

# JOB AND JESUS

by  
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*"I am a worm, and no man. . . ." Psalm 22:6<sup>1</sup>*

Now they come and laugh at me;  
I am nothing but a joke to them.  
They treat me with disgust;  
they think they are too good for me,  
and even come and spit in my face.  
Because God has made me weak and helpless,  
they turn against me with all their fury.  
This mob attacks me head-on;  
they send me running;  
they prepare their final assault.  
They cut off my escape and try to destroy me;  
and there is no one to stop them.  
They pour through the holes in my defenses  
and come crashing down on top of me;  
I am overcome with terror;  
my dignity is gone like a puff of wind,  
and my prosperity like a cloud.

Now I am about to die;  
there is no relief for my suffering.  
At night my bones all ache;  
the pain that gnaws me never stops.  
God seizes me by my collar  
and twists my clothes out of shape.  
He throws me down in the mud;  
I am no better than dirt.  
I call to you, a God, but you never answer;  
and when I pray, you pay no attention.  
You are treating me cruelly;  
you persecute me with all your power.  
You let the wind blow me away;  
you toss me about in a raging storm.  
I know you are taking me off to my death,  
to the fate in store for everyone.

Why do you attack a ruined man,

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version.  
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one who can do nothing but beg for pity?  
Didn't I weep with people in trouble  
and feel sorry for those in need?  
I hoped for happiness and light,  
but trouble and darkness came instead.  
I am torn apart by worry and pain;  
I have had day after day of suffering.  
I go about in gloom, without any sunshine;  
I stand up in public and plead for help.  
My voice is as sad and lonely  
as the cries of a jackal or an ostrich.  
My skin has turned dark;  
I am burning with fever.  
Where once I heard joyful music,  
now I hear only mourning and weeping.  
Job 30:9-31

Job, look at Jesus Christ hanging on the cross.

When I invite Job to do this, I am really inviting you to look at Jesus, because I am thinking of Job not only as an individual who lived centuries ago, but I am thinking of him as the great representative sufferer. He stands for all of us, for you and for me. And when we hear him hurl his protestations heavenward we hear words that we have hurled toward heaven, too-or we have been tempted to hurl them. Job stands for us in our suffering. His physical suffering was like ours. His mental, emotional torture was like ours. The questions he raised were like our questions. So I say, "Job, look at Jesus. Please look at Him. Job, when you do, you will see God's answer to your suffering." Don't forget: Job stands for you.

Job, notice first of all that Jesus' suffering was like yours. I think of the physical pain you experienced; Jesus experienced that. I think, too, of the way your friends came and tried to comfort you and failed so miserably; Jesus' friends were a disappointment, too, when He suffered. I think of the public mockery you experienced, Job, and how you cringed when people who had respected you laughed at you; Jesus experienced that, too. In fact, Job, when I think of what I heard you saying a few moments ago, I am struck by the fact that Jesus said just about exactly the same thing.

Psalm 22 in the Old Testament contains words that describe Jesus' suffering and death so very clearly; Jesus knew Psalm 22 perfectly, and He took the words of this psalm on His lips; we find them recorded in the New Testament as words which He spoke while He hung on the cross of Calvary. We may assume that Psalm 22 is Jesus' suffering psalm, and the words of this psalm represent the way He felt as He endured the cross. Job—listen to what Jesus said and to what He thought when He died.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
I have cried desperately for help,  
but still it does not come.  
During the day I call to you, my God,

but you do not answer;  
I call at night,  
but get no rest.  
Our ancestors put their trust in you;  
they trusted you, and you saved them.  
They called to you and escaped from danger;  
they trusted you and were not disappointed.

But I am no longer a man; I am a worm,  
despised and scorned by everyone!  
All who see me make fun of me;  
they stick out their tongues and shake their heads.  
"You relied on the Lord," they say.  
"Why doesn't he save you?  
If the Lord likes you,  
why doesn't he help you?"

My strength is gone,  
gone like water spilled on the ground.  
All my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like melted wax.  
My throat is as dry as dust,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.  
You have left me for dead in the dust.

A gang of evil men is around me;  
like a pack of dogs they close in on me;  
they tear at my hands and feet.  
All my bones can be seen.  
My enemies look at me and stare.  
They gamble for my clothes  
and divide them among themselves.

Psalm 22:1, 2, 4–8, 14–18

These words from Psalm 22 describe what Jesus went through. He even used the words from Psalm 22—"My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" Job, Jesus went through what you went through. What does this mean for you? Let's try to answer that question.

Job, look at Jesus and remember . . . remember that He suffered too. Start there. Remember that He suffered too; and His suffering was real. In spite of all the things we think about that tend to make us suspect that it wasn't really real. It is real. I know Jesus is the Son of the living God, but He is the Son of the living God become flesh, become a human being with all that that becoming implies and involves. And so He suffered just like you did, Job. He suffered just like those who today suffer as Job did.

