

Introduction

About 25 years ago, a young attorney named Daniel told me what he believed. God sending anyone to hell would be unloving. God is loving. God, therefore, will send everyone to heaven and no one to hell. But I disagreed. I explained to him what the Bible teaches in that regard. Those who follow Jesus will go to heaven. Those who reject Him will go to hell. But it was to no avail. Dan wouldn't even consider the possibility of that. He close out our discussion this way instead: **"You believe the way you want to and I'll do the same."**

That's a revealing comment. It teaches us the necessity of believing objectively and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

A Belief

Most of you know Job's story well. At one time, he was one of the wealthiest men on earth. According to chapter 1, he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 female donkeys and **"very many servants."** He also had a large family of seven sons and three daughters and he himself was healthy and well. But then he lost it all. All of his servants and animals were stolen or killed, all of his sons and daughters were killed, and he was stricken with a painful and debilitating disease (sores all over his body). The worst that could happen to him did happen. It was catastrophic, so much so that the name "Job" has become synonymous with suffering.

Job had three friends, each of whom counseled and advised him. Eliphaz the Temanite was one of those. 4:7-11 records part of what he counseled. In verse 7, he asked job two rhetorical questions, the gist of which was this. Do the righteous suffer? His implied answer was, **"No, they don't."** Righteous people don't suffer. Only the wicked do. He went on to claim in verse 8 that there are no exceptions to that. He then used an analogy in verses 9-11 to clinch his claim. Beasts of prey may terrify the earth for awhile but God, in anger, eventually punishes and

destroys them all. In the same way, Eliphaz contended, He eventually punishes and destroys the wicked. His message to Job was a blunt one: **“You’ve lost all your children, wealth, and health because you’re wicked. God is punishing you.”** If that wasn’t bad enough, his other two friends told him the same thing. It reminds me of the old adage, **“With friends like these, who needs enemies?”**

This text reveals a belief of Job’s three friends. When people suffer, it’s because God is punishing them for their sins. Most people in antiquity (3000 years ago) believed that, and you know what, some still do. Interviews with cancer patients, for instance, show that many believe they’re being punished. They think God afflicted them with cancer because they’re despicable people who deserve suffering and pain. Some are even ashamed to reveal they have it because others will then know that God despises them. What Job’s friends believed, they believe.

This is the fourth Sunday in our Worldview Month and we’re addressing our beliefs. Job’s three friends, and even those cancer patients, teach us two things about them.

Our Beliefs May Be False

I’d introduce the first by asking a question. Was that belief of Job’s three friends true or false? 1:1 tells us. It describes Job this way. He was **“blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.”** Job didn’t suffer because he was so wicked. On the contrary, he suffered precisely because he was so good. He was God’s preacher to Satan. That belief of his three friends, therefore, was false.

And some of ours may be as well. Remember a distinction from last week. Knowledge is always true. Beliefs, in contrast, may or may not be true. If they aren’t true, then they’re false.

That raises the very same issue for us that it did for Job’s three friends. Are our beliefs true or false? Are they consistent with or contrary to reality (what is so)?

Let’s take a survey here. How many of you believe differently about

something now than you used to? I know I do – about many things actually. I used to believe, for instance, that the killer instinct in sports is admirable. But I now believe that it's immoral. Logic makes clear that one of two things is so. I either believed what is false then or I believe what is false now. What is true of me is true of you. You believe differently about some things now than you used to. That shows that all of us have adhered to false beliefs, and likely still do.

But it's problematic that we do. Remember what we've learned about beliefs. They're the rails upon which our lives run. Consequently, true ones direct our lives for good. False ones, on the other hand, direct them for ill. False beliefs sabotage and sometimes even ruin our lives.

I know a professing Christian who is so hypersensitive and critical that she eventually alienates anyone who gets to know her. But she explains it this way. She's a special kind of spiritual humanity that normal people can't stand. That false belief of hers sabotages her life. It covers up the truth about her and keeps her from changing.

That then is the first thing Job's three friends teach us. Beliefs may be false, and some of ours undoubtedly are. That raises the issue of course. Which ones are they?

In the Grip of Beliefs

Job's three friends teach us a second thing. Beliefs can grip us.

That happened to them. The belief that people suffered because God or the gods were punishing them dominated societal thought in antiquity. No doubt, Eliphaz's family, his friends, their families, and almost everyone he met accepted and articulated it. As he grew, therefore, he simply equated it with reality. He took it to be true without requiring any explanation from anyone or giving it any thought. He was in the grip of a belief in other words.

And so are we! Not that one probably but others. The fact is that our belief systems, our worldviews, grew up with us from our earliest childhoods. They came to us from the teachings, expectations,

and behaviors of our families, friends, and communities. Certain beliefs were so fervently taught, clearly expected, and obviously modeled for us that we automatically equated them with reality. We don't take them to be beliefs. We consider them to be natural truths instead. So, we don't require anyone to explain them and we ourselves give them little or no thought. We're in the grip of those beliefs in other words.

