

Choosing Hope in Suffering

DAVE BAST

George Frederic Handel's world-renowned oratorio, *The Messiah*, tells in music the story of Jesus, the Messiah, beginning with his birth, then his suffering and death; and finally, his resurrection; but remarkably, it does this using almost exclusively quotations from the Old Testament. So, how do you sing about Christ's resurrection from the Old Testament? You turn to the book of Job and write a beautiful aria on the text: I know that my redeemer liveth. That is right; Job said that, even while enduring great suffering, and we will look at it today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and today we have come to the fourth of five programs looking at the book of Job. One of the things we try to do on *Groundwork* is dig into all different parts of scripture...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And Job is not only part of the Old Testament, it is what is called the wisdom literature. It is the familiar story of an innocent man—a righteous man—who suffers great loss, and it is all about the problem of evil. Why do bad things happen to good people? So, we have been trying to answer that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and by the way, you pointed this out, and I don't think we have mentioned this in the first three programs of this series, Dave, but it is interesting; we did talk a little bit in the first program about how do we take Job? Are we supposed to read this as literal? It takes place in a land...nobody knows where it was...

DAVE BAST

Uz.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; no timeframe is specified, so how do we read this? It is interesting that traditionally as Jewish scholars took their scriptures, the Tenakh, they did not put Job in with the historical books, like Kings and Samuel; they put it in the wisdom literature, so it is up there with Proverbs and Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. So, this is not a historical book in Jewish bibles, it is wisdom literature; and wisdom is designed to help us find our way through life; and in this case, through suffering...

DAVE BAST

Through life's sufferings and those agonizing questions that come; and I think most scholars believe it was written quite late, too, in the course of the composition of the Old Testament; but anyway, we have gone through the story and we have kind of recapped several times: These three friends come to commiserate with

Job, to seek to comfort him. Job actually ends up sort of dismissing them as miserable comforters because instead of comforting him, they end up getting madder and madder when Job does not fit into their preconceived notion of what God is up to in his life. Finally, at the end they are kind of hurling accusations at him and they are calling him a terrible sinner and railing on him for his wickedness; and the whole thing sort of explodes and ends in disaster.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that sets us up for the end of the book, when God is finally going to speak; and that will be our next program, and the final program in this series. For this program...and we realize we are going a little out of sequence here, but that is just because thematically Job jumps around a little bit...we are going to kind of go back to the early to middle part of Job to hear a couple of things Job says, which we have not looked at so far. There is a lot of dialogue in this book; a lot of back and forth. We have only scratched the surface in this series, Dave, but he does say a few other things that we want to look at; all the while, defending his own integrity and righteousness, and rejecting their arguments.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and some of the things he says in the book are much loved and have been statements of faith that are filled with comfort for believers. Believers for millennia have turned to a few of the things that Job says in this book; especially as they are translated in the King James Version of the Bible, and we are going to talk about that in the next segment a little bit; and sometimes that can be a bit problematic; but you know, the whole story begins, let's just remember, by affirming that Job is a righteous person; and God himself confirms that. The narrator...the writer...who is actually very brilliant in the way he tells the story, says in the very first verse that there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright, or righteous. He feared God and shunned evil. We ought to step back just for a moment and remember what righteous means in the context of the Bible, in particular, the Old Testament. It does not just mean it is someone who does right things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; to be righteous is also to be in a right relationship with God—to be justified. To be righteous means you line up with God, and that there is some...not perfect for any fallen human being...it is never perfect...but there is some significant accord with God's holiness and God's righteousness and God's goodness; and your own righteousness, holiness, and goodness. As you said, Dave, in the opening scene, where God and Satan speak in the heavenly throne room, God affirms: Have you considered Job? There are really not too many people as righteous as that one. So, Job is a good person; we know this. We know as readers all along that the friends are incorrect to say: Ah, you must be bad. You must be unrighteous after all. You look good, but maybe not. Look what happened to you; therefore.... So, no; Job won't have any of it; and through it all, though, he affirms his radical trust in God, and that is important, but we often hear the phrase: The patience of Job...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which makes us think sort of about some stiff upper lip...you know, he just endured it...he just took it...he was serene. If somebody asks how he was doing he would say: I'm fine...I'm just fine, thank you.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes we get that answer from people. They have a terrible tragedy in their life, and you say: How are you doing? I am fine—I'm just fine; God is good all the time; I'm just fine...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not Job. If that is what we define as the patience of Job, Job is not patient in that sense.

