

The Last Stand of a Desperate Man

The Hush of Heaven – Part XII

Job 25-31

Introduction

Heroic events by men – especially on battlefields - have always fascinated the human spirit. There are literally hundreds of movies on World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, the wars in Iraq, and so on; which leads me to believe that if Alexander the Great had had a video camera, we would have seen those acts of bravery recorded and replayed for generations.

One of the ancient favorites would have been the last stand of the Spartans in 480 BC. Their courage created a legend that is still talked about today.

When Xerxes led 100,000 Persians to Thermopylae in the spring of 480 BC., they were met by 5,000 Greeks that just would not give in. One of the Greek scouts reported that “Such was the number of the Persians, that when they shot their arrows the sun was darkened by their multitude.”

A soldier named, Dieneces, responded by saying to all the soldiers around him, “Our friend gives us good news. If the Persians darken the sun with their arrows, we will be able to fight in the shade.”

What an attitude with which to face a hundred thousand enemy soldiers – which they did, and all were killed. This became one of history’s most famous last stands.

If you spend any time in Texas, as I did in seminary, you see a lot of the memorabilia from the Alamo. In 1836, the American settlers fought for Texan independence from Mexico. The Mexican army of some 6,000 soldiers marched to put down the rebellion. Standing in their way was a band of 188 defenders holed up in an old Spanish Mission that we know as the Alamo. When given an opportunity to

surrender, the Americans responded, “Our flag waves over the wall. We shall never surrender or retreat.”

These men held the Mexicans off for twelve days, until they were all captured and killed.

As brave as it might sound to stand against an army of soldiers, or fight off warriors under the shade of a sky blackened with arrows, or shoot it out through the windows of an old Mission, nothing compares in courage to standing alone for the holiness or the truth of the gospel.

I have stood in the sanctuary of John Knox and gazed at length at his pulpit, elevated and attached to a massive column. From that pulpit he was the lone voice preaching against the bloody atrocities of Queen Mary. There were no soldiers to cheer him on.

I have stood in John Wesley’s chapel and imagined what it must have been like to preach with great courage; to be one of the lone voices against slavery and have the congregation respond by rioting and breaking every pew to pieces. What courage.

I have never preached a sermon during which people threw chairs into the air and threatened my life.

I would love to have visited the courtroom in Worms where Martin Luther in 1521, was placed on trial for being a heretic. There, before the highest religious and political leaders of his day, he stood alone and said, “My conscience is bound to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do none other.”

It is one thing to face trouble and anguish and perhaps even death surrounded by friends and admirers. It is another thing to face death all alone.

This is like John the Baptist who pointed his finger at Herod and told him he was an adulterer for marrying his brother's wife.

This is like Jeremiah the prophet, as well, who told the disturbing truth to his nation and as a result, was thrown into an abandoned well where he sank in the mud until he was rescued from certain death sometime later.

The chief example would be our dear Lord, who endured the cruelest of deaths, experiencing the hatred of the people He had come to save. He even experienced the abandonment of the Father as the sky grew dark with divine judgment, while being abandoned by all who had followed Him. No one has ever been as alone as He.

There is something especially courageous and admirable, and rare about someone who stands alone for the honor and truth of God.

Perhaps even now, you are in this position in that dormitory, or on that floor of cubicles lined to the windows, or in that family of relatives where Jesus Christ is a curse word, but to you He is the sovereign Savior. You know what it is like to stand alone.

We are about to see the last stand of Job. The last barrage of arrows will be released that darken the sky against this suffering servant of God.

Job will refuse to surrender his integrity – and he will be virtually alone.

He will deliver his last and longest speech, following the short denunciation by Bildad.

Afterwards, Elihu will condemn Job, immediately followed by God finally speaking. The hush of heaven is almost over.

If there were ever any doubts about Job clinging to his integrity and character and trusting in God, albeit confused and pained and challenged, these chapters will settle the score, once and for all.

Satan will lose his wager. Job will not turn away from God.

The Final Denunciation by Bildad

Let us look at Job chapter 25 and note the denunciation of Job by Bildad. Everything he says is right, but he ends at the wrong place and with the wrong conclusion.

- Bildad speaks of the power of God in Job 25:2-3.

