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1

Suffering

JOB 1

*What does God
have to say
about the
suffering of
His people?*

1 Suffering

JOB 1



DISCOVER

the story behind the story
of suffering.



LEARN

how you can defeat Satan's
purpose by your response
to pain.



WORSHIP

as you see what Jesus Christ
accomplished in His suffering.

GENESIS is the first book in the Bible, but Job is the oldest. The story comes from the time of Abraham or before, and the book of Job may well be one of the oldest books in the world. It is also one of the most important, because it deals with some of the deepest questions you will ever face in your life.

Job is the first of the Bible's wisdom books, that is books that deal with the skills we need for navigating our way through life. It also contains one of the most dramatic and compelling stories in the Bible.

When God chose to speak to us about suffering, He did not give us a book of philosophy. When we are in deep personal pain, we do not have a great deal of interest in theory or arguments. God speaks to us through a real-life experience of a man who suffered and records for us his thoughts and his struggles. As you enter Job's struggles, God will speak into your pain. Wherever you look in human history, pain is still pain, and God is still God.

THE GREATEST MAN IN THE EAST

Job was an outstanding man in every way. We are told that he was "blameless" and "upright" (1:1). This did not mean that he was perfect, but it did mean that if people were looking for anything to stick on him, they wouldn't find it. The same word is used in the New Testament for Christian leaders. They are to be "blameless" (Titus 1:6). No leaders are perfect but they must be above reproach. That was true of Job. He "feared God" and he "shunned evil" (Job 1:1). That means

that he experienced the same temptations that all the rest of us do, but he had learned to push them off. He shunned evil, and the reason he was able to do this was because he feared God. Indeed, “he was the greatest man in the East” (v.3).

The second thing that we learn about Job is that he was wealthy. He had been highly successful and God had blessed him. In those days, wealth was measured in livestock. We are told that he had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys (v. 3). His total net worth was pretty impressive.

We are also told that Job had seven sons and three daughters (v. 2), and it seems that they may have represented the one shadow on his horizon. The one thing that we are told about them is that their lives were an endless round of parties. “His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes” (v. 4). Their whole lifestyle seems to have been built around the pursuit of pleasure. If you had asked them what they were living for, they would have said, “We live for the weekend. We get our work done, and then we all have a blast.”

Job did not like what they were doing. In fact after the parties were over, he used to offer a sacrifice for each of his children. He did this “thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts’” (v. 5).

If you had spoken to Job’s sons or daughters, you would have thought them to be fine, upright people, but Job was worried that what they said and what they thought were two different things. He was worried about what was in their hearts, and it would not have surprised him if, when the wine had loosened some of their inhibitions, they had cursed God.

So here is a man who was wonderfully blessed, but had one nagging fear that haunted his mind. He felt that what was going on in his family was not pleasing to God.

CATASTROPHE

Then one day everything in Job’s life changed. The day was like any other—until a terrified servant broke through the door of the house with desperate news. “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped” (vv. 14–15).

Job did not have time to take this appalling news in, because while the servant was still speaking, another messenger came with the news that the sheep and other servants had been killed in what was probably something like a lightning storm.

“The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!” (v. 16).

While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with news that three raiding parties of Chaldeans had swept down from the hills and taken off the camels. Then a fourth messenger arrived with the worst news of all. Job’s sons and daughters had been eating and drinking at one of their parties, and suddenly the house was hit by a mighty wind that swept in from the desert. The house collapsed on them, and all of them were dead (v. 19).

In one day this man lost every familiar landmark of his life. His business was destroyed, his wealth was plundered, and his entire family tragically killed. It all happened in one day. By any standards, this is a catalog of unspeakable suffering.

GOD’S PEOPLE WILL SUFFER

Bad things happen to good people. Sometimes terrible things happen to wonderful people, and God allows it to be so. The Scripture tells us Job was “the greatest man among all the people of the East” (v. 3). So the story of Job clearly teaches us that the pursuit of a godly life will not put us beyond suffering.

Many Christians have an instinctive feeling that if we pursue a life of worship and service, it would be a reasonable expectation that God would keep us from significant suffering in our lives. But there is no such deal on the table. The book of Job makes that very clear. Christian faith does not inoculate us against suffering in a fallen world. That is why it is an absolute travesty of the gospel to suggest that if people come to Jesus, all their problems will be over. God does not immunize His people against suffering.

