

Michael McGowan

Job 19:1-27 – *Holding the Paradox*

Preached at Trinity CRC

March 24, 2019

What happens when you hold two magnets of the same pole together?

They push back against one another.

You have to actively work to keep them together...

This morning we're looking at a paradoxical passage.

Do you know what I mean when I say, "paradox?"

For our sake, let's say that a paradox is when we have 2 ideas—

That when we look at them separately, they contain some truth—

But when we try to hold them together it just doesn't make sense...

It makes our brain hurt when we try to hold them together...

Because they seem contradictory. (see Maren Schmidt, "Holding the Paradox")

Like this: Everything is important. Ultimately nothing matters.

Or: There is only one rule. There are no rules.

We can break down our passage this morning into 2 ideas:

1. Job is suffering and thinks God is punishing him.
2. Job cries out to the God in whom he has faith to help him.

If we hold them separately, which we will do, the statement makes sense:

Job thinks God is punishing him.

And Job cries out to the God in whom he has faith to help him.

But when we hold them together it seems irrational—

Like we get a conflicting picture of God:

Job is crying out to the God in whom he has faith to help him against God who is punishing him. (John Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 295)

There's our paradox...

We're going to look at how Job holds them together...

And how it becomes a model for us.

Let's look at our first set of verses Job 19:1-22.

Then Job replied:

<sup>2</sup>“How long will you torment me  
and crush me with words?

<sup>3</sup>Ten times now you have reproached me;  
shamelessly you attack me.

<sup>4</sup>If it is true that I have gone astray,  
my error remains my concern alone.

<sup>5</sup>If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me  
and use my humiliation against me,

<sup>6</sup>then know that God has wronged me  
and drawn his net around me.

<sup>7</sup>“Though I cry, ‘Violence!’ I get no response;  
though I call for help, there is no justice.

<sup>8</sup>He has blocked my way so I cannot pass;  
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.

<sup>9</sup>He has stripped me of my honor  
and removed the crown from my head.

<sup>10</sup>He tears me down on every side till I am gone;  
he uproots my hope like a tree.

<sup>11</sup>His anger burns against me;  
he counts me among his enemies.

<sup>12</sup>His troops advance in force;  
they build a siege ramp against me  
and encamp around my tent.

<sup>13</sup>“He has alienated my family from me;  
my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.

<sup>14</sup>My relatives have gone away;  
my closest friends have forgotten me.

<sup>15</sup>My guests and my female servants count me a foreigner;  
they look on me as on a stranger.

<sup>16</sup>I summon my servant, but he does not answer,  
though I beg him with my own mouth.

<sup>17</sup>My breath is offensive to my wife;  
I am loathsome to my own family.

- <sup>18</sup> Even the little boys scorn me;  
when I appear, they ridicule me.
- <sup>19</sup> All my intimate friends detest me;  
those I love have turned against me.
- <sup>20</sup> I am nothing but skin and bones;  
I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth.
- <sup>21</sup> “Have pity on me, my friends, have pity,  
for the hand of God has struck me.
- <sup>22</sup> Why do you pursue me as God does?  
Will you never get enough of my flesh?

Here is a man experiencing extreme suffering.

In chapters 1 & 2 we saw Job’s whole life fall apart:

All of his wealth (livestock) is taken away from him;  
His 7 sons and 3 daughters are tragically killed;  
And Job is infected with boils all over his body.

Back in their time, people lived by (what Tom Patton calls) the “principle of retribution.”

It’s this idea that when someone experiences hardship...

It’s because of their own sin.

You lost your job...it’s because you messed up somewhere in life.

So here is Job, sitting on the ground in a pile of ashes—

Devastated by what’s become of his life—

And his friends are saying, “Job, buddy, you must have really messed up.”

“Nobody has something like this happen to them unless they deserve it.”

His friend Bildad even says, “When your kids sinned against God, God gave them what was coming to them.” (8:4)

Could you imagine grieving like Job is, after losing everything in your life—

And then having someone say, “You’re only getting what you deserve. God is always just.”

And his friends just pour it on, chapter after chapter...

Not only do Job’s friends turn their backs on him...

Everyone else does too.

Nobody wants anything to do with Job.

They see him as grotesque and cursed...

As a wicked man who brought this upon himself.

His family is estranged and alienated from him;

His servants no longer honor him as their master;

His wife is turned off by the odor that his diseased body is radiating;

Young children—

Who are supposed to respect and defer to their elders—

They too turn from and despise Job. (PAUSE)

Maybe what's hardest for Job though is the thought that this is being done by God.

Eugene Peterson in the Message Bible translates Job's words like this:

God threw a barricade across my path—  
he turned out all the lights—I'm stuck in the dark.

He destroyed my reputation,  
robbed me of all self-respect.

He tore me apart piece by piece—I'm ruined!  
Then he yanked out hope by the roots.

He's angry with me—oh, how he's angry!  
*He treats me like his worst enemy.*

He has launched a major campaign against me,  
using every weapon he can think of,  
coming at me from all sides at once.

Job is absolutely convinced that the God of the universe has set himself against him.

Because through all of this, Job maintains his innocence.

He cannot think of anything that he's done to deserve any of this...

Remember, Job is an upright and blameless man. (Job 1:1)

He's like a man who pleas for the courts to believe him that he's innocent—

Someone that is wrongly accused and doing time for a crime they didn't commit.

