

An Exegetical-Homiletical Study Of Job 19:23-27

[Presented by Metropolitan North Pastoral Conference on March 15, 1982]

By Richard D. Balge

Job was a man who feared and loved and served God. God had blessed him richly with a large family, great possessions, and good health. And then God let Satan tempt him, shake him until he rattled. The man lost all of his children and all of his possessions. His health was broken. He lost his wife's respect and loyalty. His friends visited him and accused him of all kinds of sin and unbelief of which he had not been guilty. In the verses just before our text Job spoke of how God had treated him:

"He has alienated my brothers from me;
my acquaintances are completely estranged from me
My kinsmen have gone away;
my friends have forgotten me.
My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger;
they look upon me as an alien.
I summon my servant but he does not answer,
though I beg him with my own mouth.
My breath is offensive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own brothers.
Even the little boys scorn me;
when I appear, they ridicule me.
All my intimate friends detest me;
those I love have turned against me.
I am nothing but skin and bones;
I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth.
Have pity on me, my friends, have pity,
for the hand of God has struck me.
Why do you pursue me as God does?
Will you never get enough of my flesh ?" (19:13-22)

Then begin the words of the text which we will be studying. Job wanted posterity to know that he was not guilty of the sin and unbelief of which his friends had accused him. He wanted something durable to testify to his faith and life:

"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!" (19:23-24)

A book, an inscription in metal, or best of all a durable engraving in rock! He wanted a monument to declare that God was not simply leaving him to destruction, treating him like an outcast.

The message which Job wanted future generations to read begins: "I know that my Redeemer lives" (25a). He speaks of גֹּאֲלִי. In God's Old Testament economy the goel was the person who was obliged to redeem a relative from slavery, buy back a kinsman's inheritance, avenge his blood, vindicate his good name. The *goel's* responsibility was to "square things" for one who could not accomplish that for himself. The LORD is frequently depicted as Israel's *goel*, and his people lived by the promise that "The Redeemer will come to Zion" (Is 59:20). Job is saying: "The One who will rescue, deliver, avenge, restore and vindicate me *does live*. I cannot depend on earthly kinsmen or friends to do this, but God will do it."

Job knew this by faith because he had heard the promises of God. He knew what God had said about the Descendant of Eve who would crush the Serpent's head and rescue Eve and all her children from eternal death. Some people think Job was a contemporary of Abraham, so perhaps he knew the promise that a Descendant of that man of faith would be a blessing for all nations. In the face of all contrary evidence, in spite of the shaking the devil was giving him, in all his suffering Job believed the promises of God.

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." (v 25)

The words וְאַחֲרוֹן עַל-עֶפְרָת יָקוּם could also be translated "and afterwards he will stand (rise) upon the dust." In view of the fact that Job is speaking of something that would occur after his death and dissolution ("after my sin has been destroyed," v 26a) we can be sure that he is looking into the distant future. In the light of Scripture and from our New Testament perspective, we are able to say that Job's words anticipate the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Second Coming of our Lord. That is not to say that he knew the details which are summarized in the Apostles Creed, but that his prophetic words include all of those events. They are all part of God's work in Christ Jesus. It is not necessary to limit his words to any of those events or to exclude any of them, either.

Job's words look forward to the time when the angel told Joseph: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." The look ahead to the time when Paul wrote to the Christians in the churches of Galatia: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Job's words anticipate the marvelous triumph of 1 Corinthians 15: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Experts killed Jesus. They took precautions to be sure that he was dead and were careful to see that his body would remain in the grave. But when the dust of battle had cleared, he stood victorious upon the earth. Like Abraham, Job rejoice to see Jesus' day, and he saw it and was glad.

Job did not expect to see this in his lifetime. He expected his disease to run its course, his skin to be destroyed. But he did expect to participate in the Redeemer's victory. He already shared in it by faith as he spoke these words. He expected to share in it by sight in the day of the resurrection of the body: "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 (26-27a)."