At the heart of the Bible story, we learn that the greatest and most godly person who ever lived suffered more than any other. He was rejected by His family. He wept at the graveside of one of His dearest friends. He was betrayed and suffered injustice, and then He was crucified. When He calls us to walk in His footsteps, that includes following Him into the mystery that He experienced, of the suffering God allows in the life of a godly man or woman.

When you suffer, you will probably ask the question “Why?” Jesus did. But you should not ask the question “Why is this happening to me?” That question betrays a mind-set that says, “It may be appropriate that this should happen to other people but not to me.” Your faith in Christ does not and will not ever give you immunity from suffering. The apostle Peter wrote us, “Do not be surprised at the

painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). So the important question to ask is not “Why does suffering happen?” but “How can a man stand when all the navigating points of his life disappear?”

GOD’S PEOPLE WILL FEEL PAIN

It is a wonderful thing that God has given us a whole book of the Bible that recounts the inner struggle of a believing man who faced terrible suffering.

The book of Job gives the lie to the superficial idea that if we “Take it to the Lord in prayer” this will somehow remove the pain. Job discovered that prayer does not act as an anesthetic. C. S. Lewis described this powerfully in his book *A Grief Observed*. In the deep pain that followed the death of his wife, Lewis felt that his attempts at prayer were like coming up against a great door that was then shut in your face, with the sound of bolting and double bolting inside, and then silence.

Lewis was discovering what Isaiah describes when he said that the Lord is “a God who hides himself” (Isaiah 45:15). God reveals Himself in Scripture and in Christ, but He also hides Himself, and we do not speak about God correctly unless we have grasped both these things. He has revealed Himself so we may know Him and love Him and trust Him; but He also hides Himself, so that there are times when we will say, “I just don’t understand; I can’t make any sense of His ways.” There will be times when our heart will shout out *Why?* and there will be no answer.

Job’s friends tried to comfort him. They said many things, some misguided, some true. But Job was not able to hear them. There were times in the past when he would have enjoyed a theological discussion with his friends, but now their words seem to float outside him and beyond him. He was simply overwhelmed by the pain.

Later in the story, the comfort of God broke through to him, but it was a long time coming, and Job never pretended that he was experiencing comfort when he was not. There is a relentless honesty about this man, and he refuses to say what he does not experience. “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil” (Job 3:25–26).

God’s people are not always so honest. Perhaps the reason for that is that we are afraid of “not having the answers.” Job’s testimony releases us from the pressure of feeling that we have to say things are well when they are not. There are times of pain and turmoil when peace seems to be beyond our grasp. And we must not be afraid of this; this was the experience of the greatest man in the east.

If the Christian life is presented as a life of constant victory in which the triumphs are always greater than the pain, and the certainties are always greater than the questions, then Christian people will not be able to make sense of their experience when the pain seems greater than the victory, and the questions seem greater than the answers.

I thank God for a book of the Bible that tells me the greatest man of his time struggled in deep darkness with unresolved questions, and battled with a level of pain that his closest friends could not begin to understand. And yet in all of this, he did not sin against God.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Here we come to one of the most fascinating scenes in the whole of the Bible. In Job 1 God pulls back a curtain so that we can get a glimpse of another story that is going on behind the pain that Job experienced. God wants us to know that there was more at stake in this story than Job ever knew or could begin to understand.

There is an old war movie that I have seen many times, but every time I see it, I discover something else going on in the plot. *Where Eagles Dare* tells the story of a group of special agents who are dropped behind enemy lines supposedly to rescue a captured military commander who has information that is crucial to the outcome of the war.

In actual fact, the man who has been captured is not a commander at all, but an actor who has no information whatever. The real reason for the mission is to flush out the identity of an enemy agent who has penetrated the secret service, and whose continued presence there would spell disaster for millions of people. The team thinks that they are risking everything to rescue one man from torture and death, but in fact they are involved in a far greater mission that has not yet been revealed to them. The outcome involves much more than the safety of one man; it involves the destiny of a whole nation.

