**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

 **A BURST OF HOPE**

**Job 18-19**

**INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever spent time with someone who was so discouraged that you wondered if they would ever recover? If you haven’t, it’s only a matter of time before you will, because part of the sad reality of this broken, fallen world is that people descend so deeply into the darkness that you question if they’ll ever get out of it. Even strong, mature Christians can talk about life as if it’s not worth living, or doubt that God cares.

David spoke about this in Psalm 23 when he wrote about walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But whereas David could say “I will fear no evil, for you are with me”, we’re terrified in the valley because we’re not sure if God is with us. Or if he is with us, we’re not sure if he is *for* us. These are the kinds of thoughts that haunt us and make it so much harder to endure through extended seasons of suffering.

Many of you know what this is like. But you also know what it’s like to see something suddenly change. It could be a random text from a friend, or a passage of Scripture you read in your devotions, or a sermon you heard on a Sunday morning. Whatever it may have been, all of a sudden you have a different perspective. You have hope again. It may not be strong. It may not be consistent. But it’s there. Like a firework bursting in the night sky, you can finally see some light in the midst of the darkness. You can see some beauty, some reason to believe that the darkness won’t last forever.

Job is a man who has descended into deep darkness and discouragement. Job lost all his wealth, all his children, and all reason to believe that his life has meaning. He is estranged from his wife. He is condemned by his friends. And worst of all, he feels abandoned by God.

That was Job’s greatest loss, the feeling that he had lost God himself. He has had moments when he’s wondered if God could restore him and raise him from the dead. He’s wondered if God could advocate for him and testify that he is innocent. But all those thoughts have quickly vanished in the mist of all his doubts.

But in our text today, something changes in Job. Something turns his doubts into a certainty that God is indeed with him and will restore him with time.

This is the point in the book where Job receives his first real “burst of hope”, the certain expectation that God will prove himself to be faithful, good, and just. That doesn’t mean that all his darkness suddenly disappears. But it does mean that he has fresh strength to keep going, to not give up, and to maintain his trust in God.

The title of this sermon is **A Burst of Hope.**

We will have three points today:

1. Hopeless Rebuke
2. Hopeless Loneliness
3. Hope for a Redeemer

(1) **HOPELESS REBUKE**

We’re in the middle of an extended conversation between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. The pattern is always one of the friends speaks, Job replies, and then another friend speaks, and Job replies. Eliphaz and Bildad have three speeches, and Zophar has two. This is Bildad’s second speech.

If you look back at the first speeches of all three friends, you’ll notice that they all begin with warnings about what happens to the wicked, and they all end with promises about what happens to the righteous. They warn him of what happens to those who don’t repent, and they promise him of what will happen to those who do.

The problem with their advice is that Job didn’t need to repent. He didn’t do anything wrong to deserve all his loss, and he knows it. As the readers, we know this as well, because we heard God pronounce Job to be blameless and upright, a man who fears the Lord and turns away from evil. And so, he rightly refuses to repent and scolds his friends for assuming things about his life that just aren’t true.

Now as we study the second cycle of speeches, the three friends adopt a very different tone. No more warnings followed by promises. No more dangling of a carrot. All they do is provide a graphic description of all the horrible things that are going to happen to him. They give him what you could call a “hopeless rebuke”, a rebuke that leaves him feeling wretched and worthless. It’s the equivalent of someone today saying, “You’re going to hell! You’re going to suffer an eternity of pain and punishment, because you’re just so evil.”

There’s nothing wrong with talking about hell. Jesus spoke far more about hell than we do. There is certainly a place for warning people about the eternal fate that awaits them if they don’t repent and put their trust in Christ. But it can’t stop there. It’s never enough to win someone over by the fear of God’s punishment. We must also win them over by the promise of God’s love. Fear of punishment may produce people who are religious, but it won’t produce people who are transformed by God’s love and begin to love God and love neighbour. After all, it’s God’s kindness that leads people to repentance, not just his wrath.

