

A Blessed Assurance

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Date: 26 January 2020

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[0 : 0 0] The title that I've given this message tonight is simply, Ah, Blessed Assurance, and that's using words of the same hymn writer, the famous hymn writer, as I mentioned this morning, the writer of All the Way My Savior Leads Me. But let me introduce this text before we come to it in Job 19 and 25 by reference to a well-known Christian of more recent times. When the late John Stott was dying in a nursing home in July 2011, it was, a small group of friends had gathered by his bedside, and this is from the biography of his secretary, Francis Whitehead. I quote from her description, In the early afternoon, one of the groups suggested that they play a CD of excerpts from Handel's

Messiah, which John's niece, Sarah, had left, knowing her uncle's love of it. In due course, the Hallelujah Chorus completed the second part. Then came the confident soprano, Ere I Know That My Redeemer Liveth, Job 19.25. Soon after this, John Stott entered Christ's nearer presence. While the Apostle Paul's declaration could be heard, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 1 Corinthians 15.52. That's the quotation. And isn't that a moving story? And if it's not too irreverent to say it, what a way to go. And that's the text that I would bring before you this evening from these famous words of Job, Job chapter 19 and verse 25, I know that my Redeemer lives. And it is in that Redeemer who lived on earth, who died at Calvary, and who rose again, that Christian hope finds its ground and vitality. It's a great text and a tremendous testimony, and I want to suggest very simply that it is powerful, it is prophetic, and it is personal. First of all, that it's powerful, and I mean especially when seen in the context of the book of Job. He rises to this height of faith, really, and it's all the more wonderful and more powerful when we remember that what Job had gone through and what he was still going through when he said this here, which is more or less in the middle of the book. As we said this morning, the book starts with the story of the loss of his wealth, the loss of his family, and the loss of his health. And it was just one thing after another. We don't know a great deal about the nature of his troubles, but there are some verses that do give us some indication of the different aspects, we might say, of his pain. Let me just, if you have nimble fingers, you can follow me in this. In chapter 2 and verse 7, first of all, we read earlier on, chapter 2 verse 7, it refers to painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head, so severe that he took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. Whatever it was, it led to these suppurating sores all over his body, which threatened to drive him mad. And then if we flick over chapter 16 and just glance at a few other places, in chapter 16 verses 1 to 3, he pictures himself as little more than a target at which archers shoot their arrows. There he says, his archers surround me without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. Same chapter, verse 16, refers to his face being red with weeping, deep shadows around my eyes. And then in this present chapter now, over in chapter 19, verse 17, he's even saying, my breath is offensive to my wife. And verse 20, I am nothing but skin and bones, emaciated, gaunt. Later, further, quite a bit later in chapter 30, he adds quite a lot more to this grim picture really. Chapter 30 and verse 17, my gnawing pains never rest. And verse 27 there, the churning inside me never stops. And verse 30, my skin grows black and peels, my body burns with fever. That's just a sampling of some of the things that he describes, and it all adds up to a terrible picture of somebody suffering agonies in all sorts of ways in a world where, let's remind ourselves, it's perfectly obvious that they knew nothing of antibiotics or painkillers. Indeed, it's one of the great things about the book of Job, that it comes, the lessons of this book come not from a philosophy classroom, but from the crucible of suffering. Here's a man who has come through the mill and who still trusts in a living God, and his, I know that my Redeemer lives, is very powerful when seen against that background. And let me suggest now that Job's sufferings were actually aggravated by two things. First of all, by what seemed the unfairness of it all, and then secondly, by