Dominion and awe belong to Him who establishes peace in His heights.

Is there any number to His troops? And upon whom does His light not rise?

- Bildad implies the perfection of God as he speaks in Job 25:4.

How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?

In other words, “Job, how do you or anyone think you can stand before God who is holy perfection?”

Job already answered this in Job 19:25, when he declared his faith, saying,

. . . I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

Now this is the last stand we are all waiting for, right?

- Bildad concludes by telling of God's purity in Job 25:5-6.

If even the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in His sight,

how much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm!

This is encouraging!

Implied in this is, “Job, you are a maggot and a worm.”

It is no wonder that Job responds in Job chapter 26 verses 2a and 3b, by saying,

What a help you are to the weak! . . .

. . . What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!

Bildad's speech was reverent, but it was irrelevant. He revealed the depravity of man, but did not offer the deliverance of salvation.ⁱ

The primary message of the Bible is not human depravity, but justifying deliverance through the cross work of Jesus Christ.

The amazing thing is that Christ died for worms like us. The grace of God has rescued a maggot like me.

You might say, “That's a terrible self-image.”

No it is not – it is true. Paul said,

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ
our Lord!***

(Romans 7:24-25b)

This is the amazing grace of the gospel of Christ who saved a wretch like me.

Part of the problem of the church today is that we are running around trying to get everyone to treat us like we are some kind of rare butterfly.

Alas! and did my Savior bleed

And did my Sovereign die?

Would He devote that sacred head

For such a worm as I?

*At the cross, at the cross where I first saw
the light,*

And the burden of my heart rolled away...!

Revised hymnals have exchanged “for such a worm as I” with “for sinners such as I”. “Sinner” is bad enough, but at least it sounds better than “worm”!

We are a company of worms that will one day burst forth into the splendor of glorified bodies and purified spirits, but until then, we are at our best when we do not get too far away from remembering our worst.

The problem is not that Bildad said something wrong; the problem is that he leaves Job without hope. He says, “Job you are a maggot and a worm.”

This is true, but what about the grace of God?

“You are a worm, Job” – and Job could have looked down at his arms and, had he been like most of us, burst into tears and said, “You are so right – God is not worth following.”

Job’s Response

Instead of beginning a diatribe against the unworthiness of God, however, Job begins to describe the greatness of God.

In Job’s long response to Bildad and the other men, in fact, Job will echo five questions about which mankind still wonders. To some of these, he will provide some answers, while others will simply be carried on the words of his agony.

1. Question number one: Who can understand the greatness of God?

Job invites Bildad, in Job 26:5-14, to travel to the depths of the underworld – the place of the grave; to go down as deeply into the earth as possible, then to travel northward, straight up and beyond earth’s atmosphere into the spaces of our universe – and

points out that God is sovereign over it all. From the lowest point of imagination to the highest point, God is over all.

Job says in Job 26:14a, “And guess what,”

. . . these are the fringes of His ways . . .

What a great thought this is. No matter how deeply we travel or how high we ascend, we have only reached the outer fringes; the outer edges of God’s ways. We are nowhere near the core of His hidden glory and power. We can only see the fringes and hear the whispers of His greatness.

Job says, “Listen, Bildad, you think you have this thing figured out; you think you have God figured out. You haven’t gotten past the outer fringe of His greatness. Who can understand Him?! Bildad, your worship of God is way too limited because your view of God is way too small!”

A.W. Tozer gives us a warning in his powerful little book that I am rereading these days, entitled, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. He writes,

So necessary to the church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God. We do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God.ⁱⁱ

Relief is in trusting and following and obeying a great, sovereign, unexplainable, majestic, and mysterious Lord.

One author wrote,

Whenever there are sores on your body and they are running with pus and the fever will not go down, the perspective of Job is where you need to be. “I don’t understand . . . but I have a sovereign God of the universe who does. And He does all things well. He is in charge. I am the clay; He is the Potter. I am the disciple, He is the Lord. I am the sheep, He is the Shepherd. I am the servant; He is the master.ⁱⁱⁱ

Let suffering return you to a high view of this majestic and mysterious God who acts without explanation and moves beyond our understanding. All we can grasp of this majestic Lord are the fringes of His activity.

