

My Life Stinks, But My Redeemer Lives!

February 11, 2018

Job 19

We come this morning to Job 19, Job's second response to Bildad. In our ongoing study of the book of Job, we are entrenched in the dialogue between Job and his three "friends." Over and over again, the friends try their hardest to convince Job that his current condition is due to sin, that such calamity clearly is Sovereign God punishing Job for his sinful ways. Their desire is for Job to just admit his sin, plead with God for mercy, and then watch as God restores him.

And each time, Job responds by maintaining his blamelessness, his integrity, his rightness before God. It is not that Job denies he has sinned or is a sinner, but he maintains that he has done everything required by God (and then some!) to deal with his sin. He is convinced that he is suffering unjustly, for no fault of his own. He desires an audience with God where he can plead his case and hear God's explanation why such calamities have come upon him. Back and forth we have gone, trading barbs, insults, and meaning-rich poetic speeches articulating the same positions. There has been no movement on either side. They are entrenched and digging in more deeply each time.

The problem is that from Job's perspective, time is running out. As we will see in today's text, Job expects to die shortly. He has suffered to the point of death, a painful horrible death doubtless due to the disease which has wracked his body from head to toe. And there has been no resolution, no vindication, no respite, no comfort, no supporters, no vigil by friends. Job is alone, struggling to make sense, seemingly on death's doorstep, with no solution in sight with the whole world against him.

And yet, as we have seen before, there are glimmers of hope, tiny rays of light which occasionally filter into Job's thinking. When we find them, we find gems of great theology, a perspective that goes way beyond Job's context. Indeed, we might find it hard to believe he actually said these words, thought these thoughts. They don't fit in their context, in perhaps the oldest book in the

Old Testament. They would fit better in the New Testament, by Paul, or Peter, or John. You see Job's hope is our hope, Job's help is our help, Job's friend in high places is our friend in high places. Yes, in the words of today's text, Job's Redeemer is our Redeemer.

Yes, here in Job 19, I believe we have hit the peak of Job's theology. As we have seen, Job has been growing in his theology. In chapter 9, he yearned for a mediator. In chapter 16, he acknowledged that he had a friend in high places, pleading with God as a man pleads for his friend. And now, he states with emphatic confidence that he has a living, breathing Redeemer, who will be successful in pleading his case, in vindicating him against the accusations of his "friends," indeed perhaps against the accusations of God Himself. As we will see here, Job wants his words recorded for all time: God WILL affirm his blamelessness. His Redeemer will win!

Follow with me as I read Job 19. READ.

Main point: The ultimate hope of the unjust sufferer is that his Redeemer will win his case!

I remind you once again that the book of Job is not just about suffering. That is way, way too simplistic. The book of Job is about unjust suffering, and more specifically how to put such suffering into context. It is not just a lament at how bad life is, but a bare look at both the ugliness that is the life of the sufferer and the only place to find hope.

Bear with me as we make our way through the "my life stinks" part, to zero in on the "here is my hope" part. By now, we have a pretty clear picture that Job's life stinks. What we need to see is where he finds hope. And what we find is that his hope is in His living, breathing, always successful Redeemer. Job KNOWS that his Redeemer will win! (2 parts)

I. God has treated me as though I am set apart for punishment. vv. 1-22

The wording of this speech by Job is all directed toward his friends. Elsewhere, he speaks to them and then cries out to God. Here, though, he speaks to them throughout. But clearly the intended audience is with God. In this first section, he goes to great lengths to describe his perspective on his life at this point: he is being punished and he has no one on his side. He is isolated. He is alone in his suffering.

v.1- Then Job replied: 2 “How long will you torment me and crush me with words? 3 Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. 4 If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. 5 If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, 6 then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.

He has had enough of his friends’ “help.” As we have noted before, comforters who do not comfort are not comforters. Previously, he has described them as “miserable comforters.” Here, they torment, they crush. They have joined all those who have sought to destroy Job. They join the thieves who stole his animals, the winds that destroyed his home and family, the disease that has wracked his body. In short, they have proven not to be the friends and advocates that he needs.

Notice that he owns his own sin, but he remains confident this is not the problem. He sees in them an exercise in self-exaltation. They put themselves above him and use his humble state against him. But they have not succeeded in

convincing him that he is wrong. If there is anyone in the wrong here, it is the Sovereign God who has punished him unjustly.

