

Out of the Whirlwind, Part 1

Grappling with God: The Gospel According to Job, Part 11

Job 38:1 - 40:5

David Sunday

September 21, 2014

Lord, You are worthy to be praised with our every thought and deed. We pray that praise would rise to You as we respond to Your revelation of Yourself in Your Word today. We pray for the empowerment of Your Holy Spirit upon the preaching and upon the hearing of Your Word. We ask that we would see Your glory and respond appropriately for Jesus' sake. Amen.

They named him "Alfonso the Learned." He was one of the kings of Spain during the 13th Century, and he is known for uttering these unfortunate words: "Had I been present at the creation, I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe." I would not want to go down in history for uttering those words. But before we throw King Alfonso under the bus, let's be honest. He only had the temerity to speak what we often think in our hearts.

Have you ever thought you'd like to offer the Creator some useful hints for the proper ordering of His universe, His world? If so, God would like to have a word with you. You will see it in the book of Job, beginning in chapter 38 and continuing for four chapters. Next to the giving of the Law, this is the longest recorded speech by God in the Old Testament. It's probably not what you were expecting if you've been following the story of Job for the first time.

Let's remember a little bit about this story. Job was a righteous and blameless man who feared the Lord and turned away from evil. He was also the wealthiest and most prominent man in the East. He was both a great man and a good man, a rare combination. For that reason, God singled him out for consideration in the throne room of heaven. "Have you considered my servant, Job?" God said. "There is none like him in all the earth." Satan, the sinister adversary of God, sneered, "He only fears you because of all the good things You do and all the great things You give him. Take it all away and he will curse You to Your face."

With God's permission, Satan was allowed to devastate Job. He took his wealth, his property, his ten children and their wives, and his own health. In all of this, Job did not sin or curse God with his lips. Job was willing to receive both good and calamity from the Lord. It was Job who said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

But then Job agonized through a prolonged period of suffering. He was bankrupt, bereft, covered with boils from the top of his head down to the sole of his feet, and he sunk into the depths of despair. He pleaded with God for answers. He stood his ground against his so-called comforters, who could not believe that this innocent man would ever suffer like this. “Surely,” they insisted, “Job must have done something wicked to deserve such suffering.”

Job hung on to his faith by a thread. He did not curse God, but he did question God’s goodness. He accused God of treating him as an enemy. He came perilously close to condemning God in order to justify himself. He demanded an audience with God; swore an affidavit, demanding the Almighty appear and prove His case against Job. The amazing thing is God does appear. He comes to speak with His servant, Job.

Pause and ponder that for a moment. God speaks to human beings. Isn’t it amazing that the God of all the universe would draw near and speak to us in language we can understand, making Himself known to us? Is it not a gift of God’s grace that He is on speaking terms with a humanity that revolted against Him? How ready are we to hear God’s voice? How ready are we to listen to God’s words? Are we humble and contrite in heart, trembling at the Word of God? Or are we more impressed with the sound of our own voices, wishing we could give God some useful hints for the better ordering of His universe? God speaks to Job.

To be specific, look at 38:1: “The LORD...” —all in capital letters. This is Yahweh, the God of the Covenant; the God Who protects His people; the God Who is committed to them by promises He cannot and will not break. This is the God Who brought His people out from the land of Egypt, Who separated the Red Sea so they could walk through on dry land and Who gave them His law through Moses so that they might walk before Him under His blessing.

This God, Yahweh, speaks to Job, and what He says is probably not what you were expecting to hear. Maybe you were expecting God to come and condemn Job. Surely, that’s what his friends were hoping for. But God did not do that. God did not say anything to confirm their suspicion that Job’s suffering was due to some sin in Job’s life.

Maybe you were expecting God to apologize to Job. After all, Job went through a terrifying ordeal that God was fully able to prevent, but nowhere do we read anything like, “Oh, my dear, dear child, I’m so sorry for what has happened. I promise I’ll do my best not to let this sort of thing happen again.” There was no apology.

Maybe you were expecting a word of congratulation. After all, Job went through a lot to prove the devil wrong. The Lord did not say, “Job, I’m so proud of you! You’ve persevered so valiantly. You’ve exceeded all my expectations.”

Sam Storms says:

God says nothing to Job that one might think would be appropriate for someone who had suffered so much. There are no words of encouragement or consolation; no words of how much good his experience will accomplish in the lives of others who face tragedy. There are no words of praise for his having stood his ground when the barrage of arguments came from his three friends. There are no “Thank-you’s” for having held his tongue in check from cursing God when it seemed the reasonable thing to do.

There was none of that.