And when I say this I am not thinking merely of the physical element of Jesus' suffering and of yours. I know how terrifying that was in your case. It must have been a

devastating experience to watch your own body which had served you so well turn into a loathsome, putrid, shameful thing. I can sympathize with the way you must have recoiled and shuddered as you felt the tentacles of death envelop you. I remember your saying to God: "I know you are taking me off to my death, to the fate in store for everyone." Jesus experienced that too. Job, if you found death terrifying, you at least knew in your heart of hearts that the seeds of death were growing in your body because you knew someday you would have to go to the same place everybody goes to why, you said it yourself! But think of Jesus; this is the Lord of life, and think of what it must have meant for Him to feel His rib cage move up, constricting His tortured lungs. Jesus knew that kind of suffering.

But, Job, when I ask you to think about the fact that Jesus suffered too, just as you did, I am thinking more than anything else about the psychology of His experience. I'm thinking of His mental and emotional state—the fact that people looked at Him as they did: "He was despised and rejected of men." Psalm 22 talks about the way the people went past Him and ridiculed Him. There was that, and then there was the great consternation within His soul that related to the most fundamental question of all—"Why is God letting this happen to me?" I remember how you asked it. You cried out: "I call to you, O God, but you never answer; and when I pray, you pay no attention. . . . Why do you attack a ruined man, one who can do nothing but beg for pity?" Job, I remember your cry, and I think of all the millions of people who have addressed the same anguished question to God throughout the years.

Notice, please, that Jesus said it too. "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Matthew 27:46). He took that question right out of Psalm 22 and shouted it across the darkened noonday, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" And that means "My God, my God, why . . . ?" Oh, this is a bitter suffering. We suffer as human beings who know that we live in the presence of God. We feel His nearness, and we know that nothing happens outside of His control. It is heartbreaking to be buffeted by this question. It was yours, Job, and it has been the question of thousands.

I think of the woman at the cocktail party. One drink. Two drinks. Smiles. And then. "Let me tell you about my son. He was killed five years ago. He was so promising. He was a good boy. We don't know exactly what happened—the truck driver . . . anyway he was killed. And we don't know why." I look up from the letter on my desk and confess I cannot answer the question that lies heavy in dark black ink: "Please help me explain to my uncle and aunt why their 14-year-old daughter was abducted and beaten and raped and killed. Please help me."

Job, you went through the depths—your children were killed, you lost everything, even your self-respect; I understand why you asked God why. Look at the cross, Job, and remember that the very God you're asking went through exactly what you went through. No, it wasn't exactly what you went through; it was a thousand times more intense. Think of what it must have been like when Jesus Christ, the Son of God asked His Father, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" When He asked that question, the foundations of the universe began to tremble.

Job, I have something else to talk with you about as you stand at Calvary and look at the cross. Remember when you look at Jesus that you, yes you, are the cause of Jesus' suffering.

I know this is very difficult to think about, but it is necessary. The question of human suffering is so important and demoralizing that when we confront it in all its gruesome reality, we despair of life itself. We question whether life makes any sense at all. This is such a fundamental question that there is no use making little speeches that are designed to take the edge off our wretched experiences. We cannot bandage up our soul wounds with little phrases that have been used over and over again. We must get at the root of all this, and that means that we have to look at the answer to the why question Jesus raised, when He shouted, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" There is no answer. Even though we cannot know the ultimate answer to Jesus' startling question, there is an answer that we can know and that we must know. Jesus had to suffer because of human sin.

There is a cause of suffering, Job, and the cause is very close to home. We are the cause. God is not the cause of evil—He is not the cause of suffering either. God created the universe good; He created man for life and not for death. But when God created the universe, He made it a moral universe, and He decided to make human choice a determining element in everything that happened. So the first man, who was created good, lived in a situation of probation at the beginning. God gave him the choice to serve either God or Satan. And the simple fact is that man chose to serve Satan.

The history of man's fall into sin is found on the first page of the Bible, and even if this story seems unreal and remote, it remains a fact that this is history which God has preserved for our instruction, and He wants us to be clear on one thing: He created the universe good, but we have made it bad. So the suffering that we endure and the suffering Jesus endured—all this suffering is the natural result of sin: the wages of sin is death, and there is no force anywhere that can reverse or annul that basic law. That law is just as real as the law of gravity.

Job, the pain, the disfigurement, the retardations, the malformations, the crippling syndromes, and all accidents and all crime, all this is the result of sin. I know that sounds simplistic. No matter. The truth in this case is very simple. It is a truth that brings us to our knees and makes us cry out for mercy. I know, we do a million things to camouflage the basic flaw that sin has introduced into everything—we avoid the issue, and we act as if nothing has gone wrong, but every once in a while we see that everything has gone wrong. And you really feel that—when things happen to you that make you groan and weep or become deathly silent with the worthlessness that captures those whose depression has become thoroughly intense—you really feel it then: sin is real. We have not escaped its power and its relentless grip. And you really feel that this is true when you stand at Calvary.

