

# Eliphaz and Job's First Discourse

by Mack Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the dialogue between Job and his friend Eliphaz, highlighting the importance of responding to suffering with sympathy rather than premature solutions. It emphasizes the need for silent support and the assurance of having a mediator, even in the darkest times.*

**Scripture:** Job 4:2, Job 6:8, Job 7:11, Job 42:7, Job 42:10, 1 Timothy 2:5, Romans 8:26

**Topics:** "Compassion in Suffering", "The Role of a Mediator"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Helicopter. Man, is that an aerial? From the air we are going to view, we are going to survey four chapters in Job. How about that? Job 4-7, today we are not going to read it all, but we will read verses 4 and 5. And I really encourage you to have your copy of the Scriptures open and look at it with me, because we are going to analyze these arguments, these chapters, and see the arguments.

And it's important today for you to go away saying this. I basically am coming to understand and see what Job 1-6 is talking about. You can do that today with an open Bible and an open heart and an awakened mind, so nobody is slumbering.

Job 4. Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld the one who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it, meaning adversity, weakness, great sorrow, now it has come to you, and you are impatient.

It touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence? And the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of His anger they are consumed.

The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions are broken, the strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered. Not a word was brought to me. Now a word was brought to me secretly, quietly, suddenly.

My ear received the whisper of it amid thoughts from visions of the night. When deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face.

The hair of my flesh stood up. It, that is the spirit, stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes.

There was silence. Then I heard a voice. Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in His servants He puts no trust.

In His angels He charges with error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth. Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces.

They perish forever without anyone regarding it. Is not their tent cord plucked up within them? Do they not die in that without wisdom? Chapter 5. Call now. Is there anyone who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple.

I have seen the fool taking root. Meaning, I've seen stable people who are foolish, who had stability and roots down deep. I've seen them, but suddenly I cursed his dwelling.

His children are far from safety. They are crushed in the gate, and there is no one to deliver them. The hungry eat his harvest, and he takes it even out of thorns.

And the thirsty pant after his wealth. For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. But man is born to trouble, just like the sparks fly upward.

As for me, in other words, if I were you, I would seek God. And to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields.

He sets on high those who are lowly and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He frustrates the devices of the crafty so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their own craftiness and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.

They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night. But He saves the needy from the sore of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor have hope and injustice shuts her mouth.

Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves. Therefore, do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For He wounds, but He binds up.

He shatters, but His hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles, in seven, no evil will touch you. In famine, He will redeem you from death.

In war, from the power of the sword, you will be hidden from the lash of the tongue and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine, you will laugh and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you will be in league with the stones of the field and the beasts of the field will be at peace with

you.

You shall know that your tent is at peace and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. You shall also know that your offspring will be many and your descendants as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheath gathered up in its season.

Behold, this we have searched out. It is true. Hear and know that it is for your good.

What a wise, crafty beginning speech to break the silence. And Job broke the silence, remember, earlier in chapter 3. To review a little bit, remember, we have eight characters in Job. Job, Satan, God, Job's wife, and Job's four friends.

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and then Elihu. Not to mention Job's ten unnamed children. That would make 18 characters in the book.

And remember, there are two heavenly scenes that Job doesn't know anything about. God with the angels and the Satan. He's called the Satan.

The accuser comes among them and appears twice. And God challenges the Satan twice with Job's righteous life. Hey, the Satan.

Have you considered my servant Job? Yes. Challenges the Satan twice with Job's life. First, hits him where it hurts with his income, his livelihood, and his wealth all gone.

And then secondly, where it hurts worse, ten dead children in a few moments. The second attack, Satan, hits his health. Now think about it, beloved.

What's closer to any person than those three things? Their livelihood, their family, and their physical health. Anything closer to us than that? No. It's amazing.

The Satan was given permission to attack and being subtle in what he was, he knew exactly where to attack, exactly how to make things as bad as he could short of taking Job's life. So that's chapters 1 and 2. Job passes those tests and the Satan is exposed as the liar and deceiver that he is. So you come to Job 3. Remember, what was it about? Job's autobiographical lament.

He's not praying. He's not talking to his friends. He's talking to himself.

What's he say? Well, he wishes he had never been born. He curses the day of his birth across the board in eloquent ways. He wishes he had never been born.

