

Hope Complains

Job 24:1, 9-12, 19-25
SS Lesson for 10/19/2014

Devotional Scripture: 1 Cor 10:9-13

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson seeks to make us consider why sometimes our **Hope Complains**. The **study's aim** is to comprehend and accept that personal affliction will be part of our earthly experience. The **study's application** is to actively respond to affliction, not by retaliating but by understanding it and not allowing it to crush us. (Adapted from *the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

Key Verse: Ps 55:16

As for me, I will call upon God, And the Lord shall save me.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

This psalm records David's experience of persecution through the betrayal of an intimate friend. Commentators speculate that the occasion was Ahithophel's treachery (2 Sam. 15:31), but this is far from certain. In the psalm David called on God to enable him to escape from his terrible plight. He lamented the oppression that had come through being betrayed by his close friend. Yet David expressed his personal confidence in God who redeems. In verses Ps 55:1-8, records David's prayer to be delivered from his terrible oppression. He cried out to God, pleading that God hear his restless complaint (Ps 55:1-2a). His enemy was staring at him and angrily reviling him, reducing him to fear... trembling, and horror (Ps 55:2b-5). So he longed to escape from the hostility (Ps 55:6-8), like a dove flying away to a place of refuge in the desert, to a shelter ("a place of escape," used only here in the OT) from the storm. The psalmist asked God to confuse the wicked who oppressed him. The basis of this imprecatory prayer is that the city (perhaps Jerusalem) was filled with violence and strife and malice and abuse, which in turn were caused by threats and lies by the wicked. The painful part of his exposure to this destructive violence was that it came through the betrayal of a faithful companion. David said he could have borne the oppression of an enemy or could have hidden from a foe but far worse was the fact that he was betrayed by a close friend. David addressed the traitor (it is you), recalling how they worshiped the Lord together with the congregation (throng). Thus the psalmist wished God's swift destruction (by death) on all his enemies (cf. Ps 55:23). Expressing his confidence in the Lord, David said the Lord saves me. Knowing this, he would continue to call out to Him in his distress, for the Lord, who redeems him in battle, would hear him. God, the sovereign Ruler, hears the prayers of His own; He also hears and knows about the violence of the wicked. Having no fear of God, they are defeated by the Lord. Included among those who do not fear God was David's companion, who broke his covenant and became deceitfully destructive. This "friend's" talk was smooth and soothing but animosity was in his heart. Four times David spoke of his enemies' words being sharp and destructive like swords (cf. Ps 57:4; Ps 59:7; Ps 64:3). David's confidence found expression in his words to the saints to entrust (cast) their burdens (cares) onto the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 5:7). God will never forsake the righteous (cf. Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5). But He will destroy (cf. Ps. 55:15) bloodthirsty and deceitful men who afflict the righteous.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Theodicy is a technical term that means "defense of God's goodness and power in view of the existence of evil." For some, this definition brings up a logical dilemma that keeps them from placing faith in the God of Scripture. According to this dilemma, skeptics say that there are three statements that cannot all be true at the same time: God is good, God is all-powerful, and evil exists. Skeptics say that it's a case of "you can pick any two to be true, but not all three." This line of thought allows the skeptic to propose that (1) if evil exists and God is good, then God is not powerful enough to do anything about the evil or else he would; or (2) if God is all-powerful and evil prevails, then it means that God must not be good, or else he would use his power to end evil; or if God is both good and all-powerful, then evil must not really exist—it's an illusion. Let's take for granted that evil does indeed exist; it is not a figment of our imagination. Must we then choose between Proposal 1 and Proposal 2? It seems as though something has to give. Christian thinkers have long wrestled with questions of theodicy and have suggested various answers. The book of Job is a valuable resource in this regard.