But we don’t always do that, do we? If you’re a parent, you know how easy it is to try to scare your kids into submission rather than winning them over with love. “Don’t do that, or you’ll break your neck.” “Don’t lie to me or I won’t trust you.” “Honour your father and mother or it won’t go well with you!”

We don’t mean to do that. None of us want children who are motivated by fear. We want them to be motivated by love, and only the love of God can transform them into loving people, and yet it’s so hard. Do you know why? It’s because of anger. When we’re angry, we don’t care about comforting those we’re angry with. We only care about changing their behaviour in the most efficient way possible so that they’ll stop getting under our skin.

That’s what Bildad does in Job 18. He’s angry with Job. We see that in verses 2-3:

**1**Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

**2**“How long will you hunt for words?
    Consider, and then we will speak.
**3**Why are we counted as cattle?
    Why are we stupid in your sight?

Bildad is insulted by Job’s response to their words of counsel and correction. Job has so thoroughly rejected their counsel that they may as well have been brainless cows. That makes Bildad angry.

He’s also angry because of the implications of Job’s ideas. Verse 4:

**4**You who tear yourself in your anger,
    shall the earth be forsaken for you,
    or the rock be removed out of its place?

Do you know anyone who needs everything to be in its proper place? The chairs need to be tilted at just the right angle. Pens need to be put in their precise order on one’s desk. Bildad is like that, except he doesn’t just fuss about his home. He fusses about people’s ideas, which he symbolizes with rocks. Every rock needs to be in its proper place, which for him means that everyone only gets what they deserve. The righteous prosper and the wicked suffer, and to suggest otherwise is to bring disorder to his neatly ordered world.

This is evil to Bildad. It’s wicked, and horrible things happen to the wicked. Bildad wants to make sure that Job understands exactly what those things are.

**5**“Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out,
    and the flame of his fire does not shine.
**6**The light is dark in his tent,
    and his lamp above him is put out.

Bildad speaks of a place that is dark without end, a place where no light survives. Normally light dispels the darkness, but here it’s the darkness that dispels the light. It’s like the torture of solitary confinement, except it stretches on without end.

He then describes what many of us have experienced in our nightmares, the kind where we’re running away from some unknown terror but never managing to escape:

**8**For he is cast into a net by his own feet,
    and he walks on its mesh.
**9**A trap seizes him by the heel;
    a snare lays hold of him.
**10**A rope is hidden for him in the ground,
    a trap for him in the path.
**11**Terrors frighten him on every side,
    and chase him at his heels.

The wicked are pursued and chased, and in Bildad’s nightmare, they’re caught:

**13**It consumes the parts of his skin;
    the firstborn of death consumes his limbs.
**14**He is torn from the tent in which he trusted
    and is brought to the king of terrors.

Bildad is saying that, unless Job repents, he will be dragged from his tent and brought before “the king of terrors”, a dark lord of horrifying power who will tear up his body and terrify him forever.

As if that were not enough, Bildad adds that Job will be homeless, forgotten, and childless:

**15**In his tent dwells that which is none of his;
    sulfur is scattered over his habitation.

**17**His memory perishes from the earth,
    and he has no name in the street.

**19**He has no posterity or progeny among his people,
    and no survivor where he used to live.

He ends in verse 21:

**21**Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous,
    such is the place of him who knows not God.”

For Bildad, Job isn’t just wrong about God. Job doesn’t even *know* God. He’s not just a misguided believer. He’s not a believer at all. Bildad is like an angry religious zealot who makes every issue an ultimate issue and is eager to condemn everyone but himself.

(2) **HOPELESS LONELINESS**

How will Job respond? Not how Bildad would have hoped, because he’s so confident that he’s not one of the wicked who will suffer in the way that Bildad described. But that doesn’t make life any easier for Job. Job may not have been tormented by the king of terrors, but he was tormented by the feeling of being abandoned by those he loved. This leads to our second point.

Job begins with a rebuke of his own:

**1**Then Job answered and said:

**2**“How long will you torment me
    and break me in pieces with words?
**3**These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;
    are you not ashamed to wrong me?

Job has said this again and again: “You’re tormenting me. Why don’t you just stop talking? Aren’t you ashamed of what you’re doing to me?” They’re not ashamed, because for them, this has become more about proving their point than comforting their friend.