So you come to chapter 4. In fact, at the end of 3, it says, I think it's at the end of chapter 2 actually, Job is sitting and perhaps then laying and sitting, laying. Think he could get comfortable? He's sitting, laying probably in the trash dump or in an ash heap. Why there? Not totally sure.

We're just told that he is. But it only says in chapter 2, this significant verse. Picture Job.

Picture Job. It says, he took a piece of broken pottery from the ash heap in which he was sitting to scrape himself. He took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

Now, all of that statement is significant. What does it picture? A broken man with a broken piece of pottery scraping his broken body just to get some relief maybe. Sitting in ashes with the ashes of his destroyed

life.

Chapter 4 now, where we've come to this morning. We don't know the time frame, but probably later in the book it says we certainly know weeks have passed, months have probably passed, because Job speaks about months. He's no better.

He's in agony. No relief, no understanding, no comfort, no hope, no future, he thinks. No one with him until the three friends come.

And chapter 4 begins the three long cycle of speeches for 33 chapters. Eliphaz speaks first, probably the oldest. Generally, in those times, the older statesman would be the one expected to speak.

And so Eliphaz we presume was. He speaks three times and Job always answers. Bildad speaks three times and Job always answers.

Zophar speaks twice and Job answers. And then Job concludes with his final speech and he's done talking. No progress.

No resolution. No agreement. They didn't help Job at all.

Well, here comes Elihu. He's been listening. We don't know when he showed up.

He's been listening. Elihu finishes with a longer, a little better speech. He still was off a little bit, but he makes some progress.

All the way through the 33 chapters, it says at the beginning of the chapters, and Eliphaz answered and Job answered. And Bildad answered and Job answered. Then Zophar answered and Job answered.

It's like the way a ringside boxing announcer would speak. And Eliphaz leads with the first argument and he hits Job with it. And Job answers with a light blow to the right side of the head.

And Bildad answers with a jab. Like boxers in a verbal knockdown fight. Fifteen rounds.

They're going at it. It's a war of words. Three boxers in a ring.

They're tag teaming. Three against one. Not good odds, is it? How would you have fared if three close friends, you've lost everything, you're laying there.

Maggots are on your sores. You're covered with dirt. Three close friends come.

And the first speech, her words are coming that Job, we kind of know, don't lose hope. You've been a good man, but we know that sin somehow is behind this. How would you fare with 15 rounds of that? How sanctified would you remain? How bitter would you get? Would you lose your temper? Would you just get frustrated? Would you start screaming about after the third speech, just get out of here and start throwing ashes at them? How would we respond? Well, Job was really quite amazing.

But Job could not see or believe that God was in his corner and God would make sure the match did not take him out. He survived it. And then God was going to ring the bell at the end in ways that the friends and Job never dreamed.

Chapter 4, Eliphaz begins. And he says later in chapter 15 in his second speech, he refers to the fact that Job, don't turn there, but in chapter 15, Eliphaz says, you know, Job, both the gray-haired and the aged are here among us. In fact, older than your own father.

So, it's very possible, at least one of them, and it's possible it was Eliphaz, was old enough to be Job's father. And so, today I want us to see Eliphaz's argument and Job's response. Chapters 4 through 7. The first speech we read, chapter 4 and 5, and Job's reply is in chapter 6 and 7. So what I want us to do today is survey these arguments and see them and see what we learn about God's ways in suffering and how to see into the pain of people deeply suffering.

The first speech, chapter 4. Basically what you have here is you notice the first words of Eliphaz in verse 2. Look how wise they were. Look, when you break the silence, you're together, let's say you're with somebody over a meal, and you're going to have to tell them something hard or confront them with something. You don't sit down and say, look, you idiot.

You really blew it. No. You don't start that way.

Eliphaz didn't either. He says, look, Job, if I began to speak to you, would it be okay? Or will you be impatient with me? But I just can't hold it back. I've got some things I want to say to you.

And then what does he start doing in verse 3? He starts complimenting, legitimately, genuinely, complimenting on Job's past. He knew Job's life. He said, you've instructed many.

You've strengthened weak hands. You've made firm the feeble knees. Now pause.

Fast forward to chapter 15. The story changes. Job had mistreated everybody.

He had neglected the widows and the homeless and the hungry. He had just disregarded them. So there was total contradiction in what they said about him.

But here, Eliphaz is saying, you have been a good man. Your track record speaks for itself. But, verse 5, but, now.

But now. So in verses 2 through 6, he really commends him and then he brings it forward to say, here's what is happening with you now. Verses 7 and following, look at it.

