Arbitration that works

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev J.M.Macpherson

[0:00] his agony, but the meaning of it. Why has God allowed this? He was not guilty in the way that his friends understood him to be guilty. Some secret sin, they said, that God was justly punishing. But he knew that he was a sinner. He knew that between him and God there was a gulf.

But he couldn't so very often understand why God was dealing with him in this particular way. And as he plunges into the incomprehensible agony of his suffering, he had lost all his possessions. From being a wealthy man, he had become a bankrupt. He had lost all his children, all ten of them. Died suddenly. He had lost his health, a painful, wasting disease. And although it might seem much more trivial compared to all of these, it must have been bitter to him that he lost the love and understanding of his friends and even of his wife. That in those moments of agony she should turn and say to him, curse God and die. What has God done for you? Cast him aside. And in the depth of all that suffering, as Job explores what it means, why he has to suffer in this way, even there he brings out some marvelous declarations. Perhaps you might say, without the soaring faith and confidences of the couple that I quoted a minute ago, but nonetheless, declarations that as we look at them, they do nothing less than express the heart of the gospel. The good news of God's love to us in Jesus Christ can be found embedded in some of these perplexed, agonizing cries of the patriarch Job. And one example I believe we have here.

In those words, when he begins saying, God is not a man as I am, that I may answer him. How can I? How can I find him? How can I get right with God? How can I get out of this dilemma, this agony in which I find myself questions that seem to be the answer? And yet, the answer is here. The answer not just for Job, the answer for me, the answer for you, in our particular situations.

I want us to see how in these verses in Job's experience, there are three words words that express not only Job's experience, but the experience of a sinner coming to the Savior and receiving what we were singing about a moment ago, God's forgiveness, God's taking off all his anger and reconciling us to himself. The first of these three words is the word alienation.

[3:24] Job speaks here of alienation. Now, some years ago, I suppose, some decades ago, that's a word that would probably just have stayed for most of us in the dictionary. It certainly wasn't a word of everyday use. But now, it's sadly familiar. We hear of alienation, of groups of our people who are alienated, we're told, from our society. They feel estranged. They feel like outsiders.

When Marxism, in the last few decades, was so popular and so much in control in many parts of the world, this was a favorite word in their vocabulary. You couldn't be a Marxist or come in contact with communism without hearing constantly about alienation, about people being alienated from society, the mass of the people being alienated from the few rich capitalists who held everything in their hands. And we hear it ourselves, don't we? The alienation that the unemployed feel in a society where some people are getting richer and richer, but there's nothing for them. And so they feel alienated from this society that they're told is getting better and better with more and more prospects.

Or it may be the alienation that we read of and we see, felt by ethnic groups. There may be blacks, there may be other ethnic groups, and they feel alienated. Somehow or other, they don't feel part of this society, and we have the fruit of it all around us. On a world scale, the alienation that the underprivileged feel. The people of so many third world countries who look at us, the wealthy West, and who see that however much they strive, they can never attain. So it seems what we have. And so there is a sense of alienation. Now when this bursts out, as it sometimes does in our own society, in violence. We just think back a few months, for example, to Luton, and to the looting and the violence that was evident in the streets there. And we hear constantly people saying, and rightly saying, well, why? Why? What are the reasons? What are the underlying causes? Why is there this alienation in our society? And answers are given. Social deprivation. Well, that's part of the answer.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Unemployment. That may well be true for some. Lack of discipline in a home. That's undoubtedly a very real factor. And there are others that are mentioned to try and explain why some people feel alienated from others. Alienated from the society in which they live. But Job probes deeper. Job knows that that isn't the whole answer. Now he did feel alienated from his society. He expresses it, you have it in chapter 19, verses 13 to 19. I want to read those verses. And you give them the title, Alienation.
And see how Job knew all about this. Once again, I actually want to read it from the NIV. But you can follow it in our own Bibles here. Listen to what Job says about his situation in his society. [7:21] He has alienated my brothers from me. My acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My kinsmen have gone away. My friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger. They look upon me as an alien. 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 am loathsome to my own brothers. 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. Alienation. I doubt if there was a man who felt it as deeply and painfully as Job did. And Job, reflecting on this situation, why? Why? Why is there this alienation? He lays his finger on something far deeper than these social causes. He doesn't just talk about unemployment, that he's lost his job and his resources. He doesn't just talk about being part of a despised minority because he's poor. He goes deeper. And he tells us that there is an alienation between God and us, between man and his maker. He goes on to talk in these verses about how he calls out to God, but somehow or other, God's not there. He can't find him.
And chapter 23, verse 3, has a classic definition of this experience of Job. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat. He longs to relate familiarly, intimately to God. But he can't. He can't find him. He can't get close to him, he says.
There is this alienation. There is this gulf. And he again puts his finger on one of the main reasons. [9:40] He talks about what we could call the otherness of God. Verse 32, He is not a man as I am, that I may answer him. God is other. God is different. And of course that's true. God the great creator, we the created. God who made us out of the dust of the earth and back to the dust we shall go.