DAVE BAST

He does not just sit there and take it; he complains; he screams; he wails; he cries; he sits there in abject misery. He is sometimes even suicidal. He is sarcastic; he is angry. You know, he lashes out at his friends; he mocks what they are saying because it is not true; and he is not shy about letting the world know how he feels. So, yes, Job is a believer. He trusts in God. That is at the heart of his righteousness. You know, the Old Testament says famously in Habakkuk: The righteous will live by faith; and that is Job. He is living by faith; and by his enduring faith. He will not give up on God. So, when his wife says to him: Why don't you just turn God off. Just curse him. Just tell him what you think of him. Just say: Maybe you are not even real, God; or you are a monster; you are mistreating me. Job refuses to do that. He will not give up on God; but that does not mean he is this sort of passive...mild...meek...you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Stoic.

DAVE BAST

Yes, if you are a person of faith you must never, ever, you know, complain to God or accuse him...not at all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; and in that sense, if we do want to talk about the patience of Job, then it would be patience in the sense of the fruit of the Spirit, which we did a series on *Groundwork* a while back: The fruit of the Spirit of faithfulness, or sort of *makrothumia*, which literally means longsuffering in the Bible. So, if Job is patient, he is patient in the sense of being faithful, being longsuffering, but not...

DAVE BAST

Enduring...endurance, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Enduring...but not along the way...not being afraid of asking God some hard questions; and it becomes very clear in the book of Job as it goes on that Job gets sick of talking to his friends very quickly...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He wants to have it out with God.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He wants to talk to God...get God in the dock, as they used to say...God in the witness stand in a courtroom. Job wants to interrogate God; and so, he is going to move that; and of course, ultimately we are going to hear from God before the book is done. It will go quite differently than Job expects; but that is what Job wants; and so, as he talks about that, we will hear what he says and how he frames it all up, and we will look at that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and today we are in the book of Job still. We are in the fourth program in a five-part series that is looking at this famous Bible character...this great story that has entered the canon of the world's great literature, really, because it struggles with the deepest questions that plague us. The questions of why, of suffering, of what is God up to? Is there even a God, in the midst of a world, and sometimes my own life, that appears so chaotic...so senseless...and so, Job helps us to wrestle with these questions; and he is going to help us to answer them, too, I think.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said earlier that we talked about Handel's *Messiah*, and the beautiful, famous aria: I know that my redeemer liveth; and we are going to want to talk about that because that is, as all of Handel's oratorio is, based on the King James Version of the Bible, which is a very old translation now; and it can lead to some interesting tensions today—we will be looking at that—but we also want to think about this really important verse from Job 13 because this is part of the background of all of that. In the King James Version of the Bible that many of us do know well, Job says:

13:15 Though he (God) slay me, yet will I trust him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him. 16 He also shall be my salvation, for an hypocrite shall not come before him.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and you know, that is one of those verses that believers have found to be full of comfort, and to express their own feelings. I mean, it seems as though Job is saying no matter what happens, no matter what God does, even if he kills me, I am going to go on trusting in him; I am going to endure in my faith in him; and I believe he is my salvation. But that is, as you said, Scott, from the King James Bible, and one of the problems that has caused some people, I think, to shy away from newer versions of the Bible is they will be reading along and they will come to one of their favorite verses and suddenly they will find it isn't there or it is translated in a different way; and the truth is that Bible translations have improved over the years. As beautiful as the King James Bible is, more teams of scholars with more access to manuscripts and all the rest...we won't get into the details, but...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Dead Sea scrolls alone taught us a lot.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but often modern versions will translate things in a slightly different way; so, the New International Version is a new version that many people use in church or for their own personal reading, and this is how it translates that same passage:

13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him (and actually, it says it could more properly be translated): He will surely slay me; I have no hope. Yet I will defend my ways to his face. 16 Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless person would dare come before him.