“Look,” he says, “I've done nothing to deserve any of this!”

“I haven't wronged anybody! In fact, God has wronged me.”

“God is punishing me.”

To a certain extent, I think we've all felt like this.

When one thing after another goes wrong in life—

We lose our job, family members get sick, we get sick, car trouble, trouble in our close relationships—

Or when we look at the things happening in the world:

The mosque shootings in New Zealand, a cyclone in Mozambique, people around us living on the streets or growing up with seemingly unfair lives...

It's easy to think, "The world is against me." (do we really mean "God is against me?")

"I've done nothing wrong to deserve this."

This is where Job is at, thinking that God is punishing him...

This is our first statement of Job's paradox:

Job thinks God is punishing him.

From our perspective we know something that Job doesn't know.

We know that God is not actively attacking Job...

Rather it's Satan.

God has given permission to Satan to essentially destroy Job's life while keeping him alive.  
(Chs. 1-2)

If we put the first idea of the paradox in our own terms, we could say:

"God allows/permits us to suffer."

Now if we turn back to our passage, we're going to look at the second part...

And if it weren't written down, it would be hard to believe.

This man who is sitting on the ground, mourning in a pile of dust and ashes;

His body infected with boils—slowly deteriorating;

Everyone has turned away from him;

He's convinced that God is his enemy...

And this is what he says, (starting at v. 25)

I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

<sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed,

yet in my flesh I will see God;  
<sup>27</sup> I myself will see him  
 with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
 How my heart yearns within me!

In spite all of the evidence of his life that is pointing Job away from faith...

He says, “I know...”

“This is what I’m confident of...”

“That my redeemer lives.”

What does he mean by this?

This word ‘redeemer’ is a word that’s used in a special way in the Old Testament.

There is an Israelite custom that required family to take care of other family who is struggling.

So if a man is sold into slavery to pay off a debt...

His nearest relative is supposed to *redeem* him by paying off the debt.

Or if the man is forced to sell off his land to pay a debt...

The nearest relative buys the land back to keep it in the family.

In the story of Ruth, whose husband died, and left her in a tough situation—

It was her late husband’s nearest relative, Boaz, who married her and provided for her.

The redeemer was someone in the family who was able to help out the one struggling.

God himself is known as a redeemer. (John Hartley)

Because God made Israel into a nation, he took it upon himself to deliver them when they were in trouble. (cf. Exo 6:6)

He redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.

Their redeemer God saved them from slavery in Babylon. (Isa 43:1-7)

Job says, “I know that my redeemer lives.”

So what does he mean?

In Job’s situation, all of his family has already turned away from him...

So he isn’t talking about one of his blood relatives.

He’s talking about God...the Lord.

The one who he just said was his enemy.

In these verses Job is expressing a genuine faith in the same God he thinks is punishing him.

Here we see him holding together this paradox...

These ideas that don't seem like they go together.

“God is punishing me...”

“But I'm crying out to him...”

“Because I know he will soon deliver me.”

“This is who I believe God to be.”

Just as a relative was expected to deliver a struggling family member...

Job says, “I trust that God will deliver me.”

“He will set me free from all of this suffering.”

“He will justify me and prove my innocence.”

Job pushes through all of the evidence of his circumstances—

Evidence that would say that God hates him;

That God doesn't care—

That God turned his back on him—

Job pushes through all of this and holds onto God's commitment to him.

Job takes these 2 things that would seemingly repel each other...

And he holds them side-by-side:

“My experience is that God is punishing me right now; but I know God...and I trust that he'll set me free.”

“I know that with this weak body—“

“before I die—“

“I'll see my redeemer God and he'll deliver me.”

It really is an amazing expression of faith.

This is what we're asked to do.

We're asked to hold this paradox—hold these magnets with the same poles—

These things that don't easily stay together...

These things that don't make sense to us.

We're asked to hold them.

When we experience pain in this life;

When we experience broken relationships;

When we experience our closest friends and family abandoning us;

When we see people around us suffering for apparently no good reason;

We're told to hold the paradox...

We're told to cry out in faith/trust to the same God who allows it to happen.

Because he might allow the suffering to happen—

And we might not ever know why—

But we know that he's not indifferent to it.

We know that God is not detached from our suffering...

Because God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself. (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*)

Jesus Christ—

God in the flesh; God as one of us—

Knew what it was like to be rejected by his friends and his family.

He knew what it was like to be wrongly accused...

And to suffer ridicule for no good reason.

But Jesus Christ also knew a separation that was far greater than anything we could handle—

More intense than Job's perceived separation from God.

When Jesus was crucified and died he was separated from the love of God the Father. (Tim Keller)

A love that he experienced before time began is ripped away from him...

You can hear it and almost feel it in his last words:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Yes, he is a God who allows suffering...

But he is a God well-acquainted with it too.

He knows what it's like when loved ones are taken away from us.

He's felt physical pain, emotional darkness; Jesus has felt abandoned by God.

He knows what we're going through.

And that's why *he* went through it.

He gave up his life so that the suffering could finally be brought to an end.

We're asked to hold this paradox—

To have faith in the one who loves us...

That he will eventually bring an end to all suffering—

But God, in his mercy, doesn't leave us alone as we walk this journey of life.

He strengthens our faith along the way...

Our ears hear, our eyes see, and our mouths taste God's promises.

It's in this meal where our faith is strengthened...

And we're able to hold the paradox.