7 through 11, really from the get-go, Eliphaz begins to delicately bring up the nature of Job's suffering. It's the first mention right away of suffering and the cause of it. Suffering and the cause probably being sin through verse 11.

And then verses 12 through 21, look at that. It's a pause here and Eliphaz changes his thinking. He's going to give a personal testimony here.

He's thinking, you know, I'll give an experiential, personal testimony and Eliphaz is probably thinking this will have some weight with him. This will come across authoritative with him. He's looking for things to share.

And so, verse 12, he says, a word was brought to me, stealthily, suddenly. So he begins in verse 12 through 21 to give a testimony to Job about what he experienced that he thinks somehow will bring weight or authority to Job in his suffering. It doesn't really work, but that's what he does.

Eliphaz's vision and prophecy to Job. So it's a war of words that's going on. And Eliphaz conveys this what you have to call charismatic experience.

He experienced something. Whether it was genuine or counterfeit, he's not making up a story. Eliphaz begins to tell Job and here's what he tells him.

Listen, Job, I want to tell you what I experienced. This is verse 12 through 21. I want to tell you what I experienced.

God spoke to me one night in a very powerful way. It was a vision. I had a vision that happened to me.

And when it started coming, real fear was gripping me. I was horribly afraid. And then suddenly, a spirit, an angel, appeared right in front of me.

It passed in front of me and the hairs on my body stood up. I was shaking with fear. And the form, the spirit, stood still.

I couldn't quite make out what it totally looked like. Verse 16, he says that. And then there was this silence.

Silence. Silence. And then a voice.

The spirit began to speak. What did it say? Can any man truly be right with God? That's what Eliphaz says he heard. Can any person be truly righteous or right before God? So that was the testimony that Eliphaz shares.

He shares a vision, a supernatural visitation, an appearance of a messenger from God, he thinks. A voice speaks. He says, I heard it.

And he said, can anyone be right with God? What's Eliphaz doing by inserting this personal testimony here? Whether it's genuine or counterfeit spiritual experience, we don't know. But he's using this as a personal testimony to try to make his arguments have weight and authority with Job. He's using it as verbal leverage to try to get Job to listen.

It's like, have you ever heard somebody say something like this? Well, let me tell you what I experienced. I had an angel visit me one night. Lifted me up to heaven.

I saw Jesus. And I've written this book. And people go, wow! You must really know what you're talking about.

They're an expert. This testimony somehow is supposed to give credence to Eliphaz's arguments that he's going to try to unfold on Job. But it really doesn't.

So Eliphaz continues in chapter 5. What's there? Verses 1-7, he starts talking to Job about punishment and consequences for sin. Verse 8 is a singular call to repentance. As for me, I would seek God.

I would commit my cause to Him. Verses 9-16, Eliphaz takes off in one of the most glorious and true, accurate declarations of God's greatness and His attributes. And everything he says in verses 9-16 about God is absolutely spot on.

True and sound. But in verse 17, he misapplies it because he starts talking about you're being disciplined, Job. This is what's going on.

That mighty God, don't despise His discipline. You're being corrected by Him for your good. And this is all meant to restore you and heal you.

So, receive it, hear it, it's for your good. That's Eliphaz's speech. So, in summary, Job, you've been a good man.

Don't lose heart. No one's perfect. And God gave me a vision and a word for you.

No one can be righteous with God. So, you've got to see this, that you're being disciplined by the Almighty because obviously there's some past sin involved. So you must expect some suffering because just like when there's fire, you know there's fire when you see sparks, we know there's sin when we see such suffering.

So Job, just be patient and you'll find out that I'm right. That is Eliphaz's first speech. Pretty good beginning.

Gentler, but it is a blow to the ribs. Job doesn't respond really to what Eliphaz says. Why? When you read Job's response in the next two chapters, it's striking that he doesn't respond to anything specifically that Eliphaz just said.

Why? Why do you think? Too much pain still. When people are in deep pain, lasting pain, people can talk to them and they're not hearing a word they're saying. So, Job either ignores Eliphaz intentionally or he just can't hear yet because he's too numb.

So what is Job's reply? Chapter 6 and 7. Here's several things in two chapters that Job gives in his first response. Chapter 6. My grief can't be weighed. I want to die soon, please.

He's directing that sentiment to God, but he's saying it to Eliphaz. I want to die soon, please. And then he says in verse 14 something that's interesting.