Pause: now I know that we cringe at the thought of God “wronging” anyone. Clearly God cannot do that. You can see why the friends react. But how else can you describe a situation where someone suffers unjustly under the watchful eye of a Sovereign God? I know we reject his choice of words, but his perceptions are accurate. Whenever there is unjust suffering, God must be seen as allowing it to happen for His purposes. His role must be reckoned. He either is sovereign or He is not. There either is unjust suffering or there is not. Job is laying out raw, unfiltered, cringe inducing truth. Resume.

7 “Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.

God is being silent. God is not responding. God is not answering his cries for help. Like the psalmist in Psalm 13, he is crying, “How long! Will You forget me forever?” And the heavens are silent. The suffering continues. Or in the words of more modern authors, “Where is God when it hurts?” If only God would speak out and acknowledge that Job was hurting through no fault of his own. That would be enough for Job. Instead, the only response seems to be an ever-tightening death grip on Job’s remaining life.

8 He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness. 9 He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head. 10 He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree. 11 His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies. 12 His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent.

Job views himself being stopped in his tracks, stripped naked, torn down limb from limb, treated as the enemy, surrounded by hostile forces, who are just waiting for the command to unleash all hell upon him. Can you see how he throws Bildad's description back at him from chapter 18? "Yes, Bildad, I have been living hell on earth. And God's hands are all over it!"

Pause: there is a bit of information we must remember back from chapters 1-2 that is needed here. If Job knew what we know, his wording would surely change here. Back in that scene in the heavenlies, God agrees to take His hand of protection off of Job and allow satan to inflict harm. In 1:11, satan tempts God to "stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has." God does not do so, but gives permission to satan to do so with strict limits. Again in chapter 2, we see a repeat in the pattern. So, God is not "stretching out His hand" against Job, satan is. But God has removed His ever-present hedge of protection, under limits, for a time. So, the concept is correct, but the precise wording of Job would surely change if he knew what we know. Resume.

From this point, Job focuses on his sense of being alone. There is no one but him. It is as if everyone in the universe was against him. He feels completely isolated.

13 "He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. 14 My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. 15 My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien. 16 I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth.

No one is there to help. His brothers are no help, his business associates are no help, his kinsmen are no help, his friends are no help, his guests are no help, his hired help are no help. Indeed, they look at him as if he were from mars. He is so low that he begs his servants, and they ignore him. That's low! No wait, there is one worse.

17 My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers.

Ouch! I think I resemble that remark.

18 Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. 19 All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me.

There is no one. Job is all alone in his misery. And as we see here, time is running out.

20 I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. 21 “Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. 22 Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?”

He feels like the leper who had to go down the street proclaiming, “Unclean! Unclean!” At a time when he most needed to be surrounded by friends who cared, Job felt alone, abandoned, forsaken. And as he looked at himself, he could see that time was running out. He had no fat reserves, the disease had taken its toll. He just doesn’t understand why his friends have chosen to abandon him. When you need community most is when you are at your lowest. He was at his lowest and his community was treating him like some cursed, rotting enemy. Can you see how we might fall prey to this trap as well? Yes, ministry is messy. Yes, when you help people who are stuck in the mud you will come out smelling like mud. But this is when we show whether we are really

the community we say we are. When the situation is at its worst is when the church should be at its best. We must resist the urges to be friends like Job's friends.

II. Since Job's hope could not be in his human friends, his only hope was in his divine Redeemer. vv. 23-29

This is where we get to the good part. This is where we see the pinnacle of Job's articulation of his faith. And as I've suggested, we see here that his hope is our hope, that his Redeemer is none other than our Redeemer. How he came to this place we are not told, but his words here ought to stand out to us like a flashing neon sign.

23 "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, 24 that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever!

What words? We are not told. I suspect that he is referring to his proclamation of blamelessness. I see here a recognition or resignation that his life was soon coming to an end. He would soon lose the ability to speak for himself. And so, he wishes for an inscription on his tombstone that would be seen for all generations to come that he was not guilty, even though it looked to everyone like he must have been. It would be really easy to write a history of Job's life and make it read just as his friends saw it: wealthy, blessed man lived double life. But God struck him down and he died with nothing. Such is the fate

of anyone who seeks to “fool” God. That would be the only marker, a reminder of what happens to bad people.

But Job wished for the opposite. He wished someone would chisel out his tombstone right now and proclaim, “Here lies the body of a righteous man. He did what was right, but died as if a criminal!” He really did know God. He was a man of integrity. Don’t believe the press reports! The media is biased against me! It’s all just fake news! Oops, sorry. I’ve ventured into current events. But this is Job’s perspective. He wants it known that he was right and that in the end, he would be vindicated.

