

A Friend in Heaven

Job 16

Intro: In 1901, Frank Graeff, a pastor, was experiencing deep depression and physical pain. And the question that haunted him was this: "Does Jesus care"? This is what he wrote:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, and the cares distress, And the way grows weary and long?
Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does He care enough to be near?
Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief there is no relief, though my tears flow all the night long?
Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye" to the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks— Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

One of the most crucial things for a Christian to know is that the God who rules in heaven, cares for us. This is the stunning discovery Job makes in chapter 16. Job comes to a wonderful conviction that he has a Friend in Heaven, an Intercessor who would take up his cause and restore him to God.

I. A Rebuke

I won't spend a lot of time here since we've already heard Job's protests concerning the 'counsel' of his friends. He makes it very clear what he thinks of them and their words.

"You are miserable comforters, all of you."

They had utterly, absolutely and unequivocally failed at their mission. They had come to comfort Job – and had ended up becoming his fiercest accusers, angrily charging him of grievous sin. Their simplistic, legalistic understanding of God and His ways became a weapon which they used to bludgeon their devastated and dying friend.

Notice Job's response.

*⁴ I also could speak like you, if you were in my place;
I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you.*

Job knows exactly what they are saying. He's heard it all before. He knows their speeches because he had once given them. But he now realizes that the System is bankrupt and comfortless. The idea that God robotically rewards and punishes in this life purely on the basis of moral behavior is a vast miscalculation of the deep mystery of Gods' sovereign purposes and a wretched wounding of those who suffer for reasons

known only to God. His friends are miserable comforters because they've failed to care for him – they are more concerned with preserving their framework than in helping Job.

II. A Lament (6-17)

Job once again turns to God to express his great misery and grief. These are some of the most poignant and painful words in the Bible as Job describes his anguish.

⁶ *"If I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away.*

The pain is relentless. No matter what he does – he can't escape the excruciating agony of his body and soul. And God doesn't let up.

⁷ *Surely, God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household.*

Job speaks as a beaten man. God has crushed him completely, devastated his entire household.

I have children and 12 grandchildren. It is stunning to think of losing them all in a single moment. How do you possibly live with that kind of excruciating grief?

But the deepest agony of this whole ordeal is that God has done this to him.

⁹ God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me;
my opponent (God) fastens on me his piercing eyes.

¹⁰ People open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn
and unite together against me.

¹¹ God has turned me over to the ungodly
and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.

¹² All was well with me, but he shattered me;
he seized me by the neck and crushed me.
He has made me his target; ¹³ his archers surround me.

Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground.

The emotional pain of losing his family was excruciating, but the spiritual anguish of losing his God is even worse. He is being assaulted and terrorized by the God he once worshiped and adored. God was once his life - but now God is his death.

Now, this is where many commentators make a tragic mistake. They say that Job is blaming the wrong person. I listened to a sermon by a very well-known and dearly loved Reformed pastor and theologian who said, "Job you're wrong. God didn't do these things to you. Satan did them! God had nothing whatsoever to do with it."

Well, I don't know how you can possibly say God had nothing to do with this! Of course, Satan is involved - but it was God who called Job to Satan's attention and it was God

who gave Job into Satan's hand. Job himself immediately and accurately recognized God's sovereign hand in his devastation – "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away."

We need to stop trying to get God off the hook when it comes to Job's suffering. To simply say that Satan did it, is just as comfortless as the System. If our trials are not from God's hand but the Devil's, well what comfort is that? And who is running this Universe anyway? Does God ordain whatsoever comes to pass – or doesn't He? To deny that God has done these things is to ignore the text, refute Job's own believing testimony, rob him of his ultimate comfort and empty this book of its deepest truth.

Yes, God did this to Job. That is precisely the tension of the book. That is the traumatic truth that's meant to grab your attention. And the trauma is compounded. Not only did God do this – He did it to His most beloved servant. And not only that – He did it though **Job was innocent!** That's the incomprehensible mystery of this story! How can this be possible? How can the Infinitely Righteous God of heaven do these awful things to his most **obedient** servant? God Himself testifies that there was no one in all the world more righteous than Job. And yet God did all these things to **him**. God crushed **him** – though Job was blameless.

Job is speaking the truth in vs 16-17.

¹⁶ My face is red with weeping, dark shadows ring my eyes;

¹⁷ though my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure.

Job is not saying that he is sinless – but he is clearly and unequivocally saying that he is innocent! His hands are free from violence and there was no deceit in his mouth – his prayers were pure. There is nothing in his life that can be pointed to as a just cause of his disasters. Job is deeply convinced of his innocence – and he is not wrong.

Ash, "This conscious awareness of his innocence is of enormous importance for the book."

Job has **not** sinned and yet he suffers the judicial wrath of God. How is this not unjust? To every external appearance – God is treating Job unfairly.

Before we blame Job for charging God with wrong – let's acknowledge that, to all appearances God is wrong. God is free to do all that he pleases – but, being a God of infinite justice, he is not free to condemn the innocent. This seems demonstrably wrong.

And so, Job, sensing he is about to die an unjust death at the hand of God, calls out to the earth to bear witness. (v18)

¹⁸ "Earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest!

Job had almost certainly heard the story of Cain murdering Abel. Boys and girls, do you remember what God said to Cain after he murdered his brother?

Genesis 4:10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Shed blood has a voice. Shed blood speaks. It cries out, from the stained soil to the ear of God. Shed blood cries for justice. And God will hear. This is Job's conviction as he calls out to earth – "don't cover my blood." Let the voice of my blood continually cry out. To whom? To God!