There is one more thing you may have been expecting from God. Maybe you were expecting an explanation. After all, this went on for a long time and Job still did not know why he suffered the way he did. But if you’re waiting for an explanation from God, don’t hold your breath. It never came. God never explained to Job how his suffering came about in the first place. Job never got to see behind the scenes and look at what we saw in chapters one and two about the throne room in heaven. God never attempted to answer the questions posed by Job or his friends. God did not argue with their words. He did not contradict their words. He did not try to defend His sovereign majesty against their accusations. No, God just set all this aside and marginalized all their words because all of them, to varying degrees, had a similar problem: their God was too small.

We all have that problem. None of us has a sufficient grasp of the grandeur of our God’s majesty. For all of us, our view of God is too small. So God draws near. He went to Job and answered him, praise be to His name! But God did not answer Job in a way that was demanded or expected. However, it was precisely in the way Job needed.

Chapter 38:1-3 begins this next section, “Out of the Whirlwind.” Verse one reads: *“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’”*

Imagine what it would be like to be feeling pain in every part of your body and in your spirit; to have your wife no longer supporting you; to have your friends accusing you of some great evil in your life; and to have been suffering like this for a long time. How would you like God to draw near to you when you’re going through something like that? I would prefer the still, small voice. “God, can you please give me a hug right now?”

But that’s not what Job got. Job saw a God Who came in the whirlwind, in the fury of the storm. If Job would hang in there, if Job would hold fast to this God Who held him fast, he

would see that there is great comfort in this for him. The Lord wanted Job to know that He, God, is in the chaos of Job's life. God is in the storm. Like we sing:

It is well, it is well;
through the storm I am held;
It is well, it is well with my soul
It is well, it is well;
God has won, Christ prevailed;
It is well, it is well with my soul

(It is Well by Todd Fields)

God is not threatened by the things that threaten us. God is not subject to the onslaughts of the evil one the way we are. God sits on His holy throne and rules over all the universe. He is the God of the storm; He rules the wind and the waves. Because He is the God of the storm, He is able to hold His trusting children firm in His embrace.

The first thing the Lord wanted to make clear is, "Who is going to be asking the questions now?" Job and his friends spent many chapters asking questions and demanding explanations, and God said, "That's going to stop now. A period of silence from you would be most welcome. I'm going to ask you questions. I'm going to see how you answer Me."

Someone who was dining with Benjamin Jowett, a Master in Oxford University, asked him, "Dr. Jowett, we would like to know what your opinion of God is," to which he replied, "I should think it a great impertinence were I to express my opinion about God. The only constant anxiety of my life is to know what is God's opinion of me."

That's what happened here. God turned the tables. He said to Job and says to us, "Here, come with Me on a tour of My universe. You're going to need to brace yourself. You're going to need to man up in order to go through this tour with Me. You're going to see some things from My perspective. Yes, you've looked at the world through your own eyes, but you're going to look at it through the eyes of its Maker. Your vision is going to be enlarged. I'm going to ask you some questions, and then you tell Me whether you're in any position to give Me some useful hints about how I should run My universe."

The World Below

This is like getting a tour of the Sistine Chapel with Michelangelo at your side as the tour guide. God the Maker walked Job through His world. The first major section is 38:4-18—the world below. In verses four through seven, God compared His universe to a great building project. It had foundations; it had measurements drawn out by a surveyor's measuring line; it

had bases, secure footings and strong sockets for the pillars to rest in; it had a cornerstone to ensure the whole thing held together firmly.

In verse four, God said:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

One commentator writes, “Here is a building being built to last, a solid, secure, robust affair, replete with beauty and enduring majesty.” God wanted it to be very clear to Job, even as he went through a horrible ordeal, that His creation is basically good—that when God made the world and formed all that is in it, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy. God takes joy and pleasure in His creation. He did this for Job’s health and sanity. The longer Job gazed at his own problems and heartache, the less he saw the joy of God that brims over in all of God’s creation.

God wanted Job and He wants us to see...

This is my Father’s world. O let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world: the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav’n be one.

(This is My Father’s World by Maltbie D. Babcock, 1901)

God wanted Job to believe that.

The old poet, Robert Browning, said:

That what began best, can’t end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

“I made this world. I put it all together and it’s full of joy,” God says.

In verses eight through 11, God took Job to the border of the sea. In the Old Testament, the sea often represents disorder, chaos, danger, evil and death. In verse eight, God said, “*Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band...?*”

Isn't that beautiful imagery? It's almost as if God described the sea as a baby who came forth from His womb, and He took the clouds and wrapped up the sea in a little blankie. And He holds it in His hands. That's the vast immensity of God.

In verse ten, God said, "... [Who] prescribed limits for [the sea] and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?'" If you've ever stood at the edge of the seashore and watched the boisterous waves beating up against the rocks and saw the effects rise high into the air, it is a majestic reality to see that God stops it right there. God keeps its boundaries so that it cannot cross over. If the sea represents disorder, chaos, evil, danger and death, it could be that God was telling Job that evil does have a place in this world, but it is placed within strict limits. God holds those limits.