The only person who really knows what is going on is the team leader, played by Richard Burton. His lieutenant, an American played by Clint Eastwood, has an implicit trust in his leader, but at times that trust is strained to the limit. His life is on the line a thousand times as he jumps from cable cars to escape the enemy, but it is not until the very last scene in the film that he discovers what the whole mission was really all about.

There is a story behind the story, and it is extremely difficult to make any sense of

the film if you don't know the story behind the story, which is why I have enjoyed watching the film a number of times!

So what is the story behind the story of Job? What is really at stake as this man makes his journey through suffering? The book of Job tells us about a particular day when God summoned the angels to present themselves before Him, and we are told that Satan came with them.

The story behind the story is about vindicating the name of God.

The Bible is quite clear that in the beginning, God not only created the earth, but also the heavens. Alongside the visible creation, God also fashioned a creation that is invisible to us. The Bible indicates that evil originated in the heavenly creation before it ever infected the earthly creation. Lucifer (morning star) was an angel of God who wanted to take the place of God (Isaiah 14:12–15). His rebellion was unsuccessful and led to his being excluded from the presence of God and cast down to the earth. So right from the beginning of human history there was an enemy, bent on destroying the work of God. So in Genesis 3, we find this enemy coming to the first man and woman in a quest to involve human beings in his own rebellion against God.

This sets the stage for the great drama of human history in which God will redeem sinners. He will bring such a transformation within them that they will love good more than evil, truth more than lies, and God more than themselves. That is the big story behind our little lives.

In Job, God pulls back the curtain on the drama that was taking place in heaven. We're told that Satan, now an outcast of heaven, was summoned to stand before God.

“Have you considered my servant Job?” God asks the evil one. “There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8).

Satan uses the occasion to slander the name of God. “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (v. 9). In effect, Satan is telling God, “The only reason Job fears You is raw self-interest. You think that he loves You freely, but that's impossible! It cannot be done. Job is a man, and men love themselves!”

“Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.” (v. 10)

Satan is saying, “Of course he will profess to be a lover of God as long as You give

him everything that he wants; but take away his wealth, take away his work, take away his family, take away his health, and he will surely curse You to Your face.”

Satan, who himself had rejected God’s law and authority, was telling God, “Nobody could love You for who You are! Men may love the gifts of God, but sin is so deep that men will never come to love You for who You are.” Satan was convinced that sin is an incurable disease, and that restoration from sin is impossible. No man could love God for His own sake.

So God says, “Let’s see.”

Job never knew the story behind the story. As far as he was concerned, this whole thing is about one man struggling to come to terms with a series of unexplained tragedies in his life. But something much more important is going on. The story behind the story is about vindicating the name of God.

The Bible never suggests that every experience of suffering is a direct result of the activity of Satan. Even in this story where Satan’s activity was a direct factor in Job’s suffering, his activity was within strict limits that were determined by God. But when suffering comes into your life, whatever its shape or cause, you have the opportunity to vindicate the name of God.

SAME PROBLEM: DIFFERENT RESPONSE

When tragedy came to this family, it produced two entirely different responses from Job and his wife. Job’s wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). That was exactly what the devil had figured she would say. Suffering did to Job’s wife exactly what Job feared wine might do to his children; it lowered her inhibitions and exposed what she thought.

But Job’s reaction was entirely different.

Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship. (v. 20; EMPHASIS ADDED)

When Job worshiped, Satan was confounded. The worship of an ordinary man in the middle of his suffering vindicates the name of God. Job’s worship must have reverberated among the angels of heaven. I like to think about Satan shrinking back in silence, dumbfounded by the power of the grace of God in the life of this ordinary man.

Your response to God in times of trouble will be one of the most revealing things about you. For Job’s wife, integrity was a means to an end. As far as she was

concerned, it was God's responsibility to fill her life with good things, keep the family healthy, and keep the business prospering. As long as that continued, she "loved" God. But when suffering came to this couple, their different responses were telling: Job loved God for who He is; his wife loved God for what He gave. One loved God unconditionally; the other loved God as a means to an end. One proved that the devil is sometimes right; the other gave evidence that the devil is finally wrong.

I will always remember the evening when about twenty members of our congregation met to share their stories of loss. I had become aware that a number of our people had walked through the dark valley of the death of a son or a daughter. Each of the families who came had the opportunity to tell their story. People spoke about what they had found most difficult, and also about what had helped them the most.

