

Job 30: President Obama on Tucson, Evil, and Hope

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I chime in tonight to comment on President Obama's moving, scripture-laced speech (copied above) at the memorial for the victims of the Tucson shootings. The president devoted much of the talk's opening movement to poignant eulogies for each of the six slain; he then issued a call for national unity and serious conversation in the wake of the tragedy.

But near the midpoint of his speech, the president tried to address the utter horror of our national loss by paraphrasing a passage from one of the Bible's direst books, Job:

"Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, 'When I looked for light, then came darkness'. Bad things happen, and we must guard against simple explanations in the aftermath." (ABC News has posted the entire transcript [here](#).)

Defying those who would too quickly attribute the tragedy to violent political rhetoric, or permissive gun laws, or breakdowns in our mental health-care system, Obama instead acknowledged that some of this world's evils spring from a blackness that remains maddeningly inexplicable.

Of

course, that is the story of Job, a man beset by seemingly source-less ills, bereft of property, servants, and family for reasons he cannot discern. In the opening pages of the book that bears his name, Job loses his wealth, his household, and every one of his ten children. The three-dozen-odd chapters of poetry that follow feature Job's laments--his soul-wrenching cry, "Why?"

Job 30--from which President Obama read tonight--gives us the man near the utter depths of his despair:

But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.
I go about in sunless gloom;
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. (30: 26-28)

Expecting, yearning after, craving for the sun, Job receives terror and loss ... and is afflicted.

As

are we, after Tucson. And though God speaks to Job in the book's final chapters, delivering a terrifying testament to God's own sublimity, he refrains from "explaining" Job's devastation. Job, as we, are left without easy answers.

Nonetheless, God finally praises Job's speech. Addressing him in 42:7, God claims that Job, even through his provocative lamentations, has "spoken of [God] what is right." To throw one's hands up in the face of indecipherable evil is, perhaps, "right" in God's eyes. For there are ills in this world that defy human explanation.

So I appreciate the president's allusion to Job in tonight's speech. It bespeaks humility and self-effacement in the aftermath of real, horrifying evil. And it lays the groundwork, I believe, for a future that ultimately awaits Job: restoration, reconciliation, and hope.

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