

THE BOOK OF JOB

3. JOB'S PRAYER

Job 14:7-15, 19:23-27

PENTECOST 8

July 15, 2018

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At twelve noon today, I will host a book study on Dr. Kenneth Haugh's recently published **CANCER, NOW WHAT?**

As one of the subtitles suggests, Dr. Haugh prepared it as a practical guide for those fighting cancer, and their loved ones who support them.

The other subtitle billboards its purpose — to encourage readers to take action, find hope, and navigate the journey ahead.

As a pastor who has ministered to parishioners and families of those dealing with cancer, as a relative of and a hospice team member for my cousin's husband, Tom, and as a long-time friend to John and a support in his brave battle against pancreatic cancer, I thought Dr. Haugh's book would be of great benefit.

Today's book study also coincides with my summer sermon series on the Book of Job.

Not only was Job plagued by the loss of his sons and daughters and all of his material wealth, he also suffered from a disease affecting his entire body.

On top of all of this, he had three friends who started out with good intentions, but their lecturing ended up hurting Job more than helping him.

In one tell-tale chapter titled "Seek Listeners, Not Lecturers,"

Dr. Haugh opens by addressing that cancer sufferers have much to talk about — fears, frustrations, and the various ups and downs patients experience.

One piece of good advice the author offers is:

"It's important to be able to express your thoughts and feelings when you need to, so seek out a few good listeners you can share with."

Two helpful kinds of conversations by friends were cited by Dr. Haugh:

One person who had cancer said,

"I had a long-distance friend that I knew I could call any time I needed

to talk.

It made the tough times a little easier and the burdens a little lighter, knowing I could talk and someone would really listen.”

Another person told him:

“One day at church, someone asked me how my family and I were holding up.

I was tempted just to say, ‘fine,’ like I usually did, but I decided to take a risk and answer a little more openly.

She responded with such compassion and understanding that I stood there talking for a long time, as she listened.

Having her full attention made me feel validated and cared for, like I really mattered.”

When it comes to expressing your deeper thoughts and feelings, you’ll benefit most from people who will listen, not lecture.

Be wary of people who may take over the conversation early on and talk mostly non-stop about themselves or other people who have had cancer, or what they think you must do.

One person confided to Dr. Haugh:

“There were a few friends who constantly voiced strong opinions about what I should or shouldn’t do.

I suppose they meant well, but their pushiness just upset me.

On the other hand, those friends who put my well-being first, who simply listened and offered love and concern, put my mind at ease.”

As one person put it:

“Being lectured at causes me to shut down, but when someone listens to me, it helps me open up, and get my pain out.”

This morning, we return to Job as he tries to find hope, only to end up in despair.

In Chapter 14, Job continues his direct address to God.

He now broadens the scope of his lament to reflect on the human condition in general, rather than just his own individual experience.

Using the observational technique of traditional wisdom, Job looks to nature to discern if there is hope to which humans can cling during times of adversity and tragedy.

Job observes that a tree can grow again after it has been cut down, but humans cannot.

He comes to the conclusion that humans, like dried up seas and river beds, have no hope for renewal.

Although Job genuinely tries through his imagination to glimpse hope for some kind of future after death, he finishes on a despondent note.

At the end of the first of three cycles of speeches, Job finds himself in despair because of the boundaries God has placed on all humans.

In contrast to the final verse of the Book of Job, which will describe Job as being old, full of days and blessing, here in Chapter 14, Job concludes that all humans are consigned to brief and troubled lives.

The chapter begins with this famous and florid verse:

“A mortal born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last” (14:1-2).

As Job has come to witness for himself that human life is both brief and filled with trouble.

As the 17th Century philosopher, David Hume, echoed Job’s sentiment, he offered up his own summary of human life as “brutal, nasty, and short.”

In contrast to God’s eternal, everlasting nature, humans live on earth for mere days.

Job regards his own now troubled human state as being powerless to transcend the divine limits that contain this life.

As Job says elsewhere, the grave is a place of no return.

Job does not have the hope, like we do, of a resurrection to appeal to.

In the time of Job, the other ancient Near Eastern cultures had various notions about an afterlife, but they did not have an idea of a human resurrection after death.

This hope would only come as a revelation when God raised Jesus from the dead.

Because of his limited knowledge, Job’s only hope is for God to intervene for him before he dies.

Job had to function within his limited theological understandings, but the New Testament — the Gospels and Letters of Paul, Peter, and James — has provided for us greater understanding of what God will do for us believers after death.

In the same way today that we have limitations of what we can know about God, so, like Job, we need to trust God for what we cannot understand.

Like our ancient spiritual ancestors, we, too, need faith to trust in God.

Moving on to the second part of our reading from the 19th Chapter, we come upon Job’s response to his friend, Bildad’s, second speech.

Job employs a mixture of lament and legal language to express how abandoned he feels by his friends, and even by God.

In the final verses of this chapter, Job pleads with his friends for compassion.

As Dr. Haugh so simply and passionately expressed it in his book,

CANCER, NOW WHAT?, like Job, it is better to seek out friends who are listeners, rather than lecturers.

For Job, who feels forlorn and unheeded, articulates his hope for a redeemer to take up his cause, and he warns his friends that they, too, will have to face God’s judgment.

Job, in this chapter, does express some faint hope in God, even though his predominant emotion at this time is hopelessness.

That hope appears in the well-known and still heard verse:

“For I know that my Redeemer lives” (v.25).

I most recently heard that verse last Friday afternoon, upon placing my friend’s casket over his earthly resting place.

John’s pastor conducted a brief but compassionate committal service for him and his family and friends, who, like Job, longed for a word of hope.

In Job, Chapter 19, verse 25, “redeemer” is a translation of the Hebrew word, *go’el*.

This term was used in Old Testament legal literature to refer to a near relative who was called upon to perform several important roles.

For example, if a family member was forced into slavery due to debt, the *go’el* was responsible to pay the debt and release him or her.

The *go’el* also was required to remove a lien, or judgment, from a relative’s property, to marry a childless widow, and to avenge the death of a relative who had been wrongly killed or murdered.

In addition, the *go’el* likely served as a legal advocate for a relative.

The term came to be applied figuratively to Yahweh as God liberated His people at first from bondage in Egypt, and later from exile in Babylon.

Beloved people of God,

Job 19:25 ***“I know that my redeemer lives,”*** may be the best known verse in the Book of Job.

It has been read often through the lens of the doctrine of the resurrection, and also, most familiarly, in an aria from Handel’s great oratorio,

MESSIAH.

The content of the Book of Job makes it highly unlikely that Job is here thinking of resurrection at the end of times, because that would be revealed by God through the ministry and mission of Jesus.

At this point in the story, however, Job is nearly consumed by a feeling of hopelessness.

Wherever he looks, he finds ample reason for giving up.

Most people in this kind of traumatic situation would abandon all hope. Even when all seems hopeless, Job maintains a ray of hope that sustains him.

In the meantime, Job will have to wait, placing himself and his cause in God’s hands.

In this, he serves as an example to us today, as we must wait on the Lord while enduring our troubles.

So, like Job, we trust God to be our *go’el*, our redeemer, our one and only hope.

AMEN