

Why Be Good? | **The Book of Jōb**

“I Know That My Redeemer Lives (Cycle 2)”

Job 19

5.12.24

Job 19 Then Job responded, ² "How long will you torment me And crush me with words? ³ "These ten times you have insulted me; You are not ashamed to wrong me. ⁴ "Even if I have truly erred, My error lodges with me. ⁵ "If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me And prove my disgrace to me, ⁶ Know then that God has wronged me And has closed His net around me.

⁷ "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. ⁸ "He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, And He has put darkness on my paths. ⁹ "He has stripped my honor from me And removed the crown from my head. ¹⁰ "He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree. ¹¹ "He has also kindled His anger against me And considered me as His enemy. ¹² "His troops come together, And build up their way against me And camp around my tent.

¹³ "He has removed my brothers far from me, And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. ¹⁴ "My relatives have failed, And my intimate friends have forgotten me. ¹⁵ "Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a stranger. I am a foreigner in their sight. ¹⁶ "I call to my servant, but he does not answer; I have to implore him with my mouth. ¹⁷ "My breath is offensive to my wife, And I am loathsome to my own brothers. ¹⁸ "Even young children despise me; I rise up and they speak against me. ¹⁹ "All my associates abhor me, And those I love have turned against me. ²⁰ "My bone clings to my skin and my flesh, And I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth.

²¹ "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, For the hand of God has struck me. ²² "Why do you persecute me as God does, And are not satisfied with my flesh? ²³ "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! ²⁴ "That with an iron stylus and lead They were engraved in the rock forever! ²⁵ "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. ²⁶ "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; ²⁷ Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!

²⁸ "If you say, 'How shall we persecute him?' And 'What pretext for a case against him can we find?' ²⁹ "Then be afraid of the sword for yourselves, For wrath brings the punishment of the sword, So that you may know there is judgment."

We've been looking at *The Book of Jōb*, a man who was a kind of pawn in a kind of wager between God and the satan... The satan says, "Lord, You're proud of Your servant Job, because he serves You – but we both know: Job ONLY serves You because You make it worth his while? Take away the perks and... he's gone!"

So, all the perks are removed and at once the greatest man in the East has NOW lost it all – his children, business, marital bliss, his health (he has shingles, burning sores from head to toe) AND his standing in

the community. His friends come to comfort him but end up blaming and accusing him. And worst of all, this devout man wonders why God did this to him – “what’d I do to deserve this?”

Today, in the *Second Cycle* of arguments, Job reflects on one aspect of his suffering that’s been of great interest to 20th C writers, philosophers, social scientists and artists and we ought to recognize this feature of life and suffering as being more painful and perplexing than we sometimes understand. The feature I have in mind is ALIENATION.

It's the sense that I'm out of touch or disconnected or separated from others, from myself, from my purpose, from nature and from God. An alienated person feels like he/she doesn't belong, is out of place and strange for reasons he can't diagnose or change.

I'd like to explore this condition from Job Ch 19 and see, in the passage, in perhaps the most beloved and famous words in the book, the remedy to this trauma. Let's look at:

- 1) **The Pain of Alienation**
- 2) **The Hope of Redemption**
- 3) **The Space Between Alienation and Redemption**

Franz Kafka (1883 – 1924) explored the topic in a novella called *The Metamorphosis* (1915) which opens with the famous words: “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.” As the story unfolds, the reader sees that this is a kind of Absurdist allegory for alienation. Gregor's family doesn't know what to do with him. He no longer feels quite human. People seem to be afraid of him since he's now a six-foot tall cockroach. He's no longer at home in his own body. It's a picture of modern man.

And not only is this theme of great interest to philosophers and in high-culture but also of artists in pop-culture. So Paul Simon wrote these words you may have heard:

A man walks down the street
 He says, “why am I soft in the middle now
 Why am I soft in the middle
 The rest of my life is so hard?
 I need a photo opportunity
 I want a shot at redemption
 ‘Don't want to end up a cartoon
 In a cartoon graveyard”.