Eliphaz, anyone who withholds true kindness from a friend who's in such a condition, they don't even fear God themselves. If they're withholding kindness, they could give them to someone who's hurting so much. And then Job says, have I ever even asked for help? Did I ask you men to come? Have I asked for help? But go ahead.

Sarcasm kind of begins to kick in a little bit here. But go ahead. Give your speech.

Preach your sermon to me. Show me where I've gone astray. I'm all ears.

And then Job says, but look, all I have now is months of emptiness and nights of misery. Job summarizes what he feels in those words. Here's my life now.

Months of emptiness and nights of misery. He sums up his lonely experience. And then in verses 4-7, look at it in chapter 6. He gives us a glimpse into his view of himself.

Chapter 6, verse 4. The errors of the Almighty are in me. My spirit drinks their poison. The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

Look on down. Later, he says, my body is covered with dirt and worms. He says, my nights are long.

I toss and turn all night until the sun rises. My skin hardens and gets crushed over these sores. And then they break open again and they start all over again and they don't heal.

Satanic sores have stricken him all over. And he says here in 6 and 7, I'm allotted months of emptiness, nights of misery. And my life is coming to an end without hope.

My eyes will never see any good ever again. So he says in chapter 7, verse 11, he says, therefore, I'm not going to be quiet. I'm not going to hold back my words.

I'm not going to hold in what I feel. I am going to speak and spill out my anguish and my complaints because I hate this life. I hate my life.

Leave me alone. From verses 16 to 21 in chapter 7, Job is not talking to Eliphaz. He's talking to God.

He's complaining to God. It's a prayer of anguish complaint. So, this is quite a verbal sparring round between these two, but the worst is yet to come.

Rounds 2-13 are going to come and they will get more bloody, meaner, more unfruitful. You know, and I thought this morning, if we could have heard these speeches, if we could have eavesdropped and heard these talks start, Eliphaz speaks, Job responds, then they take turns, we would have been amazed. We would have been moved.

We would have been startled and shocked. We would have been nervous. The tension is mounting.

The suspense, the drama, filled all the arguments. From the very first speech, the friends and Job all began to speak about God. Eliphaz does in every speech.

Job does virtually in every speech. The other two friends, they do too because all of them viewed that God was in control of this. And the friend's view was, God has done this because you've sinned, so repent.

Job's view was, I know God has done this, but I know I didn't sin to cause it, and I don't know what He's doing, but I wish He would account for Himself. That's Job's view in it. So, Job's friends speak wrongly about God's purposes in Job's experience.

And God says that at the end of the book. And Job speaks rightly, God says that at the end of the book, though Job crosses the line with his attitude. And we'll see that.

So, this first speech, Eliphaz, Job, you're a good man. You've done well. Now it's hard.

Be patient. You're going to make it. We know there's sin somewhere here.

So, here's my counsel. Seek God. Turn to Him again.

And God will turn it all around. You'll be healed and restored and all will be well. You just see if I'm not right.

Job, my pain is too great. I can't take it anymore. I want to die.

So, let's think about this this morning and the dynamics of this. How was Eliphaz leading off in his like-mindedness with his other two friends against Job? They come to comfort him, but they become adversaries. And their speeches actually become a part of Job's pain.

When someone talks to you when you're hurting, and they say the really right thing, the good word, it comforts you. But when they say the wrong thing, the ill-advised thing, the premature thing, the corrective thing, the solution thing, it adds to your pain. It complicates.

It brings more struggle than you had before they started talking. So what can we learn here? Let's think about this. Two or three things briefly.

Think about this. Because, beloved, I thought about this this morning too. If the pain, anxiety, heartache, worry, depression, discouragement, anger, bitterness, that any one of you have had in life could be bagged up, it would probably be a pretty big bag.

Disappointments. But think about all of us in this room right now. If all of our sorrows and griefs and all that were put together and piled up, it would be massive.

So here's the deal. Responding to suffering and seeing it, seeing through it, and seeing God rightly in it is massively important. It's huge because when the hardest things come and the hardest blows hit you, you will think of God.

And how you view God, how you feel about God, how you respond to the Lord will come out. And a right view will draw you to Him. And a wrong view will alienate you and you'll withdraw.

So, number one, thinking about hurting people, those nearest us to those furthest out in our life. Number one, all counsel initially to people in pain. Words and counsel to those in pain is often premature.

