you protest to God when you see injustices in the world or in your own life? Why do you think it is important to "protest to God" from time to time? What has been a time when you acted like Job's "friends" and what did you learn? Who is someone you turn to when you need to protest the whims of the world? When should you listen and when should you protest something and how do use discernment on when to do either practice?

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