the unhelpfulness of his friends. The unfairness of it all, first of all, there is a story told of a tragedy that befell a one-time prime minister of this country, David Lloyd George, who was in a meeting, and he was called from the meeting to take a phone call from a doctor who informed him that his daughter had died. And naturally, that affected him greatly, and it's said that he turned from the phone and said in frustration, why doesn't life work? And there's the question. He had reached the highest political office in the nation, but high office is no buffer against tragedy. Nothing can be a buffer against tragedy. You may be rich, you may be powerful, you may be famous, you may be influential, but none of these things can protect you from life's blows. We all know that, don't we? Why, Job might have asked, why doesn't life work? And what's more, why do evil people prosper? You may remember Psalm 73 talks about that very issue. It talks about the prosperity of the wicked. So Psalm 73, they have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man. They are not plagued by human ills. And so it goes on, and there's the seeming unfairness of it all. And then secondly, there's the unhelpfulness of his friends. Friends, somebody has said, with friends like these, who would need enemies? Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu, along they come with our simple remedy. Job, you just need to confess whatever terrible sins you have committed, and then God will smile upon you. And so it is in this chapter that we read, Job bursts out, as it were, with that, how long will you torment me with and crush me with words? The power of words. Proverbs 18.21 says, the power of life and death is in the tongue.

[8 : 35] And I often illustrate that by a vivid phrase from one of William Golding's novels. It was the words of a schoolboy about a teacher who was a professing Christian. And this is the sentence.

She turned on me and tore a vivid gash through my soul with the raw edge of a suddenly savage voice. That is a powerful description. That is an eloquent phrase, isn't it? And what a terrible thing. The power of words. And Job's friends, far from helping him by what they were saying to him, were just kind of rubbing salt into the wound. Poor man. Verse 3, 10 times now you've reproached me. Shamelessly you attack me. And then adds in verse 4, if it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. In other words, he admits that he has sinned. We have all sinned, but he said, it's not for you to beat me over the head with my sins. In verse 18, he says, even the little boys scorn me. When I appear, they ridicule me. And as we know in Bible times, as in many cultures today, there has been a strong emphasis on respect for the elderly, especially in the East, I understand. And in fact, I heard a missionary in Laos, who is just over 60, I think, more or less. And she found herself treated with great respect, she said, because she was so old, just over 60. But anyway, there has been a respect for the elderly, and it was hard for Job to take the scorn of children. And the end of verse 19, those I love have turned against me. Somebody has written about the aloofness of erstwhile friends is a hard thing to bear. Those who once had a regard for you, but now don't have the time of day for you.

All of that's pretty grim. But there's something even worse, of course. Verses 6 to 12, God has wronged me. And that's the cruelest thing of all, the feeling that God has turned against him.

[11 : 12] Verse 11, his anger burns against me. He counts me among my enemies. Now, all of this, all that I've said just now, I think shows just how powerful is the theme of our text. Against all of that background, Job still says, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. How amazing and how powerful is that?

Second thing I would say about it is it's prophetic. How remarkable are the words of the text, in the end, he will stand upon the earth, when you think about it in relation to the whole prophecy of the coming Redeemer. Now, the word for Redeemer is the word that is translated sometimes as kinsman Redeemer, and Deuteronomy 25 it is, refers to the law of levirate marriage from the Latin word for brother-in-law, by which if a man dies, or if a man died then, it was the responsibility of his next of kin to redeem the property of the deceased, in situations like Ruth's famously in the Bible story, even to take the widow as his own wife, raising up children in the name, in the dead man's name. And when you apply that word, you see another great thing about the Christian faith, namely that our faith is in one who has come to share our humanity and to be our Redeemer. The word became flesh, a real flesh and blood human being, one who was tempted as we are, though without sinning, as we know, and who is therefore able to sympathize and able to help. Job hoped for somebody to vindicate him, but the fulfillment of the prophecy outshone the prediction. And in the fullness of the time, Christ came to redeem his people from sin and evil and death. Now it says, he

will stand upon the earth. That's what the text says, he will stand upon the earth. So he did, when we think it out. I mean, firstly, he came to earth as a baby. There's a song, one of the songs by Graham Kendrick says, what greater love could he have shown to shamed humanity? And then it says, yet human pride hates to believe in such deep humility. There is something about the heart of fallen human beings that rebels against instructions like humble yourself before the Lord, James 5 and 10. But this is, you might say, the super fulfillment of Job's word. The Redeemer did stand upon the earth at Bethlehem and Nazareth. And hopefully another line from that song of Graham Kendrick's would be true for us as well. The more I hear the story told, the more amazed I am. And then secondly, he stood on the earth in