In verses 12-15, God described the dawning:

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me
Let me be singing when the evening comes

(10,000 Reasons—Bless The Lord by Matt Redman)

All the evil of the night has to flee when the light dawns in the morning. Every time the sun rises, it's a tangible sign that judgment is coming; that evil and darkness will not be allowed to reign in this universe; that God will bring a righteous judgment; and that light will prevail.

In verse 12, God asked Job:

Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.

It's as if God took Dawn—sleepy Dawn—in her bed, and He shook her, saying, "Time to wake up, Dawn! Time to awaken the world. Light, shine in the darkness!" And the darkness has to flee.

In verses 16-18, God took Job into the depths—the darkest, the most extreme, inaccessible parts of His creation. He took him to places that are outside our knowledge and control—the place of death itself. God said to Job, "There is no shadowy nook. There is no dark cranny of the universe—visible or invisible—that is outside My control." Verse 16 reads, "*Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of*

death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.”

We know the One Who has been down into the place of the dead and Who has returned triumphant over the grave. We know and worship Him. That’s the world below.

The World Above

Then, in verses 19-38, God shifted Job’s gaze and showed him wondrous things in the world above. In verses 19-21, He showed Job light and darkness, saying, *“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!”* Compare the days of your life to the days of God’s eternal years. God is the One Who brings light and darkness and Who rules His creation from generation to generation. He is great; we are small.

In verses 22-30, God caused Job to gaze on some realities of nature that we are still hoping we can avoid in our beautiful weather here right now. Soon enough, we will experience these realities again: snow, hail, frost and rain. God kept asking Job, “Do you have control over these things? Do you know how these things work?”

In verses 31-33, God lifted Job’s gaze to the constellations above. He said in verse 31, *“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?”*

Then, in verses 34-38, there is both rain and lightning. God said in verse 34, *“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are?’”* What a great picture that is! The lightning shows up before God and says, “God, where do You want to send us next?” God commands the lightning storms.

He continued in verse 36, *“Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind? Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods stick fast together?”*

In all these things, God said to Job what the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, said: “The earth is charged with the grandeur of God.” The earth is electrified by God’s presence, not only His power in creating it to begin with, but His power in sustaining it moment by moment. The

effect God wanted these words to have on Job was to cause him to lift his eyes above his problems and say:

Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder.
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee.
How great Thou art!

(How Great Thou Art by Stuart K. Hine, 1885)

God wanted Job to see there is not a plant, flower or anything here below, but makes His glories known. God is seen in His splendor and majesty in creation. There are a million things about this creation that we cannot understand, but God knows it all. We are surrounded by awesome mysteries every day of our lives. If we just had the eyes to see, it would cause us to bow and wonder before God's majesty. The more we learn about science, the more we should profoundly understand the limits of our knowledge and the vast immensity of God's majesty. That's the effect God hoped these questions would have on His servant, Job, and on us.

The Animal Kingdom

There is one more section, beginning at 38:39. God took Job on a tour of the animal kingdom. As you scan through this section, we find lions and ravens. God asked Job, "Do you know how to feed these animals? Have you ever tried to feed a lion? You wouldn't forget it if you did. I take care of them every day."

In 39:1-4, God spoke of the birth of young goats and young deer, animals born all over creation without any human assistance but God knows the time of their gestation. God knows when they give birth. God tends and cares for His creatures. In 39:5-8, God spoke of the wild donkey, not the tame one—one whom no human being contained; who "*...takes the arid plain for his home and the salt land for his dwelling place.*" In 39:9-12, God spoke of the wild ox, which cannot be bound in the furrow with ropes; who will not harrow the valleys of man.

Then, in 39:13-18, God turned to one of the most ridiculous and absurd members of His creation, the ostrich. Verse 13 reads:

The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, but are they the pinions and plumage of love? [No.] For she leaves her eggs to the earth and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them and that the wild beast may trample them. She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, yet she

has no fear, because God has made her forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding.

It's as if God said, "Even the foolish things in my creation have a design and a purpose that is known and governed by My perfection."

Then, in 39:19-25, God spoke of the warhorse. He said:

Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin. With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, he says 'Aha!' He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

"What gives that horse his strength, Job? How can it laugh at fear, Job? How can it be so eager to rush into battle? Job, do you understand these mysteries of My majestic world?"

Finally, in 39:26-30, we see the hawk and the eagle. God said:

Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold. From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away. His young ones suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is he.

"Job, look at this world. Look at My creatures. What do all of these have in common? You did not make them. You cannot control them. You cannot see what they are doing. But I watch them constantly. I provide for them and give them life."

