



3.

'A Redeemer Who Lives'

Christmas through the eyes of

Job

Job is not one of the characters normally associated with Christmas but he did look forward to a time when a Redeemer would 'stand upon the earth' (Job 19:25). Christmas is about the coming of One who did stand upon the earth, who was crucified and then rose up to stand upon the earth again and who will again stand upon the earth at His second coming.

The words come in one of the best-known verses in the book: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth' (19:25).

The book wrestles with the age-old question 'Why?' Why does God allow so much suffering in the world? Furthermore, why does it often seem that righteous people suffer while wicked people prosper?

Job is introduced as a good man who 'feared God and turned away from evil.' He wasn't perfect but he sought to live in faith and obedience. Yet the first two chapters tell of the loss of his wealth, the loss of his family and the loss of

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his health. Job 2:7 tells us he had 'loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head', driven so demented that he would scrape his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Subsequent chapters tell of his sufferings, and always against the background of the question 'Why?'

It is a question echoed time and time again, from concentration camps to killing fields, in hospital wards or private homes where circumstances threaten to squeeze the life out of people and make them ask this big question.

Much of the book of Job describes the efforts of Job's comforters to explain his predicament and force him to face up to their simple message: you must have sinned grievously to deserve all this.

Job speaks of intense loneliness – 'All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me' (19:19). Against this dark background the words of verses 25-26 stand out: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.'

It is a remarkable text, coming from such depths of suffering, and from an Old Testament that does not spell out very much about the hope of heaven. It was thought then that people live on but only in a shadowy kind of existence, but here there shines through that hope of glory which would come to full expression with the New Testament message of hope in Jesus Christ. Through Him, human beings may live for evermore because of Christmas Day, because Jesus came to undo the effects of sin and the fall.

'A Redeemer Who Lives' - Job

This glimpse of Christmas through the eyes of Job tells us of Job's faith, his hope and his assurance.

HIS FAITH

Job would have shared the sentiment of Andrae Crouch's song 'Through it all'. It talks about many tears, sorrows and questions, but the chorus says, 'Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, learned to trust in God; through it all, through it all, I've learned to depend upon His Word.'

Job's faith was not in a silver lining behind every cloud; he did not simply think that things will sort themselves out some day. Rather, he trusted in a living God who is described as a Redeemer.

The Hebrew word referred to a kinsman-redeemer and is found notably in the story of the widowed Ruth. When her mother-in-law Naomi heard that Ruth had found work in the fields of a man called Boaz, she was excited because Boaz was a relative and, according to the law of levirate marriage, it was the duty of such a kinsman to take the widow as his wife, redeem the relative's property and raise up children in the deceased man's name. This was a kinsman-redeemer, a *Go'el*.

When we see Job's expression 'I know that my Redeemer lives' in that light, it becomes a precious statement - everything centres in One who came to share our humanity, to be our kinsman-Redeemer. From the depths of his suffering, Job expresses faith in such a Redeemer.

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God has given no promises that there will never be storms, but Job was patient through it all because he had an anchor that was fastened to a rock, the Saviour's love. The Bible does not mock us with empty promises, but it does point us to a great Redeemer who lives and who guides His people, pilgrims through this barren land.

HIS HOPE

Obviously Job had never heard of Christmas (in a sense none of the Bible characters had heard of the concept), and the words 'He will stand upon the earth' were fulfilled in ways he could never have imagined. It's what advent is about; it is the message of the gospel, as John says at the beginning of his gospel account: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14).

The Christian message is one of hope that is fixed on this great Redeemer. Job may have been thinking of a vindicator who would defend him against the charges of his 'comforters' who had all insisted that he must be a dreadful sinner. But the fulfilment outshone the prediction, and in the fulness of time Christ came to redeem His people from sin, evil and death.

He stood upon the earth. We can think of that in stages:

- Firstly, He came to the earth as a baby. This is the message of Christmas which is read and presented in carols and nativity plays. It is the super-fulfilment of Job's word – the Redeemer did stand upon the earth – at Bethlehem and Nazareth.

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- He stood on the earth in Galilee in His life and ministry: healing the sick, telling His parables, teaching His disciples, caring for the outcasts and even untouchables, loving even His enemies.
- Then He was lifted up from the earth. The cross stood firmly on the earth and we are reminded that Christianity is not a sanitised religion that is all about white robes and stained-glass windows. It centres in the horrible events that took place on the solid ground of this earth – amid the squalor, muck and gore.
- But again, He stood upon the earth in His risen glory. He made a point Himself of saying that ghosts don't have flesh and bones as He had (Luke 24:39). Christianity stands on that belief in His bodily resurrection from the dead.
- And He will stand upon the earth again. No-one knows *when* He will come, but we know that He *will* come. He will 'stand upon the earth', and the Bible presents us with the challenge: will we be ready? That means being faithful and obedient in all that lies before us; it means honouring Him as Lord and Master in every aspect of our lives.

There's Job, this poor man sitting under the weight of his sufferings, looking for a Redeemer who would stand on the earth. *Well, Job, He did come – the baby of Bethlehem, the man of Galilee, the man on the cross, the risen One, the Lord who will return.*

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HIS ASSURANCE

The first words of Job 19:25 are 'For I know'. This was Job's assurance, even in the depths of his suffering. All of his wealth had been taken from him; he had lost his family; his health was broken; his wife despairingly told him to 'Curse God and die' (Job 2:9). Yet here is this note of assurance: 'I know that my Redeemer lives.'

There may have been many things Job did not understand, but he was like the blind man of John 9 who was cured by Jesus. Jesus' disciples raised the very question which lies behind the book of Job; they asked, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (John 9:2) They made the same assumption as Job's friends, and Jesus taught them that it doesn't work like that; there are no simple equations between the amount of good or evil you do and the amount of suffering you have to endure.

Job also said, 'After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.' The fact that the Redeemer lives is the gospel's answer to the undeniable fact that we all die. 'Dust to dust' is the truth – but it is not the whole truth, and the Christian hope is based on the death and resurrection of the Redeemer who lives and will live for ever and who saves to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him (Heb. 7:25).

May it be our faith too: 'I know that my Redeemer lives.'