Even a surface reading of Eliphaz's speech shows that it wasn't time to go there yet. They waited seven days that Eliphaz should not have started talking about what he did. Job wasn't ready for it.

It was premature. The best thing would have been to just keep listening. To see if Job would keep talking and for Eliphaz to nod his head and to maintain eye contact if he could.

To listen, but not to try to bring any solutions. The person in pain isn't ready for solutions. They can't process any of that.

They need that person whom God has brought just to be there for a while. To listen, to listen, to listen, to hold her hand, to give comfort, to give hugs. Silent support is often the wisest and the best counseling.

Now, I hit on this before, but it comes out strikingly in Eliphaz's speech because when somebody hears nothing you've said and they're just talking about something else, you've got to know quickly what I said. It wasn't time for that. That didn't help them.

So I'll refresh. I'll reboot. I'll start over again.

Maybe I'll be quiet and just be here. All counsel initially to a person in real pain is often premature. Number two, people in pain like Job need sympathy, not a diagnosis.

They need sympathy, not a diagnosis. But Eliphaz starts giving a diagnosis right at the beginning. After a few words of compliments and a wise approach, he starts giving a diagnosis and answers even.

But listen, beloved, when we see or are around people that are in real pain, we've got to remind ourselves pain is all they can handle right now. The pain is all they can handle right now. They can't even sort

through the pain yet, much less something else that I'm going to add.

They can't process more right now. They can't take any more information right now. They can't think past right now's pain.

They can't see clearly or think clearly except about the pain that they're feeling and the sorrow they're going through. And they don't even yet want answers. They don't want information.

They have no strength to try to apply something I would say to them in that moment. So, they don't need a diagnosis. They need your heart's sympathy.

And see, this is a good thing because some of you, when your family member dies in the future and your mother or your father or your sister or your brother needs your comfort, you don't have to think. You don't have to come up with words. Be with them.

Sit with them. Be there. That's big comfort.

Number three, all the time, though he didn't feel it, Job had a mediator. He had a go-between. All the time, who was keeping him and carrying him through this great darkness, this horror, this nightmare that was real.

And Job was absolutely certain, I'm going to die soon. I'll never see light again. I'll never see any future good.

I'll never know anything good in the future. That was Job's reality. And all the while, his mediator, his redeemer was going to take him through it.

He was going to come through his gold. And he had a bright future. Impossible! That was impossible.

But God was going to do it. There's an old song. How does it go? I can't get the first words.

The second line says, God, any mountains you can't tunnel through, God specializes in things thought impossible, and His power can do what no earthly power can do. It doesn't matter what the obstacle or how dark or how deep the pain or how deep the loss. God, for every child of His, has a perfectly fine-tuned plan of perfection and good that He is going to bring about.

Job was being kept, not keeping himself, he was being kept by the power of God through faith under the very, very end. He says later, my Redeemer, I'm going to see Him when I stand on the earth. And he could have sung what we sang this morning.

My Redeemer, His faithfulness, my standing place, though foes are mighty and rush upon me, my feet are firm, held by His grace. Now, Job didn't feel any firmness under his feet. He did not feel firm at all.

But he was being held by his Redeemer's grace. And he felt the reality in his soul at times, intermittent times, gleams of this would come through his mind and his heart. And then he felt it totally later when it was all over.

He felt the reality of the modern song. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path, for my love is often cold. He must hold me fast. Those He saves are His delight.

Christ will hold me fast. Precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast. He'll not let my soul be lost.

His promises shall last. Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast. Beloved, I urge you in the next 24 hours, read those four chapters.

Soak them in. Let God apply them to you. See the lessons Job expresses about his pain.

See the lessons that Eliphaz shows us. The reality that people in pain, counsel is often premature. They just need your loving support.

They don't need a diagnosis. They need sympathy. And if they're a believer, they have a mediator.

It's going to bring them through. Let's pray. Father, thank You for what the book of Job, Job's life, shows us, teaches us.

Would You let us soak it in? The reality of what's here. Would You teach us what we need to see? Would You help us to learn what we need to learn? Would You apply it to our lives, Lord, in terms of the reality of pain and suffering and relating to others? Lord, all our life, we're going to experience this either as the one suffering or as the one coming alongside to try to do what we could do. So help us.

We are so thankful today, Lord. We do have a mediator. We have a keeper.

We have a Savior. Job's Redeemer is our Redeemer. Blessed be Your name this day.

We pray in His name. Amen.

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