And we said a moment ago that what Job really wants is to have it out with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He wants to see him face to face. He wants to be able to put his case to him and say to him: God, why? You know, maybe we have all felt that way at certain times. We would love to be able to look God in the eye and say to him: Why? Why did this happen? Why did you do this? Can you explain this to me? And that is exactly what Job wants, and he says in effect, even if it kills me, I am still going to insist that I meet with him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; or even if you kill me, you are not going to get off the hook. The one thing we know from the setup of Job...what we readers know...is that God gave Satan permission to do anything except take Job's life. So God is not letting Job be killed; but Job is saying: If you do, we still have to talk...I still want to talk to you. In fact, listen to these words, too, from that same speech in Chapter 13. Job is kind of laying out some ground rules here:

²⁰Only grant me these two things, God, and then I will not hide from you: ²¹Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors. ²²Then summon me and I will answer; or let me speak and you reply to me. ²³How many wrong sins have I committed? Show me my offence and my sin. ²⁴Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?

So, here Job is sort of saying, it seems like...and again, Job does not know all that is going on behind the scenes any more than his friends do...but it seems like Job is saying: I am pretty sure something went wrong here. Some justice got derailed; the train jumped the tracks. Can we talk about that? I've got some questions.

DAVE BAST

Right, but before we do, in order to have a fair conversation, he says to God, just promise that you won't hurt me, you know, or you won't frighten me too much, because I know I am a puny little human being, you are the God of gods and Lord of lords, and if you wanted to, you could frighten me so badly that I wouldn't even be able to...you know, my tongue would cling to the roof of my mouth. So, he says: God, let me speak and then let's have it out; and eventually, as I think we mentioned, they do have it out. God does meet face to face with Job, as it were; and it is a very interesting encounter. We will save that for the next program; but, in the meantime, here we come, I think, to also one of the key elements in the book of Job that explains a lot of what is going on in Job's own speeches and in his own mind; and that is the issue of perspective, because Job, like another book in the wisdom literature...Ecclesiastes...Job is usually thinking about his life only in terms of this life on earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we have talked about that before on *Groundwork*. We have talked about heaven and hell and different perspectives on that. We tend to read backwards into the Bible our view of heaven and hell from a New Testament perspective, and we just sort of assume, well, Abraham and David and Job and Moses all thought that way, but they didn't. There is an ever-changing...with ever greater clarity, characters in the Bible get a better understanding of heaven and hell; but in the Old Testament perspective, there was this thing called *Sheol*, which was sort of the realm of the dead, where everybody, good, bad and otherwise, went after they died, and they weren't at all sure that there was anything beyond Sheol; and you would even read that in the Psalms: God, do not let my enemies kill me because if I go to Sheol I cannot praise you anymore...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sheol is sort of this dark, dank holding tank, and nobody was quite sure if there was hope beyond that. Job is arguing from that perspective. I might die like a worm, he says, and then what? Dust will cover me, and is that the end? And Job is wrestling with...now that he is in extremis and is closer to death than he has ever been, he is wondering is there more? We will close the program in a minute talking about a little insight he had...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that...we have to remember that Old Testament perspective.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; so, if you don't...just think about this for a minute: If this life in this world is all there is, the problem of evil and of innocent suffering becomes insoluble, because...

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is all there is.

DAVE BAST

This is all there is; and as we pointed out, sometimes the wicked people don't get theirs before the end. They live to be old and full of years; and Job articulates this in some of his other speeches; and sometimes poor people suffer their whole life long and then they die; and in the end, everybody is dead, and what difference does it make? You simply have no solution to this issue if this world is all there is; and that is a big part of the problem with Job. He is not sure...if we just maintain that perspective...if a man die, he says famously, if mortals die, will they live again? That is from Chapter 14. That is the question. It seems as though this life is all there is, and when we are dead, we are dead and that is an end of it; and so, Job even suggests to God: Why don't you just look away from us? Just leave us alone. But then, there is this other possibility: What if there is more? What if there is a life to come; and that could change everything, as we will see.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in the fourth program in our five-part series on Job; and we just were saying, Dave, that weaving all through Job's words in the middle section of this book are these intimations of death, that he might die soon; and again, we were just saying, from an Old Testament perspective, there was the worry that that is it. You die and that is it. There is no future; there is no chance to praise God again; maybe that is it! And yet, we have talked about that beautiful aria from *The Messiah*, and it is based on this verse from Job 19, from the King James Version:

