

# Job: My Redeemer Lives

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer for Illumination

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.

*Let's hear now from Job 19 where Job powerfully expresses his trust in God through his pain.*

### Scripture: Job 19: 23-27 (NLT)

"Oh, that my words could be recorded. Oh, that they could be inscribed on a monument, carved with an iron chisel and filled with lead, engraved forever in the rock. "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

### Sermon: Job: My Redeemer Lives

Dante's *Divine Comedy* begins with these famous lines:

*In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself, in a dark wood, where the direct way was lost. It is a hard thing to speak of, how wild, harsh and impenetrable that wood was, so that thinking of it recreates the fear. It is scarcely less bitter than death: but, in order to tell of the good that I found there, I must tell of the other things I saw there.*

The Dark Wood is not a place you choose to go. Like Dante, the Dark Wood is the place you find yourself in. You might be pushed in the Dark Wood or chased into it. It's a place where you feel small and vulnerable.

The Dark Wood is where:

Tragedy strikes.  
A marriage fails.  
Financial ruin happens.  
A friendship ends.  
A health threat arises.  
Doubt or despair closes in.

The Dark Wood is fraught with not only peril, but promise. The Dark Wood is important because there are things that we learn in the dark that we can never learn in the light. It's the struggle and the uncertainty of the Dark Wood that imparts to us the gift not of *certainty*, but a *deeper and sturdier trust in God*.

God puts it this way in Isaiah:

*I will give you the treasures of darkness  
and riches hidden in secret places,  
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,  
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.* (Isaiah 45:3)

And it is Job who is our best guide to get us safely through the Dark Wood back home.

*"There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job."*

And so begins the unforgettable drama, tragedy, and ultimate restoration of Job. The cast of characters is small, but this is a big story that has captured the imagination of countless souls through the ages.

In the beginning we find Job living "the Middle Eastern Dream." He has 10 children, many servants, and multitudes of livestock—oxen, camels, donkeys, and sheep. He was well-respected throughout the east. Job wasn't perfect or sinless—but he was a God-fearing man who avoided evil. It was his custom each morning to rise early to pray for his children and offer sacrifices on their behalf, just in case they cursed God in their hearts.

Job was doing everything *right* when everything went *wrong*.

Then BOOM! By the end of chapter one, Satan has wiped out all of Job's wealth, and all the livestock has been killed or carried off. Before the reader gets to know anything about Job's family, BOOM! again. All his sons and daughters and their families die in their home when a windstorm collapsed the roof.

Upon hearing the news, in somber dignity, Job did what ancient Middle Easterners did in times of tragedy—he tore his robe. Like the Mesopotamians and Canaanites of his day, he adopted the mourning ritual of shaving his head. He then fell on his face, worshiped God, and wept these immortal words:

*Naked I came from my mother's womb,  
and naked I shall return.  
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;  
blessed be the name of the Lord.*

All this in chapter one.

By chapter two, God's given Satan permission to turn his attack on Job's own physical being, afflicting him with sores "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head." Job is itching so bad, he scrapes his sores with broken pottery shards.

Job's wife then informs him that his breath stinks and looks at him with disgust saying, "Do us all a favor: Curse God and die." "Shall we receive the good from the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this, Job didn't curse God, even though everything in his life is either dead, despairing, or diseased.

Enter Job's three "best friends," I mean best friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They traveled to comfort and console Job. They wept and wailed at the sight of poor Job. They could barely recognize him. They too tore their robes and threw dust on their heads. The three sat with Job on the ground for seven days in silence.

But Job couldn't hold it in anymore. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day the levy broke. Job opened his mouth and cursed—not God, but the day he was born. Yet he maintained his innocence. He was the victim of none other than the living God. In fact, Job was preparing to serve papers to summon God to court. He had an open and shut case against his Maker. God was guilty for causing this senseless onslaught of anguish.

Job's friends opened their mouths too—each trying to solve the mystery of suffering. They transformed from friends to Job's judges appointed to point out his error—which they saw as the cause of Job's suffering. The four of them do lots and lots and lots of talking. As in thirty-five chapters of speeches and soliloquies and discourses and diatribes.

Job's friend Eliphaz spoke first. He was the oldest of the friends. And the most diplomatic. But Eliphaz had a neat and tidy theology that was wrapped in a bow. For Eliphaz, faith was formulaic. Agree with God, and good will come to you—guaranteed. His faith was a concoction of confident clichés, pat answers, smug platitudes, and glib bumper sticker maxims.

Job's second friend Bildad was more confrontational and "no nonsense." If you do good—God rewards you. If bad things happen to you—that's divine punishment. You had it coming to you. Bildad's faith was black and white.

Job's third friend Zophar took things to Defcon 4. Job—you deserve this suffering, in fact you deserve even more than you're getting now. Wow! With friends like Zophar, who needs enemies?

Job rants and raves and vents and laments—a lot. Not only with his friends, but with God. Like most grieving people, Job is on an emotional roller coaster—and *the good news of the Gospel according to Job is that it's OK to do this!* Job says and feels what we're too often afraid to share. And we let our emotions bottle up and stew and fester. But not Job—he lays his emotions bare:

*Defensiveness: My companions are treacherous!*

*Anger: Miserable comforters are you all!*

*Exasperation: How long will you torment me, God?*

*Desperate: Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends.*

*Bitterness: The wicked get off scot free, while the righteous suffer.*

*Nostalgic: Will anyone bring back the days when God was my guardian? When I was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and father to the needy?*

Then, in our morning's reading, Job unexpectedly turns towards God, affirming God's redeeming presence and power. These are probably the most famous words we know from the Book of Job because they are quoted in Handel's *Messiah*.

