



Sunday, April 18, 2021

Congregational Prayer: Dave Jones (video)

Sermon: Darren Hoogendoorn (video)

Congregational Prayer

Good morning, my Living Hope family. Behind me, there's new light. There's a tree budding with blossoms. As we've recently celebrated Jesus' rising again, we know there is new life. So, my prayer for us this morning is that Father God, as we remember you, as we seek to love you and serve you with all of our lives, that we would remember we are a new creation in Christ. The old is dead, the new has come. We praise you and we thank you that in this new season, in this spring time, we can remember what you have done. We can walk in what you have done, we can live in what you have done and we can be new creations in Christ. We can experience the new things and the freedoms and the joys that are to come in this season. We can be intentional and serve you with every single second of our lives. We can worship you and praise you and lean into you and abide in you. For when we do, that is when we can grow the most. That is when we can honor and glorify you the most. So Father, I pray today that we would abide in you and that you would be the one who does the growing within us and through us. And that others would see it and be drawn to you and to know your great love for them. Bless us this morning as we worship and praise you, as we learn more about you. In Jesus name, Amen. God bless you Living Hope family.

Sermon

Good morning. My name is Darren Hoogendoorn and I'm the pastor at Hebron Christian Reformed Church in Whitby. It's my joy to be with you this morning as we listen to God's word and hear God's word speak into our lives. And so I want to invite you to turn with me in your bible to Job 19 and we're going to look at verses 23-27 and as we come to God's word, let's pray and ask his Holy Spirit to speak to us through it. So please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, may the words in my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord. Our rock and our Redeemer. We pray that you would illuminate your word to us this morning. That we can see it clearly, that we can grasp and understand what it is that you're saying to us. Because there's things in our lives, God, that you don't want them to be there. We pray that you would uproot them at this time. But if there's things that you want to be there, plant them, grow them, prune them, bring them to fruition in our lives. We pray God, that at this time, only your voice may speak and that you would silence all of the other voices in our lives and in our midst. Whether it be of our own flesh or the world around us or the devil and the demonic. Silence them Lord, that we can hear your Spirit speak. We pray all this in Jesus name. Amen.

So Job 19:23-27, "Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! This is God's word. Thanks be to God for it.

Well, one of the most consistent difficult questions for people who wrestle with belief in the God of the bible is the question of evil and suffering and evil and suffering that they witness in the world. And perhaps that's you this morning. Suffering seems to be an ever present reality in the life of the human race and we have not been able to master it thus far, nor do we show signs of being able to master it. One just need to look at the numerous dystopian movies that continue to hit the big screen. Hunger Games, Divergent, Maze Runner, Ready Player One, Mortal Engines to find out what our culture thinks of what the future is going to look like. That ship that was ferrying the belief that we can create some type of utopian paradise for ourselves in the here and now sunk to the bottom with the advent of two world wars, the rise of numerous regimes and countless lives lost in genocides, the pandemic of the 21st century. The 20th century was the bloodiest century on record but it was also the least religious century on record. The why of evil and suffering is something that the person of our text, Job, deals with firsthand. In two days, Job loses all his children, his business, his friends, his standing in the community, his health, everything. Job believes in God but he struggles with him.

But before we turn to Job and conclude what he has to say or what the Bible has to say through him about evil and suffering and to see what Christianity's answer is, I think we first need to survey the alternatives. You see, the very question of why evil and suffering, especially death, is underwritten in it the assumption that these things should not be. The very fact that we evaluate them with descriptions like bad, evil, suffering, loss, dark times, shows that we're measuring them according to some standard. The alternative option to God is that there is no God. But eliminating God from the picture doesn't answer evil and suffering. In fact, I think it actually makes things worse. If this world is caused by accident and it's just composed of what is natural through the long process of evolving and adapting, then the categories of good and bad become null and void. All behaviors are simply natural behaviors. Does the wolf wrestle with moral thoughts as it hunts down the hare? Do elephants stop and consider the suffering of the antelope on the plain? Does the spider have compassion on the fly? In the words of Mufasa from The Lion King, it is simply the circle of life. Disease and virus are not things to be eradicated. They are necessary to weed out the weak among us for the good of the collective whole. Death is simply fertilizer for the next generation. We may live as if the lives and the love that we share have some value beyond us or beyond this life, but that's a fantasy. An illusion we maintain to help us cope. I truly appreciate the way that one New York columnist Chuck Palahniuk put it. He puts it like this, "When the Hubble Space Telescope pointed to that black spot in the sky about the size of an eraser for a week, it found 30,000 Galaxy over 13 billion years old with many trillions of stars and many more trillions of inferred planets."

