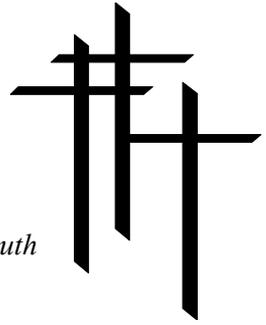


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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THANK GOD

Lessons from the Book of Job

By Lori Gardner

The book of Job is a fascinating study for many reasons. We get a glimpse of some of the interaction between God and Satan. It is comforting to read that Satan is limited and that God can make a “hedge” of protection around his people. We see the wonders of creation and rejoice in the power behind it as we ask the age old question, “Why do the righteous suffer?” Along with these lessons, we also find several things for which we can give thanks to God.

Thank God

For a True Friend

Job lost ten children, his livestock, and most of his servants in one day’s time. Then he was stricken with “sore boils

from the sole of his foot unto his crown.” As soon as they heard the news, three of Job’s friends came to visit him. At first, they sat silently with him because they saw his “*grief was very great.*” Then they felt they had to speak in order to help Job make sense of his misery. Their speeches cover many chapters and they are full of accusations, and self-righteousness. Each friend, in his own long-winded way, said the same thing, “Job, if you were really innocent, you would not be suffering” (Job 4:7; 8:6; 11:6). Job found no comfort or peace in their words.

There are times when the most sincere words from our friends are not enough to comfort us. Thank God we have someone that loves us unconditionally, and knows our every need. John 15:13 describes the characteristic of a true friend, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” The Lord

Jesus Christ is that friend, the One who gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. He assures us in His Word, *“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Heb.13:5; Deut. 31:6). Nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:38-39). We are told to cast all our care upon Him, knowing that He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). When we feel desperate, His answer is, *“My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:10).

Thank God
For His Mercy

Job’s friends insisted that he must have done something terrible to deserve such suffering. There are times when we suffer consequences for the choices we make, but Job’s calamity was not brought on by any particular sin on his part. The Bible describes Job as *“perfect and upright, one that feared God and shunned evil”* (Job 1:1). He was considered to be these things because of his faith, which is why God held him up as an example to Satan (Job 1:8; 2:3). The Lord knew that no matter what happened in Job’s life, he would *“hold fast his integrity.”*

Mercy means *not* getting what we really deserve. Job

was only seen as perfect and upright because of God’s mercy. The Scriptures tell us that we are all born in sin and deserve death as a result (Rom. 5:13; 3:23; 6:23). The only way we can escape a life of misery and eternal separation from God is by receiving by faith His gift of salvation. We can rejoice in the fact that according to His mercy He has saved us (Titus 2:5). It is through Him that we are made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). Thank God we don’t get what we deserve.

Thank God
There’s More to Life

In Job 19:13-24, he laments over his circumstances. Physically, Job had become skin and bone. All of his family and friends had forgotten him, and even his wife found him repulsive. In spite of all of this, he still had the hope that one day things would be better. He says, *“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”* (Job 19:25-26). Job knew that one day he would be in the very presence of the Lord and all of his suffering and heartache would be over.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*” (1 Cor. 15:19). Believers have assurance from God’s Word that the sufferings of our present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). We simply cannot imagine the things which God has prepared for those that love Him (1 Cor. 1:9; Is. 64:4). Thank God believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can look forward to a blessed, heavenly future.

Having endured these hardships, the latter part of Job’s life was blessed more than the beginning. He lived one hundred and forty more years, saw four generations of sons grow up, and died being old and full of days.

Man cannot begin to understand why God works the way He does. Job summed it up well when he said, “*I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from thee*” (Job 42:2). God is all powerful and all knowing. He has a reason for everything He does. We may not understand it, but we can be thankful that everything He does is because of His love for us.

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THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

By Gregg Bing

The Passion Week: Continued

Jesus spoke seven times as He hung on the cross of Calvary. These statements give us insight into two things: 1) the mind and heart of our Savior as He laid down His life for our sins and 2) the meaning of the Cross; what was accomplished for us through Christ's sacrificial death. We examined the first two statements in our last issue: Jesus' intercessory prayer for those who rejected Him—"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do," and Jesus' message of hope to the repentant thief—"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise," both statements recorded in Luke's gospel. In this issue, we will examine the next three statements Jesus made while suffering the agony of the Cross.