"I asked why and never got an answer!" There were many tears and a strong sense of the fellowship that you discover when you recognize a reflection of your own experience in somebody else's story.

"I asked why and never got an answer!"

"I felt angry with God, and then I wondered if I should feel that way."

"The pain is still with me now."

But at the end of the evening one thing stood out to me more than any other. Here were twenty people who had experienced inexpressible pain. None of them could explain why it happened. Their suffering is a mystery to them, and the pain of it is with them still, *and yet every one of them loves God.*

How do you explain that? I know people whose suffering has been much less who say that they hate God! But here are people who have endured great suffering and yet truly love Him. Satan has no answer to that, so he falls like lightning, as the angels rejoice at the vindication of the name of God. It is possible for a man to love God freely, and to love Him not simply as a means to an end, but to love Him for who He is.

Job never knew the big story of what was at stake in his suffering. If he had a conversation with the angels after he died and went into the presence of God, they may well have said:

"Job, when we heard Satan slander the name of God we trembled, and we held our breath as we watched to see what you would do. God placed His name and His reputation on the line. And Job, when you worshiped, we can't tell you the shouts

of joy and triumph that went up here as we watched the enemy shrink away in defeat and humiliation!”

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter writes to suffering believers and says that their trials “have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

SPOUNGE ON CHRIST

I cannot think about this story without my mind running forward to the suffering of Christ. He was brought before a prejudiced judge and indicted on charges brought by false witnesses, but none of this made Him ask why. He was paraded through the streets; He was beaten, stripped, flogged, and crucified; but none of this made Him ask why.

But then as He hung on the cross, darkness covered the land and the comfort of God was withdrawn from His soul. He was entering into the heart of His suffering as He bore the sins of the world. Then He “cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*’ —which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

There was no answer to His question. Yet in the mystery of His unspeakable suffering, His final words were worship: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Then He breathed his last, and that splintered the gates of hell.

UNLOCKED

God does not give us an explanation of suffering, but He does tell us how we can stand in it. Our greatest need when suffering comes is not an explanation but the ability to withstand the pressure and to come through the struggle in a way that brings honor to God.

There may come a time in your life when you are facing the mystery of great suffering, and from deep inside, you will be asking, “What does God want of me?” The answer is, “God wants that you should love Him still,” because when you do that, you bring glory to His name, and expose the enemy for the liar and slanderer he is.

The greatest evidence of a true work of God in a human soul is that when God allows a person to suffer, he or she loves Him still. That testimony may be more powerful than anything else that you do in the service of Christ.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Gracious Father,

Help those who are in great pain and distress to see Your greatness and to find strength in You. Help me to accept that there are many questions that I will never be able to answer this side of heaven, and to find peace in knowing that You know what is hidden from me.

Help me to love You for who You are and not just for what You give, so that my worship in times of trouble may bring glory to Your name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



2

Resurrection

JOB 19

*How can I hold
on to my faith in
the darkest times?*

2 Resurrection

JOB 19



DISCOVER

Job's secret of survival.



LEARN

how to confess your faith in the darkest times.



WORSHIP

as you see how you can count on the Redeemer and be certain of the resurrection.

ONE of the richest men in the world lost everything. God had given Job the joy of a large family, a thriving business, and great wealth. Then, in a single day, all the landmarks of his life were gone. His business was destroyed, his wealth plundered, and his whole family taken in a sudden tragedy.

The book of Job is the story of one man's struggle to come to terms with a catalog of suffering.

What more could happen? Plenty. Next Job's health broke down. His skin became covered in sores, and his whole body was racked with pain.

Then his wife decided to throw in the towel. Why don't you "curse God and die!" she told him (2:9).

Despite poor health and the suggestion by a bitter wife to curse God, Job remained resolute in his faith. He "tore his robes and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground *in worship*" (1:20; italics added). It was one of the greatest moments in the whole of the Old Testament.

AFTER THE CRISIS

Those who have walked the path of deep suffering know that, after the moment of crisis, there is an ongoing process of living with a new and unwelcome situation. On the day of his tragic loss, Job had made a magnificent confession of faith, but now he had to find a way to get through another day when his mind was in turmoil and his body was in pain.

