

The Magnum Opus of Faith

The Hush of Heaven – Part IX

Job 18-19

Introduction

The sky over Germany in 1941 was as blue as it had ever been. Spring had come, but for thousands of Jews, laboring and suffering in the Nazi concentration camps, hope had become little more than a thread they clung to.

In one particular camp, according to the journal entries of other inmates, a group of Jewish men were assigned to carry stones from one end of the camp to the other. It was rumored that they were going to construct a building. Others whispered that the stones were part of a road project. Day after day, the men hauled stones, their backs aching, their bodies groaning under the load. Then, finally, weeks after they had begun this mountainous task, they finished the job. The stones had been piled in an enormous mass, ready for use. That night the men stretched out on their bunks with a slight flutter of accomplishment and anticipation.

The next day the men were ordered into the camp yard as usual. Their new assignment was delivered. They were to carry the same stones to the other side of the camp – back to where they had been in the beginning. With crushed spirits they began. It became apparent that their task was meaningless. The stones were eventually moved back and forth, without purpose or plan. It was then, as the men realized that they were acting in futility, these men began to waver and eventually they died.ⁱ

Hardship without meaning is a burden too heavy to bear. The loss of purpose made the painful lives of these men unbearable.

I have read of something similar happening to an entire town – only in a different context. The powers-that-be had decided to build a hydroelectric dam across a valley in Maine where a small town had been situated for generations. The people were to be relocated and the town eventually submerged under water where the reservoir would be created. During the time between the initial decision to begin the project and the completion of the dam, this well-kept town, with clean sidewalks, tidy houses, and manicured lawns began to fall into disrepair. One resident explained it this way, when he said, “Where there is no hope for the future, there is no work in the present.”ⁱⁱ

When the prospects of a future are dashed, the drive to accomplish something, to work at something, to advance or repair something, or even to endure something is abandoned. Without a future and a purpose, like the tentacles of a vine, despair wraps itself around the heart and chokes off hope.

As far as Job is concerned, God has assigned him to carry rocks from one end to the other of his imprisoned life. There is no purpose in life – there is no meaning behind his suffering.

To make matters worse, Bildad the Black and White has nothing more than another message of guilt and condemnation for Job to suffer through. In fact, he, like Eliphaz in his second speech, turns up the heat. In order to bring out a confession of sin, Bildad describes for Job the terrible, fearful death of sinners.

The Pit of Fear and Anxiety

Bildad paints four scenes of a sinner's death. These are true pictures, by the way, but there is a problem in that they are presented to the wrong man. However, for those who do not have a Redeemer, this is their future.

Scenes of a sinner's death

1. The first scene is of a darkened tent.

Notice Job 18:5-6, where Bildad begins his lecture.

Indeed, the light of the wicked goes out and the flame of his fire gives no light.

The light in his tent is darkened, and his lamp goes out above him.

This scene painted for Job is of a lamp hanging in a tent. Suddenly the lamp is snuffed out. Perhaps a gust of wind blows through the opening. It smolders for a moment or two with the wick glowing red, but then it goes out, leaving the tent dark and sightless.

For many people, this is the darkness of death; the mystery surrounding death that makes it the king of terrors.

It will happen to us all. We cannot ignore it; we cannot avoid it. The statistics are undeniable – 1 out of every 1 person dies.

In the last century, the American newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst would never permit anyone to mention death in his presence. He never allowed the subject to come up – ever. But it did not matter – he himself eventually became the subject of death.ⁱⁱⁱ

Bildad points his finger at Job and says, in effect, “Job, you’re ignoring the obvious. The light of your life is about to go out and you will be left in the darkness of God’s judgment.”

2. The second scene is of a trapped animal.

Notice Job 18:9-10.

A snare seizes him by the heel, and a trap snaps shut on him.

A noose for him is hidden in the ground, and a trap for him on the path.

In other words, “You’re trapped, Job! Come clean, before you’re caught and killed.”

3. The third scene is of a pursued victim.

Look at Job 18:11-12.

