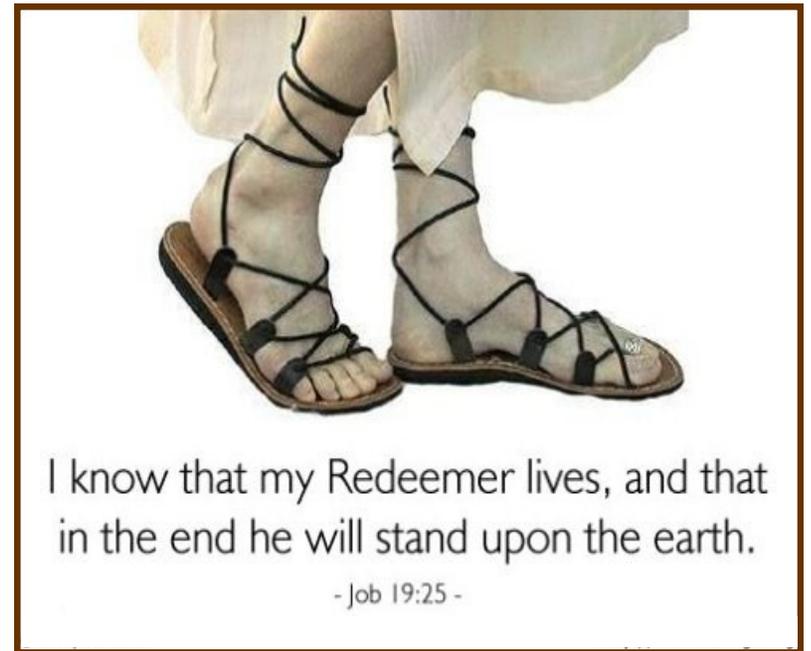


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Job

Chapter Seven:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

The Human Condition

The First Lesson: Life is Combat and Drudgery

1 Man's life on earth is combat and his day is like the day of the hireling. 2 Like the slave, he sighs for the shade, or the workingman for the end of his work. 3 So I, too, have passed empty months and I have counted sleepless nights. 4 If I sleep, I say: When will I arise? And again I will wait for evening, and I will be filled with pains until dark.

Since Eliphaz spoke before (5:17-27) to move Blessed Job from despair, he promised him earthly happiness if he would not reject the rebuke of the Lord. Here then, after Blessed Job demonstrated the rational causes of his sorrow, wants to further demonstrate that this aforementioned consolation of Eliphaz based on promising him the recovery of earthly happiness is unfitting. He first demonstrates this from the condition of the present life and then, later (v.5) from his own individual condition.

The opinions of men have differed about the condition of this present life. Some held that ultimate happiness was experienced in this life. The words of Eliphaz seem to follow this opinion. The ultimate end of man is in that place where he expects the final retribution for good or evil. So if man is rewarded by God for good deeds and punished for evil deeds in this life, as Eliphaz is eager to prove, it seems necessary to conclude that the ultimate end of man is in this life. But, Job intends to disprove this opinion and he wants to show that the present life of man does not have the ultimate end in it, but is compared to this end as motion is compared to rest and the journey to the destination. He therefore compares this state to those states of man which tend to some end, namely the state of soldiers who tend to victory in military campaigns. So he says, "Man's life on earth is combat," as if to say: The present life which we live on earth is not like a state of victory, but like the state of a military campaign. He also compares it to the state of a hireling, as so he adds, "and his day like the day of the hireling," i.e. the time of man living on earth. He compares the present life to these two states because of two things which threaten man in this present life. First, he must resist impediments and harmful things and on account of these he is compared to warfare. He must also do works useful for the end and on account of this he is compared to a hired man. From both images, one is given to understand that the present life is subject to divine providence. For soldiers fight under a general and hired men wait for their pay from an employer. Also, the falsity of the opinion which Eliphaz defended is plain enough in these examples. For it is clear that the general of the army does not spare the vigorous soldiers from the dangers of toils, but the whole nature of warfare demands at times that he exposes them to both very great dangers and tasks. After the victory has been won, the general honors those men more who proved more vigorous. In the same way, the father of a family entrusts the more difficult tasks to the better hired men, but on pay day he gives higher salaries to them. So divine providence does not dispose things so that the good are more freed from adversities and labors of the present life, but rewards them more at the end.

