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## April 22nd: Job 20 & Hebrews 10:19-39

April 21, 2021



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Zophar's final speech to Job. Do not throw away your confidence!

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## Transcript

Job chapter 20. Then Zophar the Nehemiathite answered and said, Therefore my thoughts answer me, because of my haste within me. I hear censure that insults me, and out of my understanding a spirit answers me.

Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment? Though his height mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds, he will perish for ever like his own dung. Those who have seen him will say, Where is he? He will fly away like a dream, and not be found. He will be chased away like a vision of the night.

The eye that saw him will see him no more, nor will his place any more behold him. His children will seek the favor of the poor, and his hands will give back his wealth. His bones are full of his youthful vigor, but it will lie down with him in the dust.

Though evil is sweet in his mouth, though he hides it under his tongue, though he has loathed to let it go, and holds it in his mouth, yet his food is turned in his stomach. It is the venom of cobras within him. He swallows down riches and vomits them up again.

God casts them out of his belly. He will suck the poison of cobras. The tongue of a viper will kill him.

He will not look upon the rivers, the streams flowing with honey and curds. He will give back the fruit of his toil, and will not swallow it down. From the profit of his trading he will get no enjoyment, for he has crushed and abandoned the poor.

He has seized a house that he did not build. Because he knew no contentment in his belly, he will not let anything in which he delights escape him. There was nothing left after he had eaten, therefore his prosperity will not endure.

In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress. The hand of everyone in misery will come against him. To fill his belly to the full, God will send his burning anger against him, and rain it upon him into his body.

He will flee from an iron weapon. A bronze arrow will strike him through. It is drawn forth and comes out of his body.

The glittering point comes out of his gall bladder. Terrors come upon him. Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures.

A fire not fanned will devour him. What is left in his tent will be consumed. The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him.

The possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God's wrath. This is the wicked man's portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God. Job chapter 20 is Zophar the Naamathite's second speech, the final speech of the second cycle of discourses.

This is also Zophar's final speech in the book. Zophar is not a named speaker in the third and final cycle. Like the other friends, Zophar gives an extended discourse on the character and fate of the wicked.

While he does not speak directly concerning Job's situation, it is clear that he is directing his comments to Job, and he wants Job, as someone who, in his mind, fits the category of the wicked, to draw the logical conclusions. Zophar is clearly troubled by Job's position. Zophar treats Job, not as a friend in need of comfort and support, but as someone teaching a rival doctrine.

To counter the false teaching of Job, Zophar doesn't so much engage with him or seek to persuade him, as he more forcefully expresses the retributionist dogma back at him.

This, Zophar insists, is teaching that has been around from the very beginning, from the first man, from Adam himself. Job should know this.

This teaching is fundamental to understanding the moral structure of the universe. Anyone challenging this is rejecting something absolutely fundamental. The wicked, for a time, may seem to prosper, but they will finally get their comeuppance.

Their downfall is fated, and it is only a matter of time until it will happen. It may seem, for a period, that they are getting away with their sins, that they are prospering. They will rise up, even to the heavens.

But from this great height, they will be brought down and they will perish forever, in the most dishonourable way, being compared to dung. They will leave no trace behind them. They will be wiped clean from the face of the earth.

From the disgust and dishonour of bodily waste, Zophar turns to the image of a dream. A dream is forgotten in the morning. It is insubstantial.

The dream vanishes and soon after, it is memory with it. The image of downfall here is clearly intended to speak to Job's situation. Job was once the richest and greatest man of the East, and Zophar is suggesting that these great heights of prosperity were only reached through oppression and wickedness, and now Job is being reduced to his proper estate.

Once the great honoured man, Job is now being treated as what he really is, the excrement of the society. The children of the wicked man will be reduced to begging from the poor. All the wealth that the wicked man took, presumably by oppression, has now been stripped from him.

While his body is still young, he suffers an untimely death. He is brought down to the grave in the prime of his life. From verse 12, Zophar develops the image of the wicked man as one who savours evil, as one who devours, as one who consumes, and finally as one from whose distended belly God will disgorge all that he has devoured through his oppression.