All around terrors frighten him, and [dog] him at every step.

His strength is famished, and calamity is ready at his side.

In other words, “There is no escape! Surrender, Job, there’s no way out!”

4. The fourth and final scene painted by Bildad the Bruiser is that of an unmarked grave.

Note Job 18:17.

Memory of him perishes from the earth, and he has no name abroad.

The Message paraphrases this paragraph to read:

Their lives go up in smoke;

acid rain soaks their ruins.

Their roots rot

and their branches wither.

They’ll never again be remembered—

nameless in unmarked graves.

They are plunged from light into darkness,

banished from the world.

And they leave empty-handed—not one single child—

nothing to show for their life on this earth.

Westerners are aghast at their fate,

easterners are horrified:

“Oh no! So this is what happens to perverse people.

This is how [those ignorant of] God end up!”

Again, this is true stuff, but Bildad is preaching to the wrong man. So, thanks a lot, Bildad the Burden-maker. He has only added more locks and bolts to the door of Job’s pit – a pit of fear and anxiety.

Bildad opened with the words, in Job 18:2, “Job,”

How long will you hunt for words? . . .

Now Job opens with his response, in Job 19:2,

How long will you torment me and crush me with words?

Bildad asks, “Job, how long are you going to excuse yourself with words?”

Job responds, “How long are you going to *execute* me with words?”

While Bildad described the terrors of death in Job chapter 18 – and they are really terrible – Job responds in chapter 19 by describing the troubles of life – and they are really troubling! So many things were lost.

I could not help but notice, by way of contrast, the perspective of these two men on what was truly lost.

Bildad considered Job’s losses to be:

- Job 18:12 – physical strength;
- Job 18:14 – financial ruin;
- Job 18:17 – fame and reputation.

Job considered other things to be true losses – and were they ever different. The losses of the following were most troubling to Job:

- Job 19:7 – Job laments what he believes to be the loss of justice;
- Job 19:8 – Job bemoans his lack of insight, as he says, “darkness on my paths”;
- Job 19:9 – Job laments being “stripped [of his] honor”;
- Job 19:10 – Job is crushed by the loss of hope;
- Job 19:11 – the loss of intimacy with God breaks Job’s heart as he cries that God, “considered me as His enemy”;
- Job 19:13-19 – Job brings up all the losses in his relationships with others:
 - Verse 13 – “acquaintances are completely estranged”;
 - Verse 14a – “relatives have [fallen away]”;
 - Verse 14b – “intimate friends have forgotten me”;
 - Even his co-workers are not the same –
 - Verse 15 – “my maids consider me a stranger”
 - Verse 16 – “my servant ... does not answer”;
 - Verse 17a – “my breath is offensive to my wife” – meaning, “because of my wretched condition, even my wife does not come near me”;

- Verse 17b – “I am loathsome to my own brothers” – he has lost relationships with other immediate family;
- Verse 18 – “young children [mock] me” – the community at large despises him;
- Verse 19 – “all my associates abhor me and those I love have turned against me” – his business partners have turned their backs on him.

The losses of fellowship with God and friendship with others were far greater losses to Job than fame and fortune. Bildad thought that losing fame and fortune was what really mattered. Job considered the losses of intimacy with God and his testimony with family and friends to be the real losses.

How much do we value our testimony of belonging to Jesus Christ?

This is the same not only for individuals, but as a church body. Is our reputation as a church tied to our campus, or to Christ?

I had a rather humorous reminder of this issue several years ago when we were putting up the buildings we now occupy. Many of you may remember that we held a service on this land before the building project got underway. Instead of holding worship services on Sunday morning down the street where we used to meet, we met on this property. A man told me that one of his co-workers had a real scare as a result.

This man’s co-worker was heading to his office on Sunday morning to do a little more work, and realized that he would be traveling in front of our church. He looked at his watch and thought, “Oh no, I’m going to be stuck in that church traffic jam for ten minutes.”