And yet God, from eternity to eternity. And as Job reflects on the otherness of God, God describes it in two ways. He speaks about the greatness of God. And he speaks also about the holiness of God. The opening verses of chapter 9, verses 1 to 12, give us a marvelous description of the greatness of God. We're not going to reread these verses, but you can see, for example, verse 5, he removes the mountains. They do not know when he overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth out of its place. His pillars tremble. He commands the sun, and so on. The greatness of Almighty God. And Job feels so utterly, utterly small and insignificant.
Now maybe there was a time, perhaps a few decades ago, or a century ago, when mankind spoke of progress, of the world becoming better and better, and of all the superstitions of days gone by disappearing, that the wars and the problems of generations past, that they would go before two world wars and much more came on the scene. It may well be that at such a time when man was so confident of his scientific progress, that he would look back pityingly on his ancestors back to the Middle Ages and say, well, of course, these people who thought about the greatness of God and who spoke about his majesty, is because they didn't understand. They didn't know all about the universe that we know.
But isn't it the case that as more and more is discovered, as man probes with that intelligence and ability that God has given him, as man probes deeper and deeper into the heart of the earth, more and more into the vast empty spaces of the universe, and finds out more and more of the greatness, the incomprehensible vastness of the universe and universes beyond, that modern man has far more reason than ancient man to bow before the greatness of Almighty God and to say with the apostle Paul, oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. And Job is merely echoing what the whole Bible says to us. What these psalms that we sing tell us again and again, oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent in all the earth is your name is your name and all that you have made. And we can go through them one by one and see this magnificent exposition of the greatness of Almighty God. And Job therefore says rightly that his place is in the dust is in the dust before such a God. And so this feeling of separateness, of alienation from God because of God's otherness, it stems on the one hand from

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

God's greatness, but Job goes further into the dust. And he speaks of God's greatness. And he speaks of God's holiness. God is so intensely, not just great, but so intensely pure, that those who are sinful, however little they may feel their sin is compared to the sin of others, but nonetheless in the sight of a holy and a pure God, there is a gull.
There is an alienation. Could you imagine? You can't really. None of us can. But somebody, somebody we know, who managed to keep perfectly all the Ten Commandments, somebody who never ever told a lie, not just from their lips, but in their mind and heart, somebody who never ever stole even the slightest fraction, time or affection or honor, not just things, someone who never ever ever had any idol of any kind in their hearts that took the place of God. Can you imagine such a person? Well, of course, if we could, we would say, that person lives on another planet. He's not real. She's not real. Not like us. We couldn't relate to such a person. Well, of course, what I'm postulating is impossible. We know it ourselves, but we're sinners in the sight of God, and we cannot keep or begin to keep perfectly His commandments.
[15:23] But take what I've imagined, and then recognize that this is God. Holy, pure, just, no sin, no suggestion of sin, no secret sin, blazingly, unutterably pure and holy and righteous.

And Job has understood something of that. And when Job realizes that this is God, a God who has declared His total hatred of all sin and everything that is contrary to His holy nature, then it's no wonder that Job starts speaking about things like, we have it here, speaking about rod, God's rod. Let him take his rod away from me, God's righteous punishment of sin. Or he speaks of terror. Let not dread of him, terrify me. He speaks about being unable to stand before Almighty God, that we should go to court together, stand together, as it were. He uses this kind of language that indicates it's impossible. He feels utterly unclean. He feels utterly unworthy in the sight of this God. And you have his expression of it, for example, in the two previous verses, verses 30 and 31.
If I wash myself with snow water and cleanse my hands with soap, can I then come in the presence of God? No, of course I can't. You will plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes will abhor me, because every effort that men and women make to make themselves acceptable before God is doomed, utterly doomed to failure. God is other, not only because of His greatness, but because of His holiness. And as we think of our own society, the alienation that various classes feel, and as we think of how that can often breed violence, tension between various groups, racial and social groups.
Well, of course, we say that the guilty must be punished. We may even say that, well, the authorities have some blame. Perhaps the police didn't handle it very well. Perhaps our laws are weighted against some rather than against others.
[17:52] But come into God's presence. Can you say that? Can you say, in the sight of all the problems of this world of ours, of your problems, of your guilt, of your not reaching even your own best standards, let alone God's, can you then say, well, there's something there in God's law that needs to be adjusted.

