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Eliphaz the Temanite concludes his first speech. Fan into flame the gift of God.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Job, chapter 5. I hope you find this helpful, edifying, and encouraging. Thank you for joining us today. He will deliver you from six troubles.

In seven no evil shall touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes.

At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall 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 know also that your offspring shall be many, and your descendants as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up

in its season. Behold this we have searched out.

It is true. Hear, and know it for your good. In chapter 5 we find the second part of Eliphaz's first speech.

In the book of Job there are three cycles of speeches by Job's friends. In each cycle Eliphaz begins. Eliphaz is presumably the oldest.

His speeches are the longest. They are also the most articulate and eloquent. Bildad comes second and then Zophar comes last.

There are three cycles and in the third we have Eliphaz, Bildad and then Zophar does not complete the series. As we proceed through the sequence each of the speeches is responded to by Job, whose responses are generally longer than the speeches of his friends. In the preceding chapter, while recognizing that Job was essentially a righteous man, Eliphaz had contrasted human righteousness in all its limitations with the transcendent holiness of God.

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, and 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? Unlike the wicked the righteous will not be finely cut off. However, on account of the sin inherently characteristic of human beings, no man has any standing to question the justice of his situation.

If Job is going to complain about his situation, who is he going to complain to that will answer him? Eliphaz has already stated that the angels themselves are charged by God with faults. Is Job expecting that they will intercede for him? Anger in such a situation will not do Job any good, it will just eat him up. Eliphaz, to illustrate the principle that he arrives at in verse 7, describes what he has witnessed in seeing a fool flourish.

The fool seemed to flourish for a time, and then Eliphaz cursed his dwelling. The relation of Eliphaz's curse to the fate of the fool is not entirely clear. Is Eliphaz's curse the reason why the fool's house is brought down, or is it introducing the statement of verses 4 and 5 which states the actual curse that Eliphaz made? Or perhaps the point is that he is announcing a curse that the fool is already under.

I think that latter option may be nearer to the truth. On account of his wickedness the fool is under the curse of God, and so when a curse is made against him it lands, as it were. The fool was suddenly devastated and the consequences of his downfall are experienced by his children.

They lack safety, they are crushed in the gate, and others completely devour their property. The reference to being crushed in the gate probably refers to some sort of oppression, as we see in Proverbs 22. Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush

the afflicted at the gate.

Eliphaz goes on to make his point. Trouble and affliction do not just arise from nature. Rather man is the source of his own trouble.

He begets trouble just as naturally as the sparks fly upward. Eliphaz's point here is probably not that Job is the fool. It would be particularly insensitive to speak about the fool's children being far from safety, being crushed in the gate, and other things like that, comparing Job to that fool and suggesting that Job had lost his children for a similar reason.

Eliphaz's point is probably building more upon what he said in the preceding chapter. Job, while generally a righteous man, has obviously failed in some regard, viewed from the perspective of God's perfect righteousness. Rather than complain, he should recognise and acknowledge the fault within himself.

Job has no grounds to petition God to vindicate him. Rather his response, as Eliphaz argues in verses 8-16, should be to throw himself upon the Lord as the one who reverses fortunes. Perhaps God will have mercy upon him and deal with him in his distress.

Eliphaz gives a litany of different things that are instances of God's transforming and reversing power. God is the one who breaks the drought, bringing the rains that render the earth fruitful again. He can take the lowly and oppressed and bring them high, and those who mourn can be delivered.

Opressors confident in their powers can be frustrated in their plans. Those who imagine themselves to be in control of their fate and their purposes can find themselves thwarted. The Lord who sovereignly determines destinies and reverses fortunes is the one upon whom Job must now cast himself.

Armed with the conceptually reassuring simplicities of his school teaching, Eliphaz now moves to wrapping up his speech, addressing Job more directly. What Job is experiencing is the discipline of the Lord, and he needs to learn from this. Suffering under the Lord's heavy hand, he needs to grow, he needs to understand where he has failed, and receive the Lord's rebuke.

All of this is familiar teaching from what we find elsewhere in the book of Proverbs, for instance, in teaching also taken up in Hebrews chapter 12. The Lord rebukes and disciplines those that he loves, and so we should receive the chastisement of the Lord's hand so that we may grow thereby. The problem is that Eliphaz's teaching, no matter how well intentioned it may be, is highly inapplicable to Job's situation.

Eliphaz expatiates on his point, accumulating Proverbs that will make it in different forms, concluding his didactic pronouncement with a statement that drives its simplistic dogmas home, Behold this we have searched out, it is true, here, I know it for your good.

