

I Know My Redeemer Lives

Job 19:21-27

Wayne Eberly
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I played a little trick on our son, Alex that almost went really wrong. Alex is fearless. He learned to ride his bicycle at three years old. At five, we would ride bikes together to the preschool he attended, which like our ELC here was part of our congregation in Houston. We would ride six miles. He was in preschool and we would ride six miles across several busy streets, including an overpass over a major toll road that was used by tens of thousands of drivers every day. In elementary school, we continued with our bicycle rides, especially on Friday, which was my day off. Alex would bounce out of bed on Friday mornings, put on his helmet, we would ride to school, which included a stop for donuts at his favorite shop, and then he would strut into the bicycle parking lot and lock his bike up. I loved those mornings. I loved that routine. I loved our time together. Most importantly, Alex knew how much I loved riding bikes with him to school.

One Friday morning he raced down the stairs and with an eager look said, “Are we riding our bikes to school today?” My answer was meant to be a joke, a fun and light-hearted prank. When he asked if we were riding, I responded, “Why?” The picture in my mind is as clear as the day it happened. When I said, “Why” the smile on his face vanished and an incredible look of sadness came over his face and tears filled his eyes. That one word “Why” took the wind out of his sails and nearly crushed his spirit. Our bike rides were special times. They were joyful times. When I said “Why” it was if I was saying that something we shared together didn’t really mean that much. That was not my intention. I only meant to have a little fun with him. You see, my answer was not why spelled W H Y. As soon as I saw his crestfallen face, I rushed to tell him the rest of my answer. He asked if we were going to ride our bikes to school. My answer was Y E S. Alex was a resilient little guy. After all, he had three older siblings, who did all the things older siblings do to their little brother. Anyway, as soon as I spelled out Y E S, and he realized I wasn’t casting dispersion on our treasured bike rides, the smile returned to his face. And over time, we have a lot of fun when a question gets asked and the answer comes back, “Y”. Often the other person will fill in the rest. “E S” I think the whole Eberly family has learned from my little joke that nearly went wrong that we all like YES a whole lot more than that troublesome question “Why?”

The Book of Job is beset with that troublesome question “Why?” Job was a blameless and upright man; he feared God and shunned evil. But that didn’t keep the bottom from dropping out. He suffered financial loss and the loss of loved ones and he endured painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Guess what Job did? He asked why? Job asked why? He wanted to know the answers to the suffering he was enduring. Chapter three is the first of many speeches Job gives. In chapter three Job asks why. He asks why in verse 11. He asks why in verse 12. He asks why in verse 16. He asks why in verse 20. And he asks why in verse 23. He ends that troubling chapter that repeatedly asks that troubling question with these troubling words, “I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.” If you have ever read the Book of Job, you undoubtedly noticed one of the troubling things about Job’s plight is that his questions about why never get completely answered. Job does discover God is a lot bigger than Job ever imagined, and Job finally comes to recognize that God is in control, but Job does not get a full answer to all the why questions he asks in his many speeches.

Despite never getting a complete answer to his many why questions, the story of Job is a powerful witness not to the word “why” but to the word Y...E...S. Job doesn’t get to YES in his first speech. He doesn’t get to YES in his second speech...or his third, or fourth, or fifth. That question why can really trip you up and throw you for a loop. But after five speeches, Job finally gets to YES in his sixth speech. In his sixth speech, the sixth time Job opens his mouth in the midst of tremendous suffering and pain and a level of loss hard to comprehend Job is able to say yes...YES. “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon 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 eye—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me.” (Job 19:25-27) YES is a powerful word. YES is a word of faith. I don’t know how Job got to YES, but somehow he did. Somehow he moved from why and he landed on YES. I know my Redeemer lives.

I was listening to a pastor at a big conference. He pastored a big church and he got invited to preach at big conferences and he was handsome and charming and witty, and it made sense why he was invited to speak at big conferences. He had everything going for him. You might almost guess he had the answer for all the why questions. But as he spoke it became clear he did not have the answers to the why questions. In fact, he faced some of the most difficult why

questions that can come your way. The pastor told about how his twenty-two-year old son died in an auto accident. The pastor wrote these words about the death of his son. “Dear friends, I have been to the bottom! I have been to where few of you ever have been or ever will be. I have been to where life hurts the most and cuts the deepest and hits the hardest. Therefore, listen to me when I tell you that faith in Jesus Christ is not some sideline pursuit, some pleasant diversion, some enjoyable hobby in your life. It’s not something you give yourself to when it’s convenient or when it helps you along your career track or when you want to appear respectable. It’s not just a part of your life. You’ve got to see it as the center of your life, the foundation of your whole existence. Nothing else in your life really matters, nothing else in your life will last. When the police chaplain says, ‘Your son did not survive,’ I can tell you that you find out right then that the only thing you have left is faith. But because of my faith, I can say to you, ‘I feel the bottom, and the bottom is sound.’ Faith lasts. The pastor who tells the story of his son was not done when he told his son’s story.

He goes on to tell a story about a man named Horatio Spafford. We sang a song this summer written by Horatio Spafford. It was one of our summer favorites. The pastor who tells the story of his own son dying wrote, “I have been helped in recent days by recalling (the experience of Horatio Spafford)...He sent his wife and four children on an ocean liner in 1873 sailing from New York to France. On the evening of November 21, 1873 the ship was suddenly struck by another vessel. Thirty minutes later, the ship sank, with the loss of nearly all on board. Mrs. Spafford was rescued but the four children were gone. She wired her husband. The message read, ‘Saved alone.’ Several weeks later Horatio Spafford sailed from New York to join his grieving wife on the other side of the Atlantic. As he crossed the precise spot in the ocean where the ship went down, carrying his children, Spafford sat down and wrote a hymn. Many of you know that story. Many of you know the words to the hymn *It Is Well With My Soul*.

