



Job - Chapter Thirty

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.c Job 26:1-31:40 - Job: the Power of God, Place of Wisdom, and Path of Integrity (continues)

II.c.iv Job 29:1-31:40 - Job Finishes His Defence (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty

Job contrasts the honour of his past, as recorded in the previous chapter, with his present circumstances by describing the men who taunt him (vv.1-8), their actions against him (vv.9-15), and his own internal affliction (vv.16-23), before a concluding section that references both his past acts of compassion and his present lack of hope or help (vv.24-31).

- 1 'But now they make sport of me,
those who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.
- 2 What could I gain from the strength of their hands?
All their vigour is gone.
- 3 Through want and hard hunger
they gnaw the dry and desolate ground,
- 4 they pick mallow and the leaves of bushes,
and to warm themselves the roots of broom.

- 5 They are driven out from society;
people shout after them as after a thief.
- 6 In the gullies of wadis they must live,
in holes in the ground, and in the rocks.
- 7 Among the bushes they bray;
under the nettles they huddle together.
- 8 A senseless, disreputable brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.

Job 30:1-8

But now they make sport of me. Job describes just how much of a reversal his current situation represents: although he had delivered the truly needy from the oppression of the unrighteous (Job 29:11-17), those who presume to mock him as if he has received the judgement of the unrighteous are themselves needy because of their own actions and foolishness.

But now they make sport of me, those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock. Job was tortured by the irony of it all. The sons of men whom Job would not even put with the dogs of his flock were now his mockers and critics.

Through want and hard hunger they gnaw the dry and desolate ground, in the gullies of wadis they must live, a senseless, disreputable brood. Job thought of what worthless men were now his loud critics and how unjust it all was.

The plants mentioned here represent the food of desperation: mallow or saltwort is a low, struggling bush with thick, sour-tasting leaves; the broom tree is a shrub with long, straight branches, small leaves and poisonous roots. Because the broom tree's roots are both poisonous and known for their heat when burned: <<**A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!**>> (Psalm 120:4), an alternate vocalisation of the Hebrew is sometimes followed with the sense 'for their warmth'. However, the known quality of the broom tree's roots may be used here simply to highlight the dire situation of these men.

Senseless. The Hebrew is literally 'sons of a fool' and infers further that the men being described are in some way morally responsible for their circumstances; refer to Job 2:10, and the description of the foolish in Proverbs 1:7 and 1:29-32.

- 9 'And now they mock me in song;
I am a byword to them.

- 10 They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.
- 11 Because God has loosed my bowstring and humbled me,
they have cast off restraint in my presence.
- 12 On my right hand the rabble rise up;
they send me sprawling,
and build roads for my ruin.
- 13 They break up my path,
they promote my calamity;
no one restrains them.
- 14 As through a wide breach they come;
amid the crash they roll on.
- 15 Terrors are turned upon me;
my honour is pursued as by the wind,
and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

Job 30:9-15

And now they mock me in song. Although Job had restrained the unrighteous according to Job 29:12 and 29:17, he describes those who now presume to deride him, casting off any restraint, as if they are taking advantage of an easy military conquest in which they sing and spit at his downfall (vv.9-11), while building siege ramps against him, breaching his defences, and looting him (vv.12-15).

I am a byword to them. Job was now low in the eyes of these worthless men. It was a warning and a reality that would come upon the people of God who turned away from him: <<*You shall become an object of horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you*>> (Deuteronomy 28:37), <<*But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from the land that I have given you; and this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples*>> (2 Chronicles 7:19-20), <<*I will make them a horror, an evil thing, to all the kingdoms of the earth – a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them*>> (Jeremiah 24:9), <<*I will set my face against them; I will make them a sign and a byword and cut them off from the midst of my people;*

and you shall know that I am the Lord>> (Ezekiel 14:8), and: <<*Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, “Where is their God?”’*>> (Joel 2:17).

