

August 24, 2008
Pentecost 15

"I Know that My Redeemer Lives"

JOB 19:1

Then Job replied: ² "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? ³ Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. ⁴ If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. ⁵ If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, ⁶ then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. ⁷ "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice. ⁸ He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness. ⁹ He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head. ¹⁰ He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree. ¹¹ His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies. ¹² His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent. ¹³ "He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. ¹⁴ My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. ¹⁵ My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien. ¹⁶ I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth. ¹⁷ My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. ¹⁸ Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. ¹⁹ All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me. ²⁰ I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. ²¹ "Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. ²² Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh? ²³ "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, ²⁴ that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! ²⁵ I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

In the movie "The Castaway" starring Tom Hanks, a man named Chuck Noland, a FedEx executive finds himself stranded on an island after his plane crashed at sea. He was able to survive by gathering items from the luggage that washed up to shore after the crash. He lived in a cave, learned to catch fish from sea and drank the juice from coconuts. He even had an imaginary friend, a volleyball that washed up on the beach replete with face and hair and affectionately named "Wilson." When Chuck Noland finally set out to sea in his makeshift raft, he lost his beloved friend Wilson after falling asleep on the raft. Tom Hanks almost won an Oscar for his portrayal of the loneliness and emptiness Chuck Noland experienced when he realized Wilson was gone.

Our friend Job is not acting or trying to win an Oscar or being dramatic when he speaks of the loneliness and emptiness that has swept over him after losing his children, his wealth, his health, the respect of friends and community and even his own beloved wife Mrs. Job. You have known people who have had to eat the bread of loneliness. Maybe you have been there yourself. Very few people will ever experience the loneliness that Job felt. Even his God seemed to be so distant and so far away.

There is no pit so deep that Christ is not deeper. In the loneliest hours of the night, the Lord is always there, allowing us to see his love still shining for us in the darkness. The Lord was there for Job. From the deepest, darkest pit of despair this beautiful voice cries out for the whole world to hear, "I know that my Redeemer lives." These words "I know that my Redeemer lives" were given to you and me to sustain and help us in the good times of life and the most trying times.

Look at the darkness that can come

Come with me now and experience the darkness that Job went through. Job finds no comfort in his three friends who have come to sit with him. They have encouraged him to search through his past life and look for the terrible thing he did wrong that brought all this pain and suffering on him. Can we fault Job for complaining to his friends: "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me." Job wants time alone to examine his life to discover where he failed. He doesn't need the help of his friends.

As Job looks into his heart of hearts to see where he has failed, he becomes bitter and angry towards God as he asks the all too common question, "What have I done wrong to deserve this?" He accuses God of putting a net around him and letting him suffer. I am holding in my hand bird netting that can protect the luscious grapes and figs growing in the back yard. There is always the concern that a bird might get entangle and trapped in the net. Job sees the Lord his God as someone with a net who captures him and enjoys seeing him suffer. He complains that he has no opportunity to voice his complaint against the Lord. When you have an emergency you pick up a phone and dial 911. You do not expect to be put on hold or experience a busy signal or be told to press numbers of different options. You do not expect the emergency response people to stop for coffee and donuts on the way to rescuing you. Job is angry, hopping mad, that the Lord is taking so long to hear his cries for help.

He accuses the Lord of shrouding his paths in darkness. He accuses the Lord of stripping him of his honor and removing a crown from his head. There was a time when people would joyfully say, "There goes Job." Now the people everywhere are saying with disgust in their voices, "There goes Job." Think of the shame of being stripped of your gold medal in the Olympics for lying about your age or admitting to using power enhancing drugs. This nothing compared to the shame heaped on Job because everyone assumed he had done something terrible in his life that would result in such an outpouring of evil. Job was not told about the conversation the Lord had with Satan and how the Lord ultimately planned for Job to rise victorious from all his troubles.

Oh, dear friends look even more closely at the bitterness and darkness of soul that overwhelms our dear friend Job. He complains about having his hope ripped up a like a tree. Pull a little tree from the ground or even a weed and let it dry out in the sun. It has no hope of being planted into the ground and growing. Job sees God pouring out his anger against him. He sees the Lord his God as an enemy that surrounds him and pounds him to pieces the way an army might besieged an ancient city and pound its walls with trebuchets and battering rams.