It is no wonder that Job says in Job 27:3-4,

For as long as life is in me, and the breath of God is in my nostrils,

my lips certainly will not speak unjustly, nor will my tongue mutter deceit.

This is the last stand of a desperate man. Job says, “I will not be moved.”

In other words, “I don’t understand, but I’m not abandoning my character or my trust in God.”

What follows, in chapter 27, is the logical next question of Job.

2. Question number two: In light of this great and powerful God, why does mankind ignore the coming judgment of God?

How foolish is mankind to ignore God? Look at Job 27:8.

For what is the hope of the godless when he is cut off, when God requires his life?

So why does mankind ignore their conscience and run from God? Because he thinks he can get away with it. Notice Job 27:21-22.

The east wind carries him away, and he is gone, for it whirls him away from his place.

For it will hurl at him without sparing; he will surely try to flee from its power.

“I can beat this thing – God will not judge me!”

What a foolish way to live.

As Job takes this last stand, he wonders, as everyone who suffers wonders, where he can find wisdom to handle life.

James 1:5 says, in light of being surrounded by various trials, “ask God for wisdom and He’ll give it.” He could have added, “little bit by little bit – just in time!”

3. Question number three: Where can we find true wisdom?

Now, in Job chapter 28, Job will ask a third question – and he will give a longer answer than James.

The first thing Job says is that we cannot mine wisdom from the earth. Notice Job 28:13-14.

Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living.

The deep says, “It is not in me”; and the sea says, “It is not with me.”

Not only can we not mine wisdom from the earth, but secondly, we cannot buy wisdom from other people. Note Job 28:15.

Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, nor can silver be weighed as its price.

There is no “blue light special” for wisdom. Wal-Mart does not sell it. Even Sam’s Warehouse does not stock it.

So where do we get wisdom? Job and James answer. Look at Job 28:23.

God understands its way, and He knows its place.

Skip to Job 28:28.

And to man He said, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

This is the secret unfolded. Wisdom is actually a byproduct.

We gain wisdom as we do two things – not after we do these, but while we practice these two things.

- First, we gain wisdom when we worship God with total reverence.

This is Job’s meaning when he says, “the fear of the Lord”. It means we take God seriously.

- Secondly, we get wisdom, not only when we worship God with total reverence, but when we walk with God with transparent obedience.

We take life seriously. It is to be lived for His glory.

Wisdom comes to those who worship God and walk with God. When there is surrender and submission to God, wisdom has become our companion.

Now, Job will ask and answer another perceptive question in chapter 29. However, most scholars believe that Job paused at the end of chapter 28, as if waiting for Zophar to speak.

Zophar has not yet spoken in this final round – and he does not. He has either walked away, or, more than likely, recognized that he really has nothing more to say.

However, Job does! He begins again in verse 1 of chapter 29.

4. Question number four: How do we define true happiness?

I find it fascinating that Job sort of leans back on his elbow and begins to talk about the good old days. This is not unlike people who suffer. They are actually encouraged at times, as they reflect on easier

days and carefree moments. They take a walk down “Nostalgia Lane”.

However, as we follow Job down this lane, he actually defines true happiness. We can pull from his words, five ingredients of contented, happy living.

- The first ingredient of true happiness is an awareness of God’s presence and care.

Notice Job 29:2-3.

Oh that I were as in months gone by, as in the days when God watched over me;

When His lamp shone over my head, and by His light I walked through darkness;

There are plenty of texts that inform us that Job believes God is still aware of his needs, but in the good old days it was obvious. In fact, what made the good old days so good was the sense that God was close at hand.

Notice Job 29:4.

I was in the prime of my days, when the friendship of God was over my tent;

- The second ingredient, in happier times, Job experienced an appreciation for whatever God gave him.

Job says, in Job 29:5b-6,

. . . my children were around me;

. . . my steps were bathed in butter, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

In other words, “Man, life was good. My steps were bathed in butter – a delicious delicacy surrounded me.”

This is like going to a wedding reception and discovering fresh strawberries at a table with a chocolate fountain pouring chocolate all around. You can just live there! Chunks of pineapple and banana are available too. You can stand there and dip until your reputation is gone – or your wife says, “Honey, there is a long line of angry people behind us.”

