

Is God for me or against me?

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[0 : 00] Thank you Ben. Job chapter 19. Is God for me or is he against me?

When you are right in the middle of deep and painful suffering, when you sink into darkness! and when you cry out, why? Why? In the middle of your pain and beneath your cries, I think this is what really matters.

Is God for you? Or is he against you? Because if God is actually for you, if he is on your side, if he loves you, if you're his friend, then you can keep going and you will make it through. But if God in heaven is actually against you, if he's really against you, then in your suffering and what you're going through, your despair is very well grounded and you have no hope whatsoever. Is God for me or is he against me? Suffering will move us to ask this question.

I remember driving back from a holiday a few years ago and Meg read a message on WhatsApp about some friends of our friends, not people we know directly, but friends of our friends.

Edward was a 45 year old pastor in France, married and a father of four. And on holiday in the French Alps, he was climbing with one of his sons. He had an accident and he fell and he died from his injuries. It was just awful. It was tragic. As a family losing your dad unexpectedly like that, the question will come in your heart. Does he love us? Or is he against us? You are living life to the full until one day an unusual tiredness or pain or lump, your GP refers you urgently, tests are carried out and you receive the dreaded cancer diagnosis.

[2 : 09] Your life shrinks to this now and there's suffering to come, you anticipated. You knew it might happen one day of course because the statistics say so, but now it's here in your life. Is God for me? Or is he against me?

You're young, you're a teenager and in moments, and maybe you don't understand why, you feel so alone and scared and sort of abandoned by those around you, even by him. Is he there for you? Or does he hate you?

Or you're an adult, you try to do all you can to work hard to make a living but then you are made redundant again. Or your car breaks down again and your few savings disappear. Or your possessions get nicked. And every day is such a brutal and tiring struggle.

You don't believe in bad karma because you're a Christian. And in secret you think to yourself, is he actually on my side? Or does he loathe me?

Because, well in the Bible it says that God loves me and he cares about me. But it doesn't feel like that at all. And so maybe he is against me.

[3 : 41] Come to Job chapter 19 this morning. Job chapter 19. Do you remember what's happened?

Job, this real and upright believer, is suffering awfully. In a couple of days of appalling tragedy, his wealth, his family, his health have been ripped away from him.

And sitting among the ashes with his possessions destroyed, his children dead and his sores festering, Job has burst out in dark lament, cursing the day of his birth and groaning, why?

At which point his three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamanite begin to speak to him. Not comforting him, but accusing him really.

They say the reason you're suffering is because you have sinned. God is against you. He's angry with you. He is punishing you. So wrong. Such cruel words. Piling more misery onto a man who's done nothing to deserve his pain.

[4 : 45] Job reacts. He says, I'm innocent. I'll defend my ways to God. I will. Let me see you, God. And yet again and again in speech after speech, they drive into him.

You are suffering. You are being driven into darkness. And Job, you are getting what you deserve. Because, says Bildad in chapter 18, verse 21, surely such is the dwelling of an evil man.

Such is the place of one who does not know God. Job, you do not know God. God is against you. You know that, don't you?

You feel that, don't you? In Job's suffering, is God for him? Or is he against him?

In our sufferings now or in the future, is the Lord God for us? Or is he against us?

[5 : 49] In chapter 19, Job replies. He does not reply with a nice, clean, safe, what believers are meant to say response.

He really doesn't. He replies rather with brutally honest and raw complaint. Not just against his friends, but also against the God who seems so obviously against him.

In verses 1 to 21, Job yells maybe, I think, against God the monster.

Look at it with me. Then Job replied, verse 2 to the friends. How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me.

Shamelessly, you attack me. When your friends gang up against you and torment you, that is bad enough. But it's not just the friends who are against him. Look, verse 4.

[6 : 51] If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.

God has wronged me, says Job. I wonder whether you have ever felt that secretly.

I wonder if you have ever said that openly. Should you? Job is saying here, God has put me in the wrong.

Job is saying, God is against me unjustly. And he has attacked me wrongly. He's like a hunter.

He's like a mugger. He's like a clawing monster against me, the God I believe in. Listen to how he expresses himself. Verse 6.

[7 : 57] God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. He's caught me like prey in his net trap. Though I cry violence, I'm being mugged by him.

I get no response. Though I call for help, there is no justice. Verse 8. He has blocked my way so that I cannot pass. He has shrouded my paths in darkness.

He's trapped me in and turned the lights off. Verses 9 and 10 are very forceful. Listen to the verbs, the doing words. He has stripped me of my honour and removed the crown from my head.