One of the things that Eliphaz might illustrate at this point is the way that faced with other people's suffering and difficulty, our concern can often be to protect our own theologies and our certainties. Rather than taking the opportunity to grow in wisdom, Eliphaz is more concerned to defend a brittle dogma.

A question to consider, where are some passages elsewhere in scripture that seem to be making similar points to those that Eliphaz makes here? How would we distinguish between the proper application of those principles and Eliphaz's misapplication of them at this point? 2nd Timothy Chapter 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my beloved child. Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phagellus and Homogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Anesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me earnestly and found me.

May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day, and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. 2nd Timothy was likely the last of the pastoral epistles to be written. It is also one of Paul's prison epistles, quite likely written during his imprisonment in Rome, described in Acts chapter 28, in the early 60s AD.

It is the second letter to Timothy, who here he describes as his beloved child. Timothy

functioned as Paul's shaliach, his apostolic emissary. Functioning as Paul's son, Timothy could represent Paul in various situations.

We see Timothy functioning in this way in Corinth and also in Ephesus, for instance. Paul had first encountered Timothy during his second missionary journey. Timothy is introduced to us in the text of Acts, in Acts chapter 16, verses 1-3.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Paul's introduction to the epistle of 2nd Timothy is fairly typical. He begins by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus and refers to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

By this life he probably means what he speaks of in Titus chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word, through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour. Verses 3-5 constitute a single sentence and it is not immediately clear how the clauses hang together. Does Paul, for instance, explain the reason for his thankfulness? Looking more closely at Paul's statement we can follow the logic as it works through.

First of all, he expresses his giving of thanks. Such expressions of thankfulness are a common feature of the openings of Pauline epistles. Subordinate to this expression of thankfulness, he speaks of the way that he serves the Lord in common with his ancestors.

Then he describes the occasion for his giving thanks, as he remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers night and day. He fills this out, talking about the tears of Timothy that he remembers, perhaps the tears of a painful parting. Remembering those tears, he longs for a reunion, a reunion that would be a great cause of joy to him.

In verse 5 we come to the reason for Paul's thanksgiving, which is his remembrance of Timothy's sincere faith. Paul had begun his statement by speaking of the commonality that he had with his ancestors, in his service of God with a clear conscience. And in verse 5 he also describes the way that Timothy stands in a family line of faith, perhaps in this case in contrast with Paul's description of himself, not just a faith that straddles the divide with the old and new covenant, but a faith that is explicitly a new covenant faith.

Gerald Bray argues that given the fact that women married so young within the ancient world, Timothy's grandmother Lois could well have been no more than forty when

Timothy was born. It is quite conceivable that she could have come to faith before Timothy's mother, and that they both could have taught Timothy in the Christian faith from his early to mid childhood. However, given the fact that in 2 Timothy 3 verses 14-15 we read, But as for you, continue in what you have learned, and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is possible that Paul is referring here not to new covenant Christian faith, but to the faith of a devout Jew. In Acts chapter 16 verse 1 we learn that Eunice was a believing Jewish woman. Timothy like Paul stood in a line of believing people, and one of the things that Paul is doing here is reminding him to continue in that tradition, to take those lessons that he learned from his mother and his grandmother, and to run with them himself.

Paul has earlier spoken of Timothy as his child in the faith, and in verse 6 he reminds Timothy of the role that he himself has played in Timothy's spiritual formation. It was through the laying on of Paul's hands that Timothy received what he calls here the gift of God. Elsewhere in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14 we have another account of hands being laid upon Timothy.

Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. This verse raises a number of questions. Is it referring to the same or some different event from that described in verse 6 here? Also what is the gift in view? Is this the gift of the Holy Spirit more generally? Is it the gift of a particular vocation or is something else in view? My inclination is to see these as two different events.

1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 14 relates more to Timothy's vocation in the context of the church at Ephesus. The verse here concerns Timothy's role as Paul's shaliach, his apostolic emissary. My suspicion is that the gift of God being referred to in both cases is the gift of the Holy Spirit for that particular form of ministry.

In both cases Timothy is charged to fan into flame or not to neglect the gift that he has been given. The gift is something that has to be exercised responsibly. There is a danger of quenching the spirit that has been given to us.

Paul's description in verse 6 makes us think of tending to a lamp to ensure that it does not go out. We might also remember the image of Pentecost with the divided tongues of flame descending upon the disciples. This gift of the Holy Spirit is not to be taken for granted.

There is always the danger of grieving the Holy Spirit as a flame needs to be given fuel in order to continue to burn. So the gift of the Spirit needs to be given the fuel of actual

service and activity. And perhaps above all else the person exercising this gift needs to return to its source again and again.