**So once the human will has attained its ultimate end,
it must rest in that
and must not be moved to desire anything else.**

The third reason is taken from the powerlessness of man to cleanse himself from sin. For man sinks into sin by himself, but it is only God's part to remit sin. So Job asks: If my punishment should not cease for as long a time as my sin remains and you alone can take away my sin. "Why do you not take away my sin?" which I have committed against God or against myself. "Why do you not take away my iniquity?" if any has been committed against my neighbor. Remember, Job does not ask questions of this kind like a rash questioner of divine judgments, but to destroy the falsity which his adversaries were eager to assert, namely that one should hope for good and evil things from God for human deeds only in this life. If this view is asserted, the whole reason for divine judgments by which he punishes men in the life for sin and remits sins in foreordaining those men in the next life to either predestination or reprobation is thrown into confusion. If there is no future life, but only the present one, there would be no reason why God should delay sparing those whom he intends to spare or justify or reward them. So Job shows his own intention clearly, continuing, "Look! Now I will sleep in the dust," as if the end of my life is almost here, when I will die and decay to dust. One cannot hope even to see tomorrow with certainty because of the uncertainty of death. So he says, "If you will look for me in the morning, I will no longer exist," for I cannot promise myself even a life until morning, much less a long span of life in which I can hope you would spare me if there will be no other life.

Consider that Job proceeds according to the manner of a debater, for whom it suffices at the beginning to disprove false opinion and afterwards to explain what he himself thinks is true. Note too that in these opening words, Job touched three reasons why someone should be afflicted in this life by God. The first is that his malice may be restrained so he cannot harm others. He touched this reason in the text, "Am I the sea or a whale that you should surround me to lock me up?" (v. 14) The second is to try man in order to manifest his virtue, and he touched this in the text, "You visit him at dawn and immediately test him." (v. 18) The third reason is to punish sinners, and he touched on this when he said, "I have sinned, what will I do for you, you guardian of men."

END OF JOB CHAPTER 7

Therefore, since the whole position of Eliphaz is undermined by these arguments, Job intends to strengthen them and demonstrates them efficaciously from reason. For clearly, each thing rests when it attains its ultimate end. So once the human will has attained its ultimate end, it must rest in that and must not be moved to desire anything else. Our experience is contrary to this in the present life. For man always desires the future as though he were not happy with the things he has in the present. So clearly the ultimate end is not in this life, but this life is ordered to another end like warfare is ordered to victory and the hired man's day is ordered to his pay. Note however that what we have now is not sufficient in this present life, but desire tends to the future for two reasons. First because of the afflictions of the present life, and so he introduces the example of the slave desiring the shade, saying "Like the slave," worn out from the heat, "he sighs for the shade," which refreshes him. Second, from the defect of the perfect final good one does not possess here. So he uses the example of the hired man saying, "or the workman, for the end to his work." For the perfect good is the end of man. "So I have passed empty months," for I considered the past months passed empty for me, because I did not obtain final perfection in them, "and nights," i.e. when I should have been resting from my afflictions. "I have counted sleepless," i.e. I considered them sleepless because I was delayed in them from the attainment of my end.

He next explains how his months have been empty and his nights sleepless adding, "If I sleep," when it was time for sleeping at night, "I say, 'When will I arise,'" longing for day. "And again," when day has come, "I wait for the evening," as he is always tending to the future in his desire. This desire is indeed the common experience of all men living on earth, but men feel it more or less in the measure in which they are affected by either sorrows or joys. For he who lives in joy, desires the future less; but he who lives in sorrow, desires it more. So Job passionately shows this desire for the future is in him as he continues, "I will be filled with pain until dark," for because of these pains, the present time is tedious for me and I desire the future more.

The Second Lesson: The Pains of Life

5 Decay clothes my flesh, and the filth of dust; my skin is dried up and wrinkled. 6 My days have passed swifter than a warp is cut off by a weaver and they have vanished leaving no hope behind. 7 Remember that my life is but a breath and my eye will not turn back to look on good things 8 nor will the eye of man look on me; Your eyes will be on me and I shall not endure. 9 As a cloud dissolves and is gone, so he who goes down below will not ascend again. 10 He will never return home again and his place will know him no more.