The background of this week's lesson deals with the interim between Job 19 (last week) and Job 24 (this week), Job has undergone two more rounds of counseling—one by Zophar (chap. 20) and one by Eliphaz (chap. 22). The friends' counsel did not comfort Job. They said he was guilty of wrongdoing that deserved to be punished. They accused him of pride in being unwilling to confess his guilt. They called him to heed time-tested wisdom, to repent of evil, and get right with God so God could prosper him again. Zophar seems to have taken the response in Job 19:28, 29 as a personal insult (20:3). In turn, Job viewed Zophar's rejoinder as mockery (21:3) and falsehood (21:34). When it was Eliphaz's turn, he accused Job of great wickedness (22:5-9), the cure being repentance (22:21-30). In reaction, Job expressed his wish to gain access to God's presence so he (Job) could plead his case and be acquitted (Job 23:3-7). Job then confessed that it was impossible to do so (23:8, 9) and that he was powerless to do anything about God's plans for him (23:13, 14). Today's text offers us another part of Job's reaction.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Scripture paints a vivid picture of sinful human nature at work. After Adam and Eve sinned, it was not long until the first murder occurred; mankind had begun its downward spiral into corruption. By Noah's day, the earth was filled with violence. Evil thoughts dominated the minds of men (Gen. 6:5, 11-13). Though He purged the earth with the Flood, God knew that sinful man would always pollute it. Still, He vowed never again to destroy mankind with a flood (Gen. 8:21). Through prophetic Scripture we know that in the end times, He will purge the earth again, this time with fire (2 Pet. 3:10-12). But in the interval, sinful human nature continues to manifest itself, sometimes in unspeakable ways. In this week's lesson text Job reflected on areas of life in which evil seemed to prosper and justice was trodden down. Job introduced this week's lesson text with a penetrating question: "Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?" (Job 24:1). This is a question we all ask. If God knows and designs the times, why does He seem to miss the days in which the wicked afflict us? Job now has our undivided attention. It appears to us that the wicked get away with abusing and hurting people. If God is holy, with perfect standards of morality, and if He is all-powerful and able to punish the wicked, why does He wait? This week's lesson addresses this question. Like many other mysteries in life, the answer is in the timing—God's timing.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Injustice Thrives (Job 24:1, 9-12)

- 1 "Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, Why do those who know Him see not His days?
9 "Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, And take a pledge from the poor.
10 They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; And they take away the sheaves from the hungry.
11 They press out oil within their walls, And tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst.
12 The dying groan in the city, And the souls of the wounded cry out; Yet God does not charge them with wrong.

God allows (1)

Just because God allows injustice doesn't mean that He is not to be feared (Isa 57:11)

11 "Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me, and have neither remembered me nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?"

Just because God allows injustice He will still hold the unrighteous until judgment (2 Peter 2:7-10)

7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. 10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings;

Just because God allows injustice know that scoffers are storing up God's wrath (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Just because God allows injustice He will still punish those who do not know or obey Him (2 Thess 1:5-9)

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Just because God allows injustice the wicked will still pass away (Ps 37:35-36)

35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, 36 but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.

Just because God allows injustice the wicked will eventually be destroyed (Ps 92:7)

7 that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be forever destroyed.

Wickedness seems everywhere (9-12)

Wickedness caused by people's own actions (Ps 7:15-16)

15 He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. 16 The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

Wickedness caused by people's bad choices (Prov 1:29-31)

29 Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord, 30 since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, 31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

Wickedness caused by people doing evil (Jer 18:9-10)

9 And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, 10 and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Wickedness caused by people not knowing God (Titus 1:16)

16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Wickedness caused by people's stubbornness and forsaking God's word (Jer 9:13-14)

13 The Lord said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. 14 Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them."

Wickedness caused by people's violation of God's covenant (Deut 17:2-5)

2 If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant, 3 and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars of the sky, 4 and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.

Wickedness caused by people dishonoring God (Rom 2:23-24)

23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Wickedness caused by people forgetting all God has done for them (Heb 8:9)

9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

Justice Prevails (Job 24:19-25)

19 As drought and heat consume the snow waters, So the grave consumes those who have sinned.
20 The womb should forget him, The worm should feed sweetly on him; He should be remembered no more, And wickedness should be broken like a tree.
21 For he preys on the barren who do not bear, And does no good for the widow.
22 "But God draws the mighty away with His power; He rises up, but no man is sure of life.
23 He gives them security, and they rely on it; Yet His eyes are on their ways.
24 They are exalted for a little while, Then they are gone. They are brought low; They are taken out of the way like all others; They dry out like the heads of grain.
25 "Now if it is not so, who will prove me a liar, And make my speech worth nothing?"