The evil that they are delighting and consuming is ultimately poison. It actually serves as a nemetic. Everything that these unrighteous men have devoured will end up being vomited back out.

Norman Harville remarks upon some of the poetic features of the poetry here. At several points in his speech, Zophar uses the same term twice, but with a different shade of meaning or connotations. He writes, "This technique of repeating key terms with subtle variations in meaning is employed by the poet to develop an intricate web of thematic interrelationships in the design of the poem.

The wicked man that Zophar portrays here is a gourmand who savours the taste of evil. It is delightful to him, but the very thing that he delights in will finally be his downfall. The evil he savours is like a serpent's poison, perhaps the poison of that serpent of old himself, the devil.

This poison kills him, preventing him from enjoying all the things that he would enjoy. And the cause for his demise is his oppression of the poor. Eliphaz will make a similar claim in chapter 22 verses 5-9.

Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities, for you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favoured man lived in it.

You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. This, of course, is an unmerited charge against Job. Indeed, it is exceptionally unjust.

In chapter 29 verses 11-17, Job describes his former conduct as one who was the deliverer of the poor. When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me. My justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made him drop his prey from his teeth. In Zophar's understanding, God is the one who brings about the downfall of this wicked man.

In verse 15, God is the one who casts the riches out of the belly of the man who has devoured them in his unrighteousness. In verse 23, God sends a rain to the person who is the devourer, and fills his stomach to the full, but with his fury and anger in judgment. In chapter 6 verse 4, Job had said, For the arrows of the Almighty are in me.

My spirit drinks their poison. The terrors of God are arrayed against me. In verses 24 and 25 of this chapter, the wicked man is pierced by the arrows of God.

All that he has laid up for himself is doomed to oblivion. He will be devoured by the fire of God. This is an especially cruel thing for Zophar to say, knowing that Job had lost his sheep and the servants with them to such a fire.

In chapter 16 verses 18 and 19, Job had appealed both to the heavens and the earth to bear witness on his behalf. O earth, cover not my blood, and let my cry find no resting

place. Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high.

In verse 27, Zophar claims that both the heavens and the earth will speak in Job's case, but as witnesses for the prosecution. In Deuteronomy, the heavens and the earth were witnesses of the covenant, who would testify against the people if they had been unfaithful. Zophar believes that something similar will happen to Job as one of the wicked.

All of this occurs in the day of God's wrath. Zophar likely sees a very neat correspondence with this dogmatic proclamation about what befalls the wicked and what had actually happened to Job. In one day, all of these things had come upon him.

The great wind, the fire of God, and various peoples of the earth had all simultaneously risen against him. This, in Zophar's retributionist theology, is the natural and appropriate portion of the wicked. A question to consider.

What do you think the friends of Job hoped to accomplish through their speeches at this point? Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19 to 39 Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession, and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may

receive what is promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

In the last few chapters, the author of Hebrews has been concerned with the high priesthood and the greater sacrifice of Christ, presenting the heroes of the book with a sermon that now reaches its applicatory punch in the second half of chapter 10. A new way into God's presence has been opened up to us by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, the effectiveness by which this route has been opened up means that we can now enter with an appropriate confidence. This way did not formerly exist, it is now a reality for those who believe.

The holy places of which the author is speaking are not just the copy and the shadow that existed in the most holy place in the tabernacle, but the heavenly realities to which they testified. Our access is by the blood of Jesus, by his self-offering, and by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain. The curtain of the old sanctuary was a veil dividing the first section of the sanctuary from the second, which could only be entered once a year by the high priest on the day of atonement, and then only with blood.

As the author has already written, this anticipates the movement from the old age to the new age that we have entered in Christ. The former situation in the tabernacle testified to the fact that the way had not yet truly been opened. Many have seen an association between the curtain and Jesus' flesh here.

I think it's more likely that verse 20 should be read in closer parallel with verse 19. So entering the holy places corresponds with the way through the curtain, and the instrumentality of the blood of Christ in verse 19 corresponds with Christ's flesh in verse 20, as in his body and flesh Christ offered himself for our access to God's presence. The way that we have into God's presence is a new and living one.

