

If I were to pray, He would not answer me, vv.16-18

- I. Job's greatest struggle was in the area of prayer.
 - A. He struggles to believe that G hears his prayers anymore, not because he's living in sin (Isa 59.1-2), but because the only answers he gets are more destroying tempests.
 - B. And he struggles with bitterness because he feels it's all without the provocation of sin (cf. 2.3)
 - C. God's way with him is so bitter and terrible to his senses that his faith can't find a foothold in the storm.
- II. And this is what sits at the heart of his whole struggle, because he went from a constant, vibrant communion with God to being subject to a battery of afflictions from God.
 - A. At least to his senses, he went from being best friend, to being enemy #1
 - B. Entertaining these thoughts creates a fertile breeding ground for unbelief and despair.

If I were to contend, He's too strong for me, v.19

- I. Job's second struggle was over the great disproportion between God's strength and man's impotence (cf. vv.4-13), which made it seem impossible to get a hearing with God.
 - A. Being both almighty in strength and having the sovereign authority to use all that power, none can go toe-to-toe with God.
 - B. But what's so discouraging is that all his life God's strength worked for Job; but now it's seems so clearly to be working against him.

If I were to go to court, none could speak for me, v.19

- I. Job's third struggle is that just as there's no way to contend with God, so there's no way to argue with God.
 - A. There's not a man on earth in any better of a position than Job is, who could represent him before God. In fact, Job's closer to God than all men (1.8); so that if he can't reason with God, then no one can.
- II. And it's not that Job wants to argue. He just wants to ask why—especially since he's not conscious of any extraordinary sin that would explain his suffering.

If I were to speak to my defense, my own mouth would betray me, v.20

- I. Job's fourth struggle is over his consciousness of the imperfection of his own righteousness before God.
 - A. If Job tried to defend himself, his attempt to do so would be his greatest offense, because to sound our own praise is to sound our own shame.
 - B. So Job has no intention of trying to defend himself before God, because God could so easily point out a thousand sins of which Job is unaware (1Kgs 8.38; Ecc 7.20).

- C. Which is why this entire defense culminates in v.33 in a heart-cry for a Mediator to stand between him and God (1Tim 2.5).

I am innocent, but I don't want to live like this, v.21

- I. Here we see Job throwing up his hands in discouragement. He feels like there's no way out but in the grave.
 - A. When life's reduced to nothing but pain and misery and when it seems that God's turned foe, it's hard to find any motivation to go on living, and it's very hard to find the faith to go on trusting.
 - B. That's where Job is. And maybe that's where you are.

Observations for Application

- I. Our prayers may be heard and answered, even when afflictions are upon us. Our faith in God doing us good can't be based on whether or not we feel good about it; and our trust in God to answer our prayers can't be determined by whether or not we got the answer we prayed for.
 - A. We need to understand that God answers our prayers according to His wisdom, not ours, and for our soul's good, not to accommodate our feelings. That's why we pray in Jesus' name and for His will to be done, not ours (Phil 4.6-7).
 - B. God may be answering us even when He storms us with suffering.
- II. God usually sorely afflicts those He greatly loves, Heb 12.5-14
 - A. We need to reconcile "afflictions" with "God's children" in our minds and hearts, because in God's mind and heart, these two things not only go together, but work very well together.
 - B. So we're wrong to say the heart of God is against us because of the negative providences in our life. In His hands, the scalpel, the poison, and the rod will *always* do us good, because that's His promise, Jer 32.40
 - C. This is a call to be on our guard against Satan's temptations in the hours of trial. Because when Satan sees our faith faltering, he comes to fan our unbelief into flame with a question like, "How can God love you and deal with you like this?" (cp. Mt 4.1-3).
 - 1. We need to counter those lies with the promises of God's faithfulness to do us good, not only *in* trials, but even *by* trials. And we need to remember that however bitter the cup of suffering may be, the children of God *never* drink the wrath of God (cf. Jn 19.30).
 - 2. And when we drink the cup of suffering with faith in God's promises, we can taste the sugar of His love mixed with it.
- III. The faith of even a strong Christian may sometimes waver under trial.
 - A. Faith is a grace that needs constant exercise; and when it's not exercised, it can grow weak—especially under trial—so that we think, say, and do things we ought not.
 - B. So let us remember that our recourse and refuge in the seasons of a struggling faith is to hide ourselves in Jesus, resting on the strength of His keeping power in the hour of *our* trials (Jn 10.28-30) and resting on the perseverance of His faith in the hour of *His* trials for us, when He struggled for us—and overcame (Lk 22.42; Mt 27.46).