25 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

Woah! Where did this come from? As I’ve suggested, this is the pinnacle of Job’s theology. He begins with an emphatic proclamation. Indeed, the wording is such that we might paraphrase it as, “I know that I know that I know...” I am totally confident that...” Yes, the wording is that strong.

Next we have a loaded term, “Redeemer.” It is a powerful word that can have several different slants to it. I believe it is intended to encompass them all. The basic meaning is to vindicate, to pronounce guiltless. It can also mean to pay the debt to set someone free. So, Job’s hope is in a person, a Redeemer, his Vindicator. Elsewhere, such a person would avenge the taking of innocent blood (Numbers 35), or ensure after death that a person’s inheritance went to his rightful heirs as in the book of Ruth. In Proverbs 23 and Exodus and Isaiah, God is such a person who defends the oppressed. He is the Vindicator or Redeemer.

What makes this text a bit tricky is that the offense is with God. So, I find it a bit awkward for Job to see God as his Vindicator. After all, earlier in the chapter, he saw God as the one inflicting harm. I don’t see him envisioning God as both oppressor and vindicator. It’s possible, but I don’t see it.

Instead, I see this Redeemer as the same person we saw in chapter 9 and chapter 16. He is the mediator, the friend in high places who pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend. And so, his proclamation is that he is totally confident in the work of His mediator, friend in high places, his Redeemer. This One is alive! Again, this is a loaded statement. It is not as opposed to dead. Instead, the thought is that He is at work, taking notes, ready to vindicate Job, right the wrongs of Job's life. Job is confident that this One will ensure that the truth prevails.

I see here that like us, Job's confidence is not so much in himself or even the rightness of his position. After all, this will all be resolved after he is in the grave. No, his hope is in a Person, a Person who will plead his case for him, who will make sure that justice prevails. Like us, he does not hope that he has led a "good enough" life, that his good has outweighed his bad. No, he hopes in the one he has entrusted to plead his case for him.

Can you see how good is this theology? Job has nailed it here! He is right on. He is right up there with Paul, Peter, John, James, and all the rest. Job is a confident believer in his Christ. He would say as I try to make clear each time we celebrate communion, "if Jesus is wrong, then I have no hope! I have entrusted my future to Him." That's what Job is saying right here, some 2,000 or so years before Jesus was born.

Job is confident that his Redeemer is real, alive, active, and that in the end, this One will prevail, He will stand on the earth. Woah! He will stand in victory! His word will prevail.

Doesn't this fascinate you? Job's total hope was in a Redeemer he had never met, who Himself would suffer just as Job was suffering, who was afflicted in every way as Job was, who was isolated as Job was, who endured the wrath of God as Job thought he was, who was not only blameless like Job, but sinless as well. Job's hope was in THAT GUY! THAT GUY would prevail, would ultimately win Job's case in court. This blows me away.

26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Because of the reality of this Redeemer, Job knows that he will one day see God. Even though the end of his life seems close, and he knows the process of death will be completed, still he will see God with his own eyes. It sounds like resurrection to me! Now, that statement alone ought to send shivers down our spines. No one sees God and lives. God is Spirit, so you can't see Him, but even if He made Himself visible and briefly passed by you, you would surely die. Sinners cannot look upon Holy God in all His glory. So, this could mean that Job sees his Redeemer as God in the flesh, God who walks on the earth. That would be cool. Or, it could mean that with his Redeemer at his side, he does not fear seeing God. With his Redeemer by his side, he is safe from harm even though he is a sinner. That would be cool as well. I'm comfortable with either meaning. Either way, Job just nailed it again. Job can't wait for the day he sees God—all because of his living, breathing, active Redeemer.

28 “If you say, ‘How we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him,’ 29 you should fear the sword yourselves; for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment.”

Job ends with a familiar type of warning for his “friends.” Be careful what you say, because that which you proclaim awaits those sinners who don't know God just might await you. You warn me about judgment, but I am warning you. I have a Redeemer, how about you?

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) As true friends, we will enter into the stinky, messy world of hurting people. We will surround, not isolate. We will visit those in prison, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bear each other's burdens.

2) We will not elevate ourselves above the people we serve.

3) Like Job, we will entrust our future to a real, live, living Person, our Redeemer Jesus.

4) Like Job, in the presence of all such naysayers, we will boldly proclaim our confidence in the true source of hope for sinners like us.