

Arbitration

Job

By Dr. Derek Thomas

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Bible Text: Job 9
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First Presbyterian Church
1324 Marion St
Columbia, SC 29201

Website: www.firstprescolumbia.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia

Heavenly Father, as we come now to the Scriptures, we pray from your blessing. Holy Spirit, come, illuminate these words to our minds and hearts and affections. Draw us, once again, to yourself, we pray, and grant that in our time of study together, that we might have that sense when our hearts are strangely warmed by the overtures of the Gospel. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now, turn with me, if you would, to Job 9 as we continue in our study and we're going to pick up the reading at the first verse. Job 9, and you'll find it in your Pew Bible on page 422, Children's Bible, 759. This is the word of God.

1 Then Job answered and said: 2 "Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? 3 If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. 4 He is wise in heart and mighty in strength - who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded? - 5 he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, 6 who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; 7 who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; 8 who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; 9 who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; 10 who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. 11 Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. 12 Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?' 13 God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. 14 How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? 15 Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. 16 If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice. 17 For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; 18 he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. 19 If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? 20

Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. 21 I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life. 22 It is all one; therefore I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' 23 When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. 24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges - if it is not he, who then is it? 25 My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. 26 They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey. 27 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,' 28 I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. 29 I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? 30 If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, 31 yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me. 32 For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. 33 There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. 34 Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. 35 Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.

In C. S. Lewis', "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," there is a moment when Lucy is speaking to Mr. Beaver and Mr. Beaver has just mentioned the character, the Jesus character, of Aslan, and she asks him, "Is he safe?" and Mr. Beaver says, "Of course he's not safe, but he's good. He's the King, I tell you." He's not safe, but he's good. In many ways, that summarizes the whole of the book of Job and Job is dealing here in chapter 9 with a God whom he believes in without reservation, who isn't safe.

He's responding to Bildad, Bildad the Shuhite. Bildad has been speaking in chapters 7 and 8. Let's just pick up a couple of things here. Calvin, when he preached on Job in 1554-1555, 159 sermons, in the opening sermon he said, "There is a key that unlocks the book of Job and it is this: that Job has a good case but he argues it badly and his friends have a bad case but they argue it extremely well." The case of his friends, in this case, Bildad, let's have a look at what he says. Just a couple of verses, three verses from chapter 8 if you have your Bible open. Chapter 8, verse 3, "Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?" He's saying to Job, "God is just and the reason for your suffering, the reason for your plight, the reason for your trial, is because you are unjust and God is judging you according to the standards of morality that you see in this universe that cannot be changed." Verse 6, chapter 8, "if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation." "If you are blameless like you say you are, Job, God will surely restore you and if he does not, it only demonstrates that you are not blameless." Verse 20, "Surely God will not reject a righteous man." You see, it's cash register justice. You get out of life what you put into it. No more and no less. You reap what you sow.

So Job in his exasperation in verse 33 says, "There is no arbiter between us." There is a grammatical issue. We won't go into it, too difficult, but if you have an ESV with footnotes, you'll see there's another translation and it might even be the correct

translation. Not so much an assertion as though Job is right down in the depths of despair saying, "There is no arbiter between us," but more of a question, "Would that there were an arbiter." Would that there were an arbiter. He's looking for a go-between. Actually, there is nothing like the feeling of being alone, is there? Falsely accused of a crime that you did not commit. I'm not speaking hypothetically here, someone in the very first service came up to me afterward and said this had happened to them. They had been accused of something that they did not do and they felt alone against massive powers and forces that threatened to intimidate and do stuff to them; a victim of a vicious attack. A single person who longs to be married and months turn into years and a heaviness and a bitterness begins to grow, "Where is God in all of this?." You see, that's what's happening here. Job is beginning to call and to question the very nature and character of God. "Where is God in all of this? Why does he permit? Why does he allow these things to continue?"

Look at the verbs in chapter 9. Look at verse 3, "If one wished to contend." To contend. Look at verse 14, "How then can I answer him?" You could translate that, "How then can I argue with him? Make a case with him?" Look at verse 15, "Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser." Drop down to the 32nd verse, second half, he talks of "coming to trial together." These are all legal words; these are lawyer words. The lawyers here can appreciate this. Job is saying, "How can I possibly approach God? How can I possibly make my case? How can I possibly address him? How can I speak to him? How can I make my argument to him? In my despair, in my darkness, in the heaviness of my condition, how can I possibly expect him to listen to me? How can I possibly expect justice from him?" He needs a lawyer. He needs an arbiter. He needs somebody to stand between him and God and make his case for him and argue it rightly, justly, with passion, because Job no longer believes that God is listening to him.

Actually, Job is beginning to doubt the justice of God. Perhaps because he's just a small, little cog in a vast and complicated universe, how can he possibly expect God to take any consideration of him? Let's explore this a little, just a little. You notice at the end of verse 12, "Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'" Who has the right to go to God and say, "Look at what you're doing here! What are you up to? This situation in which I find myself in that seems so unjust and so I'm saying, 'Lord, what are you doing?'"

You notice in the first half of Job 9, he talks about God as the Creator. Job believes in a powerful, sovereign God who created all things and he talks about mountains and earthquakes and stars and he mentions the constellations of the Bear and Pleiades and so on and the chambers of the South and Orion and so on and so on. You understand what he's doing here. This God that he believes in, he's sovereign, he's omnipotent, power, beyond your imagination. You cannot even begin to fathom the power that this God has and you feel helpless, insignificant, small, tiny, and there is something arbitrary about what God does. Verse 20, "Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse."

