

**Job:
My Redeemer Lives**

Job 16–19

By Dr. Derek Thomas

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Those who have suffered great loss will tell you: they coped whenever the trial first came; it is when it refuses to go away that the trouble begins.

My pain is not relieved...it does not go away. (16:6)

My spirit is broken. (17:1)

Job has begun to think the unthinkable. He has begun to think that God has become his enemy that God has been his enemy all along!

Surely, O God, You have worn me out;
You have devastated my entire household...
God assails me and tears me in His anger
And gnashes His teeth at me
My opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. (16:7,9)

God's eyes have burnt holes in him. He feels torn to shreds. God is his enemy! Job is not unaware that others are involved, "evil men" (16:11) for example; but, it God who turned him over to them. The ultimate problem for Job is God himself. How can he appeal for justice when the highest source of judgment and arbitration appears unscrupulous and crooked?

This, of course, is Satan's doing, but Job does not know it as yet. Satan always wants to draw attention away from himself by making God and His ways to appear malevolent, unprincipled, *unjust*. This has been a stratagem of his from the very start and we must familiarize ourselves with it (c.f. Eph. 6:11).

If we can't trust God, who can we trust? All that is left is a form of nihilism and despair. There is no where to turn and find relief. All sources of help are closed. There is only emptiness and a sense of futility.

And yet, it is to God s this God who appears so unfairs that Job continually turns.

...my eyes pour out tears to God (16:20)

He may be in despair; he may be angry; he may feel abandoned and victimized; but he is letting God know just what he thinks, what *he feels*! And here, yes just here, lie the seeds of his eventual recovery. For as sure as sure as day follows night, his recovery will stem from his communion with God, troubled as that now is. It is the maxim of that well known hymn by Joseph Scriven, *What a Friend we have in Jesus*:

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

God may appear silent at this moment; Job may be drawing all the wrong conclusions about God's motives and goals; but, Job is insistent that the answer to all of it lies with God.

But the silence of God is deafening. And for now, Job has to contend with these "miserable comforters" and their "long-winded speeches" (16:1).

Everyone knows that verse in Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives..." (19:25). George Frederick Handel made it all the more familiar in his oratorio, *Messiah*. Interestingly, Job has already said something that relates to this.

If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,
To lay his hand upon us both... (9:33)

Even now my witness is in heaven;
My advocate is on high. (16:19)

Job has a certainty that in heaven there is an "intercessor," one who "pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend" (16:20-21).

Who is this Arbitrator, Intercessor, Witness, Redeemer...? Tempting as it is to pour into it some New Testament insights and say, *It is Jesus*," we need to examine it a little more carefully to discern exactly what it is that Job is saying here.

Someone to plead with God

In chapter 19, Job is responding to another of Bildad's speeches (Job 18). We might call this contribution by Bildad, *The Dwellings of the Wicked*, so long as we appreciate that for Bildad, Job is the principal character, he is the wicked one!

Bildad will have nothing to do with Job's claim for innocence. That would involve

a reversal of his entire moral system (18:4). The world as he knows it works according to very definite principles: sin is punished and goodness rewarded. Suffering is always chastisement because you get what you deserve in this life, no more and no less.

And Bildad is quite the preacher! His use of metaphor and illustration makes his oratory gripping. The wicked are those in whose homes the lamp has gone out and there is no welcoming light to guide the traveler home (18:5). I recall a friend who had lost his wife some six months earlier saying to me whenever I had asked as to whether he was on his way home, "It's not my home anymore; its just the place where I live." The light had gone out in Job's home, too.

Bildad pictures an old man shuffling on, stumbling over obstacles in the way and falling down (18:7). He is caught in a trap, a noose, a snare, a mesh, a net and there is no escape (18:8-10). Terrors, calamity, disaster overtake him (18:11-12). Disease eats up his flesh (18:13). With a play on words, Bildad takes the common name for one of the Canaanite gods, *Mot*, and turns it into the Hebrew word for "death," *mawot*, and suggests that an emissary comes and marches him off, as in some police-state, to "the King of Terrors" (18:14). Fire and destruction destroys his home (18:15).

This is quite a sermon! And it is unbelievably cruel. It ends with a picture of this wicked man with no "offspring or descendents...no survivor where once he lived" (18:19). Given that Job has lost all ten of his children, this must have been a savage blow for him to hear from his 'friend.'