It was inaugurated and consecrated by Christ's sacrifice. It is also always new in some sense. It is never going to age, become defunct, or deteriorate.

Hebrews has already spoken of the importance of the eternal life of our Melchizedekian high priest, and the same point is significant here. Our access into God's presence is not just through some physical building, but through the eternally enduring person and work of Jesus Christ. Such a living way, a living way established by the eternally living Jesus and the eternal spirit, is best suited to bring us to the living God.

Jesus is a great high priest over the house of God. He is not merely a servant within the house, as Moses was, but the reigning son, the one who is placed over the entire house

as its lord. The access and authority enjoyed by such a person greatly exceeds anything that a mere steward of the house could enjoy.

Knowing these things about the way that we have access into God's presence, the appropriate response is to draw near. We must do this with a true heart and in full assurance of faith. The true heart contrasts, among other things, with the hardened hearts of the Israelites who fail to enter into God's rest.

The full assurance of faith is the sure confidence in the certainty of the promise of God that will cause us to grasp hold of what he has set before us. The hearts sprinkled clean from the evil conscience probably refers to the consciousness of sin that afflicts those under the old covenant, where sins still had not been decisively addressed, also to the uncleanness of their hearts that had not yet been purified. Behind this we might hear the new covenant promise of places such as Ezekiel recalls various old covenant rituals, but it is now fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the underlying heart problem of the people of God as a whole is addressed as the Spirit communicates Christ's life, the life of the one faithful one, the one who offered himself as a true and perfect sacrifice of human obedience. That life is communicated to us. The body is the means of access and our bodies are washed with pure water.

There is likely some reference to baptism here. The priest had his body washed in order to enter the service of the sanctuary, as described in Exodus 40 verses 12-15. Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water, and put on Aaron the holy garments.

And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, and anoint them as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as priest. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.

We have our bodies washed with pure water as a seal of our access to God's presence. The body is the foundation of the self. Before we ever developed a sense of self, interiority, subjectivity and agency, or a clear will, we are and were bodies.

Our washed bodies assure us that we have true access to God's presence, that we are welcomed as persons into God's house. Our faithful confidence to enter God's presence draws confidence from the faithfulness of the God who called us. God has not only promised, but he backed up his promise with an oath, so that there might be no doubt.

The author of Hebrews follows his exhortation to hold fast and unwavering the confession of their hope with a second exhortation. The heroes of the book should also stir each other up to love and good works. They must take an active concern in the

spiritual well-being and growth of their brothers and sisters, desiring that they will be encouraged in love and good works, which are the appropriate fruit of a true faith.

A particular concern here is that they are committed to their meeting together. The danger they faced was that of abandoning their duties to each other, and abandoning the ministry that other Christians performed towards them. They would fail to stir other people up to love and good works, and they would neglect the other people who would stir them up to love and good works.

The value of meeting together is not just some message from the front, as it were, it's the constant mutual encouragement that occurs in our fellowships. The neglect of such assemblies seems to have been a real issue among the people to whom the author of Hebrews writes. However, he wants them to feel the urgency of faithfulness at that time.

The day was drawing near. I suspect by this he is referring not to the final day of judgment, but to a more imminent day of judgment that is nearer in time, the day of judgment that would occur in A.D. 70, as judgment would come upon the Temple and upon the Jews who had rejected Christ in that generation. His tone at this point shifts.

It goes from encouragement to a stern warning. There are those who purposefully turn away from God, who reject all the good gifts that have been given to them, and end up bringing greater judgment upon themselves. He has already presented similar warnings earlier in the Epistle.

The contrast between the salvation received by the Israelites under Moses, and that received through Christ, is an important spur to this. It allows him to make an argument from the lesser to the greater. If rejection of the salvation given through Moses was so significant, how much more so that which is received through Christ? Intentional, willful, persistent sin after receiving the truth faces serious consequences.

