

**“My Redeemer Lives”**  
Job 19:21-27

November 12, 2023

Rev. Dr. Amy Rinehults  
Corinth Reformed Church  
Hickory, NC

**What happened to Job?**

In the very first verse of the book that bears his name, we learn that Job is a man who “was blameless and upright, [who] feared God and shunned evil.” (1:1) He has 7 sons, 3 daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and lots of servants. (1:2-3) He is the sort of man who regularly made sacrifices to God on behalf of his children, just in case they had sinned. (1:5) Job is wealthy, he’s powerful, and he’s following God. All that the Bible tells us about him leads us to conclude that Job is a good guy living a good life.

Then, things change. We get a glimpse of this heavenly scene where the angels come before the Lord. Among the group of angels is Satan. In this book, “Satan” is the name of the accuser. He’s not God’s sworn adversary; he doesn’t have horns and a pitchfork; he’s not the overlord of hell. In the book of Job, Satan is one of the creatures - just like the angels - who come and report to God what they’ve been up to.

God is the first to bring up Job. He asks Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (1:8) God seems proud of Job; but Satan is skeptical. His response is, “Of course he’s doing what you want him to do, you’ve given him everything he could need for a perfect life! If things weren’t going so well for him, he wouldn’t be nearly so faithful to you.”

God is confident his man Job is up to the test, so he says to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” (1:12) A series of tragedies strike Job’s life in rapid succession. His oxen and donkeys are stolen and the servants with them killed. (1:15) His sheep and the servants with them are burned to death. (1:16) His camels are stolen and servants with them killed. (1:17) All ten of his children died when the house they were in collapsed on them. (1:18)

In one fell swoop, everything is gone. I would say Job is understandably grief-stricken, but those are the wrong words. It’s not understandable in any sense of the word. I have never known that level of grief – the complete and utter loss of everything you hold dear is a pain I don’t know. Job famously responds to this by saying, “Naked I came from my

mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (1:21)

Shortly after this, we see another heavenly scene, where God is pointing out to Satan that Job has remained faithful through all his losses. Satan responds, "Of course he has! A man will do anything to spare his own life." And so they up the ante, and the rule "don't lay a finger on Job" becomes "you must spare Job's life." This is how Job ends up covered from head to foot in painful sores. (2:7) So now he has lost all his material possessions, all of his children, and is afflicted with a chronic illness marked by persistent agonizing pain.

Job's wife is the first to address him in this book. She tells him to "Curse God and die!" (2:9) Next, three of his friends show up. Things start off well with the friends. They see the depth of Job's grief and suffering, and in response to it, they sit in silence for 7 days and 7 nights. After seven days and seven nights of sitting together in silence, Job pours out his heart, telling his friends that he wishes he had never been born. From chapter 3 through chapter 37, we see a back-and-forth between Job and the friends. Eliphaz offers up the ancient version of "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Bildad shows up with the ancient version of "God must have a plan to use this for something better." Zophar gives Job the ancient version of "This is God's punishment for your sins." Eliphaz chimes back in with a "You're not as holy as you think you are." Bildad speaks again and says, "You need to calm down; you're not the center of the universe." Do you see what I mean about these friends not being particularly helpful in times of crisis and grief?

Job isn't feeling comforted by his friends. He asks how long they will crush him with their words. (19:2) He cries out that he has been wronged, he has lost everything, he has been cut off from friends and family. Job is hurting, he's alone, and even the friends who came to be with him are making him feel more hurt and more alone. This is where we pick up our story today, with Job pleading with his friends to understand his situation.

### **Job Pleads With His Friends (21-22)**

<sup>21</sup> *"Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. <sup>22</sup> Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?"*

By this point in his story, Job is completely estranged from his community. His own wife is encouraging him to give up – an option he finds intolerable. These three friends are the only social connections he has left, and even they aren't helping him. In these verses, he begs with them to share the weight of his suffering, but he seems resigned to the fact that they will fail him. With each passing word, I think Job is feeling more and more alone in his grief.