Galilee, by which I refer really to the whole of his earthly ministry, healing the sick, telling his parables, teaching his disciples, modeling the life of God, caring for the outcasts and even the untouchables, and loving even his enemies. He did stand upon the earth. And then thirdly, of course, he was lifted up from the earth. That cross stood firmly on the earth. And we're reminded that Christianity is not some sanitized religion that is all about white robes and stained glass windows and all that sort of thing. It centers rather in horrible scenes, horrible events that took place right there upon the solid ground of this earth, amid all the squalor and the muck and the gore. But again, he did stand upon the earth in his risen glory. He made a point of saying that ghosts don't have flesh and bones as they could see that he had, Luke 24, 39. Christianity stands on that faith, belief in his bodily resurrection from the dead, this Redeemer for whom Job looked, who did indeed stand again upon the earth. And you could say there's another thing still. He will stand upon the earth because he promised to return. None of us knows when he will come, but we know that he will come.

He will stand upon the earth. And obviously, the Bible presents us with the challenge continually about that, will we be ready? So many parables in the New Testament make the point, be ready, which doesn't mean to stop everything and, you know, all these stories about going up a mountain to await his coming or nothing like that at all. It means being faithful and obedient in all that lies before us. It means honoring him as Lord and Master in every aspect of our lives, our studying life, our working life, our home life, whatever. It means not leaning on our own understanding, but acknowledging him in everything and trusting him with all our hearts. So, yes, this text is actually prophetic, prophetic in ways that Job could not possibly have realized. He looked for a kinsman Redeemer to vindicate him, but his words set in the context of the whole Bible point us to a greater reality in one who did come to be the Redeemer, the Redeemer with a capital R, who came to win redemption for all who will trust in him, those who give up the idea of ever making themselves good enough to be accepted by God and trust rather in the finished work of this Redeemer.

[17:59] There's Job then, Job, this poor man sitting under the weight of all that suffering, looking for a Redeemer who would stand upon the earth. Well, we can say, well, Job, he did come, that Redeemer, the baby of Bethlehem, the man of Galilee, the man on the cross, the risen Lord, the Lord who will return. So, it's a text that is powerful, a text that is prophetic, and then thirdly, it's a text that is personal because it does have that note of personal conviction in it, doesn't it? Obviously, I know. I know that my Redeemer lives. He even says in verse 26, and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. That's actually Christian hope, isn't it, of a day when we will see him face to face with resurrection bodies, spiritual bodies in the new heaven and new earth promised in Revelation. It's see him with my eyes, in my flesh see him. And that's so far in advance of many who, if they talk about the afterlife at all, talk about it in very vague or even spooky terms as a realm of spirits or ghosts or whatever.

And you remember the relevant phrase of the Apostles' Creed says, I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That's our hope. I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. There may be many things about that that are beyond our human understanding that stands to reason. After all, we being humans, he being God, but the Bible proclaims a reality greater and grander in the life to come.

There was an Edinburgh minister once called Leonard Small who wrote in his autobiography about his wife's long illness with muscular dystrophy. And this is what he wrote, in all those shadowy years, I don't think I ever asked my God why. I often asked God how.

How are we going to bear and share all this as we have done all else in these 48 years of life together? That prayer was always answered, for amazing grace did not fail either of us. When she eventually died, he tells then of thinking about at her funeral service of some words of a novelist,

Christ has made death to be no more than a gateway on the skyline of life.

That is not to downplay the serious reality of death. Death is a terrible thing. Death is the enemy of God and man, the last enemy indeed. But what does faith say? Jesus lives. Thy terrors now can, O death, no more Apollos. Jesus lives. Henceforth is death, but the gate to life immortal.