So, how significant are you? You are not a unique snowflake, you are not special. You are just another piece of decaying matter on the compost pile of this world. Nothing of who you are and what you do in the short time you are here will matter. Everything short of that realization is vanity. Our modern culture is probably the most impoverished that has been for offering resources to its people and the question of suffering. Our big answer was, technology and progress was going to eradicate suffering and for brief moments in history and probably just in certain locations, maybe that's been the case for a while. We've been able to handle it. But only to be proved wrong again. A pointed example of this comes from Yuval noah Harari and his book, Homo Deus (which means man is God). In 2017, he published the book and in the book he makes this bold claim that we've pretty much conquered suffering. He says it like this, "At the dawn of the third millennium, humanity wakes up to an amazing realization. Most people rarely think about it, but in the last few decades we've managed to rein in famine, plague and more. Of course, these problems have not been completely solved but they have been transformed far from the incomprehensibility and uncontrollable forces of nature into manageable challenges. We don't need to pray to any God or saint to rescue us from them. We know quite well what needs to be done in order to prevent famine, plague and war. And we usually succeed in doing it." Now, Harari wrote that in 2017 when many of us thought technology was our savior against suffering. But I would dare say that a global pandemic that has ground the world to a halt and overran our highly sophisticated medical systems puts a damper on that parade.

It's also very western or modern centric because there are so many people in the world that are still living lives that are very much full of suffering. Technology only holds out a hope for the few who have the resources to get ahold of it. Not to mention that it's only ever a temporary fix. Disease and suffering is one

thing but death ratio, despite all of our technological advances, still hold steady at one to one. It turns out our high tech savior is a band-aid solution and a big disappointment. And so to help us cope in the face of death, we smuggle in resources from alternative belief systems, in an attempt to navigate suffering and death when it strikes. And I've stood in this pulpit at many a funeral and listened to many a eulogy at the people grasping in some type of way to appropriate the loss they're feeling and create some type of eternity to the moment. I've heard everything from fairy tales to some vague notion of the person's still being here. But few face the reality that a godless universe actually presents them in the face of suffering, these alternatives of other religions only slightly better in the resources they offer as opposed to the godless view. But still they lack in a big sense. For instance, if it be reincarnation, then the suffering that you are experiencing in this moment is your own fault for how you lived in a past life. Don't complain about it, just pay your dues. Also, you need to remember that the person that you lost in death is gone. Even if they are able to reincarnate as another life, it doesn't help me when my heart longs to hold them again or I realized that I will never talk to them again. The same is true of Islam, which offers you a consolation prize at the end of a life of trouble. But no hope that the people you lost in death will be restored to you again. Similar with Buddhism and reaching Nirvana. The essence of your personhood ceases to be and you just become one more rain drop in the ocean, your individuality ceases.

But now look at the words of Job and look at the radical nature and the hope of the Christian faith. Job cries out in the midst of his sorrow and pain. Yes, it is a cry of anguish but it also is a cry of defiance and victory as Job drums up his hope. He wants his words to be inscribed on a stone that they may stand forever, to be written in a book for generations to come to read. And the reason he wants this is fascinating. He wants because he knows that his vindicator, his redeemer is on the way. And even if he is the last person to be born, he is coming to vindicate Job and bring resolution to all of his suffering. Now, we need to know that a redeemer in Job's day and age was a person or a relative who would always be there for you. You see, they didn't have a welfare system or insurance in those days. And so, if suffering befell you, it was the responsibility of your next of kin to carry you through that suffering. So for example, if someone fell into debt, the closest kinsmen would redeem that person from their debt. He would go and pay down the debt. Or if the father died, the redeemer would take in the wife and the children, caring and raising them as his own. Or if there was a dispute, the redeemer would act as an advocate on behalf of that person. Which meant that the redeemer not only needed to take responsibility to see you through the suffering, but your redeemer needed to be somebody who was strong enough and wealthy enough to actually do something about your suffering.