Blessed Job had demonstrated above that the consolation in which Eliphaz offered the promise of happiness in this earthly existence was unfitting. He first demonstrated this from the general condition of the life of man on the earth. Now he intends to demonstrate that the same consolation is unfitting considering his own individual condition. He proposes two things which preclude his hoping for prosperity on earth. The first is the weakness of the body which he was suffering. When one is limited by grave weakness of body, nothing can happen which can make him happy in this life, and so he says, "Decay clothes my flesh," as if to say: My body is covered on all sides with infectious sores like a body is covered on all sides by a garment. Since wounds tended in the beginning heal, he shows that his sores were neglected when he says, "and the filth of dust," for they were not tended in the proper way because he was literally sitting in a dung heap, as the text already shows. (2:8) One can sometimes hope for health even if his sores have been neglected because he has a strong constitution. But Job lacked the natural strength, and so he says, "my skin is dried up and wrinkled," because the natural moisture has already been exhausted in it either by old age or by weakness. So there seems to be no place in this life where I can expect to find happiness anymore. The second is because the greater part of his life was already past and therefore very little time remained so he could not hope for a great deal of happiness during that time. Because of this he says, "My days have passed swifter than warp is cut off by a weaver." The life of man is in a certain sense like something woven. Just as a weaver weaving a warf joins threads to threads to arrive at the product of cloth, and when he makes a cloth he cuts it from the loom, so days are added to days to complete the life of man. When his life is completed, it is taken away. Yet he says the days of man pass away more swiftly than the cloth is cut away because the weaver rests from time to time in the work of weaving, but the time of man's life slips away continuously without interruption.

Someone could object that Job was unworthy to be spared by God because his sins merit that he be afflicted even more. This follows also from the opinion of Eliphaz who thought that he was scourged because of his sins. So he continues, "I have sinned," as if to say: Given that I have sinned and because of this merited to be afflicted, still there remains a reason why you should spare me. He adds to this three reasons why God should spare him which make reference to the frailty of man. The first is taken from man's powerlessness to make satisfaction. Man can do nothing worthy from his own powers to compensate for the offense which he committed against God. This is what he means when he says, "What will I do for you, O guardian of men?" as if to say: If you have such great care for man as if you were their watchman that you require an accounting of their individual acts, my powers are not sufficient to perform some act for which you will remit my sins. If then this is expected, you would never spare me and so please spare me despite this powerlessness.

The second reason is taken from the powerlessness of man to persevere. For man cannot persevere after the corruption of human nature without the grace of God, and so it is customary even in Sacred Scripture to say that God hardens someone or blinds someone in the sense that he does not bestow the grace on him by which he may be softened and see. Job speaks here in this way saying, "Why do you pit me against you?" that is, Why did you not give me the grace of perseverance in this matter so that I might not be opposed to you by sin? For whoever sins is opposed to God, since he spurns the divine commandments which are either handed down in the written Law or naturally inscribed in human reason. Note that reason is the strongest of all the powers of the soul. A sign of this strength is that reason commands the other powers and uses them for its own end. Yet it happens that reason is somewhat absorbed at times by concupiscence, anger, or the other passions of the lower part of the soul and so a man sins. Nevertheless, the lower passions cannot hold reason bound, but rather reason always returns to its nature by which it tends to spiritual goods as its own proper end. Therefore, a kind of struggle goes on even of man against himself when reason resists him because he has sinned absorbed either by concupiscence or anger. Since a tendency to similar acts has been added to the lower powers from past sins as a result of habit, reason cannot freely make use of the lower powers to order them to higher goods or withdraw them from lower ones. Thus man becomes a burden even to himself in being opposed to God through sin. He shows this by saying, "Why have I become a burden to myself?" One sees in this that sin has its own punishment immediately. So too after this punishment, it seems man should be spared more easily.

