

In July of this year, Andrew Malkinson finally cleared his name. In 2004 he was found guilty of a horrendous attack on a woman in Manchester. He was sent to jail and spent the next 17 years behind bars.

But Malkinson knew that he was innocent. And he fought tirelessly to prove that. He even refused the opportunity to reduce his sentence by admitting the offence.

Finally, this year the appeal court declared that this was a grave miscarriage of justice. The case hadn't been dealt with properly, evidence that proved his innocence had been withheld, and new forensic evidence proved that he was not the attacker.

Outside the court, Malkinson declared: "I came to the police station in 2003 and told the officers I was innocent. They didn't believe me. I came to the crown court in Manchester in 2004 and told the jury I was innocent. They didn't believe me. I came to this appeal court in 2006 and told them I was innocent. They didn't believe me...

Today we told this court I was innocent and, finally, they listened. But I have been innocent all along, for each of those 20 years that came before today."

I think Job would've understood this man's desperate attempts to prove his innocence. When Job suffered unfairly, he repeatedly tried to vindicate himself - not just before his accusing friends, but even more importantly before his God. But finally he realised that he needed someone else to clear his name!

Let's read Job 9:1-14

Then Job replied:

² "Indeed, I know that this is true.

But how can a mortal be righteous before God?

³ Though one wished to dispute with him,
he could not answer him one time out of a thousand.

⁴ His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?

⁵ He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.

⁶ He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble.

⁷ He speaks to the sun and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.

⁸ He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.

⁹ He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.

¹⁰ He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted.

¹¹ When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

¹² If he snatches away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'

¹³ God does not restrain his anger;
even the cohorts of Rahab cowered at his feet.

¹⁴ "How then can I dispute with him?
How can I find words to argue with him?"

1. Standing Before Others

As we saw last week, Job had been wrongly accused by his friends.

- They rightly believed that God is sovereign over this world.
- They also rightly believed that God is absolutely just and fair.
- But they wrongly assumed that life in this world will always reflect this. That God will always reward virtue and punish vice.
- And so if good people are blessed and wicked people suffer. Then Job must have been really wicked, because he was really suffering.

They even proposed a quick and easy solution to this problem. Like what happened to Malkinson, his friends promised him a shorter sentence and a speedy restoration if he just admit that he was wrong.

"If you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,
¹⁵ then you will lift up your face without shame;
you will stand firm and without fear." Job 11:14-15

"Own up. Admit your guilt. Turn from your evil ways, and everything will be good again!"

a) Innocence Declared

But the only problem was, they were wrong. As is the prosperity gospel of today. In this world good people suffer. God's people suffer.

Job had not been hiding secret sin in his life. He was "Blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." Job 2:3
Job was suffering as an innocent person.

b) Innocence Defended

And Job knew this. And so throughout his speeches he rejected their accusations and defended himself.

"I will never admit you are in the right;
till I die, I will not deny my integrity." Job 27:5

This is important. If we want to move forward in our lives, we need to push into the truth.

This means that when we are in the wrong, we need to admit our sin and repent of it and put our faith in Jesus. This is the only way to experience God's forgiveness and freedom.

But this also means that when we are in the right, we need to stand our ground. This is what Jesus did when he was falsely accused. He did not accept that false guilt. "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." 1 Peter 2:23

Jesus stood his ground. He did not accept the false accusations of those evil men. But he didn't have to fight back. Instead he entrusted himself to his Father, knowing that he would vindicate him in his perfect timing.

And we can do the same. Hold onto the truth about who we are. But also trust that God will reveal that in his perfect timing.

2. Standing Before God

But that is where Job struggled. He didn't only feel wrongly convicted by his friends. He also felt wrongly convicted by God.

Bildad had just asserted that God is absolutely just and fair in dealing with people. "Surely God does not reject a blameless man
Or strengthen the hands of evildoers." Job 8:20

a) Innocence Condemned

But Job was a blameless man. And as far as he could see, God had rejected him. He felt that he was being punished. "I am already found guilty." Job 9:29

His family had been killed. His business had crumpled. His health had disintegrated. How could God claim that was fair? How could God say that was just?

Eliphaz had asked, "Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?" Job 4:7 He claimed that this is what he had observed in this world.