Everything has gone wrong; we know that that is true when we see Jesus, the only begotten Son of God hanging on the cross. We cannot use a meter stick to measure the full impact of sin. We measure by the pieces of wood that were nailed together to form the cross on which God's Son died for human sin. Job, look at Calvary and remember that it was your sin that brought the Son of God into a depth of suffering that makes even your suffering seem almost meager. Human suffering is meager compared to God's suffering in Jesus.

Job, what you have to do as you watch Jesus die is to say something like this: "Oh, this sin that I'm involved in . . . this sin that is part of my life because I am a member of this cursed human race . . . this sin is indescribably horrible. I see this in my own life

when I see the curse of sin working itself out in my own body as the seeds of death germinate and grow within me. And I see it when I see Jesus, the Son of God, dying for human sin." Job, you should say something like that. There is an explanation for suffering: the sin of man has brought suffering. We need not try to peek behind that explanation so that we can implicate God. The answer that is near at hand is entirely sufficient, and we must hang our heads in shame.

There's an old hymn that expresses the way a person should respond to Jesus' crucifixion that catches what I am trying to say. Johann Heermann wrote it in the 17th century. It goes like this:

Ah, dearest Jesus, how hast Thou offended,  
That man to judge Thee hath in hate pretended?  
By foes derided, by Thine own rejected,  
O most afflicted!  
Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?  
Alas my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee!  
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee;  
I crucified Thee.

My friend Job, as you stand at Calvary and see Jesus suffer and as you think of your own suffering, remember that you are not the only one to suffer: God has suffered too, in Jesus His only Son. And then remember too that you are the cause of suffering. Not God. You are. Perhaps this last should take some of the bitter edge off the protests you hurl toward heaven. So think of these things, and then believe this (please believe this, Job): believe that Jesus suffered in order to destroy suffering. And He did destroy it. And that's why Calvary with the cross of Jesus standing there is a beautiful place.

I know it wasn't beautiful at all when you sat there with your crusty, weeping skin and your broken bones and your tortuous pain and your agonizing soul and your stupid, unfeeling friends. Oh, so many of us know what you went through; we have our tubes and scalpels and pins and drugs and people who visit us eager to get out into the corridor as quickly as they can. And at first glance the cross looks something like all this. But it is different. For Jesus died to pay for human sin. He died to lift the curse. He died so that the foundations of the new creation could be laid. He died so that people like you and me and all who suffer can have life and have it abundantly.

Job, you know how it can happen. It happened in your own life. God took you through the valley of despair, and He brought you through to a victory on the other side of your misery. Anyone who reads the book about you knows how it all went. And I'm sure you must have been filled with unspeakable joy when the darkness of your life was replaced by God's good light. But even so, your victory wasn't complete, because you still had to die. Jesus, though, has changed even this. Today anyone who believes in this Jesus can know for sure that God will carry him or her through whatever suffering must be borne and that God will give life eternal.

When Jesus suffered on the cross it was different from your suffering, Job, and different from the suffering of anyone of us who perhaps in this very moment is sick with pain and despair. Jesus' suffering was not only the result of sin, but in His death Jesus

bore the wrath of God against sin. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Now, of course, there is still suffering and pain and accident and even death, but this is not the final statement that must be made about the human story. Now anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and confesses that He is his Savior will be raised in newness of life.

What is the answer to all the mystery of the human condition—the mystery of suffering, pain, and death? The answer is the cross. The cross is the answer. But, you say, "The cross is a mystery, too." I know, but please notice that it is the most gloriously beautiful mystery there is: It is the mystery of the love of God which has been expressed by His sending His Son to suffer with us, to suffer because of us, and to suffer to set us free from suffering. Beyond Jesus' suffering there was a resurrection, and those who believe in Jesus know that beyond their suffering there is a resurrection too.

Maybe you don't like this answer; maybe you don't like it that God answers our deepest questions with a mystery. I'm sorry. There is no other answer.

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Job, of course, never had a chance to think about Jesus' cross. But you do, and I do. Now we need the grace to say, "I believe that Jesus died for me, and I know that whatever I have to go through during my life will finally bring me to victory."

I invite you to pray this prayer—

*What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered  
Was all for sinners' gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression,  
But Thine the deadly pain.  
Lo, here I fall, my Savior,  
'Tis I deserve Thy place;  
Look on me with Thy favor,  
Vouchsafe to me Thy grace.*

*What language shall I borrow  
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow,  
Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever;  
And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never  
Outlive my love to Thee.*

*Amen.*