

Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 10, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Job 9:1-4, 11-12, 32-35; 16:18-19; 19:25-26 (Need for Christ)

While this passage along with 16:18-19 and 19:25-26 are not included in the lectionary reading, they have been considered by Christians as one of the major texts of the Old Testament pointing toward Jesus. In chapter 9, Job puts forward the difficulty of mortals approaching and infinite God. There is a gap between them. How can justice or for that matter love exist when there is such a gulf between them? Job pleads for a mediator, an advocate to fill the gap. In chapter 16, Job proclaims that there is a witness and an advocate in heaven. We know from the first chapters that the advocated is actually God. In chapter 19, Job proclaims that one day that advocate will come to earth, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God". These texts point not only to the need for Jesus but the role of Jesus as our mediator and advocate.

Job 9:33 There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both.

Why does Job need an umpire?

When have you wanted an umpire or mediator?

Where you dealing with an organization or the government?

What about a particularly difficult time in a relationship?

How does Jesus fill that role in your life?

Commentary on Mark 10:17-31 (Eye of a Needle)

The passage is between the discussion among the disciples as to who is the greatest and James and John's question about who will sit at Jesus' left and right. Together, they deal with three of the greatest temptations: wealth, position, and power. This is the only time when someone has rejected Jesus' call to discipleship and the reason is money. This rejection must have stung since it is said that Jesus "loved him" but the man loved money more. Peter, with a hint of jealousy, reminds Jesus that they left everything. Jesus responds that they will receive a servants reward - the thanks of those who can not pay and persecutions from those who's lifestyles are challenged. This passage also includes the much debated statement, "a camel going through the eye of a needle". One interpretation of this passage is that there is a door in the wall around Jerusalem called the needle because it is only meant for one person at a time (a precaution in times of siege). A camel, loaded with trade goods would find it impossible to go through such a small entrance. Note, it is not the camel that is the primary problem but the load that the camel is carrying. So to, it is the load of wealth the man is carrying that prevents him from following Jesus. What is keeping people from following Jesus today? Do they accept the narrow path or do they want the door to be widened to accommodate their needs? Is Jesus there to serve our petty desires or are we being called to follow him?

Mark 10:18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."

If even Jesus says he is not good, what hope is there for us?

Does this make more sense when we realize that Jesus includes both intention and action?

Could Jesus be referring to the wilderness temptation?

Without the possibility of intention, can there truly be temptation?

Without temptation, can Jesus really know what it is like to be human?

Maybe the point is not goodness but following God even during temptations?

Commentary on Hebrews 4:12-16 (High Priest)

At the end of the passage, we are given the assurance that we can approach the throne of grace with boldness. It is boldness in Christ and not ourselves that we can do this. The passage opens with a reminder that we are all subject to the judgment of the "Word". The term "naked and laid bare" refers to the exposing of the flesh before a sacrifice. There is nothing between the sharp knife of the law and the nakedness of our sin except Christ. As the high priest, it is Jesus that covers our sin and allows us to find mercy and grace in time of need.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

What is the difference between being tested and sin?

Can we be justified with God and be tested?

Could sin be more about will than desire?

Could we desire something and still walk with God?

Sermon "Our Advocate"

All relationships have their ups and downs. There are periods in the relationship when individuals grow together and grow apart. During those down times when the couple feel that they are growing apart, they may reach a stage when outside help is needed. An advocate or a mediator is required to see both viewpoints, identify areas of conflict, and help the couple remember why they entered into that relationship. Our human relationships are living illustrations of our deeper relationship with God. And while God is constant, our perspective of God and our relationship with God can shift drastically. It is during those times of dramatic shifts that we desire the assurance that God is with us. We need Jesus.

In the midst of his suffering not only emotionally with the loss of his children and physically but also mentally from his friends, Job needed to know that God was with him. Job didn't know why his relationship with God appeared to be on the rocks. He needed an advocate to intercede on his behalf. He wanted a mediator to do some divine couples counseling. Someone who "could lay a hand on us both". Pain had become an obstacle between Job and God. He needed someone who could bridge that obstacle.

Sin is often an obstacle between our relationship and God as well as a distraction drawing us away from that relationship. For Job, Satan used pain to lead Job into the temptation of sin. Even when pain blinds us, we are still called to walk by faith and not sight. When we lose sight of our relationship, however, we often leave faith to follow other relationships. The popular phrase "out of sight, out of mind" describes many who replace their relationship with God with other relationships. For some, the other relationship may be prestige or money while others may place family, country, or politics before their relationship with God. We are reminded that our God is a jealous God and does not like to share our attention or our obedience. Compromise leads to sin.

This hard truth is what the author of Hebrews meant when he said that the Word was as sharp as a two-edge sword. We may fool ourselves in believing that we can have more than one relationship but eventually God will ask you to choose. For the man who ran up to Jesus, his relationship was with God and with his possessions. Jesus saw that he truly wanted a relationship with God and loved his heart. But Jesus also saw that part of that heart clung to material possessions like a child with a security blanket. When Jesus asked him to choose, his word cut like a two-edged sword. If this is the standard, then as the disciples ask "who can be saved?"

With God, all things are possible. God seeks us in our waywardness and has compassion for our struggles. In Jesus, God experienced how difficult it is for mortals to have a spiritual relationship. It is so much easier to love that which we can touch. And so in Jesus we have our advocate and mediator. A high priest who knows our weakness and intercedes on our behalf. Even when our faith begins to ebb and we are tempted by distractions, Jesus calls us to remember who we are and whose we

are. For all who are blinded by pain or have fallen for the distractions of this world, Jesus is still calling you and assuring you that you will never be alone or forgotten.