He tears me down on every side till I am gone. He uproots my hope like a tree. Stripped, removed, tears, uproots. A couple of months ago at home, I watched *The Revenant*.

The 2015 American Western film set in North and South Dakota in the 1820s. And near the beginning, Hugh Glass, who's the hero, the fur trapper, played by Leonardo DiCaprio.

[9 : 02] He is set upon by a female grizzly bear. This monster animal tears at him with her claws and strips his clothing and his back and ravages him.

This is what God has done, Job cries. He uproots my hope like a tree. I'm just out here on the way round to Cranesbill Close.

There is a tree that I think has been pulled up and left. Maybe for good reason. I suspect by local youths maybe who just grabbed it and dumped it. Uprooted and dying and dead on the way round to Cranesbill Close.

God has done that to me. His anger burns against me, verse 11. He counts me among his enemies, not his friends.

Look, verse 12. His troops advance in force. They build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent. Can you picture that? This is divine overkill. All of God's troops against me, the whole army to get me, surrounding me in my little tent.

[10 : 12] In my little tent by myself. God, the monster, has attacked me wrongly, says Job.

Maybe you've never said this. We can understand what he's saying, some of us. Can we not? Job knows that God in heaven is sovereign and supreme and that he holds Job's life in every moment in his hands.

And we should know that that is the same for us. Our God in heaven is almighty. He is sovereign. He is supreme. He is in control of all things. And he holds our lives, our next breath and every moment in his hands.

And as Job suffers terribly, experiencing loss and despair, and as we suffer similarly, what might we conclude? He's against me.

He's against me. He's attacked me brutally and wrongly. Verses 1 to 12. Verse 13 onwards. He has isolated me cruelly.

[11 : 30] And just listen to this next. The kind of miserable loneliness that can make suffering feel like hell.

He has alienated my family from me. He has done this to me. My acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My relatives have gone away. My closest friends have forgotten me. My closest friends. Not just his Facebook friends who've abandoned him. But those closest to him whom he loves, on whom he relies. They've all gone. They've turned their faces away. They can't cope with his downfall and his suffering. Or they consider him cursed. Maybe some of us, at some point in our lives, have experienced this kind of cruel isolation in some way. As we have suffered. And colleagues or family or church people have turned away. My guests and my female servants count me as a foreigner.

[12 : 36] They look upon me as a stranger. I summon my servant, but he does not answer. Though I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife. I'm loathsome to my own family. Even the little boys scorn me.

When I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me. Those I love have turned against me. Job is alone. He's as good as dead. He's a public embarrassment. A disgrace. Which is God's doing. And Job is wasting away. Verse 20. I am nothing but skin and bones.

I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth. Is God for Job? Or is he against him? In this chapter, here Job's complaint, his yell, I think.

God the monster has attacked me wrongly and isolated me cruelly. It could be, maybe it will be at some point, that our lives and experiences line up with Job's to some extent.

[13 : 46] And it could be, it may be that some of these kind of words pour out of us. You've put your faith in God. You're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know that God is your shepherd. And yet such is your suffering that you think or you say or you feel. He's against me. He's wronged me. He's wronged me. He's a monster.

Which if you say that, will be honest. And it will be how you feel. And it will be said in desperation. And it will be dangerously close to cursing God, don't you think?

And, well, is it true that God is acting monstrously? Take a step just out of this little passage in Job for a moment.

We'll look first at verses 21 and 22. And as Job turns to his friends and hear what he says, listen carefully. Have pity on me, my friends. Have pity on me.

[15 : 01] For the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh? Is this true?

But the hand of God has struck Job. Well, here's the thing just to make us pause. Because you and I know something here that Job does not.

Back in Job chapter one, right at the beginning in the heavenly courtroom, the Satan had said to God, stretch out your hand and strike everything he has.

And we read the Lord saying to Satan, very well then, everything he has is in your hand. And again in chapter two, the Satan asks the Lord to stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and blows.

And the Lord replies, he is in your hands. And Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and did his work. Which may trouble you even all the more.

[16 : 15] But ask this, whose are the monstrous hands that have attacked Job? Who has ripped at him and caused him misery? The answer is the hands of Satan, not the hands of God.

Well, Satan was acting with God's permission. Satan was on God's leash. But it is Satan's hand striking Job, not God's.

And the Satan really is a monster. And yet all of that Job neither sees nor knows. And the truth is for us, in our suffering, we do not see into God's heavenly courtroom, do we?

And so often, as far as we can make out, it can feel as though he is ripping into us wrongly and cruelly. And so just like Job, we may cry out and we may complain and accuse and say, God has wronged me.