Job tries to prove his point in verse 4:

**4**And even if it be true that I have erred,
    my error remains with myself.

He’s saying, “Even if you’re right in saying that I’m a great sinner who needs to repent, that sin is mine and mine alone. What about my children? What about my wife? What about my servants who were slaughtered? This goes far beyond the question of what *I* have done.”

Job then returns to the thought that has plagued him ever since his world came crashing down around him: the thought that God has wrongfully afflicted him:

**5**If indeed you magnify yourselves against me
    and make my disgrace an argument against me,
**6**know then that God has put me in the wrong
    and closed his net about me.

Job wants relief. He cries out for help, but he receives no answer:

**7**Behold, I cry out, ‘Violence!’ but I am not answered;
    I call for help, but there is no justice.

Job then describes what God has done to him:

**8**He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass,
    and he has set darkness upon my paths.
**9**He has stripped from me my glory
    and taken the crown from my head.
**10**He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,
    and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.
**11**He has kindled his wrath against me
    and counts me as his adversary.
**12**His troops come on together;
    they have cast up their siege ramp against me
    and encamp around my tent.

Job is a man who feels that he is under attack by God. He’s a man who has become God’s enemy. What other explanation could there be for all his suffering? He didn’t know, and neither do we, but we know a little more than he did. We know that Job was the farthest thing from being God’s enemy. He was God’s friend. Job wasn’t suffering because he had a fake faith or secret sins. He was suffering because God knew that his faith was so real and strong that it would endure the fiery furnace of his affliction. God led him through the valley of the shadow of death to prove that there are some in the world who will worship him even if they lose everything that they love.

But as Job reflects on what God has done to him, he lingers on one thing that has caused him more pain than the others: the loss of those he loves. He has lost those who have died, and he has lost those who still live:

**13**“He has put my brothers far from me,
    and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me.
**14**My relatives have failed me,
    my close friends have forgotten me.

If you’ve ever experienced an extended season of suffering, you know what this is like. People who once were close friends and confidantes become distant strangers. Sometimes it’s because they don’t know what to say. Sometimes it’s because they don’t have the time or energy to help you carry your burdens. Sometimes it’s because they’re secretly judging you because they assume that you must have done some secret sin to deserve it just like Job’s friends.

Job knows what that feels like. He doesn’t just feel abandoned. He feels mocked, scorned, and ashamed by how his closest friends and family are treating him. He’s even disrespected by his servants and guests. In verse 18 he says,

**18**Even young children despise me;
    when I rise they talk against me.

This is all unfolding in public. Job isn’t sitting in the privacy of his home. He’s sitting in the public dump, the ash heap, the place where people burn their waste, and he has become quite the spectacle. Even young children come and mock poor wretched Job. This man who was once the greatest of all the people of the East has become a laughingstock to children.

Job only has one thing to say to those who treat him like this:

**21**Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
    for the hand of God has touched me!

This is the cry of a man who is experiencing the hopelessness of loneliness. “Won’t someone have mercy on me? Won’t someone show me some kindness, or some compassion? Won’t someone sit with me here in the ash heap and treat me with some dignity?”

(3) **HOPE FOR A REDEEMER**

It is in the context of this deep lament and cry for mercy that Job finally feels a burst of hope. It is only when he has lost everything that he becomes convinced that this can’t be all there is to his life. There must be something better, a brighter tomorrow, a day when he will no longer be despised and rejected. This leads to our final point.

Job transitions to this last part of his speech with a longing for permanence. He cries:

**23**“Oh that my words were written!
    Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
**24**Oh that with an iron pen and lead
    they were engraved in the rock forever!

Job is thinking about the legacy he will leave after he dies. He knows that his life is fleeting. His days are passing quickly before his eyes, and he can’t stand the thought that he would only be remembered as poor, wretched, wicked Job. He wants to preserve his legacy. But it’s not a legacy of his greatness. He doesn’t want his possessions to be written and inscribed in a book. He wants his *words* to be written and inscribed in a book. Indeed, he wants his words to be engraved in a rock forever, because it’s his words that claim his innocence. It’s his words that uphold his integrity. It’s his words that prove that after all he suffered, he didn’t curse God but continued to look to him for hope.