— Paul Simon, “You Can Call Me Al”, track
 6 from the 1986 album, *Graceland*

It's alienation. Like, “How did I become Homer Simpson?” Or David Byrne (and Talking Heads):

“And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack
 And you may find yourself in another part of the world

And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
 And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife
 And you may ask yourself, **“Well, how did I get here?”**

“I can’t get no satisfaction.” The list goes on and on, all the ways modern people feel unnatural, estranged, detached; somehow full of angst and trapped in a life that seems to have been chosen by someone else. “How did I GET here?” In some ways these songs are secular Psalms of lament and *Thē Psalms* are full of alienation!

And we can’t help seeing, in this Ch where Job speaks, all these symptoms of deepest alienation. His loved ones are aloof. At the very moment in his life when Job is in greatest need of love and sympathy and presence, people don’t know how to relate to him, and they stay away (it’s often the case to this very day). He needs human contact, but people are afraid to be near him.

His employees don’t know how to relate to him. His wife wishes he would stop breathing (it’s not, v. 17, that he needed to brush his teeth!). Even little kids run from him.

Look at all the categories he covers (vv. 13-20): acquaintances brothers, relatives, intimate friends, those who live in his house, his wife, young children, associates, those I love. “How did I GET here?” I feel like I don’t belong anywhere.

The very friends who’ve come to comfort and counsel him have now become fiends and relentlessly attack him so that he has to ask them in v. 22, *“Are you not satisfied with my flesh?”* Like *“Isn’t having God against me enough?”*

He’s even alienated from his own body, v. 20, he can’t eat: *“My bone clings to my flesh...”* Elsewhere, Job speaks of insomnia (7.3-4); he wants to sleep but his body and mind are betraying him, disconnected from his own body.

But as we’ve been seeing: even more painful than being betrayed by his body and friends and his old way of life that was so good and rich, Job is alienated from God. And unlike modern Western man (high culture OR pop culture) Job sees – alienation from God is the source of all the rest.

Job’s thinking about God is breaking down. It’s a part of his alienation from self. He’s spiritually schizoid in the truest sense of that word. The root definition of schizoid is, “having mutually contradictory or antagonistic parts : changing frequently between opposite states.” Job sometimes thinks that God is against Him and wants to shame and kill him AND other times thinks that God loves him and has good plans for him. He says in v. 6 *“Know this: God has wronged me and has closed His net around me... (v. 8) He has walled up my way so I can’t pass... He’s put darkness in my path...He breaks me down on every side... He’s considered me His enemy...”* All the strangeness and alienation I feel from others ORIGINATES with GOD... (v. 21) *“Pity me, pity me, O you my friends for the hand of God has struck me!”* Ouch!

And yet... after reflecting on the truth that his suffering could be stopped by God BUT God won't stop it... "God must be against me..." Then Job says these astounding words: v. 25 *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the dust. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God..."*

Our version capitalizes the word "Redeemer" and that's an interpretive decision... but in this case I think it's the right one! On one hand, Job sees that God is absolutely in control of everything and if God wanted Job's suffering to stop – it would STOP immediately. SO, the fact that Job's misery continues means that it's God's will... BUT, on the other hand, God is Job's Redeemer... Job cannot stop thinking of God as good. "There's an unresolved mystery here – that God has put me in anguish AND God WILL show up as my Redeemer."

That whole idea of "the redeemer" is found in the *Torah*, the Book of Leviticus, where God prescribes, *"If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold."* (25.25).

The word kinsman is the word (גֹּאֵל – ga'al) and it means redeemer and it's the same word that's translated "buy back" in this verse from Leviticus (Ch 25). AND using this same word, Job is basically saying, "God will most definitely show up as my Kinsman-Redeemer and will ransom me, will buy me back and set me free. He will take His stand for me before I die, and He stand WITH ME in the dust." (not "earth" but dust – aphar - עֶפְרָה).