#3 "Woman, Behold Your Son"

Most of those who stood around the cross were enemies of Jesus, but there were friends there as well, most of them women (Mark 15:40-41). The

gospel of John mentions three of these women by name; all named "Mary" (John 19:25), a form of the Hebrew word "mara" which means "bitterness." This must have been what these women felt as they looked upon their Lord's sufferings. One of these women was Jesus' mother.

As Mary, the mother of Jesus, watched her son endure the physical torture of crucifixion and listened to the taunts and blasphemy hurled at Him by the people, she must have remembered the words spoken to her thirty-three years earlier. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem when He was an infant to present Him to the Lord. While there, a man named Simeon told her:

"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35)

As she looked up at her Son hanging on that cross, Mary must have felt like a sword was piercing her soul. Jesus understood her pain. When He saw His mother standing there, and

John, “the disciple whom He loved,” beside her, Jesus said to her, “Woman, behold your son!” and to John, “Behold your mother!” From that very hour John took Mary to his home, to care for her as his own mother (John 19:26-27).

There is no mention of Joseph being with Mary at Jesus’ crucifixion; it may be that he had already died. (Many believe he was much older than Mary.) If Joseph was dead, Mary was a widow and, in the Jewish society of those days, would need someone to provide for her needs.

Jesus, being Mary’s oldest son, was responsible for taking care of His mother. Even during His darkest hours, He honored her (Exo. 20:12) and made sure she would be looked after. It is notable that, instead of entrusting her to one of His own brothers, Jesus asked John, a disciple He loved dearly, to take Mary into his home.

Why didn’t Jesus entrust Mary to one of her own children? Jesus was concerned with more than just her physical needs. At that time, Jesus’ own brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). There is no record that any of them were even present at Jesus’ crucifixion, leaving their mother alone to face the death of her oldest son. Pos-

sibly, Jesus wanted someone who understood that He was the Christ, the Son of God, to take care of His mother. Jesus knew John and trusted him to lovingly care for all of Mary’s needs, including the spiritual ones.

Some question whether Jesus’ addressing His mother as “Woman” was appropriate. He addressed Mary the same way at the marriage in Cana of Galilee when the wedding party ran out of wine (John 2:4). While this title might sound disrespectful in our modern society, in Jewish society it was just the opposite. It was, in fact, a highly respected and affectionate way of addressing a woman, even one’s own mother.

John himself records that “from that hour” he “took her to his own home” (John 19:27). This makes it sound like John immediately took Mary away so she wouldn’t have to watch her son die, but John testifies that he witnessed the actual death of Jesus, saying, “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (John 19:35). The emphasis of the word “home” is more likely a reference to John immediately accepting Mary as part of his family.

This marked the end of

Mary's earthly relationship with Jesus as mother and son. Though she had known Jesus as her son, "according to the flesh," from now on she would "know Him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16). The next time Mary is mentioned in the Scriptures, she is among Jesus' disciples waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13-15). Jesus became much more to her than just a son—He was her Savior and Lord.

#4 "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

After hanging on the cross for three hours, the noon hour approached, usually the brightest time of day: but not this day. Darkness suddenly descended; a darkness that covered "all the land" and continued for the next three hours (Matt. 27:45). Near the end of this three hours of darkness, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' an Aramaic phrase that means 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matt. 27:46).

Some who stood close enough to hear Jesus' words, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" Others responded by mocking Jesus: "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him" (Matt. 27:47, 49).

Of the seven statements Jesus uttered from the cross, this is the central one, which is fitting because these words best help us understand the meaning of the Cross. The irony is that this saying is also the hardest for us, as human beings, to comprehend fully.

What is the significance of the cover of darkness? Darkness is often associated with Satan (Col. 1:13; Eph. 6:11-12). We have already seen Satan's hand at work in delivering Jesus up to be crucified, both in the hearts of the Jewish rulers (John 8:40, 44) and in Judas Iscariot (John 6:70-71; Luke 22:3). When Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, He told them, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:52-53).

Darkness also represents sin or evil, as John wrote: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), meaning He is free from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Light, but when He came into the world, "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). As they rejected and crucified "the Light of the world" (John 8:12), it seems appropriate that their wicked deed was cloaked in darkness.