**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”¹**

¹ Howard Edington, Downtown Church: The Heart of the City, p. 149, 153.

Nowhere in Job's story does he get a complete answer to why. Howard Edington, the pastor whose son died received no answer to the question why. Horatio Spafford out on the deep waters of the Atlantic received no answer to the question why. But each one, in his own way, was able to say YES. Spafford said, "It is well with my soul." Howard Edington said, "I feel the bottom, and the bottom is sound." And Job, he of the many why questions, got to the place where he could say, "I know my Redeemer lives."

In case you were wondering, my sermon today doesn't have many answers. I'm not sure it has any answers. Those why questions are hard. They are troubling. They sap our energy. I don't have many answers this morning, but I do have a verse that has helped me when the why questions seem to get the best of me. Way at the end of the journey of Moses, after the basket in the reeds and the years in Pharaoh's court and that long stretch shepherding in Midian and after the burning bush and the plagues and after the Passover and the Exodus and the manna and the commands and the forty years wandering in the desert...way at the end of his journey, God says to Moses in Deuteronomy 29:29 words that speak to the whys and words that speak to the YES. It is a short verse, but it can be very helpful. God says to Moses in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The things that are hidden belong to God, but the things that are revealed belong to us." There are hidden things in this world, why questions for which we never find an answer. There are hidden things, or as another translation calls them, "Secret things." The hidden things, the secret things belong to God. There are mysteries we will never understand and riddles that will never be solved and questions that will never be answered.

But life is not all hidden things, or secret things. The things that have been revealed belong to us. There is so much we do not know, mysteries and puzzles and suffering and sadness. The whys about those things are difficult and they drain us. There is so much we do not know. But there are things we do know. There are things God has revealed. Ultimately, God did not choose to answer all the whys of this world. Instead, God did something much more radical. God did something much more personal. God became one of us. God became flesh and dwelt among us. He did not answer all the whys, but he did embrace the suffering and sadness of life. He touched the wounded. He listened to the

brokenhearted. He forgave the sinners. He experienced rejection. He experienced judgment. He experienced betrayal. He experienced pain. Jesus experienced suffering and death. Human beings have piled up a huge mountain of why questions, even complaints about life in this world. God's answer was to send his only Son, his Beloved Son, to climb a mountain of his own, and to die on a cross, to prove that God's love for this world is real. The hidden things belong to God. But what God has revealed, the loving gift of Jesus Christ, that belongs to us. That is ours. Hold fast to that revelation. Hold fast to that precious gift.

Andy asked us to submit our favorite hymns and he has used them this summer. We have come to the garden alone...we have joined the Lord of the Dance...we have celebrated all things bright and beautiful, which by the way is inscribed on the bright and beautiful new fountain that is in Wilcox Park in downtown Westerly. We have leaned over the rails of the ship, peering with Horatio Spafford at those deep and dark waters and we have sung into that void, "It is well with my soul." Today I am taking my turn. I asked Andy if we could do my favorite.

On Labor Day three years ago, we went to the hymn sing they have in Weekapaug Chapel. It is a wonderful tradition in Weekapaug that marks the end of the summer. Everyone is invited. Everyone is welcome. I found out that night, at our first time attending the hymn sing, that Weekapaug has a song that is near and dear to the hearts of many. I had not sung the song before, but from the first note I knew the tune. The tune is Londonderry Air, described as a traditional Irish melody. Londonderry Air is more familiarly known as the tune for Danny Boy. The hymn we sang that night is titled *Savior of the World*, or *I Cannot Tell*. Nowhere in the song is there a reference to Deuteronomy 29:29, or Job. But as we sang that night I listened between the lines and I heard God talking to Moses about the things that are hidden and the things that are revealed. I heard Job finding a solid place to stand when the whole world had crumbled and giving a witness that reverberates even now. "I know my Redeemer lives." That night I heard Howard Edington saying, "I have been to the bottom and it is sound." And there might as well have been a descant of "It is well with my soul."

Each verse of the hymn speaks about what we do not know, about the hidden things, about the whys for which we will never find an answer. And yet rather than get stuck in what we do not know, what we cannot tell, each verse, every verse moves to what we do know, to what has been revealed, to what we can trust, to what we can stand on, to what we can base our faith on. “But this I know...But this I know...But this I know...”

Singing that song in that chapel is part of something very special to me. Earlier this summer I was back at the Weekapaug chapel, preaching a sermon. I told the group that morning about how I was struggling a year ago when I found out our son Alex had cancer. That little guy I tricked with why and YES, he was in the battle of his life. As he faced cancer, guess what I was asking? I was asking why, why, why. He knew I was struggling. He could hear it in my voice. And this little guy, who is now 26, facing surgery for cancer and the uncertainty of how it would all turn out, he heard me asking why, and over the phone, he played my trick back on me. He said Y...E...S. Alex said to me on the phone, “Dad, I’m in good hands.” That was his way of saying YES. I was asking why, but he knew he was in good hands, and he said YES. The bottom is sound. It is well with my soul. I know my Redeemer lives. YES!