

Sermon – 10/01/2010 pm

My Advocate

Study Text: Job 16:18-17:16

Jobs reply to the second speech of Eliphaz continues into chapter 17. He suddenly becomes more positive as he turns his eyes to heaven, before again sinking to the depths as he turns his eyes to the grave. Such emotional swings, such changes from hope to despair, are not uncommon during suffering. We see despair mixed with flickers of hope in a number of the Psalms. But most of the Psalms end on the note of hope. Job ends this speech asking where is my hope. What he means by this we will examine shortly.

Thinking about sudden changes of emotions we might recall the behaviour of Peter when he got out of the boat to go to Jesus. With great faith and confidence he stepped out and began to walk on the water. But then he saw how the wind was stirring up the waves and he became afraid. Despairing of life he cried out 'Lord save me!' Jesus reached out to save him from drowning. *O you of little faith why did you doubt* said Jesus (Matthew 14:31). Job was crying out to God as he sank to the depths in his suffering. God in his own time will reach out to Job and save him also.

Let us remember the promise of God that he will not let us be tested beyond what we are able (I Corinthians 10:13). He does not promise you an easy and trouble free life. What he promises is a way out. In Jesus Christ God has provided hope that extends beyond this world. *Be of good cheer* said Jesus *I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). Living before the crucifixion, Job had not heard those words but he was reaching out in faith to God in heaven.

Job knew God had given him life. He knew that his life was in God's hands. He believed God was sovereign in all things, even in his suffering. Some people, including Charles Darwin who suffered the loss of two infant children, in their attempt to reconcile suffering in this world with a good and loving God who rules over the world, turn away from God in despair. Job did not go down that track. In his suffering he kept looking to God believing that God alone had the answer.

My Advocate

My advocate is on high said Job as he once again thought about a mediator (16:19). *My advocate is my friend* he said (16:20). Job had just finished calling God his adversary. He said God hated him and was tearing him to pieces. Now he is calling him his friend and advocate. Is there a contradiction here? Was Job delusional?

While God was not really his enemy, it is true that God does hate sin and that his wrath is upon sin. It is true that *God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:29). It is also true that he is our friend and advocate. He is the one who in grace and mercy has dealt with our sin and made us his friends, even his adopted children.

There is no contradiction in these two attributes of God – adversary and advocate. Jesus told us to call God our Father in heaven. While the world today has a confused image of fatherhood, the Bible does not. Fathers are to be respected and obeyed. Fathers are to exercise discipline in the family (Hebrews 12:9). Children should fear the wrath of their father. As

God's children we fear his wrath. We must serve the Lord with reverence and awe for he is a consuming fire.

At the same time children feel secure and loved as their father takes them in his arms. A father comes to the defence of his child when they get into trouble or get treated unjustly. Just so we should feel secure in the love of our Father in heaven. God showed his love by sending Jesus into this world to take away our sin. Jesus called his disciples his friends (John 15:15).

'The whole drama of redemption centres around the antinomy between God's justice that is sometimes expressed in his wrath toward sinful man, and his love that reaches out to redeem that same sinful man' – quoted by Thomas.

As Job lay at death's door he cried *O earth, do not cover my blood* (16:18). His death would be a tragic case of injustice, much like that of Abel who was killed by his brother. The blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Job was pleading for justice. He was pleading for vindication of the stand he was taking for truth. He stood against all the forces arrayed against him, both natural and supernatural. If not on earth then surely he would get justice in heaven.

Even now my witness is in heaven and my advocate is on high (16:19). Job had previously lamented that there was no mediator between man and God (9:33). He wanted his day in court to plead his case before God but realized he would be way out of his league. How could a mere man stand before Almighty God.

You may or may not have experienced the courts of our land. But you know that it is necessary to hire a good lawyer if you want to win your case. If you go along to the court intending to defend yourself you will quickly find yourself bamboozled by legal procedures and technicalities. You need a lawyer who not only knows what the judge demands in his court, but will also faithfully defend you.

Where would Job find the mediator he needed? His thoughts on this matter progress in this chapter. His friends failed to defend him. They did not understand his pleas but he knew God would understand. Since no man was worthy of this task he concluded that his advocate or mediator must come from heaven. But he could not make his plea directly to God. He needed a mediator.

This desire for a mediator is widespread among human beings. Most religions put forward a mediator though whom men and women can pray to their god. Priests are often seen as taking this role. Sometimes it is icons. In the Russian Orthodox Church people are told to pray to, or through, their icons. In the Church of Rome people are encouraged to pray to the saints. In much the same way as men make idols they set up dead people for the people to pray to. What a sad day it will be for our land when the Pope, the self appointed Vicar of Christ, declares an Australian saint. Oh that he and thousands of others, including our prime minister, would read the Bible which declares *there is one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus* (II Timothy 2:5).

My Grave

Job's thoughts of a mediator did not continue for long – although he will return to this hope in his next speech (19:25). His eyes fell just as quickly as they were lifted up; they fell to looking at himself and at the grave. *The grave is ready for me* (17:1). *I wait for the grave as my house* (17:13). In vivid words he spoke of decay as his father, and worms or maggots as his mother.

He spoke of the grave being the end of his hope. Although Job was ready to die rather than deny God or give up his integrity (13:15) he wanted vindication in this life. This is what he hoped for.

My spirit is crushed and my days cut short (17:1). It is interesting that Job speaks of *when a few years are finished* (16:22). We are not given a clear sense of time in these dialogues. But he had concluded that his sickness would end in death. Death is often in our thoughts when we are very sick or going through intense suffering.

‘Many know the spirit of crushing despair that overtook Job’ writes Thomas; ‘a family shattered by divorce, an adolescent caught in the web of drug addiction or an unwanted pregnancy, a couple learning that their newborn child is handicapped’. A lady I knew said she was planning to divorce her husband but did not know how to tell him. When she went home one day to tell him she found him dead. Such things are happening all around us. These people were not believers, but we are not immune to suffering in this world. What will you cling to when suffering comes to your door?

Job received no comfort from his friends. Their hearts were insincere and their words were hollow. They lacked understanding. God would judge them for their proud claims to be wise and their dismal failure to help their friend in his time of need (17:4). Job warned them of the punishment that awaits those who falsely accuse a friend. According to the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 19) such men were to be given the punishment they desired for the one they falsely accused. *If a man denounces his friends for a reward, the eyes of his children will fail* (17:5).

Come back to me with a better argument said Job, challenging his friends (17:10). He did not accept their wisdom. He makes a parody of the advice given by Zophar. This man had promised Job his darkness would turn to light if he repented (17:12 cf. 11:17). *These men turn night into day; they claim that darkness is light* said Job. They imagine things that are not true. They promise things they cannot deliver. So much of man’s wisdom involves imagination and deception. Job wanted to know the truth.

Job prayed *give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me* (17:3)? Job felt condemned despite his innocence. He needed someone to post bail. He was too poor to do so and his friends refused to do so. They were willing to let him go to his death. So Job asked God to put up bail with himself. Did Job know what he was asking for?

Here is another wonderful truth that points to the cross. Job needed a kinsman redeemer to come to his aid. God in Christ offered up himself as the security, the bail, that we might go free. In Christ he paid the debt that you owed, the price for your freedom from sin and from death. You were bought with a price by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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