But Job saw things completely differently. He said about God that, "He destroys both the blameless and the wicked." Job 9:22

From his perspective bad things happen to both good and bad people. And as he believed that God was sovereign over this world, then who else could he hold as responsible for the suffering in this world?

"When a scourge brings sudden death,

he mocks the despair of the innocent.

²⁴ When a land falls into the hands of the wicked,

he blindfolds its judges.

If it is not he, then who is it?" Job 9:23-24

I think Job doesn't want to say this. But if he was going to hold onto the reality that God is in control, then he had to ask, "why doesn't God do anything about this? Does he not care?"

Job was struggling with the age-old problem. If God is all powerful and all good, then why is there evil in this world? Why are there tsunamis and earthquakes, cancer and heart-attacks, murder and rape, wars and terrorists. If God is in control and God is love, why do we suffer so much?

This has been an issue for centuries. Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution, believed that this was strong evidence against the existence of God. Some think that it was the tragic death of his own daughter that ultimately led him to walk away from his faith.

And it's still a major issue today. A Barna survey in the US recently claimed that Gen Zs, who are now in their teens and early 20s, are twice as likely as older generations to declare themselves atheists. And the major barrier to faith is that they have a hard time believing that a good God would allow so much evil and suffering in the world.

Maybe we struggle with this too. Like Job, we might feel like our lives are unfair. That what we're going through doesn't make sense.

And so, like others we could walk away from God. But that would solve nothing. We'd still have the same mess, but just without God.

Job wasn't going to do that. He feared God. He deeply respected him and had faith in him. And so instead he wanted to bring this issue to God. Confront God with the evidence of his life and ask him, "What's going on? Why is this happening? What have I done to deserve this?"

This is why he asked, "How can a mortal be righteous before God?" Job 9:2. Job wanted an opportunity to appeal his case before God. He wanted to be vindicated. To be declared innocent. He wanted his relationship with God restored.

But that seemed impossible. "Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand." Job 9:3

Job couldn't just confront God, like he did with his friends. He couldn't argue with God, like he did with them over these 24 chapters. Why not?

b) Inscrutable Wisdom

Well the first reason is because God is inscrutable. "His wisdom is profound." Job 9:4

God's wisdom is so deep that it is beyond us. It can't be worked out by us. Paul wrote: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" Romans 11:33

So instead of judging God, we need to trust him that he knows that what he is doing is right, even if we cannot understand it. This is where Job will eventually get to by the end of this book, but for now, God's superior wisdom just seemed like a barrier to getting his case heard.

c) Invincible Power

The second barrier was God's invincible power: "His power is vast." Job 9:4

Job demonstrated this by describing God's sovereign power over his creation.

"He moves mountains without their knowing it...

He shakes the earth from its place...

He speaks to the sun and it does not shine." Job 9:5-7

These are all demonstrations of God's invincible power over this world. The mountains can't resist him. The earth can't

stand in his presence. The sun can't shine without his permission.

Job even said that ["the cohorts of Rahab cowered at his feet."](#) Job 9:13, which may refer to a mythological monster that has to submit to him.

For us, it is often such a comfort to know that our God is powerful and nobody can oppose him. But this truth was not comforting for Job at that time. Instead he saw it as a threat. ["Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"](#) Job 9:4

God is so powerful, that even if he got the chance to speak to him, Job imagined that he would just be blown away by him. Things would just get worse:

["Even if I summoned him and he responded,
I do not believe he would give me a hearing.](#)

¹⁷ [He would crush me with a storm
and multiply my wounds for no reason."](#) Job 9:16-17

He was saying, "If God is so powerful, that nobody can oppose him, not even creation itself can stand up against him, then what chance do I have of confronting him with the injustice of my situation? How can I stand before him?"

d) Invisible Being

Thirdly, this seemed impossible, because God is invisible. In Star Trek, the Klingons have a cloaking device that means they can make their ships invisible and undetectable. It is a great resource to have in a battle. How can your enemy attack you when they can't see you?

In a similar way, Job said about God ["When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him,"](#) Job 9:11

How can you plead your case with someone you cannot see? How can you dispute with them when you can't look them in the eye?

e) Impossible Case

But even if Job could guarantee God's presence, he was sure that this would still be an impossible case to win.