[21 : 35] So, never mind all these silly poems and all the rest of it that go around and say, I did not die and, you know, see me in the flowers and the tree, all that sort of nonsense. Nothing like the biblical hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting in and through Jesus Christ.

Job 19.25 is not just part of the Old Testament. It's part of the whole Bible. And it can be seen in the light of what became so much clearer through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's His death that has destroyed death and dealt with sin, and it's His resurrection that has indeed smashed the power of death and opened the gates of life. That's what that is well expressed in one of these modern hymns that says, see what a morning, gloriously bright with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem. Honor and blessing, glory and praise to the King crowned with power and authority. And we are raised with Him. Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered, and we shall reign with Him. For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead. That's tremendous. That's the Christian hope, and it is something to rejoice our hearts. But even here, back in the days when Job couldn't know of Bethlehem and Calvary, he expresses this personal conviction. And this is what makes all the difference, to know that there is a Redeemer. And that, I know, certainly carries the tone of personal conviction.

In verse 27 too, it's personal. I myself will see Him with my own eyes, I and not another, how my heart yearns within me. This is not wishful thinking. This is not some general theoretical principle. This is not some vague dream. He says, I know. This is the bottom line. There are many things that I don't know, many things that I don't understand, many questions that I have, but behind it all, I know this. I know that my Redeemer lives crowned upon the throne. Lord, over earth and heaven, He saved and He alone. He couldn't yet have imagined the second half of that verse that says, He conquered death by dying upon the accursed tree, and from His death sprang glorious eternal life for me.

Although it is true when you come to the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, you get more detailed prophecies about what would happen in Bethlehem of Ephrathah when the servant of the Lord would be pierced for our transgressions. I thought that text actually reminds you, does it not, in a way of that once blind man of John 9. And you remember how Jesus' enemies tried to trip him up with question after question, until at last he could simply say, one thing I know, that once I was blind, and now I can see. That was the incontrovertible fact of the matter. They might badger him till the cows come home, which is a furiously mixed metaphor when you mix up badgers and cows together. But you know I mean, they might go on at him forever and ever, but he knew that he had been blind, and now he could see. That was the one thing that was certain, and it's almost as if from the depths of his sufferings,

[25 : 43] Job says, but one thing I know, that there is a Redeemer. He couldn't yet add Jesus, God's own Son, precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One. But this was his underlying undiminished faith, I know, that my Redeemer lives. Now let me ask you to think of one other thing. How astonishing it all must have appeared to those who observed what was happening. I mean, how did he still hold on to that faith of his when all around had given way, and really everything had been taken from him, and he'd been crushed into the ground, so it seems. And perhaps you can imagine them talking to one another, and maybe they would come round to saying, well, whatever else we may say about Job, it's undeniable that his faith has held fast. The devil might say that Job was, you know, a fair weather believer, that his faith would soon crumble away if you just touch his very soul and his body, that things would, if things gave way in that way. Well, no, his anchor does seem to have held in the storms of life, and whether we agree with him or not in his conclusions. He is a man with an undeniable conviction. I don't know if they might have thought that when they observed what was going on. Wouldn't that be a great testimony for people to have today, for God's people to be living such dedicated lives in prosperity or adversity such that others would take note of our conviction?

Do you know, there's a story of the famous Scottish philosopher David Hume, who was an atheist and had very little time for religion, but one day as he went along a street somewhere, I don't know where this happened. A friend asked him where he was going, and he said, to hear George Whitefield preach.

And this friend was startled and said, but you don't believe what Whitefield is preaching, do you? And Hume's reply was, no, but Whitefield does. There's no record, I'm afraid, of Hume being convinced or convicted, but even as an unbeliever, he recognized the conviction of Whitefield. People could see that with Job as well, surely. Job had such conviction. I know that my Redeemer lives. This is no fairy tale. This is no maybe true and maybe untrue and I just want to hedge my bets kind of attitude. This is something of which I am absolutely convinced. This is a blessed assurance. And can we say the same? Can we say, by God's grace, because it is by His grace, He's the one that opens our eyes?

