

“Grace through the ages” Job 19:23-27a

“Oh that my words were written!

Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

Oh that with an iron pen and lead

they were engraved in the rock forever!

For I know that my Redeemer lives,

and at the last he will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been thus destroyed,

yet in my flesh I shall see God,

whom I shall see for myself,

and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Most of you were born and raised in Christian families. Even as there are some who became Christians only later in their lives. One of the differences between these two scenarios is the questions that we ask about our Christian faith.

When you are born in a Christian family you may more or less assume that, yes, that's how things are, what my parents teach me is true, and then you just go with it, without much questioning all the “whats” and “hows” of Christian faith.

It probably is rather different, when this Jesus invades your life and demands with His divine authority: “Follow me and I will bless you!” In this scenario people tend to question everything. What about this? What about that?

How to understand this? How do you explain that? This is why it is so interesting to be with someone who is young as a Christian. All these questions coming from the mouth of someone new to Christian faith also help us to rethink what we believe and what is the best way to share our faith with others.

One of such questions which often comes up is this. What about all the many people who haven't heard about Jesus? Yes, we know that it is written that the Triune God “wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). However, what about all those who have never heard about Jesus? What about those who lived before Jesus time?

Our today's reading from the book of Job in a way invites us to reflect on these questions and to think about what our answers might be, and this will be our focus for our today's meditations.

First, and we need to state it clearly. That is not the primary purpose of the Bible to satisfy our curiosity recording details of what and how the Triune God has done

during the long history of humanity to invite as many as possible into this wonderful fellowship with the Father and the Son through His Spirit.

The primary purpose of the Bible is to point to Christ, so that by knowing Him we can have eternal life. However, this being said, there still is an abundance of testimonies in the Bible that can help us to see that our God has always been very serious about our salvation. He has always been at work, since the very beginning.

The more burning questions are these – how serious are we about our salvation and the salvation of others? How much have we done? How much are we ready and willing to be used by our God to see others to come to the knowledge of the truth?

Let's take a look what the Bible reveals us about the grace of God throughout the ages. Let's see what He has done to invite us back into this fellowship with Himself. We could begin in the very beginning with Gen 3.

Right after our first parents have turned away from God, thus bringing sin and death into this world, it was the Son of God Himself who came calling them back: "Adam where are you?"

It was the eternal Son who didn't hesitate to proclaim the first Gospel promise, right after the choices and actions of our first parents had set into motion events, that would culminate with the death of Jesus on the cross.

He knew what it meant for Him... His incarnation, rejection, sufferings and death, and still He didn't hesitate to promise: "I will take care of it. I will restore the goodness of what was broken. I will bring you back."

We know little about how this Gospel promise was delivered from generation to generation before the Flood. We know there were faithful men and women, but we also know that the evil of the mankind kept growing until there was no other way left, than to save Noah and his family, eight souls, by means of the Flood.

All the eight survivors carried the Gospel promise to the next generations as they continued the God given mission of being fruitful and multiplying. God's promise about the Redeemer didn't disappear, it went on.

Then about 2000 years before Christ, the Triune God called this man Abram. He was chosen to be the forefather of the One who will be born of a woman, meaning, without a human father, and by Whom all the nations of the world will be blessed.

From that moment onwards we have more or less uninterrupted historical records of how God fulfilled His promise, first given to Adam and Eve, then repeated to Abraham. However, and this is where it gets exciting... Abraham was by no means the only true believer at that time. Yes, the Biblical history zooms in following his journey and the journey of his descendants, but they were not the only true

believers out there. This is where the book of Job comes in. It is more or less consensus among scholars that Job would have been a contemporary of Abraham. Without direct connections to him. But Job too new the true God. More, his friends new the true God, whatever imperfect their faith might have been. And most likely there were many others as well.

Job knew, as we read today, not only about the true God, he knew also about the ultimate hope that we all share with him. He knew that there is the Redeemer, who will redeem him. More, Job knew that the Day will come, when his Redeemer will stand on this earth.

Our brother Job was looking forward to the resurrection of the body, when he would see his God and his Redeemer with his own eyes. Isn't that amazing?! Job was looking forward to the day when our Triune God will again dwell among us and when we, together with Job, raised in new and glorified bodies, will reign with our God and Redeemer forever and ever.

But it wasn't just Job and his friends. In Genesis 14 we read about Melchizedek, who was priest of God Most-High, meaning – the Triune God. In Gen 20 we read about the king Abimelech, who also knew the true God. As most likely did many people around them.

From these testimonies we can get at least a few glimpses that God's message was continually delivered to the nations. That there were many faithful God's people in different times and places who wouldn't cease witnessing about Him.

