### “I Myself Shall See” Steve Finlan for The First Church, November 6, 2022

**Job 19:23–27 Douay-Rheims translation**

23Who will grant me that my words may be written? Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book?

24With an iron pen and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flint stone.

25For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth.

26And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I will see my God.

27Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

**Luke 20:27–38**

27 Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him 28and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. 29Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; 30then the second 31and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. 32Finally the woman also died. 33In the resurrection, then, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

34 Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 35but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. 36Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are . . . children of the resurrection. 37And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

Belief in the afterlife is one of the pillars of Christian faith. It’s hard to imagine a time when this was not believed. But it was not believed in the time that Job was written. The standard belief was that everyone descends down into the dust: “mortals lie down and do not rise again” (14:12). The Book of Job says “live in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust” (4:19). Of *all* people, regardless of the kind of life they lived, Job says they “They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them” (21:26).

This is the traditional Mesopotamian belief, which the Israelites inherited. Sometimes they thought that people lay there in a dim, half-conscious state, eating dust: a wholly gloomy existence. Job is struggling with God on the subject of suffering, and part of that struggle involves his rebellion against this gloomy belief. Out of his suffering, he declares at one point that God will at least consider raising him up again. He tells God “you would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands” (14:15). He believes God will want to see the result of God’s action in creating Job.

The book of Job is a theological drama, and Job’s struggle toward faith in an afterlife is one of the key dramatic breakthroughs in the book. Here, in chapter 19, he goes furthest, affirming that he shall see God. “I shall rise out of the earth” (19:25), he asserts. The Book of Job is an adventure in ideas, with this exclamation of belief, this rejection of the gloomy afterlife concept, being one of the supreme decisions of the character, Job. The truth welled up from Job’s spirit, and his mind grasped it.

The afterlife issue also comes up in Jesus’ dispute with the Sadducees. The Sadducees do not believe in an afterlife, nor do they believe in anything beyond the five books of the Torah. Their question is an absurd and insincere one. They don’t really believe such a situation would ever arise, but they think they have asked a question that will stump Jesus.

Despite the insincerity of the questioners, Jesus gives a straightforward answer, because he knows a part of his audience is sincere. So he tells them that people do not marry and have families in the afterlife. He tries to convince the Sadducees that their own texts should tell them that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living, at least, if they believe that God is God of the living. Instead of being stumped, Jesus stumps them. And this is not the only time that Jesus used people’s Scriptures to get them to change their beliefs. If they don’t believe the patriarchs are alive in the afterlife, they should stop referring to God as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, whom they think are just dead. Their theology is paltry. Their conversation is superficial.

It is alright to wrestle with God, if you have to, to struggle with beliefs, as Job did. It is not alright to be frivolous and insincere in your conversation with God. The frivolous never get to have a wholehearted and personal experience of God, whereas the wholehearted Job is able to speak of God, “whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (19:27).

Honest wrestling with God and theology is a legitimate pursuit. It is even better if you break through to something important to believe in, and then cease to have any conflict about that belief. Then you can confidently say “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth” (19:25). It’s so much better to have to struggle to decide what your beliefs are than to thoughtlessly accept the beliefs of a group without ever using your own mind to decide what you believe. Job is a hero of the faith. At the end, Job is vindicated, even though he often argues with God and complains about his suffering. But his struggle is more to be respected than are the smug and unexamined beliefs of the three so-called friends.

Do you struggle with God? Do you question your suffering or the suffering of others? Do you wonder what the afterlife will be like? These are legitimate questions, but don’t short-circuit the answers by being angry with God or being sarcastic and frivolous. God blesses those who wrestle with him, as long as they do so with some faith. It’s alright to ask, as Job did, “If mortals die, will they live again?” (14:14), but it’s good to have enough faith to add “You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands” (14:15). Doubt is not the enemy of faith, but more like its companion, its wrestling partner. Your faith gets stronger if you wrestle with doubt, rather than suppressing it, or feeling ashamed for having it. Doubt may be the fire that tempers faith. Job’s faith was stronger for his having wrestled with his doubts, than was the faith of his supposed friend, Eliphaz, who pompously assumed he was one of the righteous, and didn’t “argue in unprofitable talk” (15:3). Eliphaz tells Job “you are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God” (15:4), but God tells Eliphaz, “my wrath is kindled against you . . . for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7). Job is allowed to be the hero of his own story, and is vindicated by God in the end, even though he is blazing his own trail, as regards his beliefs. He has earned the right to say “I myself shall see” (19:27).

Be the hero of your story, too. Speak honestly with God, while seeking God’s help. Every outreach to God, if it is sincere, is rewarded. Trust that your honest outreach to God is highly valued. God values *your* questing . . . and your *finding*, too.