For the most part, these are not well-known, useful animals to us. God highlighted parts of His creation that seem useless and mysterious and even hostile to us at times, but they are part of God's creation. They have a purpose known to their Maker. It's like that with suffering, too. Sometimes suffering seems useless. Sometimes it seems senseless. Sometimes we cannot discern any purpose in it. Sometimes it is as hurtful to us as the wild animals can be, but God weaves suffering into the order of His creation. He knows what He's about when He does it. He designs suffering to be part of our lives.

The Lesson: We Cannot Begin with Ourselves

The lesson I believe the Lord wants us to learn from this is that we will never understand or make sense of our suffering if we begin with ourselves. If we look within ourselves, turn inward, become introspective and try to figure it all out, we lose sight of the grandeur of God. There is something very sane, healthy and godly about looking outside yourself in the midst of your sufferings and trials, looking at the vastness and immensity of God's creation, seeing in creation the reflection of a great Creator Who knows the answers to millions of questions you may never understand.

We can be so centered on ourselves and our own problems and difficulties, we can start to act as if the whole universe revolves around us and our situations, but God wants us to turn away from ourselves. It is not as though our problems are insignificant or that God does not care about us, but precisely because He cares about us as much as He does, God wants us to have the right medicine for our sufferings and difficulties. Looking inward will only make us more and more depressed. Looking upward and outward to God and His beauty—His glory and grandeur—can have the effect of calming and quieting our hearts in the midst of the fiercest storms of life because we start to realize, as we look at the vastness of this world He has made, He's got the whole world in His hands. And "He's got you and me, baby, in His hands" (from a traditional American spiritual). He knows what He's doing in our lives.

The Lord's Conclusion

Look at the Lord's conclusion in 40:1-2. This is the first speech. Next week, Dan Leeper will preach on the second speech. Verse one says, "*And the Lord said to Job: 'Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.'*" In other words, "Okay, Job, I've given you a test here. I've walked you around some of the mysteries of My creation. I've asked you a few questions. Do you know the answer to any one of those questions? Even one, Job? I do."

I suspect that Job probably left the whole page blank. He didn't even know where to start with this test. God is great. We are small. God said, "Job, do you really want to find fault with Me? Do you really want to give Me some hints on how I should run My universe?"

I was instructed by this statement of Christopher Ash:

Amazingly and soberingly, to the man whose wealth God has confiscated, whose family God has taken away, whose greatness God has removed, and whose health God has ruined, God says in summary, "I have made no mistake. I know exactly what I am doing

in your life and in every detail of the government of the world. My counsel is perfect; I have got nothing wrong.”

Our Response: Silence

How will you respond to this God? I can assure you that, when we stand before God in glory, He will not feel obligated to apologize to us for anything that has happened in our lives. We will not be looking for an apology either. We will know then that He has done all things well. If we had the power of God, we may change a number of things. But if we had the power and wisdom of God, we wouldn't change a thing.

How will you respond to this God? Can you and will you trust a God Who is not beholden to your questions? Can you and will you trust a God Who is under no obligation to give you an explanation for His ways?

The right response is found in 40:3-5. Silence. The first sign that you are listening is that you learn your place before Him. God speaks. God is great. We are small. When we see this, we start to do more listening and a lot less talking. We put our hands over our mouths. We stand in awe and silence before Him.

Verse three says, *“Then Job answered the LORD and said: ‘Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.’”* Have you ever been silenced before God?

Isaiah 30:15 reads, *“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’”* In quietness and in trust shall be your strength, but God says in Isaiah, “You are unwilling.” The question He asks us is, “Are you willing to trust a God like this—a God Who doesn't respond to your demands for an explanation?”

Herein lies our comfort. When we cease striving, when we are still and know that He is God and trust that He will be exalted among the nations, exalted in all the earth (Psalm 46:10), and exalted in our lives, then indeed, we find Him to be our refuge, our strength and our very present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

How sweet it is for us to know that this God Who came to Job in the whirlwind; this God Who created light and darkness and Who made the universe by the word of His power; this God has now spoken to us in these last days in His Son. He came not only in the whirlwind but in the weakness of a manger in Bethlehem. He bore our frail humanity in Himself. He walked the waters and stilled the storms. He reversed the curse and bore our sin and shame on Calvary's cross to disarm the evil one who held us in his vice grip. We have a Word from God that answers

our deepest longings and satisfies our darkest distress: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

Will you trust a God Whose final Word to us is Jesus? Oh yes, there are many things we won’t understand, but we see Jesus. We see Him suffering in our place. We see Him risen from the dead. God says to us, His people, “What more can I say than to you I have said? To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”

What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

(How Firm a Foundation by John Rippon, 1787)

Let’s worship Him as we behold His glory.

Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit, impress this revelation of Yourself upon our hearts and minds. May it have the calming and quieting effect upon us that You desire, so that we would worship and trust You with the many things we do not understand. We know You and all Your ways; we know You are good and do good. We see that so richly in Your Son, Jesus. So we worship You in His name. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net