A man who was steeped in a Pentecostal tradition shared something he believed. Interpreting the Bible is the Holy Spirit's job, not ours. We don't have to figure out what it means because He tells us. But I disagree. I believe we must partner with the Holy Spirit in His work by learning and use the principles or rules for interpreting the Bible. We'll misinterpret it if we don't and there's a mass of anecdotal evidence that proves that. Well, I tried to share some of that evidence with him and he wouldn't let me. He said instead, "**I don't need any evidence because I already know.**" That's a telling statement. He was in the grip of a traditional belief, so strongly that he wouldn't consider any evidence, no matter how convincing, to the contrary.

But it isn't just traditions that can put us in the grip of beliefs. It's desires as well. We believe things simply because we want to. It's pleasant if we believe them and painful if we don't. So, we believe them no matter what. Remember what the young attorney named Daniel said, "**You believe the way you want to and I'll do the same.**" He believes about heaven and hell what he wants to believe. Pride is another thing that can put us in the grip of beliefs. Think about it. If we believe otherwise than we believe now, we're admitting we were wrong. But some of us are too proud to do that. So, we refuse to believe otherwise.

Whatever the reasons are, it's true. Many of us are in the grip of false beliefs that are sabotaging or even ruining our lives.

Changing Beliefs

So let's get out of their grip and change beliefs. To change beliefs means to remove false ones and replace them with true ones. That is

without doubt one of the most difficult and sometimes painful things we can do. But it's also one of the most urgent. So, let's do it. Let's change beliefs and here's how - by doing three things.

First, we identify the beliefs - especially the defining ones - that are directing our lives. Most of us aren't aware of the beliefs that are directing our lives and how they're doing so. But we need to be and can by seriously considering why we think, feel, and act the way we do. We ask and carefully answer the question, **"What is the belief or beliefs that are causing me to think, feel, and act the way I do?"**

Second, we gather as much information as we can about the subjects or issues to which our beliefs relate. I identified our resources for doing that last week: the Bible, insightful teachers, books and magazines, the internet, insightful acquaintances, observation coupled with analysis and thought, and experience coupled with analysis and thought. Employing those resources, we learn as many facts and truths as we can about the subjects or issues to which our beliefs relate.

And third, we follow the information we've gathered wherever it leads us. I can't impress upon you enough the importance of this. When I was 36 years-old, the Holy Spirit spoke to me in his still small voice and said, **"Be an objective pursuer of truth."** Objective means "unbiased" - not influenced by traditions, desires, or pride. No one is ever 100% unbiased, but we need to be as unbiased as we can in the pursuit of truth. In his book *Plato's Socrates*, Plato identified a Socratic principle that all of us should follow and it's this: **"Follow the evidence, wherever it leads."** That is one of the most life-altering principles we will ever learn. Follow the evidence wherever it leads. It takes great moral courage, but we're objective pursuers of truth when we do.

I once counseled a Christian whose janitorial job was killing him. He hated what he did and dreaded going to work every day. I wanted to help him and went through the three steps I just described to do so.

First, I helped him identify the belief of his that was directing his life. It finally came out in our conversation. He believed that some jobs are menial, like his (cleaning), and that some are noble, like his sister's

(practicing law). That belief of his was dramatically affecting the way he felt about and experienced his job.

Second, I helped him gather information about the subject to which his belief related - work. I explained two Bible passages in detail to him: Ephesians 6:5-8 and Colossians 3:22-25. They reveal three facts about our work. (1) God scrutinizes how we do it; (2) He evaluates how we do it; and (3) He will reward or penalize us eternally based on that evaluation. I also mentioned Martin Luther's famous dictum that "**God milks cows through the farmer**" and explained what it means.

And third, I tried to help him follow the information where it leads. Where it leads, objectively, is to this fact. There is glory in every job. God cares as much about the janitor's job as he does about the brain surgeon's. That means that no job is ultimately more important than any other is. All jobs are eternally and thus equally important.

I did those three things but it didn't help. Some jobs are inherently more dignified and meaningful than others are. That is the widely held and persistently communicated belief of our culture. And that Christian is in the grip of it. "**That's ridiculous,**" he declared, when I told him cleaning toilets is equally important with removing brain tumors. He won't follow the information where it leads. It would drastically alter the way he perceives and experiences his job if he did.

Conclusion

This sermon is the last installment in the series of sermons about our worldviews. Let me quickly review them in closing. All of us are theologians. The issue isn't whether or not we have worldviews because we do. The issue is are they good or bad ones. We make them good ones by doing three things. First, believe Biblically. Let the Bible not culture shape how we believe. Second, believe competently. Make knowledge the basis of our beliefs whenever we can. And third, believe objectively. Follow the information (facts and truths) wherever it leads. Let's do those three things. We'll have the worldview of Jesus if we do.