In contrast to the past, God has loosened the bowstring that protected him or the cord that secured Job’s tent: <<*when I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent*>> (Job 29:4), and men of low esteem have taken the opportunity to unbridle their tongues and embolden their posture in his presence, thereby not adhering to the protocol of respecting their elders.

Amid the crash. The rabble stormed upon Job like a troop of soldiers pouring through a wide breach in a fortification. They continued uninhibited in their plunder of his reputation.

Terrors are turned upon me; my honour is pursued as by the wind, and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud. Job mourned the agony of his present state of being despised among men, whereas before he had been respected and honoured. His honour and prosperity had vanished.

- 16 ‘And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
- 17 The night racks my bones,
and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
- 18 With violence he seizes my garment;
he grasps me by the collar of my tunic.
- 19 He has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
- 20 I cry to you and you do not answer me;
I stand, and you merely look at me.
- 21 You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
- 22 You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
- 23 I know that you will bring me to death,
and to the house appointed for all living.

Job 30:16-23

And now my soul is poured out within me is an idiom for grief; as it was for the psalmist in his longing for worship at the temple: <<*These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival*>> (Psalm 42:4). Job again described his present crisis. He described the persistent, gnawing pains that were ever with him; but for him it was first and foremost a crisis of the soul. Job laments the isolation in which he now pours out his soul (v.16) as one who wastes away without help (vv.17-22) and waits for death (v.23).

The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest. With poetic power and eloquence, Job described the physical agony of his suffering.

With violence he seizes my garment; he grasps me by the collar of my tunic. The description of Job's solitary grief and disfigured clothes contrasts with his earlier image of being clothed with righteousness and justice for the sake of delivering those in need: <<*I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban*>> (Job 29:14).

I cry to you and you do not answer me. As in v.28, Job feels that his present cry for help from God is unanswered, which contrasts with the descriptions of Job's earlier actions on behalf of others: <<*because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper*>> (Job 29:12). This was the worst aspect of Job's suffering, the sense that God had forsaken him. He undeniably felt that God was against him. Indeed, Job felt that God wanted to and would destroy him.

I know that you will bring me to death. Charles Spurgeon comments, "Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die; he feared that God would not relax the blows of his hand until his body became a ruin, and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. A life of usefulness, and happiness, and honour lay before him; and yet he had set up his own tombstone, and reckoned himself a dead man."

24 'Surely one does not turn against the needy,
when in disaster they cry for help.

25 Did I not weep for those whose day was hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the poor?

26 But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.

27 My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still;

days of affliction come to meet me.
28 I go about in sunless gloom;
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.
29 I am a brother of jackals,
and a companion of ostriches.
30 My skin turns black and falls from me,
and my bones burn with heat.
31 My lyre is turned to mourning,
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.

Job 30:24-31

Surely one does not turn against the needy. Job felt, “God, you are more merciful than this. You would not afflict a pitiful heap of ruins if only it would cry out to you.” Job wondered why God did not respond to his cries.

Did I not weep for those whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? Job wondered why God did not treat him with the same kindness Job had often shown to others. The sensitive soul of Job was another demonstration of his godliness and appropriate for any servant of God. Spurgeon again comments, “I know that a man in the ministry who cannot feel had much better resign his office. We have heard some hold forth the doctrines of grace, as if they were a nauseous medicine, and men were to be forced to drink thereof by hard words and violent abuse. We have always thought that such men did more hurt than good, for while seeking to vindicate the letter, they evidently missed the spirit of the faith once delivered unto the saints. Cold and impassive are some of our divines; they utter truth as though it were no concern of theirs whether men received it or no. To such men heaven and hell, death and eternity, are mere themes for oratory, but not subjects for emotion.”

My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still. Perhaps Job tried to just take it easy and not get so troubled over his problems, but for him it was impossible. His physical and spiritual agony was more than it seemed he could bear or his friends could relate to.

Job concludes the chapter by picturing himself as being like one of those whose cries for help he used to answer (vv.24-25) but who in his own distress has found evil where he hoped for good (v.26), and isolation and mourning (v.27 and vv.29-31) when he has called for help (v.28).