The crisis in Job's life plunged him into a desperate struggle to hold together his faith and his experience. The unanswered questions don't go away after the funeral—remember he had lost seven sons and three daughters. The mystery of suffering does not diminish with time. Faith may have triumphed yesterday, but there is still today, and then there will be tomorrow.

Job had kept the faith in his hour of crisis, but now he began to wonder how much longer he could keep this up! Sometimes he felt that it would be best if his own life ended immediately; at least then he could say, "I have fought the good fight and kept the faith." The problem was that God kept calling him to face another day, and he didn't know how much more of this he could take!

"Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I would still have this consolation—my joy in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One." (6:8–10)

I've been told that there are three stages to seasickness. First you think that you are going to die, then you are sure you are going to die, then you are afraid that you might not die. That's where Job was! He was more afraid of the pain of living and denying the Holy One than he was of the prospect of dying.

Besides, there was nothing on Job's horizon that he felt he could look forward to. He might have looked forward to grandchildren, but his children were gone. He might have looked forward to some travel, but his wealth was plundered. Or he might have enjoyed some mellow years in the company of his wife, but she had given up the faith and, as we will see, walked out on him. So what was there left to look forward to?

With great candor and anguish, he cried out to God: "What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze?" (6:11–12).

Job was getting to the point of saying, "I just can't go on like this." You can't read his words without sensing the great agony in this man's soul.

WHERE DO YOU TURN WHEN NOBODY UNDERSTANDS?

Job looked to his friends for help and support. We are told about three friends, Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. You have to give them credit for being there, but they

left a lot to be desired when it came to sensitivity! These friends were quite certain that all suffering is a punishment for sin, and that Job must have had some skeleton in the closet. They were convinced that Job was holding out on them and not telling the truth. Job told them straight; there was no hidden skeleton. But they didn't believe him.

For all their sincerity, Job's friends were of no help to him whatsoever. Eventually Job became frustrated with them and said, "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone" (19:2-4). That's really a nice way of saying, "Why don't you all go away and mind your own business?"

Job didn't get much help from his wife either. We have already noticed that she was ready to throw in the towel as far as faith in God was concerned, and it appears that she gave up on Job as well. Job said "my breath is offensive to my wife" (v. 17), which seems like a good way of saying that his wife didn't want him anywhere near her, and the same seems to be true of the other members of Job's wider family. He said, "I am loathsome to my own brothers" (v. 17).

It appears that Job's wife came back to him at the end of the story, and his brothers and sisters joined him for a feast at his table, but in the middle of his suffering, he was utterly alone.

So it is difficult to imagine a more desperate situation. Here is a man who lost everything. His friends were no help to him, his wife didn't want to know him, and his own health was deteriorating to the point where he said, "I am nothing but skin and bones" (v. 20). People who went to visit Job would go away saying, "I don't think that he has long left you know."

So how are you going to get through when the wheels come off and there is no help at hand?

JOB'S SECRET OF SURVIVAL

Right in the middle of all this pain in his body and turmoil in his mind, Job made a confession of the faith on which he would stake his life. When there are a thousand things that you don't know, the most important thing you can do is affirm what you do know.

Many years ago someone said to me, "Never doubt in the darkness what God has taught you in the light." That is wise counsel. In the darkness of great suffering, hold on to what you know is true.

As I was thinking about this, a memory came back to me of a family vacation when I was about twelve years old. We were staying at a country cottage in the north of Scotland, and my brother and I were enjoying a game of soccer when I kicked the ball into a field.

My father said that he would get the ball, but the field was an extremely wet marshland, and as he walked toward the ball, it seemed as if the whole field was moving. For a few moments I was quite certain that he was going to go under and never appear again, and he might have, except for one thing. He was able to grab hold of something solid: the branch of a tree.

That is exactly how it was for Job. Everything around him was collapsing, and the only way to avoid being sucked down was to grab hold of something solid. That's what Job did when he identified and confessed the fundamental convictions on which he would stake his life. Here was Job's branch:

"I know that my Redeemer lives." (v. 25)

That was Job's secret of survival. He knew that there was a living Redeemer, ready and able to deliver him.

