

I'm sure most of us have watched with broken hearts the recent events in the city of Gaza.

It's not for me to preach about who is in the right or wrong there, but it is incredibly tragic to see so much suffering and loss of life for so many innocent people who've been caught up in that conflict. I'm sure we all pray for peace in that city.

And even though we can watch these events on TV, I don't think many of us can imagine how it must feel to have been trapped there - with the lack of resources, a healthcare system that's crumbling, buildings reduced to rubble, so much bloodshed and no way out. It must feel so hopeless.

But I think Job knew what that felt like. The cause of his suffering was very different, but the impact on him was similar. He too felt trapped, attacked, surrounded by suffering and death, with no way out.

But for him, the worst thing about this was that as far as he could see, it wasn't his enemy that had come against him. Instead it was his God who had done this!

And so many times Job felt like it was a hopeless situation. All he could see was darkness and despair.

And yet, there was a ray of hope. Even though it looked and felt like the end – Job could also express faith that it wasn't. He knew there was more to come. He knew that his Redeemer lives!

Job 19:1-12: "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.

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

⁸ He has blocked my way so that I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.

⁹ He has stripped me of my honour
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.

1. Criticised by Friends

Job was right in the middle of his argument with his friends and he was fed up with it. Bildad had just described the fate of the wicked, those who don't know God.

"The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning." Job 18:5

Bildad believed that God is in control and that God is just, so he always punishes those who do wrong. He said they end up in darkness, experience disaster and death, disappear from the earth and have no descendants to remember them.

And though he didn't say it directly, the implication of his speech was clear. This matched with what Job was suffering. And so Job must be a man who is wicked, who doesn't know God.

a) Wrongly Accused

Of course, Bildad and the others were wrong. According to God, Job was "blameless and upright, a man who fears God and

shuns evil.” Job 2:3

But this did not stop their constant criticism. Mercilessly they attacked Job, blaming him for his own suffering. As Job said in verse 5, they saw themselves as better than Job and looked down on him, judging him as guilty.

And it wore Job down. So he started here asking, “How long will you torment me and crush me with words?” Job 19:2

As if losing his wealth, business, family and health was not bad enough. On top of that, he had the torment of their constant, unfair criticism.

b) Words are Powerful

It’s a reminder of the power of our words. Unloving words can be so destructive, cause so much pain, crush self-confidence, destroy relationships and churches!

But of course words don’t only have the power to destroy. They also have the power to encourage and heal. “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” Proverbs 16:24

The right words at the right time can have such a positive impact on someone.

And that’s what Jesus’ words did. When loads of people were leaving Jesus, he asked his disciples if they were going to leave too. But Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” John 6:68

Jesus’ words, more than any other, have the power to restore the broken-hearted, lift up the discouraged, bring the ultimate healing of eternal life.

Let’s make sure that our mouths are filled with Jesus’ words – words that don’t torment and crush, but that give life!

2. Condemned by God

Job knew that Bildad and his friends were wrong about him. But he thought they were right in one way. He also believed that God had condemned him.

“Know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.” Job 19:6

Job believed that God was sovereign over this world. And so whatever happened to him came from the hand of God. When he was blessed, he believed that this blessing came from God. Now that he was suffering, he believed that this too came from God. “The hand of God has struck me.” Job 19:21

a) Attacked By Satan

But Job didn’t have the full picture. We know that there was more going on than this. In Job 1:11, Satan had said to God, “Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” Job 1:11

But God didn’t do that. Instead, he allowed Satan to do that. God said to him, “Everything he has is in your hands.” Job 1:12

So, yes, God did allow these things to happen to Job. This was all under God’s ultimate control, in accordance with his purpose and for his glory. So in a sense, Job was right when he said, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.” Job 1:21

But the hands that destroyed Job’s possessions and killed his kids and wrecked his health were the hands of Satan.

b) Under Siege

But Job didn’t know this. And so from his point of view, God had attacked him like a city under siege.

“He has blocked my way so that I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness.” Job 19:8 He’d blocked all of his escapes and plunged him into darkness.

“He has stripped me of my honour and removed the crown from my head.” Job 19:9

Like a king in a besieged city, he’d dethroned Job, stripping him of all his dignity:

“He tears me down on every side till I am gone.” Job 19:10 The walls of his life had been destroyed on every side, so that

there was nothing left.

“He uproots my hope like a tree.” John 19:10. Not even hope remained, because God had so thoroughly pulled him from his previous life.

“His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent.” Job 19:12 In anger, God had sent his overwhelming army against him, surrounding on all sides.

And why did this all happen? Why had God wiped him out and reduced his life to rubble? Well, because “He counts me among his enemies.” Job 19:11. For some unfathomable reason, God had condemned him as a sinner.

And that wasn’t fair. “Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.” Job 19:7 He hadn’t done anything to deserve it. And though he’d appealed his case, he’d got no reply.

3. Cut off from Everyone

And as a result of all of this, he’d been cut off from everyone.

“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.

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

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.” Job 19:13-19

Job was completely isolated. From his brothers, acquaintances, family, friends, servants and wife. All of them recoiled from him. All of them turned their backs on him. Even the kids on the street had no respect for him.

Suffering often brings isolation. Sometimes it’s because when we’re hurting, we don’t want to be around other people. We withdraw, thinking this is the only way to cope.

But sometimes it is others who withdraw from us, especially as suffering continues. They don’t want to be dragged down by our pain. They don’t want to have to face our issues. They don’t know how to help.