That was a *good* wedding!

Job pulls out a food item from his culture and exaggerates it to suggest how good life was – “my steps were bathed in butter”.

A couple of weeks ago, a lady in our GreenHouse church membership class brought two dozen doughnuts with chocolate icing for me. Some teachers like apples – not me. These doughnuts were from a bakery – not Krispy Kreme; the bar has been

seriously raised – they were freshly made that day at a bakery in Rocky Mount. This lady and her husband drive an hour to get to church on Sunday and to GreenHouse class on Wednesday, and even bring bakery doughnuts. She is going to get an “A” in GreenHouse; in fact, she does not even have to come anymore – she is a member already!

Happiness, obviously to me, is an abundance of fresh doughnuts. To Job, it was butter.

However, Job goes deeper than food.

- Thirdly, happiness, to Job, also meant having an opportunity to influence others.

In Job 29:7-11, he talks of going to the city gate and taking his seat.

- The fourth ingredient of true happiness included the opportunity to be generous and compassionate toward the needy.

Job speaks of this in Job 29:12-20.

- Finally, happiness, to Job, was found in a place of respect, earned by giving godly counsel.

We find this in Job 29:21-25.

This chapter is unique to everything Job has said in this book. I believe it merely sets us up for the great grief of Job as he recounts in the next chapter, the ways in which his happy circumstances turned sour and bitter.

Job chapter 30, in fact, does nothing more than catalogue the catastrophic changes in Job’s life. This is meant to show us that everything he had in chapter 29 has been reversed in chapter 30.

Job ends the cataloguing of his grief by writing in Job 30:27-31,

I am seething within and cannot relax; days of affliction confront me.

I go about mourning without comfort; I stand up in the assembly and cry out for help.

I have become a brother to jackals and a companion of ostriches.

(In other words, “Only the wild animals will have anything to do with me.”)

My skin turns black on me, and my bones burn with fever.

(Job’s skin is literally bruised and decaying.)

Therefore my harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the sound of those who weep.

This is the point at which we would expect Job to throw in the towel.

Perhaps you have been at this point too – maybe you are there right now.

You remember the good days – when butter was plentiful; when your children were around you; when God seemed near. Those were the good old days.

Now, all seems lost. There are days of affliction; pain; suffering; loss; disease; debt; abandonment – a harp that now mourns and a flute that can only weep.

It is time to take your last stand. It is time to take a final, courageous, stand of faith.

At this moment, to me, Job becomes an amazing sufferer. In the face of this suffering, Job amazingly digs in his heels and makes new commitments to God. He basically says, “I will not give up my integrity. I will not throw away my character. I will take my stand.”

This is amazing.

Now, in Job chapter 31, Job defines for us the answer to a fifth and final question. Job has thus far, raised these perceptive questions:

1. Who can understand the greatness of God?
2. Why does mankind ignore the coming judgment of God?
3. Where can we find true wisdom?
4. How do we define true happiness?
5. **Question number five: How can we develop a life of integrity?**

In the last section of Job’s response, there are at least ten resolutions that create the foundation for a life of integrity.

- Determine pure boundaries (Job 31:1-2).

Job writes, in Job 31:1,

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?

In other words, integrity is developed by determining ahead of time what we will and will not look at.

For us today, the battle for integrity will be a battle over media; the internet; television.

At the outset of these ten ways to develop integrity, know this: *integrity does not happen by accident.*

Are you willing to take a stand?

Integrity must be pursued, developed, desired.

- Develop honesty (Job 31:5-6).

Job writes, in Job 31:5-6,

If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened after deceit, let Him weigh me with accurate scales, and let God know my integrity.

In other words, integrity and telling the truth are synonymous.

Tell the truth.

- Disallow moral compromises (Job 31:9-11).

Job talks candidly about resisting the enticement of a woman, in Job 31:9, and hanging around a neighbor’s house for the wrong reasons. In verse 1, Job deals with not pursuing or lusting after a single woman. In verses 9-11, Job is refusing to be enticed by a married woman.

Job made no compromise for “hanging around this woman’s door”. This is the equivalent of giving a woman your business card, or phone number . . . which opens the door for moral sin.