Do you see how Job, even in the worst moment, in the deepest depth of his suffering, can't help but turn to God! His laments are born of his faith. He can't help but turn to God – where else can he go? And as he turns to God, he discovers a new conviction.

III. A Conviction

¹⁹ *Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high.*

Job discovers within his broken heart a believing conviction that "in heaven", in other words, in the very presence of God, there is an Advocate, someone who will intercede for him and argue his case. He uses the personal possessive pronoun. This is not "a" witness but "MY" witness. No an advocate but his very own advocate!

It's a stunning discovery! The Spirit of God surely must have revealed this to him. Job had been living in the darkness of his grief and the despair of sensing God's anger. His earthly friends were of no help at all. But faith moved him to look up – and suddenly a light came piercing through the darkness. His life wasn't defined or determined by what he could see on earth – but by what he now sees in heaven. He has a Witness on high!

Job's grieving soul embraces two precious truths concerning this Heavenly Intercessor.

1) His Intercessor Cares for him in his grief.

²⁰ *My intercessor is my Friend as my eyes pour out tears to God"*

The first and foremost thing Job lays hold of is that his Intercessor cares for him, loves him, is bound to him as a dear, devoted and faithful friend. His Intercessor cares for him as his eyes pour out tears to God. What a precious, comforting thought.

C.S. Lewis, in his book "The Problem of Pain" writes,

“When pain is to be born, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.”

2) His Intercessor Acts on his behalf before God.

²¹ *on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend.*

The word “plead” doesn’t mean to “beg” but to testify, to advocate, to argue a case. His Advocate stands in the presence of God and, *as Job’s friend*, argues Job’s case before God. And Job is absolutely convinced his Advocate would win his acquittal. Why? Because Job was convinced of two things: God was ultimately just – and Job was innocent. His Advocate would not plead for mercy but for justice!! This is Job’s conviction. And in this Spirit-born conviction God displays the gospel.

IV. The Gospel

Job’s confession in verse 19 is one of the most stunning gospel texts in the entire Old Testament.

“Even now, my Advocate is my friend. On behalf of a man He pleads with God as one pleads for a friend.”

This is precisely the confidence of the New Testament believer – that we have an Intercessor in heaven – A Friend who loves us is standing even now, in heaven, to argue our case and win our acquittal before the judgement throne of God. (Rom 8:33-34)

Romans 8:33-34 “Who is able to lay any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—*is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*”

This is the gospel! And what amazes me is how Job’s experiences point with such perfect clarity to the suffering of Christ. Listen to Job’s words again as they prophetically point to the experience of Jesus.

¹⁰ People open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn
and unite together against me.

¹¹ God has turned me over to the ungodly
and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.

This is what happened to Job – and it is precisely what happened to Jesus! God turned Jesus over to the ungodly – to wicked Ananias and godless Pilate and the soldiers and they struck his cheek with scorn.

Mark 15:17–20 “They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Job’s testimony in verse 12 is precisely fulfilled in the experience of Christ.

¹² All was well with me, but he (God) shattered me;
he seized me by the neck and crushed me.

Who shattered Jesus? Who crushed Him? God did.

Isaiah 53:9–10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; though he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

God crushed Jesus – though he had done no violence, exactly what Job had said about himself. God crushed His perfect, sinless, spotless Son. Without pity, God pierced his kidney and spilled his gall on the ground. The soldiers took a spear and pierced his side and blood and water spilled to the ground.

All this happened literally and truly to Jesus, the very Son of God – though he had done nothing wrong. Never, in all the history of this world, did God seem more unjust than in the crushing of His own perfectly sinless Son. And yet – it was not unjust at all. Jesus was crushed bearing our iniquity. His blood was shed for our sin.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

And this is our hope. Jesus’ blood was shed, spilled out on to the ground. And shed blood cries out for justice. The wonder of the gospel is that, having nailed the law and its record of debt that stood against to the cross, Jesus our Advocate now stands in heaven to plead our cause. And he doesn’t plead for mercy but for justice.

We said that Job’s confidence in his ultimate acquittal was rooted in his conviction concerning his innocence. And the wonder of the gospel is that we can say the same. What Jesus accomplished on the cross – bearing your sin – was the removal of your guilt. The suffering and death of Christ has washed away the stain of your sin and robed you in the righteousness of Christ. It’s what the cross **accomplished** for all those who belong to him. So when God justifies you – when God declares you righteous, it isn’t an act of mercy but an act of justice. God declares you righteous, because in Christ, and because of Christ, you are.

Jesus didn't die to get you off the hook of divine justice. Jesus died to receive the hook of divine justice in your place. He died your death and then rose for your justification. And He now stands, as sovereign Lord of all – to prepare you for all the glory he has prepared for you.

The reality of our life isn't bound up or limited to what we see and experience. It isn't constricted by our circumstances. It isn't defined by our weakness or failures or loss. Our life is ultimately defined and directed and destined by this one fact – we have a Friend in heaven who gave his life for us!

“I do not know or understand, what God has willed, what God has planned.
I only know on his right hand, stands One who is my Savior.”

Our Friend is bound to us with chords of everlasting, unbreakable love. And he sits at the Right Hand of God, even now, with all dominion and all power and all authority to care for us. His friendship is not merely a matter of empathy but of agency! Our story isn't primarily told in the events and circumstances of our experience – but in the love and grace and power and truth of His intercession. Let that truth sink into the reality of your life. You have a Friend in heaven. You just have to look there.

Frank Graeff's life was filled with sadness and pain. The question that haunted him was about God – does he care? Does he see? And then he turned to 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you.”

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.

Your **Savior** cares - the One who died for you, the One who has reconciled you to God, justified you by his own righteousness and given you His Spirit to lead you safely home – cast all your cares on Him. You have a Friend in heaven.