The authorities, God and His messengers, they've somehow got it wrong. The fault is not in God. The fault is in us.
There is alienation. God has a controversy with His people. And He has good reason, because of my sin, your rebellion.
So there's the first thing. Job speaks about alienation. And unless we have recognized this alienation, then we haven't begun to understand the gospel.
There's no good news unless we recognize the need of it through alienation. There's a second word that I think describes Job's thinking here, and it is arbitration.
[19:09] You'll notice that in the version that I read, the NIV, it spoke in verse 33 of someone to arbitrate. Here in our version it talks of a mediator.

Not is there any mediator between us. Now as we've seen, all Job's efforts, however good, couldn't change the situation.
He remained in the sight of God a sinner. And it's got to be like that, because God can't change. God's nature can't adapt to our sinful lack of reaching His standard.
God can't say, well, they really can't live the way I would like, so I'll just become more easily attainable. I'll enter in a little bit to their sin, so that they can then comfortably get into touch with me. How can God do that? Can a holy God become less holy? Of course He can't. And that symbolized the very beginning of our human history.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[20:21] When Adam and Eve, because of their sin, were driven from the garden, we're told that a flaming sword was set there. No way back. All their efforts, all their seeking, all their trying, no way back.

The flaming holiness and righteousness of God barred the way to sinful men and women. And if God can't become a little bit less holy, just to make Himself a little more accessible to us, then on the other hand, Job can't make himself that little bit better.
Job can't become infinite enough, or holy enough, so that he can embrace God on equal terms, and feel confident coming into His presence.
And so Job has this dilemma. I can't reach God, and God is sinful, and He can't become as I am, because He can't become sinful.
What are we going to do? And He expresses it in this way. In verses 32 and 33, He says, He's not a man as I am, that I may answer, so that we could go to court together.
[21:36] I'd like, He says, to be able to confront God, to be able to come and talk things over with Him. And then He says this marvelous thing, if only, if only, there were someone to arbitrate between us, someone to lay His hand upon us both.

I've got this dilemma. There's this alienation, this gulf, but I wonder, says Job in his deep agony, I wonder if somewhere, somebody, could be an arbitrator, would understand enough of both of our situations to come in between us, and put His hand on God, and put His hand on me.
And so you have this call for arbitration. Now once again, I said that alienation is not the kind of word that maybe some years ago we would have been so familiar with.
In a way, the same with arbitration, that is familiar enough today. So many groups in our society and they can't agree. Pay claims.
The employer doesn't want to give it. And the employees say, well, if you don't give it, we're going on strike. And so we have our ACAS, our Arbitration and Conciliation Service.
[23:00] It's woven into the warp and whoop of our society now. The whole concept of arbitration. And what do you need? Well, you need somebody, don't you, who has the trust of both parties.

Somebody that both parties will see as impartial. They're not involved. They're not going to have to shell out a bigger wage. On the other hand, they're not going to have to appeal for more wages for themselves.
And so, somebody impartial. Somebody that they can trust. And in our own situation, we see, don't we, these irreconcilable situations between the management and unions and other groups.
Now, there are human arbitrators. Some more successful than others. Shuttle diplomacy. Trying to get the parties in Bosnia to come together.
The Jimmy Carters of this world who become mediators and arbitrators trying to bring together the various factions. But human arbitrators, even the best of them, they often fail, don't they?
[24:18] One of the reasons they fail is that while the parties may agree to go to arbitration, one party is all the time saying, perhaps both, well, we'll go to arbitration, but if it doesn't work out the way we like, we're not going to accept it.

We're familiar with that, aren't we? And what is Job asking for? Job is asking for an arbitrator, not like that, but one who will truly, successfully bring him, so sinful, suffering so much, and this holy, distant, totally other God bring them together.
Is there someone like that? Have you ever heard a clearer explanation of the gospel than this? That there is someone, the very person that Job is looking for.
He's come, the only, the perfect arbitrator. It's got to be someone who can lay his hand on God.
Or only someone who is divine, who has the nature of God, can do that. And someone who can lay his hand meaningfully on us.
[25:42] Well, he's got to be human. He's got to know what we feel. Got to be like us? Is there such a one? The eternal Son of God became man.

Christ took our nature. The second person of the glorious, divine trinity. He who is God became what we are.
What an arbitrator. His hand on God, his hand on me. And so, the Lord Jesus is the answer to Job's great plea.
Fully man, but he was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and yet at the same time, totally and utterly God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

He went through life, didn't he? With his hand on both. He was born just the way we're born. ordinary human birth.
[26:47] But he was born of a virgin, a divine conception, the arbitrator. He's got us put in both camps, if you like. He's got the understanding of both.