We have discovered the word "redeemer" in volume 1 of *Unlocking the Bible Story*, in the book of Ruth. The kinsman-redeemer was someone who would get a relative out of a mess. The word was used most commonly in a financial crisis. If a family came on hard times, they might be forced to put their land on the market. Their best hope would be that somebody within their own family circle would have the means and the will to buy the land so that it would stay within the family. Then at least the suffering family could remain on the land and work for someone who had their best interests at heart.

He was staking his life on the Redeemer. That was all very well with land and money, but who in all the world could get Job out of the mess he was in when his whole body was breaking down and death was on the horizon. Who would get him out of that mess? The issue wasn't recovering his property; it was recovering his life!

Job's confession of faith was absolutely magnificent. He turned to his friends and said, "Now just listen to this: You have seen the tough situation that I am in, but of two things I'm sure: I have a Redeemer, and I know that my Redeemer lives."

If they had asked him who this redeemer was, he would not have been able to

answer. All he knew was that God had somebody somewhere who would have the will and the means to do whatever was necessary to deliver him from this mess.

Job's physical condition was getting so bad that he was beginning to feel that he may well die before this Redeemer appeared on the scene. But that would make no difference. He was convinced that this Redeemer would come and even if he did not come until long after Job had died, he would still be able to deliver Job from ultimate loss.

Can you imagine the Son of God listening to these words? There would be at least another two thousand years of history before Jesus Christ would come into the world. But here was a man who was already looking for Him to come, and counting on it! He was staking his life on the Redeemer.

At the beginning of time, God had promised someone would come to get men and women out of the mess they are in, and Job held on to that promise of God. He believed that the pain, suffering, and loss of life in this fallen world would not be the end.

When the Redeemer came, He had to pay a price to redeem. Peter says, "It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed" (1 Peter 1:18). It was not like the Old Testament days when you looked around for a wealthy uncle to buy your field to get you out of financial trouble. That was relatively easy, but the mess that we are in laid a much greater price tag on the Redeemer. Instead, Peter says, you were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ" (1:19).

The agony of
the cross...
ruptured the
heart of God.



When God looked down on the suffering of His people in Egypt, God said, "I can't leave them there! I must go down and redeem them." That took overcoming Pharaoh's resistance and parting the waters of the Red Sea. But what is that to almighty God?

Then God looked at the world in its pain and suffering and death, and He said, "I can't leave them there. I must go down and redeem them." That took God giving up His Son. It took the agony of the Cross. It ruptured the heart of God. The Cross tells us that when the Redeemer came, He did something infinitely more difficult than anything else God had ever done in all the history of the world.

But the Redeemer has come, and He has paid the price. His blood was shed, and on the third day, He rose again. So even through your tears, you can say with absolute confidence, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

JOB'S CONFIDENCE

Right from the beginning of human history there were men and women who were looking for the Redeemer (Genesis 3:15; Job 19:25). After the fall, God warned the serpent that an offspring of the woman “will crush your [Satan’s] head.” Adam and Eve heard that promise of deliverance, and when they held their first son, they would have wondered if he was the Redeemer. But he wasn’t, and Adam and Eve died before the Redeemer came. As time went on, there were more and more people who died believing that the Redeemer would come, but they did not live to see the great day.

Job was at the point where he felt that his body would give way before the Redeemer showed up. So he turned to his friends and said, “Now here is a second thing I want you to know. I am well aware that it is more than likely that I will die before the Redeemer comes. And if that happens, some of you might be tempted to think that my faith was in vain. So here is what I want to tell you. Even though worms destroy my body, I will see God. Death will not put me beyond the range of the Redeemer’s power.”

“After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.” (v. 26)

Now this is a remarkable statement of faith. Remember that Job is one of the oldest books in the whole Bible. God has chosen to reveal His truth progressively through history. Eventually, through the coming of Christ, “life and immortality [were brought] to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). It was as if Christ came into a dark room and switched on a brilliant light.

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But here, at least two thousand years before Christ turned on that gospel light, it is as if God had given Job a candle in a dark room. In its short flame, this man had enough light to know that God had more in store after his funeral service was over.

Job’s wife didn’t begin to grasp this. Her philosophy was very simple. “What you don’t get now, you won’t get ever!” As far as she was concerned, this life was everything, and death was a kind of black hole that led into a world of shadows where nothing was quite as it had been before. There are a lot of people today who would agree with her. As far as they are concerned, whatever lies on the other side of death cannot be half as attractive as suburban life here!

