

Sunday February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Job 18:11-21; 19:23-20  
“On a Highway to ...?”

Two Canadians die and go to hell. Satan puts them in their own cell, and turns up the heat to 49C, figuring that’s a good temperature to start off with newcomers. He comes back a while later to find the Canadians shirtless but smiling. They say to Satan “We love it here. It never gets this warm in Canada, so we’re enjoying it while it lasts.” Satan is outraged that the two Canadians aren’t miserable.

Angry, Satan turns up the heat to 60C figuring nobody could ever enjoy that. But low and behold he returns to their cell and sees that a bunch of other Canadians have turned up and are having a cookout. Furious, Satan decides to try a different tactic, and instead turns the thermostat all the way down to -20C, and all of hell freezes over. Cackling, Satan visits their cell and finds the Canadians having a roaring party.

“HOW CAN YOU BE HAPPY!?!” He demands. “Well, its obvious isn’t it” they said. “Hell froze over so the Leafs must have won the Stanley cup.” Hell is one of those topics that really draws the line among believers. Some take the traditional view of a lake of fire, and weeping, and gnashing of teeth, or like Dante’s Infernal. Others see Hell as metaphorical, that without God in our lives, we are damned to an eternity of isolation from his grace. Then some don’t believe it exists at all. Well, I can’t speak for all of you, but clearly Bildad, as he begins his second speech, believes in Hell.

His sermon is actually well crafted; with some excellent theological points, but Bildad misses the mark in applying his sermon to Job’s situation. Therefore, it becomes a sermon that does not edify us, as it did not edify Job. Job has just spoken to his friends about his “house” or his “bed” and he wonders where he will reside after he dies. Well, Bildad claims to know exactly where Job is heading. He is going to hell for the things he has said and believes.

Bildad’s sermon really has two parts to it. The first part talks about how the world works. There is moral stability in the universe, and everyone has their own place in it. Therefore, the wicked have a place we now call Hell. Bildad accuses Job of playing word games. He calls Job to come to his senses and see his error. “Are you calling us cattle? Do you think we are stupid?” Job you are doing this to yourself. You are inflicting even more hardship on yourself.

Once again Bildad underscores the three friends view point that Job is out right wrong in denying that his suffering is deserved. God can no longer bless a sinner than move a mountain on our whim. Ironically, Job has already said God does this in chapter 9. Bildad’s use of the word “place” indicates that the three friends, dwell in a well-ordered universe, where everything makes sense and goes as it suppose to.

They think Job would say, as we do often, “I am not in a good place right now.” Bildad invites Job to see where wicked people dwell and then draw his own conclusions. Hell, Bildad says, is a place of utter darkness. There is no light for a deceased wicked person. Picture a room with no external illumination and you get the idea. Hell, is a place of inescapable punishment, in Bildad’s mind. Hell is like a trap, a mesh to ensnare the wicked.

Job lost everything, because he is caught in this trap. He has been snared by his own misdeeds. Bildad may be picking up on the fact that Job describes his situation as being trapped. God has hunted him down (10:16) Hell then is also a place of insatiable terror. The word terror invokes our sense of the demonic. This is what Sheol is like for the wicked. It is like the black riders in “Lord of the Rings”, pursuing and embodying evil.

Calamity awaits the wicked to step into their snare. The “first born of death” mentioned here, probably refers to death itself as the orchestrator of all this terror. Again, an image from our culture might help. We see death as the grim reaper, preying on the unaware and ill prepared. Hell is also a place of total dissolution, or loss of self. Bildad’s imagery is quite vivid here. “Fire resides in his tent” refers to burning sulfur or brimstone.

A wicked person’s tent, or habitation, is utterly destroyed. Nothing of what identifies us as individuals will be left. Even our branches and root. Meaning our descendants and our ancestors. Jesus uses this same imagery in Luke 17 when he recalls the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and then says, “so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed”. In Mark 9 he says, hell will be the place where the fires are unquenched.