And normal growth, just the way we've grown and developed from our childhood to our adulthood. childhood. And yet, at the same time, in that growth, we hear him say, I must be about my father's business.
I'm not just your son, Mary. I am my father's son. And then too, as we see him there in the carpenter shop, doing the ordinary chores of everyday working life, and yet in the midst of it all, never man spoke like this man, crucified in weakness.
How human. Can God die? Of course, God can't die. But Jesus Christ, who was God, died as he became man for us.
And yet, the one who died in weakness is the one of whom it was said, truly, this man was the son of God. I tell you, friends, Job's prayer has been answered, and it's answered for me, and it's answered for you.
[28:13] Tonight, God says, there's an arbitrator, there's a mediator. You don't need to remain alienated. You don't need to remain separate from Almighty God.

There's someone who bridges the gulf. Someone like you. Someone like me. And so we come to our third word.
There's alienation, there is arbitration, but of course it has to be completed with reconciliation. Once again, one of these perhaps more dictionary words in days gone by has become yet again all too sadly familiar in our own day.
Reconciliation, what does it mean? What does it imply? Well, states of enmity, racial enmity, class enmity, enmity in different national and international situations.
And we know, don't we, how notoriously difficult it is to reconcile those who, looking back through history, centuries of antagonism between one race and another, between one sector of society and another, how notoriously difficult it is to reconcile them.
[29:34] we don't need to look further than across the water to Northern Ireland, or we go across to the former Yugoslavia, or we go to Cyprus, Turks and Greeks, or we go to Israel, Jews and Palestinians.

And we see that reconciliation on a human level is sadly all too often impossible. all. And my friends, there is a state of enmity between us and God.
God is angry with sinners every day. Not my words, the words of Scripture. On our part, we say to God, we will not have this man to reign over us, whom you have appointed, your king, your Messiah.
We will not have him. God's side, we read that he is of holier eyes than to behold iniquity. He cannot look upon sin. So there is the enmity.
There is the alienation, as we have seen. So how? How is the reconciliation effected? Well, it's not just by the incarnation. It's not just that God became man.
[30:52] That's marvelous. It's extraordinary. And it does indeed mean that there is a man in the glory and God here on earth.

But it's not just through the incarnation. God shows by his coming into our condition his good will. But there is more, isn't there?
This sin that is an affront to almighty God must be dealt with. the soul that sins must die. It's a testimony of God's word from the first page to the last.
And that must be fulfilled for God has said it. Job puts it this way. Look back to our text. He says in verse 34, I'm looking for somebody, some kind of arbitrator, who will take God's rod away from me. Someone to remove his rod so that his terror will frighten me no more. Then, when that is done, there is harmony.
[32:04] And it's been done, friends. The great song of Isaiah in chapter 12, where he rejoices, says, O God, I will praise you. Though you were angry with me, your anger has been turned away, and you comfort me.

And how did he do it? Did God just flick it away? Did he say, well, I've shown my goodwill, my son has gone to earth, and he's able to communicate with these sinful people?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Oh, no. There was more than that. It wasn't just that he became like us. We have to go further. We have to go to Calvary.
We have to go and hear the words, for example, of the prophet, the famous words in Isaiah 53, where he speaks of our sin being laid on him.
It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He has put him to grief. For thou shalt make his soul an offering for our sins. Led like a sheep to the slaughter.
[33:14] The lamb, or led like a lamb to the slaughter. The sheep before our shearers is done. And that's where we find it. The arbitrator becomes a victim, the sufferer, the one who bears the penalty of sin.

And this is surely the most successful arbitration that there has ever been. Human arbitration often fails, as I've said. There isn't the will to implement it.
But God has not only arbitrated, God has reconciled. And why then should anyone live in enmity? Why should you live as an enemy of God? Why should you live, to use Job's words, with God's rod resting on you, the rod of his wrath?
Job, although obviously he didn't understand the fullness of the gospel, yet God gave him some understanding of the wonder of his salvation in Christ. And he goes on to say there in the last verses, I want someone to take God's rod away from me, so that I will not be terrified anymore.
[34:27] Then I would speak and not feel him. And Job has a glimpse of that reconciled experience, of that harmony between himself and God.

And you and I can say that it's true for us, because God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. My friend, don't, don't live in enmity with God.
He offers the reconciliation. We're told that we, preachers, all Christians, are messengers of this reconciliation, pleading with men and women, be reconciled with God.
And he's done it all. There is an arbitrator. An arbitrator for you, as your faith is placed in Jesus Christ.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host