[28 : 51] I know. It's not just my feeling, my sneaking suspicion, my hunch, my opinion. It's not even just my hope in the vague way that that term is often used.

We, you know, we hope it's going to be nice tomorrow so we get out in the golf course, something like that. That vague sense of the word hope. Much more than that, I am convinced. And how could anybody come to have such an assurance? Well, partly through the sheer weight of evidence for the truth claims of Christianity and the Bible. Before that, really, because of the inner conviction of the Spirit, bringing us to an ever surer grasp of the central things of our faith. And, of course, here it is in our hands. The more you heed what He says in His word, and the more you give yourself to knowing Him in prayer, and the more you act in obedience to what you know He has revealed to be His will, the more you'll be able to share Job's sure conviction.

[30 : 02] And these words, the words of this text, face us with that question of whether we will go the same way as Job. Whatever sorrows there may have been in our hearts and lives, whatever trials, whatever experiences of ourselves or of others that we know that might question our faith, here is a word that faces us with a choice, as if it says to us, well, you can choose to go the way of despair and just conclude that there is no meaning in life, that everything is just a meaningless accident, and you just have to make the best of it, or you can go with Job and share that faith that came to mean so much to him and that can mean so much to us as well.

To Bildad, who had spoken in chapter 18, and to the other comforters whose words Job was answering in this text, God was little more than a factor in a formula or a theory. But to Job, God was his Redeemer, into whose hands he would commit his cause, into whose care he would commit his soul, into whose service he would give his life, which is surely the better choice.

Will it be yours and mine? Let me draw it together, finally, with some words from Charles Spurgeon's little booklet, devotional booklet, Morning and Evening Daily Readings. This was actually a few weeks ago. It was his evening reading for January the 10th, when he was on this very text, In My Flesh I Shall See God.

[32 : 00] And this is what Spurgeon said about it. Mark the subject of Job's devout anticipation. I shall see God. He does not say, I shall see the saints, though doubtless that will be untold felicity, but I shall see God.

It is not, I shall see the pearly gates, I shall behold the walls of Jasper, I shall gaze upon the crowns of gold, but I shall see God.

This is the sum and substance of heaven. This is the joyful hope of believers. It is their delight to see him now in the ordinances of faith. They love to behold him in communion and in prayer, but there in heaven, they shall have an open and unclouded vision, and thus seeing him as he is, shall be made completely like him.

The patriarch, he means Job, looked forward to this sight of God as a personal enjoyment, whom mine eyes shall behold and not another. Take realizing views of heaven's bliss.

Think what it will be to you. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty. All earthly brightness fades and darkens as we gaze upon it, but here is a brightness which can never dim, a glory that can never fade.

[33 : 34] I shall see God. So he says, I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end, he will stand upon 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. That is powerful. It is prophetic and it is personal.

I know that my Redeemer lives. Amen. And may God bless his word to our hearts. Let us pray. Lord God, again we give thanks for this testimony of your believer of old, the saint of old, Job, who had

suffered so much, but who expressed this tremendous assertion, this great statement of faith. I know that my Redeemer lives. We remember, O Lord. We've thought of how powerful it is against the background of his sufferings, against the background of all that other people were saying to him.

But Lord, we thank you that it is a powerful statement and that it turned out to be so prophetic of the Redeemer who did come and who did stand upon this earth in his incarnate life, in his risen power, and who will stand upon the earth when he comes again.

[35 : 11] And Lord, we remember it's a personal text and we pray that by your grace, by the leading of your Spirit, we may more and more be able to say, it's my faith as well.

I know that my Redeemer lives. Hear us, O Lord, in our prayer and we give thanks for your word that you have caused to be written down and inspired for our good and for our instruction.

We give thanks in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.