You are sovereign and supreme. I see no other thing but that you have wronged me. You've wronged me. And yet.

[17 : 39] And yet, even in our moments of darkest despair, when we feel the Lord God is utterly against us, there is something that we can know. And there is something that we must know.

And it's this. That God the monster is my living redeemer.

And I will see him. In Job chapter 19, in verses 23 and 24, Job gets to the end of himself. He's done.

He's been fighting to prove his innocence. He's on the edge of death, he feels, pursued by both God and his friends who are all against him.

And he longs for some record of what he said when he's gone. Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead or engraved in rock forever.

[18 : 43] May the words, my innocence, my complaint be kept forever. And it's at this moment that somehow Job's mind is lifted from the depths of despair.

And he remembers what he knows, what he knows. And what Job knows in these verses is wonderful. And it is life changing for believers who are suffering.

Listen to this, verse 25. It's almost out of nowhere in these chapters, this. A shaft of light into the real darkness of suffering.

I know that my redeemer lives. And that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.

I myself will see him. With my own eyes, I and not another. How my heart yearns within me. What does Job know?

[20 : 00] First, I know that my redeemer lives. In the Old Testament, a redeemer is often a family relative. It's someone close to you who is committed and bound to help you.

A redeemer is a person who stands with you and stands for you when you cannot stand for yourself. Your redeemer is your defender and your helper and your champion.

A redeemer is one who is for you. Job says, I know that my redeemer lives. That is my God.

The God whom I fear and I love and I belong to is alive and he is committed to me. And he does stand with me. And he is for me, my redeemer. I know this.

Even though now his hand has struck me, he lives. Two, in the end he will stand on the earth. And maybe, there's a footnote here, do you see?

[21 : 06] He will stand on my grave. I think that means he will stand with me and for me in my death. And he will declare like an advocate in a court of law, this is my faithful servant.

I know my redeemer lives. In the end he will stand on the earth. And third, I will see God. Verses 26 and 27 are extraordinary.

After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him.

With my own eyes, I am not a stranger. How my heart yearns within me. What Job is saying is this. This monster God who is against me.

It is not the whole story. And it's not everything. And it won't be like this for me forever. I know that. I know that my God is my redeemer and he is for me.

[22 : 21] And in the end, even if it is after my death, I will see him. In my flesh I will gaze upon the one who loves me and is for me for all eternity.

I will. And this prospect of seeing his God, my redeemer, so moves Job that his heart and his kidneys move within him and he yearns for that time and that moment.

And we asked at the start, is the Lord God for me or is he against me?

When you are right in the middle of deep suffering, when you sink into darkness and you cry out, why, why? This is what we want to know and need to know, isn't it?

At the end of the day. Does he love me? Is he for me? Is he for me? In the middle of suffering, Job yells out, God the monster feels so against me.

[23 : 37] In the middle of suffering, Job confesses, I know he's my redeemer and I will see him. You know, this faith in a living redeemer in the midst of darkness, it's not wishful thinking.

It's not nice, lovely things for people to hold onto in a world without hope. It's not. How can we be sure? We can be sure because there was once another real and blameless believer.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus was himself attacked with all God's monstrous terrors. Stripped of his honour, he died a death he did not deserve in darkness, without friends, with God's anger burning against him.

And yet on the third day, his living father stood and acted as his redeemer. Raising Jesus from the dead, declaring him publicly to be the son of God and filling Jesus with joy in his presence.

Verses 25 to 27 are not wishful thinking, they are true. They have happened already for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 02] Because God was for Jesus. He was. And he raised him to life and joy for all eternity. And as he was for Jesus, so this God is the living redeemer for all who belong to Jesus Christ.

And I don't know how the book of Job is connecting with you personally.

Six weeks in Job is a pretty big thing. I don't know quite what suffering you've gone through in the past. I don't know quite how things are for you right now. And who knows what the coming months and years will hold for us.

And to be honest, of course I don't know what you feel in your heart this morning, in your heart of hearts about God. Do you feel he is like a monster to you? It may feel sometimes as though God is making our lives a misery.

And sometimes in your bedroom at home or out loud, you might even yell about him and come so very close to cursing him. In your suffering, come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 19] Put your faith in and cling on to the one who has himself suffered. Not just with us, but for us.

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ and cling to him, this one who suffered terribly and rose again. And through faith in him, even in your darkest despair, even when you think he is a monster to me, you can know that God is for you.

You can. And you too can take these words from Job 19 and make them your own. You can say this. I know that my Redeemer lives.

And that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes.

I and not another. How my heart yearns within me. and let's be quiet together for a moment.

[27 : 34] for a moment. for a moment. for a moment.