And we want to ask, "Job... which is it? Is God against you as an enemy or for you as a relative, a kinsman, a BROTHER-REDEEMER who will stand with you to vindicate you as you cry on the ash heap, in the dust?"

And I think Job would've said, "I just don't know how to explain it but all I can say is, *"As for me, I KNOW that My Redeemer lives..."* God will show up to ransom me! I know!" I may not know how or when or what's the wait or why this is all happening but this one thing I know, *"My Redeemer lives..."*

And WE are called into this same certain uncertainty. If you're a Christian, you're being invited to say with Job, "I know my Redeemer lives and with the Apostle Paul who wrote, *"I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return."* (2 Tim. 1.12 NLT)

Did Job think that His Redeemer was Jesus Christ (even though Job lived many centuries before the coming of Jesus)?

My answer would be "No"... Again, Job knew God who had afflicted him would also rescue him, that God was his Redeemer... and that the Redeemer would make a stand and be IN the dust right down where Job was hurting... That's all Job knew.

BUT... WE KNOW... We know whom we have believed. We have seen Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God, unite Himself to our human nature. He walked on our dusty streets. He even wrote in the dust on one occasion (John 8). He became One with us, became our Kinsman, a real human being made of dust, who intimately knew our frame, that we ARE but dust (Ps 103.14).

Jesus Christ took Job's situation to Himself... He took my situation to Himself... If YOU trust Him, you'll find that He took your situation to Himself and He became the most alienated Human Being that ever lived.

He lived the life I was required to live, and He died the death I deserved to die... He was alienated from people when they spat on Him and ridiculed Him. Children were warned to stay away from Him (though they couldn't; Mt 21.15).

His brothers alienated themselves from Him (John 7.3-5; Mark 3.21). Everyone left Him, completely estranged and alienated from everyone... AND finally, He was estranged from the Father that He'd loved from eternity, a love that had NO beginning, eternal harmony and joy in the Eternal Community of the One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Alienated, the Stranger, the ultimate Outsider, the One who suffered INFINITELY, cried out, *"My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?"* It was God alienated from God in some supreme mystery... that reconciled Job's schizoid view of God – a God infinitely Holy and infinitely loving; supremely exalted and humbled to the dust.

And finally, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer Job trusted but didn't really know... He was indeed humbled to the dust and placed in a tomb... until on the Third Day, He took His stand and we have to celebrate the truth: "I know that My Redeemer Lives – up from the grave He arose!"

For those of you who are believers in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of God's people, we live in what C.S. Lewis called the "Shadowlands". We sometimes endure profound suffering and deep alienation, but we do so with our eyes fixed on the Redeemer. A lot of stuff doesn't fall into neat categories and we wonder, "if God CAN stop the suffering WHY doesn't He? Is He against us?" So, we avoid the kind of "pat answers" of Job's fiends who added to his anguish. We live in the tension of alienation and redemption. We hear God speak with the Prophet Isaiah saying, *"For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," Says the LORD your Redeemer.*" (54.7-8)

And WE, living in this shadowland-tension between redemption and alienation, we feel modern man's deep sense of estrangement (we ALL live East of Eden – the redeemed and the lost alike) but we also know the remedy... And that doesn't (or shouldn't!) make us cocky or smug... but instead ready to get our hands dirty to get down in the dust and care for people who are in the throes of alienation and confusion about life.

On the one hand I can say, "I KNOW my Redeemer lives and I KNOW whom I have believed" (rock-solid confidence and constant hope). And, on the other hand, I see what I deserve when I look at the Redeemer on the Cross – that's what I deserve. And my confidence is always held in tension with humility... So, the position that makes most sense in the "shadowlands" as we await our final redemption is:

We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8.23)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Eph. 4.30-32)