Then Bildad says, that Hell will be a place of awful separation. The wicked will be separated from the world of life and light. The wicked are like a blot on God’s creation, and they will be removed to another place. The name of the wicked will be removed from the world. Psalm 9:5 says God will blot out the name of the wicked. Bildad’s point is pretty unnerving. Imagine a person dies and there is no record, no memory of them ever being alive.

Hell, then is a place with no stability, no center, no known location in the universe. It will have no records of people or events. It is in essence, outside of reality. A person ends up in Hell by their own hand. Bildad’s implication then is that Job is already experiencing Hell. Job is already cut off from everything that identifies him, and also from the blessings of God. We can express it like, Job is experiencing “Hell on earth” and it is where Job is heading for eternity.

These are not comforting words. But you can see from this passage how some of the church’s concepts of Hell developed over time. Bildad’s words have considerable merit. There is a perceived order to the universe. God brought order out of the chaos in Genesis. Bildad’s portrait of Hell is pretty close to the traditional view of Hell many Christians hold. God will one day come and judge the living and dead. In Matthew 25, the “sheep and the goats”.

However, Bildad drops the ball in one of his premises. Yes, the wicked go to Hell, but Job is not wicked. He is described at the beginning of the book as “blameless and upright”. A blameless, upright believer is experiencing the torments of hell and Bildad’s system has no place for this. The reality is that some wicked people prosper, and some blameless believers suffer enormously from undeserved grief.

Job’s experience, once again points to Jesus, who experienced hell on the cross. When he died, all the world was cast into darkness. Jesus felt dragged down into the inescapable punishment for the wicked. His relationship with the Father was cut off. Jesus suffered public humiliation.

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I hope you are beginning to see that you cannot understand the book of Job without the cross of Christ. You and I, are called on to endure by faith, the struggles of a road to hell until we receive our full redemption and new bodies from Christ (Rom 8:23) We all are called on to drink the cup that Jesus drank. That being said, Job responds in chapter 19 by revealing the tension in Bildad's words. If God is in control of the universe, why is there so much evidence that he isn't?

Considering his situation, Job is still wanting to know from his friends, and God himself; is God for me or against me? If God is for me, then nothing can ultimately do me eternal harm, but if he is against me, all hope is lost. The very ancient question abounds throughout Job, but here it really shouts. "Why"? Why did my spouse die? Why did he or she have to get Alzheimer's"? Why must I suffer such enduring heartache, with no comfort or peace?

In other words, given our perspective from Job, we wonder, "What was going on in heaven to make this happen to me"? I know the bible says that God loves me, and he is in my corner, but it sure doesn't feel like that right now. The pat answers we learn in Sunday School or read in sympathy cards fall flat. Bildad may be accurate in his description of what happens to wicked people, but he fails to apply it correctly to Job.

Job admits in verses 1-12 that God is treating him like his enemy. His three friends have simply rubbed him raw with their insensitivity and arrogant theology. In fact, their treatment of Job is worse than the bankruptcy, and loss of his children. Job never claims he is sinless; not once. But he does claim he is blameless; that in his religious devotion, and sacrifices, he was done right by God. God even declares him blameless.

While the three friends, and Job, agree that God is the author of his woes, they disagree to the reason why. Job goes on to describe his experience as if God has violently mugged him in the street. God should help me and defend me, yet he assaults me. There is no justice. The dominant image in Job's speech is once again the idea of a city under siege. Like a king under siege, he has been stripped of his glory

All of God's troops set up siege ramps on every side. Job is in his tent; an image of weakness and vulnerability. What threat am I to God, Job argues? It is like any of us camping in a park only to be surrounded by the entire Canadian forces, with all their guns and tanks etc. Not only is he under siege, but Job acknowledges again, how isolated he is, how terribly lonely. Not even his own wife is there to comfort him.

