

Thought for the Day 15th May - John Reed

Read Job 42:1-9

Who is the shortest man in the world?

Guinness World Records [<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2020/5/shortest-living-man-616969>] this week announced a new – and old – record-holder this week. 34-year-old Edward Niño Hernández of Colombia, at 72.10cm (or 2 foot 4.39 inches) is officially the shortest mobile man in the world. He is the absolute shortest man in the world – that honour belongs to Junrey Balawing of the Philippines, who stands (or actually probably doesn't stand) at 59.74cm (1 foot 11.6 inches). However, Junrey Balawing is not mobile, so Edward Niño Hernández is the shortest *mobile* man in the world. This is, in fact, a title he has held before, being first recognised back in April 2010. However, he was overtaken (is that the antonym of overtaking?) by Khagendra Thapa Magar of Nepal, who stood 2 feet, 2.41 inches tall; who in turn later lost the title to fellow Nepali 1-foot-9.5-inch Chandra Bahadur Dangi. However, both of those men have since died, so the title is now passed once again to Hernández.

Which brings me to the question: who is the shortest man in the Bible?

Zacchaeus was, of course, famously short and had to climb a tree to see Jesus over the crowd. However, it has often been suggested that there are others who deserve the title [warning: Dad Jokes ahead!]. One favourite is Nehemiah (“knee-high,” get it?). However, the man most often regarded as deserving the position of honour is Job’s “friend” Bildad the Shuhite (get it? “shoe-height”?).

Bildad is not one of the Bible’s great heroes. He and his two friends Eliphaz and Zophar turn up to “comfort” Job following his devastating losses and illness. Having mourned with Job silently for seven days (Job 2:12-13), things go bad when the friends opened their mouths. Eliphaz was first to speak. Then Bildad chimed in (Job 8), telling Job that he needs to repent of his wrong and God will restore him. The implication being, of course, that material prosperity is directly linked to one’s righteous behaviour, and Job’s sufferings prove that he is *not* pure and upright. In Job 18, Bildad again chimes in, saying that God punishes the wicked, and so if Job is suffering he must be being punished for being wicked (philosophers will of course immediately spot the logical fallacy here). In his third speech in Job 25, Bildad focuses on the idea that nobody can be righteous before God, therefore Job is clearly unrighteous (neatly side-stepping the obvious question of why Bildad himself is not suffering, since he is presumably also not righteous?).

In Job 42:7, Bildad and his friends are rebuked by God: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”

You have not spoken of me what is right. That’s a terrible indictment from God.

We've seen all sorts of "fake news" flying around in this pandemic. There have been suggestions of miracle cures, from unproven drugs [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/hydroxychloroquine-trump-coronavirus-drug>] through fancy light machines [<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-24/pete-evans-fined-25000-by-tga-over-coronavirus-biocharger-claims/12183050>] to bleach [<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-13/church-in-australia-selling-bleach-coronavirus-treatment-fined/12242150>]. There have been wild accusations about who is responsible for starting this pandemic, who is responsible for spreading it, and their political motivations. Most of these are at best highly suspect if not downright illegal and libellous.

It makes me wonder how often we do that to God. How often we proclaim "truths" in his name, claim "insights" into his thinking, and "prophecy" his plans, with no real basis for it. We must be careful to avoid the sin of Bildad and Job's other friends, in failing to speak what is right about God.