But now look at Job's words. His redeemer, whomever he is, Job believes is strong enough to redeem him even from death. "After my flesh has been destroyed," he says. So after I die, is what he means. "Yet this I proclaimed that I will see God in my flesh." So Job says, "Even though my flesh will die and be destroyed, my redeemer who is coming is strong enough to bring me back to life and I will stand before God. My eyes shall behold God and not another. When Job's redeemer comes, whoever he is, he will answer all the suffering in the world including the continual problem of death. And everyone around Job is like, "Job. Give it up, man. Your religious integrity has gotten you no further than the rest of us. You're still suffering in the same way that we are. Give up on your fairytale." But Job defiantly responds, "No, my redeemer lives. And even if the grave comes to me before he appears, he can even redeem me from death." Now, this is an amazing prophetic testament to the work of Christ, who is the great redeemer of all who belong to his family, the redemption we find in him gives us hope and it gives us resources for navigating the waters of sorrow that are comparable to nothing else that we find in the world. First of all, the redemption of the Christian hope or Christian faith is personal. Job expects to be a self forever. Who is it that Job expects to be redeemed? Himself and not another will behold God. In our hearts, we long for eternity, especially in the face of our own death. But there is only one God who offers eternity to you. And his name is Jesus Christ. If you know that you are not just a collection of atoms or some part of a life force waiting to return to the greater whole, but rather you are an individual with a unique identity unlike anyone else, then you need to recognize that the gospel is the only place that affirms that reality and offers you hope for that reality on into eternity. The God of the gospel made you unique in your mother's womb, he knit you together in that dark place and he loves that individuality. When he redeems from death, it is not something other that he wants but you yourself.

But the second thing is, it's relational. If we are redeemed as self forever, then the same is true of all those who belong to Christ. Which means the work of our great redeemer does not just hold out hope for us, but it holds out hope for our loved ones as well. Because the work of a redeemer is to buy back what was lost. This means he is not seeking some consolation prize for what was taken from us. He is seeking to get back what was stolen. When you lose a husband or a wife or a son or a friend or a grandparent, what your heart longs for in the wake of death is then restored to you. You want them and not another. I don't want eternal riches in place of the person stolen from me. I want them restored. It is them I want to hold again. It is them I want to see again, them I want to talk with again. I want their company again to enjoy. But it is only the great Redeemer Jesus Christ, that offers this kind of a audacious hope to his children. Let me try and offer up an illustration. In 1845, American poet, Edgar Allan Poe published his now famous poem, The Raven. And the poem chronicles a man's night of mourning over the loss of his beloved Lenore. As he mourns, a mysterious black raven taps upon his chamber window and once inside the room, perches himself above the door. As the man in his grief recounts the memories of his beloved Lenore, the raven continues to cry to him but one word, "Nevermore. Nevermore." At first, the man thinks the bird is a mere inconvenience but soon he is haunted by the birds' ominous reply to each one of his memories. Nevermore. Nevermore."

*"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil! – tell me truly, I implore –
Is there – is there balm in Gilead? – tell me – tell me, I implore!" Quoth the Raven "Nevermore." Tell this
soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore –Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom
the angels name Lenore." Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."*

What is the real source of his sorrow and spirals him into despair is the nevermore, nevermore of the loss of his beloved Lenore. Nevermore shall he see her again. Nevermore shall he feel her touch. Nevermore shall they walk hand in hand by the canal. Nevermore shall they sit around the table with friends. Nevermore. Nevermore. But finally, the hope of the Gospel, our great Redeemer is certain. And if the hope of the Gospel did not shine forth clearly before, here It certainly does. Every other system of belief sets out hope in front of you if it is to be called hope at all, that you must attain under your own power. Live a good enough life and it will be yours, meet a certain standard and you will attain the prize. Be a good enough person. But the gospel is the gospel of our great Redeemer. In other words, who pays the bill to buy back and get back what was lost? Who takes the debt that was incurred. Who works to restore, who pays for it all? It's not you, it's your Redeemer. He is the one who brings you from poverty into wealth. He is the one who brings you from trouble and hardship into flourishing. He is the one who brings you from death into life. You are not redeemed by the strength of your own hands but by the hands of your Redeemer. What is required of you is to put your trust - that is your faith - in the object of your redemption, to put your faith in your Redeemer. You entrust yourself to Him and He does the work. And this is why Christianity is a gospel. A gospel is good news. It is an announcement, it's a gift to you. It's not advice. It's not a 12 step program. It's not what you can do to attain and drum up your own hope. It's a declaration of redemption from suffering. Redemption from evil. Redemption from death, available to us because Christ has won it for us. This is why Job wants his words written on a rock forever as a testament that in his despair, though he knows not why he is suffering, one day there is coming a redeemer who will make everything right. So that long after Job has passed, generation upon generation will look upon that stone and see that Job suffered and that he died in the hope of redemption to life. The answer and vindication for his suffering was on the horizon somewhere. Essentially, Joe wants these words inscribed on his tombstone so that people evaluate his life, knowing that the final chapter is yet to be written. Job's wife has already scolded him, "Why do you hold on to your integrity?"

