

The Righteousness of Job

By Brian Coatney

Job's suffering grew so intense that even the "trash" of society derided him (30:1-11). These scorners could not even have gotten a job with the pack of dogs that ran with Job's flocks, since they fled society to live as wild men in the wastelands, feeding on roots and braying like animals. Not only did Job's friends torment him with reproof, but outcasts from society made him the subject of mocking songs.

Job follows this lament with an elegant summary of his purity and charity; what man would not blush in shame at the testimony of one so detached from sexual lust and pouring forth the charity of a Mother Theresa? At the end of chapter 31, the text says; "the words of Job are ended" and perhaps heaven sat relieved.

The three friends also refrained from further sermonizing to Job, "because he was righteous in his own eyes" (32:1). Who can penetrate through one who is right, or conversely, one that can never endure admission of wrong?

Into this context steps Elihu, a younger man, but kindled and wrathful toward Job. His words deserve study because God never reproves him as he does the three tormentors. Elihu sets forth this thesis: Job justifies himself rather than God (32:2). By appearance,

the tormentors say the same thing, but they miss what Elihu sees. Elihu offers a reproof that says, "My terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee" (33:7).

Elihu repeats Job's summation that he stands innocent and without iniquity (33:9), and then Elihu brings up God's ways of dealing with what the Greeks would later call "hubris," meaning pride or a fatal flaw. Elihu sees that Job walks in danger of imminent tragedy if unchecked: Job risks letting his pride lead him into the pride that caused Lucifer to fall and become Satan, meaning God's adversary.

With diamond point clarity, Elihu warns, "What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water?" (34:7). Then Elihu already sees Job as walking with the wicked, because Elihu sees the road Job has embarked on, regardless of prior righteousness. When setting out on the road called pride, floods of sin must follow. Job's assertion, "It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God" (34:9) bursts headlong into enemy territory.

Elihu then argues forcefully for the justice of God that Job himself would have previously argued for until his affliction. Since Job has put God on trial, Elihu says of Job, "he addeth rebellion unto his sin" (34:37).

Job does not yet realize that his case against God only hurts himself, or as Norman Grubb continually said, "The wrath is in man." Job's pride and vanity only threaten to destroy himself.

Thankfully, Elihu, as God's spokesman, intends redemption and not final judgment: "and if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded (...) that they return from iniquity" (36:9,10). God will provide a "ransom" (atonement) (33:24).

Elihu concludes by preparing the way for God's word to enter; Elihu begins to praise the majesty of God in His creation and His incomprehensible works in Nature. Thankfully, Job does not argue with Elihu or with the whirlwind of God's voice that breaks in; he softens and repents in dust and ashes.

Job's story foreshadows the Gospel era, for "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom.3:11). But Job's redeemer does live and ours as well. Some of us have fallen into the pigsty of sin and know our mud-caked past or occasional present slip into the slop. We also, know, however, the scriptural meaning behind Norman's comforting, "Quick sin, quick cleanse, quick out, quick in." He always warned against the second sin, the sin of wallowing in condemnation.

Job does not do this; he takes the cauterizing flame of God's word and rises in Christ.

Lastly, Job's suffering foreshadows Christ's intercession through us for those that turn loose the self-justifying self, the God-accusing self, and also the self that blames others, echoing the cry, "She gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12).

Now instead of an endless wheel of self-justification and blame of God and others, we say, "God, how are you using my sufferings to 'fill up that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church'" (Col. 1:24)? This means both the church now formed and the church that will be birthed out of our present intercessions.

Job just didn't hear for a long time God's word, "In the end Job, this isn't about you." Neither did I.

But homecoming is sweet!