He shows how God turns his heart towards him when he says, "You visit him at dawn," i.e. from the day of his birth you help him by your providence with things necessary for his life and glorification, whether they are corporeal or spiritual. "And immediately test him," by adversities in which he shows clearly he is disposed to virtue. As Sirach says, "The oven proves the pot of the potter and the trial of trouble proves the just man." (27:6) God is said to test a man not so may learn what kind of man he is, but to inform others what sort of man he is and also so that he may know himself. These words of Job are not to be understood as expressing contempt for the divine concern for men, but as investigating and wondering. For if man is considered only as he appears exteriorly, he seems small, fragile and perishable. So it would be astonishing for God to have such great care for man unless he should have something hidden which makes him capable of perpetual existence. Thus by inquiry and wonder, the opinion of Eliphaz is refuted, because if there were no other life for man except life on earth, man would not seem worth such great care God has for him. Therefore the very care which God has especially for man demonstrates that there is another life of man after the death of the body.

Then he adds another reason that God should spare him taken from the brevity of life. He puts it in question form saying, "How long do you not spare me?" This is like saying: The time of the life of man is short and the greater part of the time of my life is already past. Therefore, what limit is expected so that you spare me if you do not spare me now so that at least I might have at least some brief time in which to rest. He shows the meaning when he says, "Won't you leave me in peace to swallow my spittle?" For one cannot swallow his saliva while he is speaking. It is necessary to pause briefly while speaking to spit out or to swallow spittle. He compares the time remaining in his life to this brief instant as if he says: If you delay in sparing me, no rest, even the rest during which someone speaking swallows his spittle will remain for me. This way of arguing presupposes that the opinion of Eliphaz, because if there is no other life for man except the one on this earth, there will not remain a time when God may spare Job if God does not spare him in this life.

But one might object: although the greater part of his life has passed by, Job could still hope to return to the state of his past life. For some have advanced the theory that after death, when the course of many years has been completed, man returns to the same stages of life which he had lived before. For example, Plato in future times will lecture at Athens and will do the same things which he did before. So although man has lived the greater part of his life, he could hope to be restored to happiness in this earthly life. To remove this possibility, Job continues, "and they have vanished, leaving no hope behind," of returning to his former days. He had already seemed to address God in the text saying, "The life of man on earth is combat." (v.1) Now to prove his point he adds, "Remember that my life is but a breath," like the wind. For as the wind passes by and does not return afterwards, so the life of man does not return when it has passed away. He continues in this vein, "and my eye will not turn back to look on good things," of the earth which I once possessed but now have lost. In the same way that when my life has passed I will return to see earthly goods, so I will not be seen by any eyes on earth. So he goes on, "Nor will the eye of man look on me." He posits these two things to show that he will not return to human association which consists chiefly in seeing and being seen. Since sight is the most acute of the senses, it holds a position of authority in sensitive life. Although after death he says that he will not be seen by the eyes of man, yet he confesses that he will be seen by the eye of God saying, "Your eyes" will be "on me." For the dead are seen by God who observes spiritual things, because the dead live according to the spirit, not according to the flesh which man can see with his eyes.

One could take this to mean that the eyes of God consider the dead, not according to the present state, but he regards future things, as though a dead man is going to return again to the life which he lost. Therefore to exclude this he continues, "and I shall not endure," as if to say: I say that your eyes will be on me after death because afterwards, I will not be present again in the state of this earthly life. He proves this by a comparison when he adds, "As a cloud dissolves and is gone, so he who goes down below, will not ascend." The dead are said to go down to the underworld either because they all descended to Sheol according to the soul there before the death of Christ, or because according to the flesh, they are buried under the earth. The exegesis here makes no difference for the meaning of the present text. For he only wants to say that the dead do not return to their past life and he proves this in the comparison using a sufficient proof. As Aristotle says in *On Generation*: a kind of circular motion appears in both corruptible and incorruptible bodies. But there is this difference. In heavenly bodies, the same one in number returns in the circular motion, as the same sun in number sets and returns at dawn. This is so because the substance is not corrupted in such a change, but only the place changes. But in the motion of generation and corruption, the same one in number does not return, but the same species does. It is clear that according to the annual circular motion of the sun, a kind of circulation happens in the disposition of the atmosphere, for in winter there are clouds, which are dispersed later in the summer. When the winter returns again, the clouds return, yet not the identical clouds in number, but only the same in species because these clouds which existed before perish completely. It is so with men. The same men do not return in number through generation who formerly existed, but only in species.