Job said, “I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped by only the skin of my teeth.” Job 19:20 He was living at the dump, bankrupt, bereaved, broken and barely holding onto life. Who’d want to be identified with him?

But more than that. If Job’s friends were anything to go by, then people were convinced he was suffering so much because he’d sinned so much. So who would want to hang out with someone so wicked?

a) Love Never Fails

Of course, it’s in those darkest of times that we should turn up. We’re called to “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” Romans 12:10

That’s because we’re called to love others as God loves us. And his promise is: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5

But that’s not what Job experienced. Everyone abandoned him and left him alone. No wonder, he pleaded: “Have pity on me, my friends, have pity.” Job 19:21

4. Craving Vindication

But Job didn’t just want to have the help of his friends again. More than that, he craved vindication: “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

for ever!" Job 19:23-24

Job had been falsely accused. And he knew that, as we say today, mud sticks. Even without any proof, allegations stick long in people's memories.

So Job longed for his words to be recorded. Not just on a scroll, but in metal and stone so they'd last for all time. So that people would know that he'd not deserved this, that he was suffering as an innocent man.

a) A Written Record

And this happened in a way more than he could've imagined. Job probably lived before any of the Bible was written. He'd no idea that thousands of years later, we'd be studying his words and learning that he was suffering as an innocent man.

It reminds us that in the end it doesn't matter what other people think of us. It doesn't matter what accusations are levelled against us. Ultimately what matters is what God writes about us in his book. At the final judgement, John recorded that "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:15

If we've put our faith in Jesus, then we've been declared righteous in God's sight, and our names are written in heaven, and we will never be condemned! That's what matters!

5. Confident of a Redeemer

But Job didn't know the gospel like we do. But incredibly, he was still able to look ahead in faith.

a) He Lives

So much of Job's life was uncertain. He didn't know why he was going through such a hard time. But even in this darkest of times, there was something that Job knew. "I know that my Redeemer lives." Job 19:25

A redeemer was someone connected to you by covenant. Someone who'd stand up for you if you couldn't stand up for yourself. To demand justice if you were wronged, safeguard your inheritance, ensure your legacy, guarantee your future. And Job was confident that he had a redeemer who lives.

b) He Will Stand

And he didn't mean just live at that time, but forever, because he said, "In the end he will stand upon the earth." Job 19:25. Stand on the dust, probably meaning Job's grave.

Better than a tombstone with Job's innocence declared on it, Job knew that his Redeemer would be there at the end to vindicate him, to declare that he was innocent.

So who was his Redeemer? Who was Job trusting in to stand up for him when he couldn't stand for himself? Who was going to demand justice for him, safeguard his inheritance, ensure his legacy, guarantee his future?

Well, it was none other than God himself. Even though his complaint was against God, even though he felt condemned by him, Job was trusting that God would stand for him!

I'm not sure how Job got his mind around the apparent contradiction of this. But we know that this tension is resolved at the cross of Jesus. It is there that God is both our Judge and our Redeemer. In Christ, God both punished our sins, but also provided our salvation.

"Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." 1 Peter 3:18 Jesus was criticised and condemned. He too was cut off from everyone. Betrayed by Judas. Denied by Peter. Abandoned by his disciples. Ridiculed by his nation. Crucified by his creation. Even forsaken by his Father.

But unlike Job, Jesus experienced all of this willingly. He did this for us. He suffered in our place, so that he could be our Redeemer - so we could be declared righteous, brought into relationship with God and given a secure future.

c) I Will See him

Job was confident of his future too. Previously, in his first lament, in chapter 3, he'd wished that he was dead because in his grief and despair, it seemed like the end of everything. Later he said that "As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return." Job 7:9

But later he asked the question, “If a man dies, will he live again?” Job 14:14. He was beginning to consider the possibility of hope beyond the grave.

But by ch19, he was able to declare his hope in the resurrection:

“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.” Job 19:26-27

In this darkest of times, when everything seemed empty and hopeless, Job experienced a growing confidence that death would not hold him. But that one day, he’d be face to face with God, his Redeemer!

And that’s the unshakeable hope that we can have. That no matter what we go through in our lives. No matter how dark it gets or how bleak it seems. This is not the end. There is more to come.

That’s because Jesus did not stay in the grave. On the third day, God raised him from the dead, revealing his true identity and vindicating him: He “was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead.” Romans 1:4

And so we can be sure that he is our Saviour and that he is coming back for us. And “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2

If we’ve trusted in Jesus, then this is our confidence. Our Redeemer lives.

6. Concerned for Others

And if we have that hope, then we should be concerned for others who don’t. That’s how Job finished here:

“If you say, ‘How we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him,’

you should fear the sword yourselves; for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment.” Job 19:28-29

Job was concerned for his friends. Theirs’ was a law-based religion. Good or evil, we get what we deserve. That meant they had no place for undeserved suffering and no place for undeserved grace.

But what they needed was God’s grace! So without it, they stood in danger of judgement. So Job warned them!

And we need to do the same. As we comfort ourselves with the reality of our living Redeemer, we also need to warn those who’ve not yet put their faith in Jesus. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20

Conclusion

Like Job we may go through days of darkness and despair. But knowing Jesus makes all the difference.

- We may feel criticized by friends, condemned by God and cut off from everyone.
- We may crave vindication.
- But we can be confident that our Redeemer lives, that he will stand up for us and one day we will see him face to face.
- And so in concern for others, we need to go and tell them about Jesus, the one who loved them and gave himself for them, so that they too can experience this unshakeable hope, even in the darkest of times.

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November 12th 2023