

Sunday August 22, 2021
 Lesson 12: Angry Despair
 Scripture: Job 30: 16-23

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 Angry Despair and how we can question why God sometimes seems unresponsive to our plights in life. Our focus will be on Job as he pours out in a lament to how God has abandoned him and how all he can foresee is death coming his way.

In the passage before, Job has lamented how society has abandoned him and now he turns his eyes towards God. We can tell Job is using the "he" to refer to God in several clues. Firstly, the section opens with a reference to his *nepeš*, an idiom frequent in psalms of complaint; and it continues with language already heard in previous complaints in the book of Job.¹ Job is addressing God directly and this time it is not in the language of worship or resignation.

Secondly, some of the verses between sixteen and twenty-three use similar imagery to the passages before where Job protests to others how God has been with him. Job is making a comment about how God is currently treating him in contrast to how God earlier watched over Job and protected him from the woes in life.² Job now cries out how God is the one to grasp his clothing, throwing Job into the mud to become dust and ashes.

Yet Job does not stop there. Job moves to using the term "You" and acknowledges how he has cried out to God in his distress. He continues to name how God ignores him and how he crumbles in the sight of God and those around him. Job is not afraid to use the words he needs to paint the full portrait of what has happened to him.

Job's use of the words "Mire," (or mud in some translations), and the "dust and ashes" also carry meaning. "Mire" is another word connected to "clay" which is also translated to the human body as mortal, with a beginning and ending point.³ The use of becoming "dust and ashes" also points to how Job understands being a "cliché" (or cast in some translations) as becoming a parable.⁴ In other words, Job realizes with renewed poignancy the finitude and status of humankind in the total scheme of things.⁵ Job has cried out, God has not answered, and now Job will be left to make a point of how despair and anger are companions on the journey of life.

¹ Janzen, Gerald J., "Job," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 207.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 208.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Application

There are many things I love about Southern culture. I love how we know about hospitality and how to make people feel comfortable in our homes or porches with tall glasses of sweet tea with lemonade and perhaps dinners with fine china in a formal dining room. There are the traditions we carry forward from tailgating at SEC football games to the friendly rivalry we share with other Southern states about different customs, yet still connected by a common heritage. I like how dressing up is not seen as ostentatious as much as it is about dressing your best before God when it comes to going to worship or simply because you like things like bow ties or pearls or whatever brands feel most comfortable, yet fashionable.

Yet there is one thing which I've found Southern culture sometimes lacks and maybe it's in other part of the country and world I've never visited. At times, we emphasize how it is impolite to get angry or to despair. It is seen as mannerly, especially in Christian circles, to not show anger or grief. Those are impolite things to be stored away, compartmentalized as not to disturb the peace, which includes our false self and the those around us. We are conditioned to not cuss, feel too deeply, and to carry on forward.

While there is something to be said for not firing off or making public spectacles, to deny we ever feel anger or despair is to hold ourselves to an impossible standard. When we deny those feelings or processes, we end up hurting ourselves and potentially those around us. We forget what it means to be human, how God created us to process and deal with those things which are natural to the human experience.

There are those who when commenting on the book of Job may try to soften Job's angry despair to emerge out of him. It is tempting to say he was not serious and was "just having a bad day." On the other end, it is easy to say God allowed him to be angry until God wanted to tell Job to stop. "This was all part of God's plan to tell us a story until God was done."

While all commentators are entitled to their opinions, to try and explain away Job's anger and despair to God is to dismiss the natural processes and feelings humans go through, especially in the face of distress and trauma. Job cries out to God demonstrating to all of us how to question God does not connote a lack of faith or "anger issues." Instead, it reveals a true experience nearly every Christian will go through as we see bad things happen to people with no specific rhyme or reason.

God can handle our anger towards God. God can handle our despair. God doesn't keep some timer though as the limit to how many times we can cry out when life is unjust or unfair. We can cry out to God naming our anger and despair, not to receive some trivial pat on the head for being expressive in what we think or feel.

As mentioned before, the Christian tradition has lost the art of lament. Often we want to move to solutions or deny the pain or anger within us. And we can go that route, believing time will heal all wounds.

Or we can be honest with ourselves and God to name the despair and anger in our lives. We can still be good Christians who ask the question of "why" and keep coming back to texts like Job with the hope we are not the only ones with inquiries of why God is silent in human suffering. We can find those people we trust and love to occasionally have those times and moments where we rant and rave, naming our feelings. We are to find how our anger and frustration point to the deep grief inside all of us at certain times

and places. We are called to cry out to God in our anger and our grief.

Why do you think it is important to name your feelings towards God even if culture tells you not to name those feelings? How can the things to make you angry alert you to something connected to grief and despair? What spiritual disciplines like reading the scriptures help you name your anger or despair? Who do you turn to when you need to sometimes just cuss or vent about your feelings? How can dealing with your feelings lead you to a deeper place in your walk with Christ?

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