Let's move forward to 15th century BC. This is quite amazing. When God Yahweh worked His mighty signs and miracles in Egypt, why did He do that? Yes, to free His chosen people from slavery, sure, but also – so that all the Egyptians and all the nations would know that Yahweh is the Lord, and there is no other. (Ex 7)

That's exactly what happened. Fast forward 40 years. City of Jericho. Different country. Hundreds and hundreds of km from Egypt. Prostitute Rahab hiding two Israelite spies. This is what she says:

“The fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard [what the Lord has done] how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt...” (Joshua 2)

Whatever the Triune God does, He does it so that everyone can know Him, the true God and be saved. This is what we should learn, – that everything we do should point to our Father in heaven and to our Lord Jesus so that all the people can get to know His holy name and receive the gift of eternal life. Let's move forward. 9th century BC. Assyria was the most powerful empire those days with Nineveh as its capital. God Yahweh sends his strange messenger, Jonah, to call them to

repentance. And ... surprisingly so the Nineveh repents... God's grace really upsets His messenger Jonah. "I knew that you are gracious God and will not destroy them." He hoped God will wipe them out, for they were enemies of Israel.

God didn't, He was gracious and merciful calling them to repent, to return to Him and to receive the gift of eternal life. Isn't that how we often think? That we would prefer that our God would just wipe out our enemies, instead of being gracious to them. It's good that He is not like us.

Fast forward. 6th century BC. Babylon had become the most power empire. Its most famous and most powerful emperor Nebuchadnezzar encountered the true God Yahweh, as God used His servants Daniels, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to reveal Himself to Nebuchadnezzar. What happens as the result?

As the result, Nebuchadnezzar the emperor sends out the message that begins with the words: "To all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most-High God has done for me.

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation." Read more in the book of Daniel chapters 2 to 4.

Then the mighty Babylon was conquered by another empire, Persians and Medes. And that was their emperor Darius who witnessed the power of the true God as revealed through His servant Daniel, and as the result this is the message that he sends to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

"I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end." Wow!

That's something, the message from the emperor to all the nations and people under his reign. Similar things happened again and again. Not only in the Old Testament times, but throughout the entire course of our history.

There are so many magnificent testimonies, how our God has worked to make His name known to many nations and people. Through the leaders of Roman empire, Byzantine Empire, Mongolian Empire, British Empire, and we couldn't go on and on and on. Or think about the most powerful empire during the last half of century, the United States. Many of their leaders have been and are true and outspoken disciples of Jesus Christ.

Even the current president just a few month ago begun his re-election campaign in the name of Jesus Christ. Our Father never ceases to call us. He never gives up on

us. He won't stop until all His chosen people are gathered for the eternal feast in the New Heavens and New Earth. We often think about Christianity as some Western phenomenon. But before it even laid roots in the West, the Church had already spread in most of Africa and Asia. Likewise, today the fastest growing churches, also Lutheran churches are in so called Global South, in Africa and Asia.

Besides, even if we are lazy or hindered by objective hurdles, nothing can stop our gracious God from revealing Himself. It is heartwarming to read the testimonies from people who live in Muslim countries, how Jesus appears to them in their dreams, identifies Himself and then sends them to where other Christians are.

Nothing will separate us from the Father's love in Jesus Christ. Our God is gracious God. His grace has been unchanging through the age, since the very beginning. And it will remain such till the very end. He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek 33:11)

He has sent His messengers to the ends of the earth. And today we experience such time of God's grace as never before. Today the Gospel of Jesus is not only spoken from person to person. It is available in written form in almost every language. It is on radio, it is on TV, it is on Internet, it is in our mobile phones. It's everywhere.

Think about the funny phenomenon, Kanye West, the king of Hip-Hop and worldwide celebrity. We don't know how our Lord has done it, but this mega famous musician has published his latest album "Jesus is Lord", saturated with the Biblical message about repentance and forgiveness. Now this album is on the top end of all music charts. Millions and millions are listening to it.

It almost seems that our gracious Father and our Lord Jesus are making the final push before the very last days come, when there is no one left to save. Then Jesus returns. Then we will see our Lord as He is. We won't be alone.

We will stand together with Job, and Abraham, and Moses, and Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, and Darius, and Queen of Sheba and the multitudes of God's saints from Egypt and Assyria, from Babylon and Persia and from every nation and tribe and language. Praising God with many tongues!

It's interesting to notice that the prayer of Job was answered. **"Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!"** There were written. We read them today. Four thousand years later. The message from our brother has reached us. Here in Barossa, in 2019. The word of the Lord remains forever.

I pray that the Holy Spirit gives us all the eyes to see how gracious our God is, and always has been, and how much He has done to bring each one of us back to Himself and I pray that He would use mightily us as He continues His mission. Amen.