

“That’s What They All Say”  
Job 31 – Part 4

We methodically moved through the security line at Akron-Canton Airport. The same thoughts that we had about the stringencies of security likely floated through the minds of the others moving through the line. After going through the x-ray machine and receiving a quick pat down on my upper body, I was told to pick up my belongings. Pick up my belongings? At the counter, one of the TSA officers held out a small turquoise suitcase and wanted to know whether it belonged to me. Laughing I said, “Nope and I’m innocent.” His quick dead pan response was simple. “That’s what they all say.” I’m sure he was trying to be humorous. Yet, I couldn’t help but wonder. Was I in line for a security check at an airport or was I in line in a prison ward?

“That’s what they all say.” Could we apply that same statement to Job’s summary argument? After introducing his summation (31:1-4), he uses the word “if” seventeen times throughout chapter 31 (31:5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 38, 39). He considers all the sinful actions that he might have taken against God and his fellow man. If he is guilty of any of these crimes, then he would willingly accept and undergo the justified punishment. Each time that he considers the possibility of sinning against God, his innocence, like a defensive tackle, forcefully pushes its way through the line. “I am innocent!” Sure, that’s what they all say. But in Job’s case, by God’s declaration, he is innocent (1:1, 8; 2:3).

Read along from the New Century Version as Job enumerates the sins he could have committed, but sins that he did not commit (31:5-40). He walked righteously with God.

<sup>5</sup>“If I have been dishonest  
or lied to others,  
<sup>6</sup>then let God weigh me on honest scales.  
Then he will know I have done nothing wrong.  
<sup>7</sup>If I have turned away from doing what is right,  
or my heart has been led by my eyes to do wrong,  
or my hands have been made unclean,  
<sup>8</sup>then let other people eat what I have planted,  
and let my crops be plowed up.  
  
<sup>9</sup>If I have desired another woman  
or have waited at my neighbor’s door for his wife,  
<sup>10</sup>then let my wife grind another man’s grain,  
and let other men have sexual relations with her.  
<sup>11</sup>That would be shameful,  
a sin to be punished.  
<sup>12</sup>It is like a fire that burns and destroys;

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-- Solomon

all I have done would be plowed up.

<sup>13</sup>If I have been unfair to my male and female slaves  
when they had a complaint against me,

<sup>14</sup>how could I tell God what I did?

What will I answer when he asks me to explain what I've done?

<sup>15</sup>God made me in my mother's womb, and he also made them;  
the same God formed both of us in our mothers' wombs.

<sup>16</sup>I have never refused the appeals of the poor  
or let widows give up hope while looking for help.

<sup>17</sup>I have not kept my food to myself  
but have given it to the orphans.

<sup>18</sup>Since I was young, I have been like a father to the orphans.  
From my birth I guided the widows.

<sup>19</sup>I have not let anyone die for lack of clothes  
or let a needy person go without a coat.

<sup>20</sup>That person's heart blessed me,  
because I warmed him with the wool of my sheep.

<sup>21</sup>I have never hurt an orphan  
even when I knew I could win in court.

<sup>22</sup>If I have, then let my arm fall off my shoulder  
and be broken at the joint.

<sup>23</sup>I fear destruction from God,  
and I fear his majesty, so I could not do such things.

<sup>24</sup>I have not put my trust in gold  
or said to pure gold, 'You are my security.'

<sup>25</sup>I have not celebrated my great wealth  
or the riches my hands had gained.

<sup>26</sup>I have not thought about worshiping the sun in its brightness  
nor admired the moon moving in glory

<sup>27</sup>so that my heart was pulled away from God.

My hand has never offered the sun and moon a kiss of worship.

<sup>28</sup>If I had, these also would have been sins to be punished,  
because I would have been unfaithful to God.

<sup>29</sup>I have not been happy when my enemies fell  
or laughed when they had trouble.

<sup>30</sup>I have not let my mouth sin  
by cursing my enemies' life.

<sup>31</sup>The servants of my house have always said,  
"All have eaten what they want of Job's food."

<sup>32</sup>No stranger ever had to spend the night in the street,  
because I always let travelers stay in my home.

<sup>33</sup>I have not hidden my sin as others do,  
secretly keeping my guilt to myself.

<sup>34</sup>I was not so afraid of the crowd  
that I kept quiet and stayed inside

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because I feared being hated by other families.

. . .

<sup>38</sup>If my land cries out against me  
and its plowed rows are not wet with tears,  
<sup>39</sup>if I have taken the land's harvest without paying  
or have broken the spirit of those who worked the land,  
<sup>40</sup>then let thorns come up instead of wheat,  
and let weeds come up instead of barley.”

Listen very carefully to what Job is denouncing. In his case before God and his friends, he says, “If I have done anything wrong, let that wrong come back to me in judgment. Let God be the one that brings vengeance on me. But I am innocent.” He is denouncing the supposition that his present circumstances exist because he is guilty of some heinous crime. His call was, and is, and will ever be, “I am innocent!”

- I have not lied (31:5-6).
- I have not turned away from taking the right action (31:7-8).
- I have not desired another man's wife (31:9-12).
- I have not turned a deaf ear to the complaints of those that serve me (31:13-15).
- I have not turned a deaf ear or a blind eye to the poor, the orphans or widows (31:16-23).
- I have not committed idolatry (31:24-28).
- I have not rejoiced at the downfall of my enemies or failed to be hospitable to strangers or hidden my sin (31:29-34).
- I have not cheated in my business dealing (38-40).

In each instance, if Job is guilty, then he calls for God's judgment to fall on him no matter what that judgment might entail. Yet, God remains silent. In God's silence as to Job's righteousness or sinfulness, no explanation for Job's circumstances comes forth. Job has only one song, one verse of that song to sing. “I am innocent.”

Outside the book of Job, the biblical writers use Job's name three times (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11). The two references in Ezekiel speak of Job's righteousness. His righteousness, and that of Noah and Daniel, is affirmed by God in both instances. Job is innocent before God. Moreover, Job's righteousness belongs only to Job. “The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20 ESV). On a human level, righteousness is non-transferable to others.

Each of us must stand or fall before God based on our righteousness. Of course, this leaves us in an extreme dilemma. Why? “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard” (Romans 3:23 – NCV). “For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one’” (Romans 3:9-10). “The payment for sin is death. But God gives us the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23 – NCV). “[A]nd all need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:24 – NCV).

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After hearing of the grace of God freely given to sinful people, the people in Jerusalem ask a direct simple question. "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). On that initial day of preaching the gospel, Peter filled with God's Spirit responds. "Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38 NCV). There is no need to wonder whether you are right with God. God plainly shows us how we may receive His grace. God bless you as you follow His lead.

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