



The First Sunday after The Epiphany.

The Collect.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Job 20

King James Version (KJV)

20 Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said,

2 Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste.

3 I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer.

4 Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth,

5 That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?

6 Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds;

7 Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?

8 He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night.

9 The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him.

10 His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods.

11 His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust.

12 Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue;

13 Though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth:

14 Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him.

15 He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly.

16 He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him.

17 He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter.

18 That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein.

19 Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not;

20 Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired.

21 There shall none of his meat be left; therefore shall no man look for his goods.

22 In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him.

23 When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating.

24 He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through.

25 It is drawn, and cometh out of the body; yea, the glittering sword cometh out of his gall: terrors are upon him.

26 All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle.

27 The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him.

28 The increase of his house shall depart, and his goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath.

29 This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.

How greatly do men's minds divide over established Truth? The misapplication of truth can be as damaging, or more so at times, than an outright lie – for truth misapplied is a great lie. Good Christian men and women are divided in Christ because they misinterpret the Words that Christ taught us. Greater issue is made over the definition of 'wine' than over the so-called right to abort innocent babies, in today's

churches; and more battles are fought over infant baptism than in the nurturing of the convert in the faith AFTER baptism. If Godly folk would take upon themselves the Mind that was in Christ, the division would cease. Need I remind you that those saints who die in the Lord will then be members of One Church only, and not be stretched between Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Anglicans – in ascending order of Godliness of course? (*___~)

So we see Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and even Job misinterpreting the meaning of God's truth. Though all three friends speak wise words, their basis is rooted more in the humanistic application of godly principles than those of Job. Job, though he errs at logic at times, does base both his understanding, and misunderstanding, upon what he perceives to be God's will. Though many churches today claim the Bible to be the Word of God, they take a very licentious view thereof in feeling that they have acquired a greater knowledge of Christ than the apostles had, and they feel free to alter the Bible according to their foolish deceptions. But, as a common Alabama proverb goes, "*It ain't over 'til its over!*" Our great LORD shall bring everything into judgment and set all things right that are amiss in the end times. We may judge from the midsection that a fish is a fish, but we will not know which direction it is headed until we have seen the head and tail. So with the persevering Job. Our lives are, as our friend, Shakespeare says, like a play. We enter the theater at mid play and leave before the play is over. So how can we judge the play and its ending? "*All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts.*" (As You Like It – Wm. Shakespeare).

Zophar violates a cardinal rule of wisdom in speaking his wisdom – he speaks in haste! 2 Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste. Please note the contrasting reverence in which God is held by Job as opposed to that of his three friends. Job KNOWS God even if he misinterprets God's will at times. The assertions of the three friends of Job are constantly condemning Job more than uplifting the God whom Job fails not to honor. Not a single word of Job's three friends rises to the zenith of beauty and truth of Job's single claim in the last chapter: *For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.* (Job 19:25-26) We often quote the beauty of expression of Job, but seldom of his friends.

The cause of Zophar's hasty answer is a quick temper! 3 I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer. He essentially blames, now, Job of speaking too harshly against him, but suggests that he will respond to a harsh reproach with a reasoned understanding. What follows is no more than a recycle train of charges and allegations against Job. The dung beetle recycles dung, and it is the strongest bug known. It never gives up or quits in its dirty business. Of course, the polytheists of ancient Egypt considered such a bug of filth to be sacred. It was called a scarab. It is unfortunate today that the religious zeal of many Bible-believing Christians is so much harsher than Christ ever spoke that their efforts result in a greater, not less, ignorance and love of God. 4 Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, 5 That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? 6 Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds. Is Zophar harboring a dormant jealousy for Job's earlier prosperity? Job, as we all know, triumphed early in the favor of God. He was then tested by Satan (not God), but this is not the END of the story – a vision that has escaped Zophar. One other point: the prosperity of the wicked is not always so fleeting as Zophar implies. There are evil men born into wealth and live their entire lives in

opulence. I believe that is the prosperity to which Zophar makes reference, but erroneously as to duration. The true fact is that the wicked NEVER triumph except in the myopic eye of lost men. They may gather many false gems to their purses, but their hearts remain a wilderness of burning and unsatisfied desire. He comes nearer truth in his next statement: 7 Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? 8 He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. 9 The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him. Of course, Zophar means these words to apply to Job, but he is simply spitting against the tide.

10 His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods. The children of the prosperous wicked man shall attempt to appease the misery their father causes the poor. The repayment of offences will be repaid at the cost of the children. Here comes some truly fire and brimstone preaching sans any satisfying grace of God: 11 His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust. 12 Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; 13 Though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: 14 Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him. 15 He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. 16 He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him. 17 He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter. 18 That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. So-called "Fire and Brimstone" preaching often leaves out the solution that to which the wicked may turn just as a detour sign that fails to point out the alternate route.

Words to describe the bitterness expressed in Zophar's half-truth defy solid expression. It is tantamount to my coming upon a good and faithful friend who has had an auto accident on the highway. He is hurt with many wounds and broken bones – then I say: "Well, old boy, do you not know that sudden destruction comes upon all wicked?" My question is right, but its application is way out of line.

19 Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not; 20 Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired. 21 There shall none of his meat be left; therefore shall no man look for his goods. 22 In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him. 23 When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating. These words are not counsel to Job – they are darts of fire – and unjustly thrown. Somewhere along the way, though the three came out of friendship, they ceased to be the friends of Job and became his demons. As they chatted, their old jealousies arose, and their pride of present prosperity compared to Job's predicament got the better of them. They, like Eve, began to listen to the wrong voice.

Listen below to the obvious animosity clothed in the supposedly Godly counsel of Zophar: 24 He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through. 25 It is drawn, and cometh out of the body; yea, the glittering sword cometh out of his gall: terrors are upon him. 26 All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle. 27 The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him. It would be a delight to be a fly on the wall of Zophar's heart when the end of Job's story

comes. He has laid stronger judgment against Job than any I have read in the Old Testament – yet it was all erroneously said, and spitefully contrived. See how he completely misses the target next: 28 *The increase of his house shall depart, and his goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath.* 29 *This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.* Yes, it is true, but perhaps more about Zophar than of Job. At this point, I wish that I could sling the final chapter of Job before Zophar's eyes and watch him melt, as the snail at noon, into the ground. The Redeemer to which Job made reference in chapter 19 will speak that which Zophar needs so badly to hear now: *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* (John 7:24)