But Job knew there was more. “In my flesh I will see God.” He only saw this dimly, but when Jesus Christ came into the world, the one true Light declared it: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25; see also John 1:9; 3:19).

When you think about the Bible story, this is the only ending that would make sense. In the beginning, God created the man from the dust of the ground and breathed a living soul into him. The angels are spirit without bodies, and animals are physical beings without souls. But the unique glory of the human creation is that God has brought body and soul together, giving men and women a capacity for all the joys of physical and spiritual life.

Right from the beginning, Satan attacked this creation, seeking to destroy the soul by bringing temptation through the body. The purpose of God is to redeem men and women from every generation and culture. This is why the Son of God took human flesh. He assumed our flesh in order to redeem it.

If there was no resurrection of the body, the devil would have won a great victory. He would have forced God to abandon the original plan of creation, and change human beings into creatures without bodies, rather like the angels. If that was the case, the enemy could spend eternity savoring the pleasure of knowing that at least he had succeeded in overturning God’s original purpose, and had successfully ruined some of the gifts that God had given to our first parents in the garden.

SPONDIFICATION ON CHRIST

That is the great significance of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why was it important that He should rise from the dead as opposed to returning to the Father in His Spirit and sending the Holy Spirit? In His resurrection, Christ became the prototype of a new humanity. His body was raised, adapted for everlasting life. The outcome of our faith will include the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23–24).

The day is coming when you will be done with sin forever. It will have no entrance to your soul or your body. Your whole being, body and soul, will be responsive to what is right, good, pure, and true. You will be filled with all the fullness of God. Temptation will be gone, confusion past, disability unknown, pain forgotten, and tear ducts superfluous.

There are two houses in the British Parliament: the House of Commons, where all the action is, and the House of Lords, where distinguished leaders of the past are able to carry on some fairly limited functions. Those in the House of Commons

sometimes refer to the House of Lords as “the other place.” Indeed, some very distinguished people walk the floor of the House of Lords, but it isn’t really a very exciting place. I don’t wish to be unkind, but as you see these folks sprawled out on the benches, it is not always easy to tell the ones who are asleep from the ones who may have become unconscious!

To some people, the House of Lords seems like a consolation prize for distinguished people who are past the rigors of a working life but may still have some useful contribution to make. When a politician gets to a certain age, people begin to talk about him “being ready for the House of Lords.” And, of course, when your time comes to go there, it is the sort of thing that one should accept gracefully, but nobody really wants to go there!

If you think of heaven like that, you will never have a right view of your life in this world. We do not retire into the presence of God; we graduate there. I love the phrase that they use in the Salvation Army when a believer dies, “Promoted to glory!”

God has planned a life in heaven that will make the joys Adam and Eve knew in the garden pale into insignificance. The joys of body and soul in this life are so great that it is difficult for us to imagine this, and God tells us that what He has prepared is beyond what we can conceive and beyond what has entered our minds (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Job discovered that he was not in the land of the living on his way to the land of the dying. Rather, he was in the land of the dying on his way to the land of the living. In his ongoing pain and confusion over the tragedies of his life, he knew that he could count on the Redeemer, and that he could be certain of the resurrection.

UNLOCKED

In times of trouble, when we are surrounded by many unanswered questions, it is important to focus our attention on what we know for sure. Job gives us a wonderful model of this as he confesses his faith in the Redeemer and the Resurrection.

You can trust God to bring you through, and you can be certain that even death cannot put His people beyond His redeeming power. Never doubt in the darkness what God has taught you in the light. Faith grows as we fill our minds with the truth we know, and leave what we don’t know in the hands of God. Perhaps you can follow the example of Job, and tell your friends what God has taught you. Confessing what you believe is a great way to keep the truth clear in your mind, and that will bring strength to your soul.

PAUSE FOR PRAYER

Almighty Father,

Thank You that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, and that where there is a Redeemer, nothing can end in final defeat. Thank You for the Resurrection and for the knowledge that what we cannot understand now will one day be known.

Help me to stand strong in faith in times of trouble. Help me to find rest in the truth You have given. Thank You that Jesus Christ shines light into the deepest darkness. Help me to move forward in that light. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.