Then there is the alienation or loneliness he feels because all his friends have left him. Step on a cat's tail and it cries in pain. Job cries out in pain because he feels so alone. He does not even have a volleyball named Wilson that he can talk to as a friend. "He has alienated his brothers from me; my acquaintances completely estranged from me." There was a time when Job could throw a BBQ and the whole community would show up and everyone loved Job, and he loved helping people with the vast wealth the Lord gave him.

Even his servants who once proudly boasted, "We work for Job." can't stand to hear him call out to them for help. "I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth." Even Job's own wife cannot stand the smell of his breath. When people suffer severe illness they may also develop bad breath. There was a time when Mrs. Job was always there for her husband. Now she turns her back on him. She cannot stand the smell of her own husband. Even the little boys join in mocking Job. Job is not exaggerating when he says, "Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear they ridicule me." There was a time when these boys stopped playing just to admire the man Job as he passed by down the street. Now they join in singing songs to mock Job, the former hero now fallen, similar to the way the young rowdies of Bethel mocked Elisha with the words, "Go up you bald head, go up."

Job looks at his body sees nothing but skin and bones. "I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth." He looks at his arms and his legs and there is very little meat, only skin and only bones. He has escaped death by the skin of his teeth. We still use that expression today to describe a close brush with death. He has escaped by the skin of his teeth." Anger pours out against the Lord as Job pleads with his friends, "Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Will you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?"

Look at how the Son always shines

In this deep dark pit of loneliness and despair a voice cries out, not the voice of pain and suffering, loneliness and despair, but the voice of confidence, the voice of hope, the voice of someone whose eyes have seen the light of the sun, not SUN but SON, God's Son Jesus our Savior.

The voice cries out, "Oh that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever." Job wants the whole world to be able to access his words, not angry words against the Lord but words of confidence and hope. He wants these words preserved by being carved into rock or even into lead so that they would stand as a permanent monument to how the hand of the Lord can reach into the darkest pit and fill a person's life with hope.

Here are the words that Job wants preserved forever for all to read and hear. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Job does not say, "I think my Redeemer lives or I hope my Redeemer lives. He knows with absolute certainty that his Redeemer is alive and that he will stand by him every hour and minute on this earth, and after this present world is destroyed he will stand with his Redeemer even after worms

destroy his body.

Job looks up from deep down in the darkest hole and he sees the SON shining brightly. He sees Jesus God's Son, his Savior and his Redeemer. The Hebrew word for Redeemer is GOEL. The Lord used it to describe how he would "redeem" or rescue his people from the land of Egypt. In Isaiah 43 the Lord says, "I have redeemed, I have called you by name, you are mine." God kept this concept of redemption alive in the hearts of his people by having laws laid down for redeeming property or even redeeming a widow by having the nearest of relatives whether brother or cousin marry the woman and raise up children for her. That is how Ruth and Boaz got together. The whole message of the Bible can be summed up with this one word "Redeemer." God did not give us the Bible to provide rules and regulations by which we could try to redeem or rescue ourselves. He gave us the Bible to reveal the unique one of a kind message of God sending his Son to redeem us from the pit of hell that we deserve for our sin. Psalm 103 says of the Lord, "He has redeemed us from the pit and crowned us with love and compassion." Job knew that even his most angry words were forgiven and paid for by his Redeemer. Life on this planet earth is inhabited by people who have angry thoughts towards God, sinful thoughts in the hearts, evil words and thoughts for other people. We cannot redeem ourselves as Romans 3 says, "There is none who does good, no not one." Only in our Redeemer do we find pardon and cleansing that never changes.

I know that my Redeemer lives. The Redeemer who forgives you and me will stand by our side after we die. "After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." We will see Jesus in the flesh because our Redeemer will raise us to life again with real bodies just as he raised himself to life again with a real body. We yearn and long for the new heavens and new earth and resurrection bodies that will be ours. Because of Jesus resurrection from the dead every tomorrow rests in his loving arms.

The devil may throw you into a dark pit, but he can never put a cover over the pit and keep you from seeing your Redeemer who lives for you and promises to take you to the place he has prepared for you. Amen.