God is the one who ultimately gives the Spirit and the person who has the gift of the Spirit that they are tending to will constantly return to God in prayer. In verse 7 Paul describes the manner of the Spirit that has been given to Timothy, a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. We might remember statements like Romans chapter 8 verse 15, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

We might also think of the way that Moses charged Joshua, his successor, in places like Joshua chapter 1 verse 9, have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous, do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Timothy perhaps struggling with timidity needs to be reminded of the character of the Spirit of God, a spirit of God that gives even the weak power, that burns with a divine love and delivers us from the bondage of the flesh, enabling us to exercise self-control. Living by this Spirit Timothy will find resources that he lacks in his own human flesh.

It is to the power of the Spirit that he must look for the resources that he needs to perform his ministry. Paul isn't encouraging Timothy to develop his own internal virtue here, so much as to receive a gift that God has given him, and to live in terms of that gift, a gift that empowers him to act in ways that he would not be able to by the natural human capacity of his flesh. In contrast to a spirit of fear is boldness and not being ashamed of the testimony that he has.

Acting in the power of the Spirit, Timothy will be able to boast in the sufferings of Christ and in the sufferings of his servant Paul. He will be able to share in such sufferings himself. While the surrounding society which glorified a false form of power would look down on this and see it as pitiable, Timothy would know the power of God in it.

Just as his master Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God, so Timothy, living by the Spirit of Christ, will be able to know power even in his weakness and suffering. Although Paul isn't identifying the Gospel with the power of God here, some readers might still discern slight echoes of Paul's statement in Romans 1.16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Verses 9-10 are another one of Paul's dense statements of the Gospel message.

Philip Towner observes that there are a series of pairs and contrasts. The first is a pairing, saved us and called us. Then there's a contrast, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace.

The next pairing is one to do with time. The grace was given in Christ Jesus before the ages began. The grace has now been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour

Christ Jesus.

The final pairing concerns the nature of his salvation. He abolished death, he brought life and immortality to light. Once again Paul is highlighting that the initiative for salvation is found in God's action, not in ours.

And this initiative is one that dates back from before the ages began. It's something that's grounded in Christ, not in us. God's purpose before the creation began was to form a people in his Son.

Now in the fullness of time, with the revelation of Christ in the Gospel, that purpose is coming to pass. Many might see here a reference to the election of particular individuals, but I think that would be to miss the redemptive historical force of Paul's point. What has really been elected is Christ.

The fulfilment of this purpose is not the salvation of detached individuals, so much as the formation of the people of the Church in Christ. From this eternal divine purpose, Paul draws a straight line to his own ministry. He was appointed a preacher, an apostle and a teacher of this, and he suffers for this reason.

He is not ashamed, whatever men may think of him. He is serving the God of the universe, and he can stand before him on that great day, accepted and blessed in Christ. He also enjoys a confidence in his labours.

A great ministry has been committed to him, and Paul knows that despite the limitations of his own powers, his Master who committed that charge to him can guard the converts that have been converted through his ministry, and the churches that have been founded by him. When thinking about Paul's ministry, we can focus upon his preaching and travelling if we are thinking about the Book of Acts, or we can think about his letter writing if we look at the epistles. But when we look at the beginning of the epistles particularly, and at the end, we get a sense that Paul's ministry is one of prayer for the churches.

He constantly commits the churches that he is serving, and his brothers and sisters and fellow ministers, to the charge of the Lord, trusting him to complete in them what he had started. In Philippians 1.6 we have a window into this. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul has entrusted things to Timothy. He has given him a pattern of sound words, a model of teaching that Timothy is to follow, something that was communicated in a pattern of life, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers the entire mission. Having encouraged Timothy in these various ways, Paul ends by giving him some cautionary examples.

A number of people formerly associated with Paul had now abandoned him. The

reference to all who are in Asia is probably not a reference to every one of the Christians in the Roman province of Asia, nor is it a reference to all of the church leaders even, but rather presumably to Paul's former associates. Paul is left without anyone that he can trust in the region.

Recognising the way that people can fail or fall away should encourage Timothy to steel himself all the more for the times of testing. As one of the few remaining associates of Paul, he needs to learn from the example of those who have failed in that regard. Against the backdrop of these disheartening betrayals and abandonments, Paul presents the example of Anesiphorus as akin to a light in his very dark place.

Even when Paul was in prison, Anesiphorus was not ashamed to be associated with him. Indeed, he went out of his way to seek him out. The example of such a man is definitely one to follow.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which we can fan into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit within us?