Job determined to steer clear!

Ladies and gentlemen, recognize, especially in light of our culture where men and women work together every day, there is no such thing as innocent flirting; there is no room for moral compromises of any sort with excuses such as, “Oh it’s nothing . . .” It might be nothing now, but nothing can become something.

I have pastored long enough to see marriages destroyed by couples who were involved in the same Bible study; by couples who counseled one another and partners from both marriages left their spouses for one another.

Make no allowances for moral compromise – guard the gate; guard your heart!

- Defend the disadvantaged (Job 31:13-15).

In verses 13-15, Job’s words can be turned into a positive definition of integrity as one who does not take advantage of his power and position to mistreat an employee. He takes care to see that complaints against him are handled with kindness and fairness.

- Distribute to the needy (Job 31:16-23).

In the next few verses, Job describes a man of integrity who will distribute to those who are needy.

Eliphaz condemned him for not caring for the orphan or the widow (Job 22:9), and Job says, in Job 31:21-22,

If I have lifted up my hand against the orphan, because I saw I had support in the gate,

let my shoulder fall from the socket, and my arm be broken off at the elbow.

In other words, “If I’ve mistreated a widow or an orphan, let me be disabled.”

- Deplore materialism (Job 31:24-25).

Job says in verses 24-25, a man or a woman of integrity does not put their trust and confidence in gold.

- Denounce spiritual compromises (Job 31:26-28).

In these verses, Job refers to those who blow a kiss toward a false god. It was the custom of the ancients to blow kisses toward the temples and shrines of their gods to show affection.

Job says, “I have never acknowledged the false gods of my generation.”

Developing integrity demands that we denounce spiritual compromises.

- Display compassion toward others (Job 31:29-32).

Integrity means we display compassion toward all others.

- Decline hypocrisy in all things (Job 31:33-37).

Job writes, in Job 31:33a,

Have I covered my transgressions like Adam...?

In other words, “I know about Adam! He covered up his nakedness with leaves.”

A person of integrity will refuse to play the hypocrite. They are real and genuine.

- Deny any excuse for greed (Job 31:38-40).

Finally, Job effectively says in these verses that integrity demands that we deny any excuse for greed.

Job is staking his verdict before his fellow man and before God Himself, upon his integrity.

Job says, in effect:

- I have determined pure boundaries;
- I have developed honesty;
- I am disallowing moral compromises;
- I am defending the disadvantaged;
- I have distributed to the needy;

- I have deplored materialism and never trusted in money;
- I have denounced any spiritual compromise;
- I am displaying compassion toward others;
- I am declining hypocrisy in all things;
- I have denied any excuse for greed.

If you did not notice, Job has covered every area of life.

Steven Lawson pointed out that Job’s integrity has affected his:

- thought life;
- ethical life;
- home life;
- work life;
- community life;
- financial life;
- spiritual life;
- social life;
- stewardship life.^{iv}

We have been fed the lie that it is possible to be a person of integrity in public, while being dishonest or immoral in private. The truth is that a lack of integrity in any area is to lack integrity.

Job says, “Take a good look anywhere in my life. Go through my files. Check my internet sites. Interview my employees. Look at my expense accounts. Sift through my bank records. Look at my giving record at church and other charities. Interview my wife. Talk to my neighbors. Ask my business associates. Talk to my closest friends. You will find the intention and direction and resolve of my heart is to be a person of integrity. It’s not something I would like to be; it is what I must be.”

Job took his stand. The question is, “Will you? Will I?”

Integrity is for those who are willing to take a stand in desperate times and difficult days. It is for those, like John Wesley, one of the pioneer leaders in the Great Awakening, who prayed in the late 1700s,

I am no longer my own, but Thine.

Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by Thee or laid aside for Thee,

Exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee.

*Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy
pleasure and disposal.*

*And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine, and I am Thine.
Amen.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/23/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Derek Thomas, The Storm Breaks (Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 198.

ⁱⁱ A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (San Francisco, Harper, 1961), p. 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (W Publishing, 2004), p. 213.

^{iv} Steven J. Lawson, When All Hell Breaks Loose (NavPress, 1993), p. 190.