["How can I find words to argue with him?"](#)

¹⁵ [Though I were innocent, I could not answer him;](#)

[I could only plead with my Judge for mercy."](#) Job 9:14-15

Job imagined that he'd be so overwhelmed by God's presence that his words would fail him. His eloquence would disappear and he'd just fall on his face pleading for mercy.

He was even afraid that in God's holy presence, he'd say all the wrong things and admit his guilt. ["Even if I were innocent, my mouth would condemn me."](#) Job 9:20

So what was Job going to do? His pain and suffering seemed to condemn him. And yet, he could not plead his case before God. He could not prove his innocence before him.

And what should we do with the problem of pain and suffering? If we can't and shouldn't put God on trial, then what can we do?

3. Standing Between Us and God

Well, to conclude this chapter, Job ruled out two options and longed for one final answer.

a) Cheer Up

First of all he said, that because his life is so short, then maybe he should just cheer himself up. ["I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile."](#) Job 9:27

That's the solution of those who tell us just to cheer up, snap out of it, get on with enjoying life!

But we can't just turn a blind eye to our suffering and struggles. We may be able to push our emotions down for a while. But they don't go away. ["I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent."](#) Job 9:28

Pretending that everything is ok might work for a while. But it just stores up problems for the future. Eventually we have to face reality!

b) Clean Up

Or maybe, if he couldn't get God to declare him innocent, he could just wash himself clean. But Job also knew that wouldn't work:

"Even if I washed myself with soap
and my hands with washing soda,
³¹you would plunge me into a slime pit
so that even my clothes would detest me." Job 9:30-31

If he tried to clean himself up, then sooner or later, something else would come along and he would again be messed up from this world. He'd be right where he started.

Sorting out our lives, turning over a new leaf, reinventing ourselves might work for a while. But only until the next crisis comes along, the next tragedy.

c) Call On A Mediator

So Job knew that he couldn't handle this on his own. He couldn't vindicate himself. And he couldn't just cheer himself up or clean himself up. And so he ended this chapter with a longing, a desperate call for someone to come and help.

"If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,
to lay his hand upon us both,
someone to remove God's rod from me,
so that his terror would frighten me no more." Job 9:33-34

Job longed for a mediator. Someone who could act as an umpire, a go-between. Someone who could bring God and him together to settle this dispute, resolve their issues and bring about reconciliation once again.

This is his desperate hope, but as his arguments with his friends continued, Job's hope developed into a deep conviction.

"Even now my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.
²⁰My intercessor is my friend
as my eyes pour out tears to God;
²¹on behalf of a man he pleads with God
as a man pleads for his friend." Job 16:19-21

Job believed that there was a mediator in heaven for him. But Job didn't know the full identity of who this person could be. But we do. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men." 1 Timothy 2:5-6

This is the answer that Job needed. And this is the answer that we need.

- Someone who can stand in God's holy presence, who unlike Job is not silenced by God's overwhelming wisdom and power.
- But also someone who has lived our life. Who can sympathise with us in our struggles. Who understands our pain. Who has suffered our agony. Who has died our death.

Who is that person? It is of course Jesus. The one who is fully God and fully man. The one who bridged the great divide between us and God when he died on the cross, paying the price of our sins, setting us free from condemnation, declaring us innocent in God's sight. And the one who was raised to life and is now seated "at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Romans 8:34

Conclusion

This is our ultimate answer to the problem of pain and suffering.

- Not to think, like Job's friends, that we can control our experiences through our behaviour. Be good and only good will happen to you.
- Not to conclude, like so many people, that God doesn't exist. That suffering is our destiny in this meaningless and empty world.
- Nor to do what Job was tempted to do here: to put God on trial, accuse him of injustice and try and defend ourselves.

- But rather to look to the cross of Jesus where God's love and justice perfectly meet.
 - To put our trust in the one who loved us and gave himself for us.
 - To receive his forgiveness and grace.
 - To depend on him completely in every situation.
 - Knowing that he is always with us.
 - That he is holding on to us.
 - That nothing can separate us from his love.
 - That he always lives to intercede for us.
 - And that one day, he will bring us safely home.

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