We know the reality of the salvation given in Christ, and if we turn our backs upon it, then there remains no hope for us. There is no salvation left in the Judaism to which such people could return. Judgment is going to fall upon Jerusalem and its Temple.

All its efficacy looked forward to the efficacy of a sacrifice that would be offered in Christ. There is no hope to go back now. All that awaits is literally the fury of fire that will destroy that whole system in a few years' time.

Reject the sacrifice of Christ, and there's no other sacrifice towards which you can turn. There's no other way to get access to God. All that awaits is eternal loss.

If there was a death sentence for those who formerly apostatised and rejected Moses' law, how much more for those who reject Christ? They face that eternal loss. There is no hope for them. There's a threefold description that he gives of what rejecting Christ means.



They have trampled underfoot the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of Grace. Such a person who willfully rejects Christ, even knowing what that salvation means, is someone who tramples Christ underfoot. They profane the blood of the covenant by which that new and living way into God's presence was made open for us, treating that blood of Christ, his sacrifice, as a mean or a common thing, something of no value, even though it is the most holy and precious thing of all.

There is a contrast here between sanctification, that which renders us holy, and profanation, that which despises or holds something up to contempt. Such a devaluation or denigration of the sacrifice of Christ is a deeply serious matter. Such an apostate is also insulting or outraging the Spirit of Grace, disdaining the one who communicates the grace of God and the life of Christ to us.

This is what the rejection of Christ and his sacrifice will lead to, and the consequences for such a person are of the utmost severity. The author of Hebrews does not want to give any ground for presumption. While he seeks to spur Christians to a proper confidence in God's promise and the surety of his word, he does not allow them to take confidence just in a once-saved-always-saved position, for instance.

True salvation requires perseverance in the faith, holding on to God's grace and not letting go. Those who once received God's blessings and abandoned them, and rejected them and despised them, faced the devastating prospect of eternal loss. While some might be tempted to look back to their first start in the faith as a source of presumption, that once they had received the grace of Christ there was never any risk of their losing it, the author of Hebrews wants them to look back in a different way, to look at the start that they made in the faith, to seek to keep up that same spirit that enabled them to face the challenges of persecution and opposition, to recognise how much they valued the hope and the promise that they had been given at that point, and not to let go.

They had looked forward to a greater reward which enabled them to hold their earthly possessions with an open hand, to be prepared to sacrifice or lose much on account of the much greater gain and reward that they awaited. They once had that confidence and they should not throw it away, it is invaluable, don't give up what you began, recognise those earlier sacrifices and commitments that you made, follow them through, abandon those sacrifices at this point and all that you once suffered will have been in vain. There is a value of looking back here, not to take presumption but to redouble your commitment.

The salvation of God will surely come, even though it might appear to tarry, here he quotes Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 2-4 And the Lord answered me, Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time, it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it, it will

surely come, it will not delay.

Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. That passage speaks of God's judgement upon the Chaldeans that would occur even if it appeared to take time. Paul also quotes this in Romans chapter 1. The author of Hebrews here quotes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which he is using, and he tweets it in order to strengthen the contrast between living by faith and drawing back.

The wilderness generation were those who drew back, but the people of Christ should be those of faith. Righteousness, proper standing in good relationship with God, is confident faith in the certainty of God's promise. The author gets his hearers to look back, to look at the start that they made, to look forward to the hope that they await, and to redouble their energies and their commitment, striving to enter into the promise that God has set before them.

The confidence with which they began is of inestimable value. To abandon it at this point would be a tragedy indeed. He is like the coach encouraging the runner on the last leg of the race.

Don't give up now. Think of all the sacrifices that you have made. Think of all the things that you are looking forward to as a reward for this victory.

Do not let go. Do not give up. Continue and persevere.

Grasp hold of what you are waiting. It is all so close. There's only a little further to go.

At the beginning of chapter 12 he will turn to this language of a race, a race that must be run with endurance, and talks about the witnesses that help us in pursuing this, the great gallery of faith to which he will introduce us in the following chapter. A question to consider. Can you identify some of the sources of confidence and commitment that the author of Hebrews directs our attention to in this chapter?