All those he relied on for fellowship, and community strength, have abandoned him. This is what Bildad said happens in Hell. He used to be a lord of his domain, now his associates treat him like a dead man. A social pariah. He literally is too repulsive to be around. Little children mock him and throw rotten fruit at him. Job knows what it is like to be attacked as a sinner. The problem, all through the book is, that everyone assumes Job deserves it.

Job diagnoses his condition as "the hand of God had touched me." The intention here is not positive. God is clearly against me. One detail, however, that Job does not know, is that it was the Satan that touched him and not God. With God's permission of course. Satan is thrilled with this thought in Job.

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He likes nothing better than for Job to attribute his calamity to God's direct action. Job's friends have no place in their theology for an agent of evil, and Job doesn't either. Job though is beginning to wonder who is the agent of his suffering. Job explores more fully that what he needs in all this is a mediator. He also says, "O earth, cover not my blood." (v.18) In other words like Abel's death in Genesis, may Job's innocence not be forgotten.

Job continues to cling to the hope that he will be vindicated. That he will be proven as being right before God. In his struggle to prove his innocence, and that he does not deserve his suffering, but he fears it is a losing battle. Even in death he fears he will not find vindication. His headstone would read something like, "Here lies Job, who was a sinner with secret sins he refuses to confess; he has paid the penalty of his sins at last, and the justice of God has been vindicated by his death. May he not rest in peace."

His friends' "words" say he is an unrepentant sinner. Job's words say he is unfairly punished. It is a war of words over Job's soul. How Job longs to have his memory and his struggle preserved. Then Job leaps to an inescapable conclusion. Job knows he needs a redeemer. The word "redeemer" is an important one throughout the bible. Job states he has a living redeemer. Someone who was tied to him by covenant.

A redeemer was someone who avenged your death, or if your wife was widowed, you made sure she had a child. The story of Ruth is a beautiful example of the work of a Redeemer. Boaz acts as Ruth and Naomi's redeemer. But Job's redeemer is eternal, and therefore must be God himself. The Old Testament has several examples of God being Israel's redeemer. Some people find it hard to imagine God helping Job against himself. But that is what Job means.

This concept of a Redeemer before God, really is difficult to grasp without connecting it to Christ. Job also says that his redeemer will stand upon the dust, or the earth. It may mean standing on his grave vindicating him even in death. Job is also assured that one day he will be face to face with his Redeemer God. Unlike Bildad's picture of what will happen to him, Job has faith that he will be escorted before God to see him.

To stand before God, means to have a right relationship with God. At the end of Psalm 17 David writes, "As for me, I shall be vindicated and will see your face." Job is bold now in his faith. "I know" he declares. "I shall see for myself." Job says he faints inside himself over the anticipation of seeing God. Literally the word "heart" here is "bowels" which in ancient times were believed to be the seat of emotions.

What a glorious insight Job has. There is a sovereign redeemer who lives and nothing can separate us from his love as Paul writes in Romans 8. How do we know this, well, there once was a man who was viciously assaulted by the terrors of hell, and who did not deserve what he experienced? A man of great faith who bore it all to be our living Redeemer. "I can face tomorrow, because he lives"

Job ends his speech with a warning to his three friends, and maybe a warning to all of us. His friends "pursue" him because they still hold to the idea that Job's suffering is because of his sin. They cannot believe that Job's suffering can be innocent and even redemptive.

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There is no place in their well-ordered world view for the idea of undeserved suffering and undeserved grace. Therefore, they themselves stand under judgement. They are in great danger of speaking against God's plan for Job and for themselves as well. These friends, if nothing else, need to accept that sometimes suffering is undeserved. We may rail against God for allowing it to happen, but in the end it still happens.

It may feel sometimes as if God is against you. That God is this terrible monster trying to destroy you. We may feel lonely and that no one cares. But we need to hear Job's words in these moments of our lives. In chapter 19 verse 25-27 we read,

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me." May you have such a faith that your heart will faint within you.