And the sermon ends:

Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man;
such is the place of one who knows not God. (18:21).

This has been a sermon *about Job!* Job is the most wicked man imaginable and his suffering is proof of it.

With friends like this, who needs enemies?

God has wronged me...

Job's response is both predictable and understandable. He feels abandoned and rejected.

Rejected by his counselors. Their attacks have been "shameless" (19:3).

Rejected by his friends. His wife, little boys, his intimate friends... all of them "have turned against me" (19:19).

Rejected by God! "...God has wronged me' (19:6).

It is this last thought that upsets him the most. We sing of this in John Newton hymn, *Though Troubles Assail Us*:

Though troubles assail us and dangers affright
Though friends all fail us and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The promise assures us, "The Lord will provide.

But what happens when that promise seems to fail, too *when God abandons us and turns into our enemy*? What then? The Hebrew word translated "wronged" above (19:6) is the verb "to pervert." Justice has been perverted. "The hand of God has struck me" (19:21).

If Bildad can use graphic pictures, so can Job. In a series of pictures, Job imagines himself caught in a net (19:6), set up by thugs and abandoned (19:7), unable to get home (19:8), humiliated as a prince by some alien King (19:9), forced into single-handed combat (19:11), surrounded by besieging armies (19:12), *without hope* (19:10).

Can a Christian feel like this? It's an important question, Such melancholy and gloom seems to many out of keeping with true spirituality.

Robert Davis, a minister on the verge of Alzheimer's Disease, wrote down his responses and feelings while he still remembered them. He described his condition at one time, knowing what lay before him, as "a combination of medical, psychological, mental and spiritual changes that tossed me like a cork in the sea."

This is Job. He hasn't stopped believing in God; it's just that God doesn't seem to be answering him. It is a bit like the story in Mark 5 when Jairus' daughter is sick and he asks Jesus for help, only to find that Jesus gets sidetracked with a woman who has another urgent problem. By the time Jesus comes back to Jairus, it is too late; the girl is dead. "Don't be afraid, but believe," Jesus says. Like Jairus, Job is being asked to believe when everything is pointing in the opposite direction.

This is why Job needs a mediator. Since Job cannot himself speak to God and plead his case (because God doesn't appear to be listening) he needs someone to do it for him, someone with greater ability to present his case. Tempting as it is to see in this expression the need for a someone to forgive us our sins before we can enter God's presence, this is not Job's plea here. Job has been saying all along that he has a valid case one which we know to be valid from God's own corroboration of Job in the opening chapters). It is not so much a Savior that Job is asking for (though Job would not have denied that he needed one); rather,

what Job needs is an Arbitrator, someone to defend him before God.

The Hebrew word, translated "Mediator" here, is an interesting one. It is the word that describes Boaz, for example in the story of Naomi and Ruth. Boaz was the member of the family, the kinsman, whose role it was to defend the honor of the family in times of trouble and seek justice and redress. He was, for example, under some obligation to care for, even marry, Ruth, the wife of his deceased relative. Job is saying something similar here. He is confident that such a person exists to plead his case before God.

We may pour into this more than perhaps Job could see. Jesus ever lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). He helps us (Heb. 2:18). He sympathizes (Heb. 4:15). And this is Job's confidence. Perhaps he spoke beyond his own comprehension. He has no certainty that he will be alive to see the result of his Redeemer's work on his behalf. "In the end he will stand upon the earth," he says (19:25), suggesting (since the Hebrew word for earth can also mean "dust") that even if Job dies, his Redeemer will stand in triumph over his "dust" and proclaim his case and validate him before God.

And then, what many Bible scholars find incredible, Job announces a belief in his future resurrection.

And after my skin has been destroyed,
Yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
With my own eyes I, and not another (9:26-27).

How can this be after such words of gloom and despair? Only those who have never been where Job has been will ask this question. Those who have trod this path will know how suddenly moods can swing, how despair can be answered by sudden moments of light and hope, only to sink back again to darkness and gloom. We are fearfully and wonderfully made!

Job's momentary relief came as he considered the *total* picture one that transcends the boundaries of this world. Here there may be no justice; but in the world to come there will be.

Here, there may be a death; there in the world to come there will be life. Here, there may be a cross to carry; there in world to come there will be victory.

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