However, as he got closer, there was no traffic line-up. He wondered why. Then, as he drove past our church building, he saw that the parking lot was empty. He immediately thought, “Oh no – it’s the rapture and I’ve been left behind!”

We should do that once a year – and shake people up! Oh that our testimony would be so associated with Jesus Christ that if we did not gather here, it would be assumed Christ had raptured the church.

If our parking lot was empty today, would anyone connect it with the rapture?

If you did not show up for work, would anyone wonder if it could be the rapture?

This kind of reputation is built by living life for what really matters.

For Bildad, this meant fame, riches, and stuff. He says, “Job, you’re never going to get back your name, your wealth, your position among the power brokers of Southern Arabia, if you don’t listen.”

For Job, what really mattered was not something that could be put on a ledger or in the bank.

By the way, on this Father’s Day, this text provides a wonderful check-up for men. What would you consider to be the greater losses? Your:

- house;
- stock portfolio;
- retirement fund;
- job;
- boat;
- health?

Or your:

- integrity in the business world;
- testimony for Christ;
- relationships with family and friends;
- fellowship and walk with God?

What losses would keep you up at night?

When we read over and over of the things that Bildad thought were Job’s true losses, we soon learn that Bildad would have fit right in with the American culture. He would be selling books on management and finance topics; such as:

- How to stay in top drawer shape physically and mentally;
- How to avoid financial ruin;
- How to expand your reputation in the community and beyond;
- How to be sought after and promoted;
- How to be a mover and shaker in your world.

Job, however, would say, “I had all that! And now that I’ve lost it all, what matters most are my relationship with the Lord, my integrity, and my fellowship with family and friends.”

By the way, I got an email this past week that sounded very similar to this from a couple in our church. They are living some of Job experiences. They have lost their business and their finances along with it. Their home is headed for foreclosure and they are having to declare bankruptcy. Yet, the email goes on to evidence faith in Christ and trust in the

grace of God. Even from the pit of anxiety and fear, they have reached the pinnacle of assurance and faith.

Would you believe that in the midst of this experience in Job, from the depths of the pit, we are about to hear nothing less than one of scriptures pinnacles of faith?

Look at Job 19:23.

Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

(They will be, Job! People have been able to read them for about four thousand years now.)

Why Job? What do you want us to read that you have said?

The Pinnacle of Faith and Assurance

Notice Job 19:25-27a.

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

Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God;

Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see . . .

Talk about the pinnacle of faith and assurance! This is it –

. . . I know that my Redeemer lives . . .

Wow!

One of the most famous musical oratorios is called the *Messiah*, by George Handel. It is considered his magnum opus, which means, his greatest work; his most renowned achievement.

I found it interesting that this magnum opus of Handel was written under difficult circumstances. Go figure!

It was rumored that this piece was composed while Handel was in the Tower of London, imprisoned for debt. This rumor was not true, but it was true that at this time in his life he was struggling with insurmountable debt.

In addition to this, Handel had recently suffered a stroke – his health broken by an anxious and difficult life. The stroke had paralyzed the left side of his face, causing intense pain.

On most days, Handel could barely afford rent and food. He was despondent and discouraged.

One night in 1741, depressed and defeated, Handel wandered the lonely streets until dawn when

he returned to his shabby room. On a table was a thick envelope. It was from Charles Jennens, a friend, who encouraged him to take the texts and compose a new work. They were simply Bible verses regarding the prophecies of and fulfillment by Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

George tossed the pages aside and crawled into bed – but he could not sleep. Some of the words he had read came back to him: *Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God . . . the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . it is the glory of God . . . Hallelujah!*

He got up and went to his piano. He began to write.

He was left handed and because of his stroke, had trouble writing. The notes and text in his original script were poorly written and somewhat strangely curved. This did not stop him. For three weeks straight, he composed – hardly stopping to eat or sleep. He refused to see anyone.

At last, after twenty-two days, a friend managed to get inside the apartment and found George Handel at his piano. With sheets of music strewn everywhere and tears streaming down his face, he said to his friend, “I do believe I have seen all of Heaven before me, and the greatness of God Himself.”

