

Job cries out to God in the darkness of his despair



Michael Olmsted

A church member asked, “Why do you preachers preach on those terrible Bible stories about suffering and death? We get enough of that stuff every day in the news.”

The simple answer is that we live in a flawed world where hope can be smothered by the darkness unless we can learn to see God present and loving through everything. Job is not a Hallmark movie. Job is real. Job is us! But we know who the Redeemer is that Job believes will appear.

This week we look at two texts — Job’s utter despair (2:11-3:10) and Job’s discovery of hope (19:23-27a).

As you read about Job’s three friends, remember what it is like to try to comfort a friend who has lost a child, gone through a painful divorce or received a diagnosis of terminal cancer.

Job’s friends did not recognize him he was so broken. They went through the rituals of mourning — weeping, tearing their clothing and casting dust on their heads. They sat in silence seven days and nights (2:11-13).

When Job spoke, it is like a tornadic wind of darkness, savage and unrelenting. Twelve times Job wishes he were dead or had never been born (3:1-10).

In the movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” George wishes he had never been born and the angel Clarence gets heaven’s permission to grant the wish. The consequences bring tragedy. Since we cannot know the ultimate consequences of our wishes and we do not have the power or wisdom to solve the problems of this world, we can begin to understand what it means to trust God.

Job’s neat little world of faith as God’s rewards for good behavior

and punishment for bad is blown apart. Judging by the opening scene’s conversation between God and the Adversary, there was no man on earth like Job in God’s eyes and the Adversary saw a challenge (1:8).

The man who is God’s shining example and the man sitting in the ashes of his former world are one and the same.

What is the “same”? Job believes in God. His suffering is overwhelming. All he can see is darkness. Yet, he cries out to God. Job is not alone among the Old Testament saints who rage against God because of suffering and injustice. (See Habakkuk 1:2-3, 13 and Jeremiah 17:17-18; 20:14-18.) Later chapters have Job seeing God as his enemy and the cause of his suffering (13:24; 16:9; 19:11; 33:10).

Job disassembles our bland idea that faith is a serene, calm, undisturbed bubble out of which we peer at the troubled world. We live in this troubled world and without God we would never survive! Job would not be hurling his agony and fear at God if he did not believe in God. A wounded soul cries out to God because it knows God is there.

Never forget that God loves you no matter your brokenness and flaws. Jesus did not go to the cross for the “good” people but for everyone. At the darkest hour on the cross, Jesus cried out “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” in loneliness and longing (Mark 15:34).

In the absence of faith, there is silence. In the presence of faith, there is a cry for God. Job had not lost his faith. He was desperate for understanding and to know God was with him in his suffering.

It seems there is no possibility of resolution for Job, no restoration for this broken soul. Job believed God had “uprooted (his) hope like a tree” (19:10, Common English Bible). But then something wonderful happened, as though the darkness

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Scripture: Job 2:11-3:10; 19:23-27a

was torn apart for a moment and hope appeared.

“But I know that my redeemer is alive and afterward he’ll rise upon the dust. After my skin has been torn apart this way — then from my flesh I’ll see God, whom I’ll see myself — my eyes see, and not a strangers,” Job said (19:25-27, CEB).

No name or detail is given. No clever theological statement is offered. No popular religious ideas or traditional answers are quoted.

Did Job finally exhaust his anger and let go of all the usual religious answers to finally see that hope can only be found in the God who will not be defined or described by our ideas?

Of all biblical characters, both admirable and questionable, Job is the one in whom I most see myself. We all do well to ask ourselves some serious questions: Can I be as honest with God as Job was? Do I believe I can get away with nice little prayers when my heart is suffering, angry or bitter? Do I really believe God knows me and loves me?

When God offered Job as an example of faith before the “heavenly council,” did God understand how cruel and unjust life can be? God knows all. God knew the risk of creation. God knows the dilemmas of life and faith. God is just, powerful, loving and gracious.

We will never know all God knows and we will never have all the answers. But when the darkness seems endless we can know that “our redeemer is alive” and we will “see God.” Struggle is facing reality, crying against the darkness and finally finding God.

Retired after 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.