From this the solution to the argument of those who posited a return to the same life and the same acts becomes clear. For they believed that lower things are disposed according to the motion of the heavenly spheres; hence when the same constellation returned after a very long time, they believed that the same thing would return in number. But it is not necessary that the same things return in number as has been said, but only things like them in species. Those men thought that a dead man, after a certain span of time not only returned to life, but also had the same possessions and houses he formerly possessed. To disprove this he says, "He will never return home again." They also held that he would do the same works he had done before and hold the same offices and dignities. To exclude this position he adds, "and his place will know him no more," i.e. he will not return again to his place. Here the term "place" means the state of a person in the manner of speaking we commonly use to say: He has a great place in this community.

Consequently he pursues both points. First he says of his weakness, "What is man," that is, how small a thing and frail in body, "that you lift him up," by honoring him among the other creatures or "that you turn your heart towards him," by guarding him and protecting him with special care? Here note that although all things are subject to divine providence and all things in their state receive their greatness from God, nevertheless some receive it in one way, others in another.

For since all particular goods which are in the universe seem ordered to the common good of the universe as part is ordered to whole and imperfect to perfect, they are disposed by divine providence as they are ordered to the universe. Note that according to the way some things participate in perpetuity, they pertain essentially to the order of the universe. However, as they are deficient with respect to perpetuity, they pertain accidentally to the perfection of the universe and not in themselves. Therefore according as they are perpetual they are ordered by God for their own sake; but according as they are corruptible they are ordered for the sake of other things. Things which are perpetual either in individual or in species, are governed for their own sakes by God. But things which are corruptible in individual but only perpetual in species, are ordered for themselves in species by God but for the species only on account of the individual. This is the good and evil which happens to irrational animals. For example, the fact that this lamb is killed by this wolf or some such thing is not arranged by God because of the merit or demerit of this wolf or of this lamb, but because of the good of the species since its own food has been divinely ordained for the good of each species He expresses this saying, "or because you turn your heart towards him, when you provide for him because of his own good. He does not turn his heart to the good of individual animals, but rather to the good of the species which can exist perpetually.

The Fourth Lesson: The Prayer of Job

16 Spare me, O Lord, for my days are nothing. 17 What is man that you should make so much of him; or that you turn your heart towards him? 18 You visit him at dawn and immediately test him. 19 How long do you not spare me? Won't you leave me in peace to swallow my spittle? 20 I have sinned. What will I do for you, O guardian of men? Why do you pit me against you and why have I become a burden to myself? 21 Why do you not take away my sin? Why do you not take away my iniquity? Look! Now I will sleep in the dust; in the morning if you will look for me, I will no longer exist.

After Job has shown that the consolation of Eliphaz based on the promise of earthly happiness was leading him to despair and the desire for death, he shows what remains for him to hope for from God, namely, that the trial put on him should cease. He expresses this saying, "Spare me, O Lord," as if to say: I have abandoned the hope of earthly prosperity, it is sufficient that you spare me, cease to afflict me. Since the unhappiness and weakness of man usually induces another to spare him, he continues, "for my days are nothing," which seems to refer to the weakness of man and the brevity of life, both with respect to all men in general and to him in a special way because his days were almost at an end.

It is clear from these verses that Job here does not deny the resurrection which faith asserts, but a return to carnal life which the Jews hold and certain philosophers also held. Nor is this contrary to the narration of Scripture which asserts that some men are brought back to the present state of life. For one thing is done miraculously and the other is done according to the course of nature and Job speaks in this sense here. Consider also that in saying, "Remember that my life is but a breath," he did not speak as though God could forget, but he speaks hypothetically putting himself in the position of his adversaries. For if God were to promise the goods in this earthly life to a man whose life has, as it were, already passed, he would almost seem almost to have forgotten that the life of man passes away like the wind which does not return.

The Third Lesson: Job Laments his Terrible Destiny

11 For this reason, I will not refrain from speaking; in the trouble of my spirit I will speak; I will talk in the bitterness of my soul. 12 Am I the sea or a whale that you surround me to lock me up? 13 If I say, 'My bed will comfort me; I will be relieved by talking to myself, on my couch, 14 then you will frighten me with dreams; and terrify me with visions? 15 This is why my soul has chosen hanging, and my bones death. 16 I have despaired; I will not live longer to any purpose.