This was indeed Handel’s magnum opus. When it was first performed in London, King George stood up at the Hallelujah Chorus and removed his crown.^{iv}

From the depths of anxiety came the declaration of assurance. From the pit of fear came this pinnacle of faith.

This was Handel’s declaration of the gospel of Jesus Christ – the Messiah. Today it is sung all around the world.

One of the texts incorporated into Handel’s Messiah is the text in Job 19:25. Before this became the magnum opus of Handel, it was the magnum opus of Job.

This was the crowning achievement of Job’s faith, “I am in the pit, but . . .”

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives...

Features of a pinnacle of faith

There are at least six features in this magnum opus of faith.

1. First, notice the conviction of faith.

In Job 19:25, we read,

As for me, I know . . .

I would agree with Spurgeon, who preached from this text, that we would expect Job to be certain of nothing. Nothing seemed to be certain with Job but uncertainty. [But this he knew], the Messiah lives. The winds may rage and the tempests roar, but they cannot shake this rock – I know . . . I know.^v

Job did not say, “I hope so” or “I think so” or “Maybe so” or “It could be so”. He knew!

If Job could have this assurance with the little revelation he had been given, and none of it in written form, how much more should we, who carry around with us the completed infallible word of God, believe with this assurance?

The apostle John wrote of this assurance, saying,

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

2. Secondly, notice the possession of faith.

Job continues in Job 19:25 to say,

. . . my Redeemer . . .

Job did not say, “I know that my wife’s Redeemer lives” or “my parent’s Redeemer” or “my grandfather’s Redeemer” or “my Sunday school teacher’s Redeemer”.

Martin Luther used to say that the meat of the gospel was found in the pronouns. Job said, “He is...”

. . . my Redeemer . . .

3. Thirdly, notice the concentration of Job’s faith.

We also read in Job’s words of Job 19:25,

. . . I know that my Redeemer lives . . .

Where did Job get this word “go’el,” or “Kinsman Redeemer,” apart from the moving of and revealing work of the Holy Spirit?

The “go’el” was someone who:

- could buy a relative out of slavery;
- had the right to defend a relative in court;
- could marry the widow of a near relative and give her a future and a hope.

Long before Boaz fell in love with Ruth, the widow, and purchased the right to redeem her estate and take her as his bride, Job understood that there was a Redeemer who would buy him out of slavery,

defend him in court, and give him a future and a hope.

In the pit, by faith, Job held out his heart for his Kinsman Redeemer.

4. Fourthly, notice the foundation of faith.

We see not only the conviction of faith, the possession of faith, and the concentration of faith, but also the foundation of faith. We read in Job 19:25,

. . . I know that my Redeemer lives . . .

Were it not for the resurrection, our faith would be meaningless, Paul wrote to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 15).

Job did not say, “I know that my Redeemer will live one day” or “I know that my Redeemer used to be alive”. No, this is the foundation of Job’s magnum opus – his Redeemer was alive.

Spurgeon preached from this text, “Spring on this rock, man! If you are struggling in the sea, just now, and waves of sin and doubt beat over you, leap on to this rock – Jesus is alive.”^{vi}

5. Fifthly, Job delivers the expectation of faith.

Job says, in Job 19:25b,

. . . And . . . [my Redeemer] will take His stand on the earth.

Job said more than he understood; he delivered more truth about Christ than he could ever begin to explain. From the pit of despair came this powerful declaration of prophetic truth.

We today, join Job in looking forward to that victorious day when Christ will personally, literally, actually stand upon the earth – when,

. . . all things [will be put] under His feet (I Corinthians 15:27)

Job refers to Him as standing – a picture of conquest and victory and triumph.

This is the expectation of our faith.

6. Finally, notice the motivation of Job’s faith.

In Job 19:26, we read,

. . . after my skin is destroyed, [in] my flesh I shall see God

Not only is the Redeemer going to reign triumphantly on the earth; not only will there be a future with God and man fellowshiping together as they once did in the garden – and much more so – Job says, “I’m going to be there too! I shall see God!”