RSV cuts this confession out of the canon and out of the believer's armory with the footnote at verse 26: "The meaning of this verse is uncertain." It is not at all uncertain that Job expected to see his Redeemer God. In three forms the first person singular appears: twice in the verb אֶרְאֶה, in the emphatic pronoun אֲנִי, and in the preposition לִי. NIV seems to combine the emphatic pronoun and the *li* in the phrase "I myself." Not as a disembodied spirit, not merely in the mind's eye, but physically, with, his own eyes, in person. It is not uncertain that Job expected to see his Redeemer-

God physically, in his body. The rendering of *וּמִבְּשָׂרִי* as "without my flesh" by RSV and NASB is grammatically possible. But the *min* of separation is not the only possibility here, "in my flesh," "from out of my flesh," agrees with Job's confidence that after his death and dissolution he will see with his own eyes, personally.

NIV renders the passionate yearning of Job's kidneys (a seat of emotion) with "How my heart yearns within me (v 27b)!" That is translating according to sense.

Job the sufferer could be patient Job in the hope of Christ's Day, in anticipation of the Redeemer's justifying work. He expected a part in the resurrection of the just and trusted that he would enjoy the vision of God. The Spirit of God gave him the assurance and caused his words to be recorded for our encouragement and joy.

God wanted us to have these words, too. And so they were not simply written on a scroll or engraved in metal or chiseled into rock. They were preserved in Holy Scripture and translated into languages which people can understand. God wanted us to know these things because they were more important than anything Job had said up to that time. They were not preserved simply to clear Job's name; they proclaim the Savior's name and they meet our desperate need.

Even if we did not ever suffer any physical or mental anguish and could not identify in that way with Job, we would still desperately need to know what Job confesses here, We would need to know it because the Old Evil Foe is always tempting us to rebel, teaching us that we must despair of the mercy of God, teaching us to be careless about the things of God. We would need to know these words because the Law of God judges us and declares us guilty and says that we are deserving of eternal punishment.

Death and the Last Judgment! Luther once said that when he was the most pious of monks his hair would stand on end when he thought of the Last Judgment. The very fact of death must convince even the most smug and self-righteous person that all is not well between God and his creatures. We see the death notices, the signs of aging in our loved ones and in ourselves. We read reports of violent death. We notice that the only empty graves are those which wait to receive our dear ones and us. We observe that the cemeteries fill up after a few generations. And we know that death is not "natural," not what God had in mind when he made man in his own image. That terrible tearing apart of soul and body is *not* natural.

And so, like Job, we desperately need to know that our Redeemer lives. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

We know more details about this living Redeemer than Job did. We know his name. We know that he is our nearest and dearest relative, our flesh and blood, our Brother. He has freed us from the slavery of sin, restored our eternal inheritance, avenged our murder, vindicated us in God's sight. He will come to raise believer and unbeliever, to judge the living and the dead. He will stand at Job's grave and our graves and say what he said at the grave of Lazarus of Bethany: "Come forth."

"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The rest will follow in the resurrection and we will be acceptable in God's sight. Not as ghosts or disembodied spirits but in our bodies which he shall change and fashion like his glorious body.

Job once asked, "If a man dies, will he live again (Job 14:14)?" Jesus' answer to that question was: "Because I live you will live also." God answered the question when he raised Jesus from the dead. The Holy Spirit answered it when he gave Job these words to write.

"How my heart yearns within me!" We know the yearning. We know our desperate need. We know the desire to believe without doubting. We know that what keeps the yearning alive and

what makes us believe that it will be satisfied is the Word of God. These words of Job, the whole word of the apostles and prophets, all point to the risen Christ, the living Redeemer. They say: "He lives. Because he lives, you will live also."

A workable basic outline for this text is:

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES

I. We desperately need to know this.

II. We know it now by faith.

III. We will know it by sight.