Destiny of the wicked (19-21)

A destiny of being shut out from the presence of God (2 Thess 1:9)

9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

A destiny filled with God's wrath (Rev 14:10-11)

10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

A destiny of being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15)

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

A destiny named the second death (Rev 21:8)

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

A destiny of eternal fire (Matt 25:41)

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

A destiny of a great chasm that cannot be crossed (Luke 16:26)

26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

A destiny of destruction (Phil 3:19)

19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

Intervention by God (22-25)

Intervention by God to shorten the days of tribulation (Mark 13:20)

20 If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

Intervention by God to saved some (Zech 13:8-9)

8 In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. 9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Intervention by God to show His mercy (Rom 11:30-32)

30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Intervention by God to honor His promises (Isa 45:4)

4 For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.

Intervention by God to protect His elect (Rev 7:2-3)

2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from David Guzik

Job 29:1-25 – *Job Remembers Better Days*

A. Job's blessed relationships

1. (Job 29:1-6) Job was blessed in his relationship with God

a. Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God watched over me: Job longed not only for the days before he lost his children and health and wealth; he especially longed for the days before he lost his sense of God's closeness. There was a time when he felt that God watched over him; and those days were gone.

i. "His keenest sorrow is discovered. It was that of the feeling that, in some way, and for some reason, God no longer watched over him." (Morgan)

ii. Job further continued his discourse: "Probably, after a pause, Job resumed his speech. This second address was not so much an answer to his friends as a statement of his whole case as he saw it." (Morgan)

b. When His lamp shone upon my head . . . when the friendly counsel of God was over my tent . . . when the Almighty was yet with me: Job fondly remembered the days when it seemed that God was *for* him rather than *against* him. It reminds us of the fact that Job's great crisis after his catastrophic losses was primarily *spiritual*, in that he did not sense the support and succor of God in the aftermath of his loss.

i. "It is a great thing for a man to be near to God; it is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion, and to become God's familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light." (Spurgeon)

ii. Spurgeon went on to describe the ways that Job sensed this great loss from God.

- “First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of divine *preservation*” (as in the days when God watched over me).
- “Job had also lost divine *consolation*, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God’s candle shone upon his head” (when His lamp shone upon my head).
- “Moreover, Job deplored the loss of divine *illumination*. ‘By his light,’ he says, ‘I walked through darkness,’ that is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity” (by His light I walked through darkness).
- “Moreover, Job had lost divine *communion*: so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle” (when the friendly counsel of God was over my tent).

c. When my children were around me; when my steps were bathed with cream, and the rock poured out rivers of oil for me: Job painted a beautiful (if exaggerated) picture of his former happy life. He genuinely felt that he was in fellowship with God and the blessing flowed in to every area of his life.

2. (Job 29:7-17) Job was blessed in the relationships with people

a. I went out the gate . . . I took my seat in the open square: In this and the following verses Job remembered how greatly he was respected in the community. He had a position of community leadership and was feared by the young men and honored by the aged. Even princes and nobles stopped talking and listened to him.

i. “We have no idea what this city was, but any city that had a gate and a public square was a major urban center.” (Smick)

b. When the ear heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me: Not only did Job gain the attention of the people and leaders of the city in days past; they also *liked* him and what he had to say. He was blessed and approved by those who heard him.

c. Because I delivered the poor who cried out . . . I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy . . . I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame: Job described how his reputation for wisdom and goodness was *deserved*. He was a man full of good and noble works, especially to the poor and disadvantaged.

i. It reminds us that though Job was a man of great wealth and influence (Job 1:1-3), he used his wealth and influence to do good instead of simply being greedy and selfish with his wealth.

ii. “In Job’s conscience, sins are not just wrong things people do, disobeying known laws of God or society; to omit to do good to any fellow human being, of whatever rank or class, would be a grievous offence to God.” (Andersen)

iii. “It was not ambition, popularity, or self-interest that put Job upon these and the following good practices and proceedings, but the care he had of discharging his trust, and the pure love he bore to justice and upright dealing.” (Trapp)

iv. “Not once before this has he pointed to any of his good deeds as evidence of his faith, but rather he has taken his stand squarely upon faith alone and not upon works. The fact that Job waited so long to introduce any hard evidence into this debate with his friends shows enormous restraint on his part.” (Mason)