Job is feeling attacked by both God and man. The difference is that Job will affirm that God has the right to take away everything he had given Job, even if it seems unfair to him in the moment. God can do what he wants. But Job is fed up with his friends who are also “pursuing” him. Job is feeling like his friends also want their “pound of flesh” from his suffering. God can do what he wants; Job’s friends are behaving poorly.

Job, stripped of all his earthly possessions and reduced to a sore-covered, emaciated shell of a man, has hit his breaking point. God has done what feels unfair. His friends are useless. Everything is gone and everybody has abandoned him. Job has nothing left to give, and nothing left to lose. Job is at the end of his proverbial rope. But he musters up just enough energy for one more speech in his defense.

### **Job Wishes for a Witness (23-24)**

*<sup>23</sup> “Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, <sup>24</sup> that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever!”*

Although Job has suffered unimaginably, he maintains that he is innocent. This is an important point. In Job’s world, the prevailing understanding of pain was that people who disobeyed God were cursed, while those who obeyed God were blessed. Most of us don’t hold onto that worldview anymore – we know that the world is full of good things and evil things, and that every person (regardless of how good or righteous or holy they are) experiences a mix of good and evil, joy and sorrow, victory and defeat. In Job’s time, there was a much more black and white view. If Job had been living such a prosperous life before, he must have been obeying God. And for him to suffer such a huge reversal of fortunes, surely he must have disobeyed God – even if he didn’t understand when or how. Anything else would mean that God wasn’t playing by the rules that all the people knew and expected.

Job knows that something is off. Whatever is happening to him, he’s certain it’s not punishment for his disobedience. He doesn’t know why all this is happening, but he is certain of his innocence. For a moment, to appreciate this story, we need to set aside our evangelical Christian understanding of everyone being a sinner in need of repentance. Job would have understood the need to make sacrifices for sins, but he also lived in a world where it was understood that he could achieve “right standing” with God. And according to all Job knew, he had done all the right things to be in right relationship with God. God’s actions were incomprehensible to Job inside this framework.

Job wants to speak in his own defense. He is so confident that his words are true that he wants them preserved forever. He doesn’t just want to speak his defense, or write it, he was to carve it into stone. Think about the words you say. How many of them would

you be ready to carve in stone for all time? I'm guessing maybe a few, but not many! It's really hard to change something after it's carved in stone.

Job feels so confident in his innocence, and is so passionately committed to restoring his good name by means of his own self-defense that he's ready to carve it in stone. But that hints to something even more ominous. Job is at the end of his rope. He can feel his life slipping away from him, and he doesn't know if he's going to live long enough to see himself vindicated. He wants his protest of innocence carved in stone, preserved forever, in case he dies before the truth about him comes to light. He's wishing for this stone to be a witness, a lasting monument to the fact that he is in fact, still a "blameless and upright [man], [who] feared God and shunned evil." (1:1)

Job, in what he believes to be his dying declaration, will also say that he knows he's not alone. Although nobody is on his side now, he beautifully and boldly declares his faith that help is on the way. Job has confidence that he will have an advocate to declare his innocence.

### **Job Declares His Faith (25-27)**

*<sup>25</sup> "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; <sup>27</sup> I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"*

Of these three verses, the one we're going to pay the most attention to is verse 25. That's partly because verse 25 is so important, but also in part because verses 26-27 have proven baffling to Bible translators and interpreters.

At the core of Job's hope in the midst of despair is that he knows his redeemer lives. In the ancient world, this redeemer was usually the nearest living male relative. That redeemer was responsible for protecting and restoring his relative's interests, when the relative was unable to do so for himself. The redeemer would buy back property that had been sold in distress. The redeemer was also responsible to retrieve property that had been stolen (Numbers 5:8), or buy back a relative from slavery or avenge a murdered relative. Job, who is feeling isolated from his community and abandoned by his friends and family, declares that he is certain his redeemer – the one who will advocate for him and restore him to his proper place in the world – lives. Though the friends and family he knows have forsaken him, Job is claiming that his nearest relation is standing in the wings, ready to come to his aid.

Job's central complaint is that God has afflicted him unjustly; Job's central affirmation is that he has a redeemer who is able to advocate for him before God himself.

It is clear that even though Job cannot understand why God is acting so out of character, he still believes that God is the nearest relation he has, his greatest and

perhaps only hope. Whether he lives or whether he dies, Job is holding onto the hope that God has not left him, and that God will do the right thing.

