

## Sermon: My Redeemer Lives

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, Oct 13, 2024)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Words of Job, in chapter 19, verse 25-26 (from the King James Version of the Bible).

I doubt when Job uttered those words, that he had the foresight in knowing how they would lead to a Messianic interpretation of the text, and how they would one day become inspiration to hymn writers and composers, that these words would be treasured, sung, appreciated and remembered.

To us Christians, the Messianic reading of this text points to Jesus Christ. We see this, no, more like hear this, in G.F. Handel’s Messiah, Part III, track 45, as sung beautifully today, by Katie, our vocalist. The lyrics of this piece is straight forward enough: “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Mirroring verse 25-26 of Job 19, but yet adding a third part, “For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep”.

Christ Jesus lives, he is the redeemer that Job inadvertently points to, and he is resurrected from the dead, and he shall be the one who brings the faithful out of the grave, into life-everlasting. However, before we get too far ahead of ourselves, we need to retrace our steps back to Job, back to the context by which he uttered those words.

As I preached last week, Job was righteous and blameless. Unwittingly, he became a pawn of a bet between God and the Accuser (that is Satan). Was Job’s faithfulness a mere product of God’s bountiful blessings? Should those blessings be taken away, would Job curse God to the divine face? So the Accuser was given permission, by God, to have their way with Job. His material wealth vanished, his children perished, and his health was no more. His wife told him to give up, to curse God and die, but Job did not sin with words. He lamented but he persisted in his faith.

At the tail end of chapter 2, joining the lament came three friends of Job: Eliphaz, Bided and Zophar. They were by any definition, good friends. Even when all others had abandoned Job, had shunned him, these three friends of Job came to be with him. For seven days they spoke no words, and simply lamented in silence.

However, starting from chapter 3 and all the way to chapter 31, Job proceeded to engage in a protracted theological dialogue with the three friends, all in poetic form. Back and forth they went at each other, earching for an answer to Job's suffering.

At first, the three friends of Job were gentle—prodding Job to reflect that perhaps he had inadvertently sinned against God without knowing. When Job persisted in maintaining his innocence, their attacks became pointed and vicious—that Job had indeed offended God, had committed unspeakable sins that only God knows, and is being punished justly by the just God, and that even his unrepentant heart, his persistence to maintain his innocence is a sin by itself—the sin of pride. For the three friends argued that no one righteous would ever be punished by God in such a way.

From a doctrinal stance, the three friends are probably closer to the Deuteronomistic theology, which believes that obedience and faithfulness bring success, and disobedience and unfaithfulness bring failure. In the Hebrew Bible, or what we call the Old Testament, that line of thinking is well attested and accepted. Nevertheless, Job begs to differ, that righteousness doesn't always result in wealth, and God doesn't always punish those who are wicked.

It is helpful to differentiate between what Job knows and what he desires. Job knows or believes that his own innocence is known to God but unacknowledged by God. Although he is innocent of any wrong for which he could be suffering, he could have no hope of vindication from God. We see that in multiple passages in these chapters. Job knows or believes that God is against him, is his enemy. Job knows or believes that he will never see good, that he will soon be dead, that his death will be akin to murder.

What Job *desires*, on the other hand, once he overcome that initial desire to be put to death right away, is to enter into a dispute with God, with the hope of wrestling vindication from God, before his ultimate death.

But how does one enter into, in a legal sense, a disputation with God, when God is also the final judge who is supposed to righteous and just?

How does one plead his innocence before a judge when that same judge is the one who had, seemingly, already pronounced the sentence, and executed the punishments? How does one stand before the judgement throne, when even his three best friends are all against him, and have all pronounced their disapproval and their verdicts?

Job needed help! He knows that he does not stand a chance facing God alone. Now, chapter 19 is not the only place that Job pleaded for outside help. In chapter 9:33, Job alluded to a mediator, like a umpire, who has power over both parties. In chapter 16:19, Job calls for witnesses in heaven and an advocate on high. In chapter 17:3, Job questions who might be able to put up a surety, like posting a bail, on his behalf. But it is in chapter 19, verse 25, we come to Job calling for a redeemer, and affirming that “I know that my redeemer lives”.

This word, redeemer, or *go'el* in Hebrew, is actually a word, a concept with a complicated history. A *go'el*, in its most original form in Leviticus 25, is a person's nearest relative at any particular time, be it a brother, an uncle, cousin, or some other kinsman, who is tasked with the responsibility of buying back family property, so as to keep it in the family inheritance. He is also responsible, should a kinsman ever become enslaved in any way, to buy back that person from slavery.

The role of a *go'el* seems to have expanded, as we see in the Book of Ruth, where Boaz married the widow Ruth out of loving kindness, in order to secure an heir for her dead husband. Its role further expands to avenging the blood of a murdered relative, as we see that in a number of biblical passages in Number 35, Deuteronomy 19, and Joshua 20.

Perhaps the most expansive understanding of *go'el* or redeemer rests in the role that Yahweh, the Lord God, plays in redeeming Israel from Egypt (in Exodus 6), and from the exile (in Isaiah 44), who redeems the needy, the widows, the orphans, as the psalmist proclaims about God in Psalm 103:4, “who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with love and compassion”, and in the invitation of Psalm 107:2, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble.”

It is difficult to fathom that Job was calling on God to be his *go'el*. It is more likely that Job is calling on someone else, whom he has yet met, whom he may not yet know, who can act as his advocate, his vindicator, his mediator, his redeemer. Ultimately, this *go'el's* role is not simply to prove Job's innocence, but help Job to see God, to bring God on his side of this disputation, not on the other.

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

Our meditation on this *go’el*, this redeemer would not be complete, without connecting it to the writer of Hebrews, who wrote in chapter 4, “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”

Yes, we have this *go’el*, this high priest, who is given to us by God. God not only gives us this mediator to redeem or purchase us from the power of sin, God also pays the price, by the blood of Christ. In a real sense, as Jonathan Edwards noted so clearly that “God is both the purchaser and the price; for Christ, who is God, purchased these blessings by offering Himself as the price of our salvation.”

Job envisioned his *go’el* to prove his innocence, to restore his standing before God, to help him see God. Christ Jesus is so much more, so much better. Jesus helps us to bridge that unbridgeable chasm, to bring us to God, to cover up our shame, our guilt, our sinfulness. Though we are not worthy, but with Christ, we stand tall, and are accepted.

I’ve painted this picture before, in other previous sermons. In my most simplistic understanding, this is how I picture that day of final judgement, before the heaven throne, before the full heavenly court, before the Holy God Almighty, the Alpha, the Omega, who was, is, and is to come. Jesus, my best friend, my best buddy, putting his arm around me, walking me heavenwards, telling all others, and especially the Father, pointing to me and says, “He is with me! He is alright!” He is with me, he is alright!

So on the Thanksgiving Sunday, we can boldly proclaim that: We know that our redeemer lives! And in the end we shall see God. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**