B. Job reflects on former times.

1. (Job 29:18-20) Job’s former sense of security and confidence

a. I shall die in my nest, and multiply my days as the sand: In his former confidence, Job felt that he would die happy and secure in his nest, after a good long life.

i. Smick mentions an unlikely approach taken by some translators, thinking that Job made a reference to the mythical creature known as the phoenix in Job 29:18 : “Some translators accept the old rabbinic opinion that the second half of the line speaks of the phoenix. The question seems to hinge on whether the word *hol* (usually ‘sand’) can mean ‘phoenix’ at all.”

b. My root is spread out to the waters . . . My glory is fresh within me: We can sense Job's prior sense of blessing and abundance of life. His former blessed life made his present crisis all the more unbearable and seemingly unjust.

i. Root is spread out to the waters: "A metaphor taken from a healthy tree growing beside a rivulet where there is plenty of water; which in consequence flourishes in *all seasons*, its leaf does not *wither*, nor its fruit *fall off*. See Psalms 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8." (Clarke)

2. (Job 29:21-25) Job's former authority and leadership in the community

a. Men listened to me and waited . . . After my words they did not speak again: Job again remembered how greatly he was respected and esteemed in the community. He was a man honored for his wise words.

i. Even if Job had mocked at them, then they did not believe it. "*They believed it not*; it was so acceptable to them to see me well pleased with them, that they could scarce believe their eyes and ears that it was so." (Poole)

b. I chose the way for them, and sat as chief: This highlights the tremendous contrast between the former esteem Job enjoyed and the terrible criticism he had endured from his friends. There was a time when no one would have criticized Job the way his friends now did.

i. Job is also a tremendous example of how a wealthy and powerful man should live his life; not in selfish indulgence, but in care and concern for the less fortunate. "Noble Job! Look at him, ye *nobles* of the earth, ye lieutenants of counties, ye generals of armies, and ye lords of provinces. Look at JOB! Imitate his active benevolence, and be healthy and happy. Be as guardian angels in your particular districts, blessing all by your example and your bounty. Send your *hunting horses* to the plough, your *game cocks* to the *dunghill*; and at last live like *men* and *Christians*." (Clarke)

(Adapted from URL: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/view.cgi?bk=17&ch=29>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The problem of theodicy, with which we began, remains a challenge for our thinking about God. Our passage has affirmed God's power, affirmed God's justice, and affirmed the reality of suffering. Humans may not understand how to affirm all three of these at the same time, but Scripture does not hesitate to do so. God cannot be contained by the logical boxes that we create, and we are too small to build boxes that can even come close (compare Isaiah 55:9). All of this is for the good. As children, we could not understand why our parents wouldn't let us eat ice cream before bed, why they were allowed to stay up late, and why one sibling was allowed to do something that another was not. It all seemed unfair from our perspective, no matter how hard we tried to wrap our minds around it. We truly comprehend only after we grow up. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the apostle reminds us that now we "know in part." When Christ returns and his kingdom comes in its fullness, then we will have answers to questions that are currently beyond us. In the meantime, we are to trust that the one in control has our best interests at heart. We do not have all the answers now, but we can rest assured that God does. Job was not privileged at the time to know what was really going on (see Job 1:1-2:7), but he had the wherewithal to invoke God's justice. Even when the fulfillment of that justice is not within sight, we can call on it in response to our pain (see Psalm 119:126). God is able and willing to handle the hurts and frustrations of his children

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God is just; but in our limited vision, we do not always fully see His justice (Job 24:1)
2. The wicked often do prosper, and God may not call them to account in this world (vss. 9-12)
3. The wicked may not experience judgment in this life, but they cannot escape God's justice (vss. 19-20)
4. We can be sure that the eyes of God are upon those who do evil (vss. 21-23)
5. The wicked are exalted for only a while, for they cannot escape death (vss. 24-25)