In Job 19:25 the beleaguered, belittled, beaten-down Job declares:

*I know that my Redeemer lives and that at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.*

Handel turned this despairing declaration into a glorious confession of faith and Messianic promise in *The Messiah* we sing each Easter.

Despite Job's inspiring confession, he's still human. Job's struggle doesn't stop there. It continues for another 20 chapters:

Confusion: *You made me God, now you destroy me*

Shame: *I am a laughingstock*

Doubt: *If mortals die, will they live again?*

Despair: *My days are past, my plans broken off, my heart's desires extinguished*

He sees himself as a victim: *I am God's target*

*In his triumph and defeat.*

*Through the heights and depths.*

*The ups and downs.*

*The zigs and zags,*

Job doggedly, relentlessly pursues God for an answer. He wouldn't give up. He doesn't try to get rid of the problem by getting rid of God. Doesn't let God off the hook. He wasn't going to take this senseless suffering with a stiff upper lip. Job went straight to the top with his concerns:

*"I want to talk to the manager."*

Then—out of nowhere, at the end of the book--a mysterious fourth friend appears—Elihu. This younger friend has a different perspective than the other three friends. He listens carefully. He even quotes something Job said earlier. He's humble, *"I am as you are Job."* Elihu asks good questions. He invites his friends to listen to God—

*"Listen! Listen to the thunder of God's voice!"*

Above all—Elihu doesn't point fingers. He only points Job to God. Elihu softens us to the voice of God. May we all be blessed with an Elihu in our lives. May we be an Elihu to others.

And then FINALLY! God shows up—39 chapters into the 42 chapter-long story!

God doesn't appear in a still small voice. No, God appears in a whirlwind, in a tempest. God doesn't punish Job, but God doesn't pamper Job either. God just puts Job in his place. "Gird up your loins like a man Job, because I'm going to question you." And God grills Job for FOUR chapters:

*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Can you fasten the harness of the Pleiades or untie Orion's bands?  
Do you clothe the horse's neck with its mane?  
Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook, Job?*

In God's majestic presence Job's words ... *stop*. He puts his hand on his mouth in awestruck silence.

I have uttered what I did not understand ... I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

God shows up, but never explains the problem of evil or how we can avoid suffering or why Job's life went from good to great to bad to worse. Suffering just "is." And Job's OK with thy mystery of it all. His encounter with his Maker ultimately makes his very real questions and protests irrelevant.

Job gives up the right to be right.

The Gospel according to Job teaches us about the gifts of the Dark Wood. Suffering has the possibility of driving us to God for strength, hope, peace, and even worship—in ways that a life of smooth sailing never could.

The Gospel according to Job reminds us that God does not operate by plans, legalities, agendas, or our sense of justice. Thank goodness. I like how Leonard Sweet puts it,

*God is a God of unpredictable and unfathomable love. God is a God of out-of-this-world mercy. God does not operate by our sense of fairness and proportion. God operates out of an unexpected, unpredictable, overflowing dynamic of mercy, love, and extreme patience.*

The Gospel according to Job reminds us to beware of becoming Advice-Givers, Fixers, and Experts on Living. Beware of giving daily doses of unsolicited diagnoses, prescriptions, and miracle cures to inoculate or alleviate suffering. Job or the Bible never say that if you are intelligent enough, moral enough, or spiritual enough—you will be exempt from suffering.

The Gospel according to Job also teaches us about the importance of forgiving those who have hurt us. God blessed and restored Job only *after* he prayed for his friends.

The Gospel according to Job reminds us to never stop trusting God and to never stop talking to God and even wrestling with God. Job stayed in relationship with others. With God, with his friends, with his wife—even when they kicked him when he was down. Let us pray for not only the patience of Job, but the perseverance of Job, and the authenticity of Job.

Job teaches us that our calling is to bless the Lord—on the halcyon days and heavenly seasons of life. Job also teaches us to bless the Lord when we're going through living hell, when we feel lost in the Dark Wood. But each and every day, we're glad to be alive, grateful for the life we've been given.

Some days feel like Resurrection Sunday. Other days are Good Friday awful. But with Christ, Sunday is coming! TGIS—thank God it's Sunday!

Resurrection always defeats crucifixion. Christ's life brings about the death of death. And Christ's life is our life.

Sometimes the answer comes quickly—but usually it's slow, painfully slow between the crucifixion and the resurrection. And usually what God gives is not so much an answer, as a presence and a peace. The good news is that we're in relationship with a suffering God—a God who relates with our pain, personally. It was Christ, our Crucified Redeemer, who cried out to God from the cross,

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

It is Christ, our Risen Redeemer, who also says to us,

“Behold, I make all things new.”

*Why* does suffering happen? *God only knows*. But we know from Job *what* we're supposed to do in seasons of suffering—to honestly keep talking and engaging and wrestling with God through it all, alone and in community with others. And God will show up. God will grow us.

Let us say with Job this morning: “I know, You know, We know ... that our Redeemer liveth.”

Amen.

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