After Job showed that the consolation of Eliphaz promising earthly prosperity was inconsistent by arguments, he now shows the same thing by deducing arguments of unfitness, because if he should rely on that consolation which had been given to him from the hope of earthly prosperity by Eliphaz, as has been shown, it would follow that it would be necessary for him to still remain in sadness, to utter words of sorrow and to despair entirely. This is because Eliphaz's hope is frivolous. He concludes therefore, as though arguing against this proposition, "For this reason," because to hope in earthly prosperity is vain, as has been shown. Moreover, you have nothing else with which you console me and therefore, "I", as if destitute of consolation, "will not refrain from speaking" but rather I will speak words of lamentation which my mind suggests. He continues, "in the anguish of my spirit, I will speak," that is as the trouble which I suffer impels my spirit to speak. Not only does he suffer exterior trouble, but also interior sadness conceived from it. So he continues, "I will talk in the bitterness of my soul," for I will speak vain and almost incredible words as the bitterness of my soul will supply me.

Among other things, which embittered men usually discuss together, they are accustomed especially to search for the causes of their bitterness because there is hardly an embittered man who does not seem in his own mind to have been afflicted either very unjustly or more than is just. So Job, playing the part of an embittered man, inquires as to the cause of his affliction saying, "Am I the sea, or a whale that you surround me to lock me up?"

Note here that the providence of God works in one way for rational creatures and in another way for irrational creatures. Rational creatures merit or demerit because of free will. Because of this, rewards and punishments are due to them. Irrational creatures however, neither merit rewards nor incur punishments since they do not have free will. God, however, acts in their regard to increase or restrict them on the basis of what is due to the good of the universe.

From this economy God constricts the sea so that it does not occupy the whole surface of the earth, to make the earth a place for animals and the things born on land. In a similar way he constricts the whale to remain in the ocean seas because if he were in the other seas, it could harm someone. Job therefore seeks to know if there is some explanation for his affliction like the confining of the sea and the whale, namely, that he is not afflicted because of some lack of merit but because of some usefulness to others because of it.

He says that he has been surrounded to be locked up in the sense that he had been so burdened by trial that no liberation or consolation lay open to him on any side. Consequently he proves next that he is deprived of those remedies which ordinarily console the afflicted. One is sleep, for sorrow is mitigated after sleep. To note this he says, "If I say: 'My bed will comfort me'," in the time of sleep. Another remedy is to consolation wise men give themselves by the deliberation of reason. He touches this cure when he says, "I will be relieved," from the oppression of sadness by "talking to myself," by the deliberation of reason, "on my couch." For when wise men are alone and removed from the distraction of men and commerce, then they can speak more within themselves thinking something through according to reason. These cures too could not help him, because at the time when he should have used these remedies, other impediments like terrible dreams and horrible visions were present in him which disturbed him. To express this he continues, "Then you will frighten me with dreams," which appear to one when sleeping, and me "with visions," which appear to the one awake who has lost the use of his exterior senses, "will terrify me". Images at night are usually formed by thoughts experienced during the day and so because Job thought about sad things during the day, he was disturbed at night by similar images. For the weakness of the body contributes to the fact that people experience disturbing images when sleeping. So, then, when consolation is refused me from every side and no way remains for me to escape so many anguishes but death, I therefore prefer death however abject to such a painful life. He then expresses this saying, "This is why my soul has chosen hanging." Lest someone should think that this decision comes from some thought opposed by stronger thoughts, he insists there is nothing in him so strong that it does not desire death. So he says, "My bones have chosen death." For bones in Scripture usually mean what is strength in man. He shows why he chooses this saying, "I have despaired," i.e. I have lost the hope which you gave me that I might enjoy earthly prosperity. He shows why he despaired adding, "I will not live longer to any purpose." Two things can be understood which he had posited above in this statement. (v.6) The greater time of his life had already passed away and that he does not return after this life to the same life which he lived on earth. This unfitting conclusion is the result of the consolation of Eliphaz for Job himself and would lead him to despair, choose death, and have no way to curb sorrow.