## **Job for Today**

What do we do with Job's story? And, since we're now 11 weeks into a sermon series called "Jesus in the Old Testament," where is Jesus in Job's story?

**1. *Suffering is universal.*** This should not come as a shock to any of us. Everybody suffers. We suffer in different ways to different degrees at different times for different reasons, but we all suffer. Some of you are suffering now... with illness, with job loss, with addiction, with broken relationships, with concerns for your children, with the loss of a loved one, with the loss of the future you planned for and hoped for. In case nobody has told you recently, your suffering doesn't necessarily mean you did something wrong. Sometimes our choices do result in hard consequences. But sometimes awful things just happen, terrible situations just exist, and there's no easy answer to the question, "Why?" Suffering is part of being human. It is real, it's miserable, and it hits all of us at times.

**2. *An honest response to suffering is okay.*** I've seen a lot of different responses to suffering. Some people get angry at God and angry at other people, and rage and fume for the whole world to see. Some get sad and hurt and fall into seasons of depression, and are utterly inconsolable. Some try to put on a brave face and "grin and bear it." But most frequently, people tend to vacillate between different responses. What we see in Job's story is that a mess of conflicted feelings and thoughts is normal, and can be part of a faithful response to suffering.

Job doesn't try to sanitize how he's feeling. He is brutally honest when he makes that case that God has caused unspeakable suffering in his life. And at the very same time, Job declares in confidence that God will restore him. Job experiences God as adversary and advocate, all in the same breath. So if you, in the midst of your own suffering, find yourself angry at God one moment and desperate for God's comfort the next, you're in good company. Conflicted feelings are normal, and they don't indicate a lack of faith or a moral failure. God can handle whatever your honest response to suffering is.

**3. *Our redeemer lives!*** Job spoke a profound truth centuries before he could have fully understood or appreciated the magnitude of his statement. In fact, where we see Jesus in this story is in Job's prophetic words, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth." (19:25)

The phrase "I know that my redeemer lives" is one that we have adopted and clung to in the Christian tradition. And in a sense, we are thinking in the same way Job was. Remember, Job's idea of a redeemer was someone who would stand up for him when we couldn't stand up for himself. It was based on a tradition of someone buying back

what had been lost or stolen, freeing what had been enslaved, and restoring the one in need to his former status and glory. The redeemer in Job's world is perhaps the greatest symbol that the one in need is loved, that they are seen, that they matter, and that they are part of the family. When Jesus shows up, he declares that God's people of every nation and every race and every walk of life are loved, they are seen, they matter, and they are being adopted into the family

Job's faith in God as his closest relative, the one who is sure to redeem him points forward to Jesus, who is our redeemer who lives forever. There is a long tradition in the Old Testament of thinking of God as the redeemer of orphans and widows (Proverbs 23:11; Jeremiah 50:34), and others who are helpless (Psalm 119:154; Lamentations 3:58). Jesus continues and fulfills that tradition, and the New Testament has no shortage of reminders that our redeemer, our advocate, the one who will surely restore what has been lost and make right all that has gone wrong, is Jesus:

- Galatians 4:4-5 – “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”
- Hebrews 9:12 – “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.”
- 1 Peter 1:18-19 – “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”
- Colossians 1:13-14 – “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
- Ephesians 1:7-8 – “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.”

Job suffered unjustly up to the brink of death, and that wasn't fair. But in his suffering he called on God to be his redeemer. Jesus, God himself, suffered unjustly too, past the brink of death and straight into the grave. And that also wasn't fair. But when Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, he became the redeemer of mankind. While we as Jesus' followers will suffer in this life (and some of it might be unfair and unjust), we can cling to the faith of Job, made evident in the work of Jesus, that we have a Redeemer, an Advocate, a Defender who sees us, chooses to come to our aid, who has completed the work to redeem our suffering, and who declares us blameless and righteous before God, and has promised us an eternal restoration (to complete perfection!) of all that is lost and broken in this life.

That's Jesus in the Old Testament. That's Jesus in the story of Job.

We know that our Redeemer lives.