It is no wonder that critics and skeptics try to tear this verse from the lips of Job, or distort its clear and simple, yet profound prophetic truth. In this declaration of faith, there are the doctrines of:

- the incarnation,
- the atonement,
- the resurrection of Christ,
- the future, physical resurrection of those who follow after God.

We are heading for home! We are not heading for death, but deliverance – full and final in the triumphant life of Christ our Redeemer.

Conclusion

Steven Lawson included in his commentary on Job the following story involving Henry Morrison and his wife. Morrison was a rather famous missionary to Africa during the late 1800s. He and his wife had served on the mission field for forty years. In fact, they had never returned to the States until this particular voyage which signaled the end of their fruitful and dedicated missionary service.

As the steamer headed into New York harbor they had wondered if anyone would remember them. Would anyone be there to even greet Henry and his wife? This was before the days of fax machines and cell phones and they were not certain if anyone from the mission would be there at the dock when they arrived home.

As the steamer pulled into New York Harbor, Henry Morrison and his wife stepped to the railing of the ship’s upper deck. They were astounded to see hundreds of people standing at the docks bearing signs that announced, “Welcome Home!” There were banners and balloons everywhere and smiling people waved and cheered as they steamed up to the dock. Henry’s heart just leaped out of his chest and he turned to his wife and said “Sweetheart, they have remembered us . . . they have come to welcome us home.”

Unknown to them, sequestered away in private quarters and hidden from the rest of the passenger’s knowledge, Teddy Roosevelt had been a passenger. He was returning to the States from a big game hunt in Africa. The banners were for him. The waving and smiling friends were all there for the President of the United States.

Henry Morrison and his wife were detained from disembarking until the President and his entourage got off the steamer. The Marine Corp Band was even there to play, “Hail to the Chief”.

Henry Morrison said, “It just doesn’t seem right that we’ve served the Lord so faithfully for these forty years. We’ve served in anonymity, but we’ve been faithful to God. Teddy Roosevelt comes to Africa to shoot some elephants and the whole world welcomes him home. It just doesn’t seem right that we come home and there is no one to even greet us.”

Henry’s wife looked up at him and gave that now famous response when she said, “But Henry, we’re not home yet. We’re not home.”^{vii}

One author wrote, “If we were given all we wanted here, our hearts would settle for this world rather than the next. God is forever luring us up and away from this one, wooing us to Himself and His kingdom where we will certainly find what we so keenly longed for.”^{viii}

Home is not here – it is there. How do we get from here to there? Our Redeemer – the Messiah – Jesus Christ!

Just remember, while you are heading for home – you are not just moving rocks from one place to another – pain without purpose; effort and struggle without meaning – you are building a life which is nothing less than a monument of faith in the provision of Christ now and the visible presence of Christ to come.

So, keep singing the lyrics of your own personal faith in Christ. There is a Redeemer – who is alive – and He is mine – and I will see Him one day with my own eyes as He reigns triumphantly in glory.

These are the lyrics to the magnum opus of our own faith in our Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/17/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Knute Larson, Holman New Testament Commentary: 1 Thessalonians (Holman, 2000), p. 51.

ⁱⁱ Steven Lawson, Holman New Testament Commentary: Job (Holman, 2004), p. 122.

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren Wiersbe, Job: Be Patient (Victor Books), 1991), p. 68.

^{iv} Edited from several internet sites on George Handel/History of the Messiah.

^v Charles Haddon Spurgeon, ed. by Kerry James Allen in The Suffering of Man and the Sovereignty of God (Fox River Press, 2001), p. 161.

^{vi} Ibid., p. 162.

^{vii} Steven Lawson, Job: When All Hell Breaks Loose (NavPress, 1993), p. 149.

^{viii} Elisabeth Elliot, The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter (Sept/Oct 1988), quoted by James Dobson in When God Doesn’t Make Sense (Tyndale House, 1993), p. 106.