"Curse God and die." In other words, "Give up your faith. Clearly your God, in whom you trust, is not coming to save you because look at the suffering that you're going through." But Job knows that, "Even if I am not vindicated in this life, I will be in the life after death. So don't you dare measure the quality of my life based upon my present sufferings. If this life were all there is, then I am rightly to be pitied above all people, but I know that my Redeemer liveth," he says. "And one day, even if it is the very last day, he will stand upon the earth and I shall behold His glory. I myself and not another." I'm a big fan of the Marvel movies, and the twofold end to Avengers Saga is the Avengers Infinity War and The Avengers Endgame.

Now in the movies, there is this great enemy of the universe named Thanos, who is on a mission to wipe out half of all life in the universe to restore a balance. And so to do so he must find all of the infinity stones to wield their power. Now the Avengers are the last holdout with the last stone. But suddenly, in the midst of the raging battle, Doctor Strange, one of the Avengers, offers the stone up to Thanos on a condition that he will spare Iron Man, Tony Stark. Thanos accepts Doctor Strange's offer Strange gives him the stone and with a snap of his fingers, Thanos wipes out half of all the life in the universe. Now, in the days and the years that follow, the earth is in a perpetual state of mourning. Humanity struggles in the face of death and suffering. How do we cope? Some, like Hawkeye, turn vigilante in their anger in an attempt to eradicate all evil. Some give up the fight altogether because, "What is the point?" Other people try to move on with the pieces that they have left. They go on dates but all they do is just end up talking about the person that they lost and can't get back. And in that moment, all of their hopes fade away because they're not really hopes at all. No one wants a consolation prize. No one wants starting over. No one wants, "at least we're the lucky ones." The only hope that brings any actual hope in that moment is the thought of restoration and redemption. The thought that perhaps somehow they can bring back those who are lost. But it soon becomes apparent why Doctor Strange demanded that Iron Man stay alive. Because in order to redeem what was stolen, what was taken, Tony needs to pay the ultimate cost. Tony dies in order that others might be brought back to life. No one else can pay down the debt but him. But yet everybody else benefits from his work. Do you see the gospel of Jesus, our great Redeemer displayed for you on the big screen? I love fantasy stories because often what we try to cover up and hide in our serious conversations about reality, shines through in our dreams. We can't hide it there. The Avengers movies show us the raw true human longing in the face of death that many of us are too sheepish to admit to ourselves is what we really want. Often we find that the best stories of which we long to hear tap into the recesses of our souls and speak to things that we did not even know were there. And then we hear this faint whisper of God calling us to himself, inviting us into his grand story of the true champion, the ultimate love story between the noble Prince and the Pauper bride that asides of cosmic battle between good and evil and real redemption through a great Redeemer. But this tale is no dream. That's reality.

Let's pray. Our Father, who is in heaven, Holy is Your name, God, because there's nobody like you. Father, we think and we look in the face of death, God, and we see that you have provided and the only one who provided a way through that death. You are the only one that provides hope that is actual hope. And it's a hope that can be certain, God, because it's not based upon our doing or our ability to earn it. Father, we look out at so many of the other religious systems, especially as many people we know who are Muslim are going through Ramadan and this kind of digging in and taking things most seriously in the hopes that Allah will accept them. And then Father, we look at you. Your Son Jesus, who did it all for us and we are just the recipients. He is the great redeemer of our family. He is the one who has bought back every single one of us that was lost. Father, help us to rejoice in that. Help us to just enjoy that. Help us to lay down our deadly doing or the thought that we can earn it or that we need to add anything else to your work and just enjoy the sheer beauty of what you have done for us. Father, do not let anybody or anything or any power in heighth, nor depth, nor any evil in all creation quench the fire of that flame inside of us. That our hope stands sure as a steady anchor, God, that you will bring us to yourself. That if we put our trust in you, the great object of our redemption, Jesus Christ, you will lead us on into victory and one day we will gather on a new heavens and a new earth. And we will laugh and romp and play and sing with all the redeemed in your presence, God. And there will be no more evil. There'll be no more suffering. There will be no more pain, for the old order of things has been wiped away. God, this we rejoice in. And may you hear our praise now because it belongs to you and to you alone. We pray all this in Jesus name. Amen.

Transcribed by Liza Perry