Darkness is also associated with judgment upon sin. Dark-

ness was one of the plagues God sent upon the land of Egypt to bring about the exodus of the children of Israel (Exo. 10:21-23). The condemnation God has reserved for ungodly men who “deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” is “the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 4,13). Darkness covered the land during Jesus’ last three hours on the cross because it was there God condemned (judged) our sins as Jesus bore them for us in that body of flesh (Rom. 8:3).

Jesus cried out these words about the 9th hour (3:00 P.M.) as He was near death. He directed His words to His Father, but instead of addressing Him as “Father,” Jesus called Him “My God.” This is the only place in Scripture where Jesus actually addressed His Father as “God.” In speaking to others, Jesus referred to His Father as “God” and even “My God” (John 20:17), but Jesus always personally addressed Him as “Father” (cf. Matt. 11:25, Luke 10:21, Luke 22:42, John 12:27, John 17:1).

In His first and last statements from the cross, Jesus addressed God as “Father” (Luke 23:34, 46), so why did He call Him “My God” here? Some contend that Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1; Jesus was not quot-

ing Psalm 22:1—He was fulfilling it. The 22nd Psalm is an amazing prophecy of the death of Israel’s Messiah by crucifixion, written several hundred years before the Romans rose to power. This Psalm includes detailed pictures of Jesus’ physical sufferings (vs. 14-18), His emotional and social anguish (vs. 7-8, 12-13), and His spiritual sufferings (vs. 1-6).

By addressing His Father as “My God,” Jesus indicated that His relationship with God as “Father” was, at that time, broken or suspended. This broken relationship was foretold by David in the 22nd Psalm, beginning with the desolate cry of Israel’s Messiah:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.” (Psalm 22:1-2)

The perfection of this prophecy is seen in the details given. Jesus cried “in the daytime” because it was the middle of the day, but “in the night season” as well because of the darkness that covered the land.

The word “forsaken”

means to desert or abandon completely, to literally “leave behind.” Why would God abandon His beloved Son this way? To answer this question, we must understand the nature of God. The Messiah continues to cry out to His Father:

“But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed.” (Psalm 22:3-5)

God is holy and, as such, must remain separate from sin. Because of His absolute holiness, God was “enthroned in the praises of Israel.” The fathers of that nation trusted in God, and He delivered them, time and time again throughout their history. Though He was holy and they were sinful, God made provision through the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the system of sacrifices and offerings, for the people of Israel to have this holy God dwell in their midst and be their God. This was not the case for Israel’s Messiah as He hung on the cross of Calvary. We see the reason for this separation in His own words as He suffers the anguish of separation from His Father.

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.” (Psalm 22:6)

When the eternal Son of God left heaven and came to this earth to take a body of flesh, it was a tremendous step downward, but while He hung on that cross, the Man Christ Jesus, was made even lower, becoming “a worm, and no man.” This is certainly how the angry crowds of people surrounding His cross viewed Jesus (Isa. 53:3), but this is how His Father saw Him as well; not because of any imperfection in Him, but because of the burden He bore for us.

During His last three hours on the cross, Jesus “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). This Holy One “who knew no sin” was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). As the prophet Isaiah spoke 700 years earlier, “The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). While hanging on that cross, Jesus Christ “became a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13), as it is written in the Law of Moses: “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21:23).

Because Jesus bore the burden of our sins, a holy God had to turn His eyes away from His beloved Son. The prophet Isaiah

spoke to Israel about God's response to their sins:

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." (Isa. 59:2).

Jesus experienced this same separation, once again, not because of His sins—for He had none—but because of ours. The Father's face was hidden from His Son; the Father's ears were closed to His cries. The prophet Habakkuk said of God: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Hab. 1:13).

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus "cried out with a loud voice" when He uttered the words "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" The expression "cried out" literally means that He raised a cry upward. This expression is sometimes used as an expression of joy, sometimes as an expression of pain, sometimes as a cry for help. Jesus' cry was one of desolation, uttered by a Man who was totally alone. It was a cry of destitution, uttered by a Man who was empty, completely poverty-stricken. For "though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we

through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Jesus' anguished cry came in the form of a question: "WHY have You forsaken Me?" It is the only time in Scripture that Jesus asked His Father a question. But, was it really a question? Did Jesus not know why God had forsaken Him? Jesus is the Son of God; He knows all things. So, why would He ask the question?