Eugene Peterson in his book, "The Message," a paraphrase. It's a paraphrase. He paraphrases the end of Job's little response here in chapter 10:20, 21 and 22, and this is how he paraphrases what Job is saying. "Isn't it time to call it quits on my life? Can't you let up, and let me smile just once Before I die, before I'm buried, before I'm nailed into my coffin, sealed in the ground, And banished for good to the land of the dead, blind in the final dark?" Have you ever said that or something like it? Perhaps not, for which you should be thankful. Praise God you've never been brought there, but I want to tell you this morning there are brothers and sisters here in this congregation, this congregation, we're not talking about people way out, we're talking about right here in this room this morning, who have been right here. Actually, if truth be told, they are there right now.

Stuff happens. Terrible things happen. Awful things happen. Things you wish wouldn't happen and things that you wish would happen that don't happen. Perhaps you have just put it in a little compartment in the back of your mind. You have come to worship and you go through all the ritual, all the routines. You say the Lord's Prayer and the Creed and the Doxology and the Gloria Patri and you listen to the benediction and you've been there, done that and you go away. You're here every week, but it's not real anymore. It's not real anymore, you just do it. It's just a habit. You're trying to keep up appearances to yourself as much as to anyone else, but there is in the back of your mind, there is this nagging thought and when you're alone at night it comes up and it takes on life and energy and it says, "This God that you believe in, how could he possibly have allowed this to happen? You know, maybe he's not just. Maybe he's unfair." Do you think that, God is unfair? Life has been unfair? God is unfair. "I need an arbiter. I need a lawyer. I need a defense counsel. I don't trust myself anymore. I don't trust my ability to reason. I don't trust my thoughts. I don't trust my words. I don't trust my emotions. I don't trust what I'm going to say and I don't trust what he's going to say. So I need an arbiter, I need somebody to stand between me and God."

It's very important, it's very important that you don't think that Job is asking for somebody to forgive him his sins. He's not asking for that kind of advocate, he's asking for somebody who understands him; who sympathizes with him; who can take his case and make it eloquent and passionate. Verse 33 and let me take the alternative translation, "Would that there were an arbiter between us." This is like a voice that is crying in the darkness, way back in the Old Testament and it's crying. Do you know what Job is crying for? Of course you do: he wants Jesus. He wants Hebrews 4:15, "We do not have an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Does he know what it means to be in the dark, uncomprehending of the sovereign, omnipotent will of his heavenly Father? Questioning it? "Is it possible for me to go another way?" as the judgment of his Father comes down upon him and he cries in uncomprehending agony, "My God, my God, why have you forsake me?" Does he know what it means to be betrayed? To be let down? Does he know what it means to be let down by his friends, his closest friends? Do you think the Lord Jesus understands what it means to be in a position that seems to be so unjust? Yes, of course.

"Would that there were an arbiter between us." I think of a woman this morning in Memphis, violated in the most horrible manner imaginable. I think of her this morning

crying out for justice, for someone to understand her plight. I think of a teenager tired of being picked on by unsympathetic and unfair parents. "No one understands me." I think of a widow bereft of their partner, missing the sound of their partner's voice, missing things they did together, places they went together, the emptiness, the hollowness of life. There is a pretense and you go on and you try and do all the things that you're supposed to do but I think of this widow and this widow is saying, "Oh, that there were an arbiter between us." I think of a family this morning, trying to pick up the pieces after their son has taken his own life and in the depths of their agony, an incomprehension that a loving heavenly Father would permit such a thing to happen and they are saying, "Would that there were an arbiter between us." And there is. You see, there is and he is called Jesus who took our frame; who at the table says to you and to me, "This is my body which is for you. I've been there, stood there. I know what it is. I know the weakness of your frame. I know what it is to be in the midst of a providence that seems so dark and uncomprehending. I've been there for you. For you. For you." Bruce Reeds, broken-hearted.

I was thinking yesterday when the Holy Spirit came down at the time of Jesus' baptism, he came in the form of a dove. Was there ever a creature that spoke of gentleness and kindness? A dove. That's his ministry. He wants to come and give you peace. He wants to come and whisper words of Gospel truth and tranquility to give you a peace that passes all understanding. "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." "Would that there were an arbiter between us."

I've been reading "Lord of the Rings" again, 43rd time, I think. I will accept your challenge as to whether I think that it's more important than the Bible and I need you to keep reminding me about that all the time, but I love "Lord of the Rings." I can't imagine not wanting to read it again. There is a moment when Tolkien has the character Sam Gamgee who is going through a similar trial of life and this is how Tolkien describes it, "Even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength and he felt through all his limbs a thrill as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue."

Why are you in this trial, my dear friend? Why was this brought upon you? Perhaps because he wants to crush you and in that crushing process, produce a diamond. You say, "I feel so weak and helpless." Then rest. Fall into the arms of Jesus. Let yourself fall into the arms of Jesus and he will catch you and carry you and lift you on his shoulders and whisper in your ear, "I have loved you from before the foundation of the world." It's a wonderful thing to be a Christian even in the darkness.

"Would that there were an arbiter. We do not have an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He is here represented in emblems, signs and seals, bread and wine, body and blood. He came and took human flesh and he bids you come now, Christian believer in the Lord Jesus. He bids you come. Put your feet under this table. Eat. Drink. Get nourishment for that's what Jesus wants to do for us: nourish us, strengthen us. God may crush us. The forces are so powerful and immense to form a diamond for his glory.

Father, we thank you for your word. As we come now to the table, fill us with your Spirit. Minister to the bruised reed and the smoking flax, those who are at an end of themselves. For Jesus' sake. Amen.