²⁵For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; ²⁶and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

DAVE BAST

And yes, Job actually said that. That is one of those that don't get translated away. Here is a bit more of that passage from Job 19, in one of the modern translations:

²³Oh, that my words were written down; oh, that they were inscribed in a book! ²⁴Oh, that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever. (In other words, what I am about to say, I want it to be permanent. I don't want it to just float away in the air. I want there to be an indestructible record of what I am about to say, and this is it):

²⁵For I know that my redeemer lives; and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; ²⁶and after my skin has been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

That is just an amazing...it is like a ray of sunshine breaking through the clouds suddenly and lighting up everything...the whole landscape. That is an amazing little piece of hope, a bit of the Gospel that comes, almost miraculously, into this life of suffering old Job.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as we said, most of Job, like most of the Old Testament, wrestles with this idea of Sheol as sort of the common realm of the dead, and there maybe is nothing beyond Sheol; but there are a few passages...maybe in Daniel and Ezekiel...there are a few passages here and there, tucked into the Old Testament...

DAVE BAST

Often from books that are later, which is one reason maybe why Job maybe was written a little bit later.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you get kind of a sketchy, veiled preview of what will come to full fruition, and the picture of the afterlife that will finally come into nice, sharp focus after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and that is where we now as believers in God through Christ Jesus the Lord gain our perspectives on the afterlife. So, this is not a full-blown...and Job was almost surely saying more than he knew here, right?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the author of Job, who wrote this down, was saying more than he knew; but we certainly are getting a preview of the idea of the resurrection of the body—our bodies; that this flesh will decay, but there will be...there is more than a hint here...there will be a new flesh, and I will see and praise God in that new flesh, and that would be our affirmation of the resurrection from the dead of us all, of which Jesus was the firstfruit...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was the first one, and we will follow.

DAVE BAST

And Job also mentions his redeemer, who lives. Redeemer: that is a great and important concept in the Old Testament. We did a series on *Groundwork* about the book of Ruth, and that is one of the key ideas that emerges from Ruth, this idea of a kinsman who is also a redeemer...the one who delivers you from slavery, who pays your debts for you; and again, looking at it post-cross and post-resurrection, we can read back into that term so much more than Job would have known or understood. He could not quite guess how this was going to happen, that he would live again. He could not begin to imagine who that redeemer would be, but with the wonderful knowledge that we have, we can kind of sing Job's words along with him and after him with an even deeper meaning.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is great about this...Job...the book of Job has 42 chapters, and this comes almost at Chapter 20, so this is almost at the dead center of this book; and there, right in the middle of this book...in the middle of massive suffering, big theological arguments and lots of wrangling with Job and his friends...in the middle of all that, as you said, Dave, like a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day comes this startling testimony and confession of Job, which is so startling, and for a man of his time, so out of time...it almost also counts as a prophecy, you know, that there is going to be, in a way we cannot conceive of...Job is not thinking about: Oh well, the Son of God will become a human being and then he will...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, no, no; let's not give him too much credit, but the Spirit gives him enough insight to say: This is the trajectory...this is the arc of where things are going to go with God and with his image bearers.

DAVE BAST

And this is ultimately, too, I think, the answer...the final answer to the problem of suffering and the question of why. This life is not all there is, and there will come a time, as the Apostle Paul will say: We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. There is a final judgment, a final sorting out. Those wicked people who died, you know, sleek and fat and their animals all were reproducing, as Job says...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And their children were spreading out, like Don Corleone and his garden, they died happy ends to terrible, wicked lives. Well, that is not the end, really. There is something beyond that when God will address all the evil that has been done in the world, and he will bring the secrets to light, and there will be no more anonymous victims, you know, who disappeared into the gulag or something...nobody ever... So, that is all coming, and that too is implied by the resurrection. In that day, we look for mercy through Christ for our sins, but we also look for righteousness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as the New Testament says: Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God; and when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. That is the distillation in the New Testament of everything that Job ever could have hoped for; and it is everything that any of us could have hoped for, that our life is hidden in Christ, and he is coming back.

DAVE BAST

Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study how God answers Job in Job 38 to 42, and unpack God's response to our quest to understand why bad things happen to good people. Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you; or give us some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

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