We find a similar situation when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me ..." (Matt. 26:39). Jesus understood that "the cup" of death could not "pass" from Him, that He must drink it to fulfill the will of God. Jesus prayed these words to help us better understand the anguish He felt as He faced His coming death on Calvary.

While He hung on that cross, Jesus certainly understood why He was forsaken by His Father. His statement, in the form of this question, "Why?", was an expression of the sorrow, despair, and utter helplessness He was experiencing. His anguished cry helps us comprehend, at least a little, the mental, emotional, and spiritual agony our Lord and Savior was willing to endure—all because of our sins.

#5 “I Thirst”

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’” (John 19:28)

Why did Jesus say: “I thirst”? The obvious answer is that He was physically thirsty. Jesus is the Son of God, but when He came to earth He took a body of flesh that was subject to the same physical limitations we experience: weariness (Mark 4:38), hunger (Matt. 21:18), sorrow (Matt. 26:38), even trouble of soul (John 12:27). The physical effects of crucifixion are described in the 22nd Psalm, David’s prophetic view of the death of Israel’s Messiah.

“I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.” (Psa. 22:14-15).

Crucifixion slowly, painfully drains away its victim’s life, described in this Psalm as being “poured out like water.” Hanging from the nails in one’s hands (wrists) and feet, the vic-

tim’s bones soon become “out of joint,” including the shoulders, elbows, and wrists. This transfers much of the body weight to the chest moving the rib cage out of place as well and making it much more difficult to breathe. In order to exhale, the victim must push himself up using his feet and legs, a task which becomes increasingly difficult as the person’s strength is “dried up like a potsherd (piece of clay pot).”

The victim’s difficulty in breathing lowers the blood oxygen levels and raises the carbon dioxide levels in his heart. This causes the heart rate to increase as it tries to compensate. It is a vicious cycle that gradually causes the heart to begin to fail and the lungs to collapse and fill with fluid. The Psalmist, speaking for the suffering Messiah, put it this way: “My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me.” The victim becomes severely dehydrated and unbearably thirsty, as seen in the words: “My tongue clings to My jaws.” This terrible thirst seems to express the consummation of all Jesus’ sufferings as He declared, “You have brought Me to the dust of death.”

Jesus’ statement, “I thirst,” reflected His physical condition, but why did He say this? Thirst is a dreadful thing to suf-

fer. Was Jesus' complaining about His sufferings? As we have already seen, though Jesus was oppressed and afflicted, yet "He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Was Jesus asking for a drink to quench His thirst? The soldiers did offer Jesus sour wine on a sponge, and He did drink it (John 19:29-30a), but this meager offering wasn't enough to satisfy His thirst, and Jesus knew He was very close to the point of death, after which His physical thirst would no longer matter.

Some believe that Jesus was not expressing His physical thirst but His spiritual thirst, a thirst for a renewed fellowship with His Father. But, Jesus had already expressed this spiritual thirst when He cried out, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" Why would He restate this agony using different words?

To understand the reason for Jesus' statement, "I thirst," we must consider that the only gospel writer who records this statement is John, whose gospel account emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ. Two key expressions precede Jesus' declaration of His thirst in John 19:28: 1) "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished," and 2) "That the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Jesus was omniscient or "all knowing" (John 2:23-25). He understood every Old Testament prophecy about His life and His death. Having refused the pain numbing drink earlier, He was fully alert and knew what He had endured up to this point. He knew there remained but one prophecy to be fulfilled before His death, that of Psalm 69:21: "And for My thirst they gave Me vinegar (sour wine) to drink."

When Jesus said, "I thirst," He wasn't seeking refreshment; He was ensuring the soldiers would offer Him the sour wine to drink, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John 19:28). The writer of Hebrews quotes the words of God the Son: "Then I said, 'Behold I have come—In the volume of the Book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.'" Before He died, Jesus made sure He completed all of His Father's will, just as it is recorded in the holy Scriptures, for "by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

Next Issue: We will look at the last two statements Jesus spoke from the cross and the events that took place following His death.



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