And in the verses that follow, Job gives us some of the most memorable words in all of Scripture, words that would not only be engraved in a rock but inscripturated in God’s Word. They are words that will endure even beyond the passing of the heavens and the earth:

**25**For I know that my Redeemer lives,
    and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
**26**And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
    yet in my flesh I shall see God,
**27**whom I shall see for myself,
    and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
    My heart faints within me!

What was nothing more than a fleeting fancy has become a confident assertion. “I know”, he says. Not “I wish” or “I hope”. “I know that my Redeemer lives”. He knows that there is One who will stand in his place and rescue him from his affliction. That’s what a Redeemer does. A Redeemer avenged you if you were murdered. A Redeemer bought back your land if it was taken. A Redeemer gave your wife and your family line a child if you died without leaving an heir.

A Redeemer stands in the place of one who has been wronged and makes it right. And Job knows that his Redeemer lives. Indeed, he knows that his Redeemer will always live, for “at the last he will stand upon the earth.” He won’t be buried under the earth. He won’t be consumed when the earth passes away. He will stand upon the earth as Job’s everlasting Redeemer.

And at the last, Job will also stand upon the earth with him. After his skin has been destroyed, yet in his flesh he shall see… who? He shall see *God*. He shall see God and live, because he knows deep in his heart that God isn’t his executioner. God is his Redeemer. God is the one who will stand in his place and rescue him from his affliction.

And that is what he did in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Job’s Redeemer is Jesus, just as our redeemer is Jesus. Jesus is the one who stood in our place to make our wrongs right. Our sins made us wrong with God, so Christ made us right by his death on the cross. Our sins cast us far from God, so Christ came down from heaven and brought us near. Our sins put us under the curse of death, so Christ became a curse for us so that we could receive God’s blessing.

Galatians 3:13:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”.

Christ is our Redeemer, and though he died, we can say, “Yet I know that my Redeemer lives”. I know that he lives because he was raised on the third day by the power of the Spirit in accordance with the plans of the Father. I know that at the last he will stand upon the earth as he makes all things new. And I know that after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God with my own, resurrected eyes. I shall behold my Redeemer, and not another, because Christ will raise us and bring us to himself. We will stand with him at the last upon the new heavens and the new earth beholding his glory and declaring his excellencies for eternity.

This was Job’s great desire. This is what made his heart faint within him. It was this burst of hope in his Redeemer who lives that comforted him in all his affliction. And it is this same hope that sustains and renews us today.

**CONCLUSION**

Do you know this Redeemer? Do you know that he lives, because he rose again on the third day? Do you know that all who trust in him and hope in him will also live as he raises us to everlasting life? Do you know that even after your skin has been destroyed and your flesh has rotted away, you will see him with your own eyes?

If you know this Redeemer, then you have hope. You have hope for today. It doesn’t matter what you’re going through. It could be the darkness of depression, anxiety about the future, or the fear of the unknown. It could be chronic pain in your body, a battle with terminal sickness, or the fatigue of living through this pandemic. It could be the loneliness of being abandoned by those you love or the living hell of losing what you loved. Whatever it is, if you have Christ, you have hope, because your Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth as the sovereign, resurrected King of creation who redeems you and loves you.

And when we finally see him face to face, when faith turns to sight, when we who wrestle with indwelling sin are transformed in an instant by the vision of his glory and grace, then all that is wrong will finally be made right. All our tears will be wiped away. All our sorrows will be swallowed up. All our pain will turn to praise for our Redeemer who died and rose again.

These are hard days. We live in a world that is collapsing under fear, suspicion, and anger. Perhaps you’ve felt that in your soul. Don’t look to the world. Turn your mind’s attention and your heart’s affections to our Risen Redeemer. If you do, you will feel what Job felt in his darkest moments as he received his burst of hope, and Christ himself will sustain you until that day when you finally see him face to face.