

## **Shall a Faultfinder Contend with the Almighty?**

### ***Job 38:1-40:5***

When we go through the book of Job, one of the questions that Job continues to ask, and we are asking alongside Him is this:

God, what are you doing? Why would the Almighty allow such suffering?

Our own suffering pushes us in the same direction. It's hard to think about anything else.

I can illustrate this in a simple way: when I stub my toe it's hard to think about anything else. When I stub my toe my mind is immediately consumed by my pain. I'm not thinking about how great it is that the sun came up again this morning.

I'm thinking: ouch.

Pain in our lives can consume our thoughts. We already have limited perspective. But when suffering comes into our lives, it's hard to think beyond it. It's hard to notice anything but the pain and sorrow. Especially when it is intense pain. Or prolonged. And we don't know when or how it is going to end.

And it naturally leads to some difficult questions:

How can God be good when He allows this to happen?

How can God be good when I am still stuck in my sickness?

How can God be good when I am consistently being attacked?

How can God be good when my life is so difficult?

And thankfully, the God that we serve is not intimidated by those questions. He welcomes them. He gives us example after example in the psalms of people approaching Him with questions. Crying out: why God? Where are you? What are you doing?

Jesus himself takes up the cry of the sufferer: *My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*

We are given incredible freedom and encouragement to bring our honest questions before the LORD throughout the pages of Scripture. Job is not the only example of someone who questioned the LORD.

But one significant way that Job is unique from the Psalms is that we hear the LORD respond to his servant.

In the psalms we hear prayers of the LORD's desperate servants.

In the book of Job we hear the LORD respond to Job's complaints.

This week we are looking at the LORD's first speech to Job. That means that we are passing over the speeches of Elihu.

Let me just comment that Elihu is the subject of much debate. Some people see him in a more or less positive light. Some people in a negative.

It's hard to make any definitive statement about Elihu because he is the only one to speak about himself. God neither rebukes him nor commends him. Job never responds to Elihu.

Job is both confronted by God and strongly affirmed by God. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are given a very sobering rebuke from God. But the only person to talk about Elihu in the book of Job is Elihu.

So I'm not sure exactly what to make of Elihu. Some things he says sound similar to what God says to Job, some things he says sound awfully similar to the friends.

I'm sorry if you were hoping for more than that on Elihu, but we're moving on to the LORD's first speech in chapters 38 and 39.

Again, this is a lengthy passage, but it comes to us as one speech from the LORD so it's good for us to hear and try to put ourselves in Job's shoes hearing the LORD speak to him.

*Read Job 38-40:5*

One of the interesting questions that gets debated in these speeches is the **question of tone**.

It's an important question, but it is quite a difficult one to answer, especially when we don't read Hebrew!

The question of tone is asking with what kind of voice is God speaking to Job?

Should we read God's words as gently reminding Job that he's out of his place when he accuses God of being unjust?

Or should we read God as smacking Job back into his place with force?

We all know that the tone of voice is an important part of what message gets communicated. And it's tricky to know how to approach that question here.

Here are a few points that I find helpful in considering this question of how God is speaking to Job:

1. God speaks to Job. This is what Job has longed for. No matter how God is speaking to Job, the fact that He is speaking to Job at all is an answer to prayer. It is a kindness of God to speak to His suffering servant. God is *not* obligated to do this. He is not at Job's command. So the first thing to remember and appreciate is that God responds to his servant.

2. God speaks to Job from the whirlwind. From the storm.  
He doesn't whisper to Job. We can think of other times that God revealed Himself in a similar, frightening way. When Moses and the Israelites came to the mountain and God gave them the 10 Commandments, He revealed Himself to Moses and to His people in a fiery storm.

*Exodus 19:17-18*

*Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.*

God reveals Himself in the storm.

God is not gently coming beside Job with a cup of tea to tell him how sorry He is for everything he has had to suffer.

God is not apologetic as He comes to Job. He comes to him wrapped in power and majesty and mystery.

3. If that sounds like God is being harsh towards Job, we should remember that Job was not primarily asking God for sympathy. Job didn't just want God to acknowledge his tragedy and mourn together with him.

Job wasn't asking for tenderness.

Job was demanding justice. Asking for an explanation. Job was arguing his case before God.

Job said to God: I am firmly convinced that I am innocent. I don't deserve this suffering.

What do you have to say for yourself? How are you going to explain this?

Job wasn't asking for sympathy, He wanted God to give some explanation or defense of His treatment of Job.

4. We should also note that God does not come with the accusations of the friends. He doesn't search out Job's hidden sin. He confronts Job's

faulty accusations – but He does not show that Job has some grievous hidden sin that makes him deserve all this suffering.

God is not coming as an accuser in His speech to Job.

5. And the last point I'll mention is this: God is not at all intimidated by Job. He's not embarrassed. He's heard all of Job's complaints and questions. And He will respond to His servant.

So God says to Job: OK son, if you want to challenge me, get ready.

Dress for action like a man is translating: Gird up your loins.

Meaning: put your big boy boots on, and let's talk.

So the LORD comes and responds to his servant. It's an act of grace. But it is not safe and calm. The LORD comes in the whirlwind, in the storm, to respond to His servant.

And instead of directly answering Job's questions, the LORD responds to Job by asking Job questions. He turns the tables.

**The LORD begins by asking Job:**

*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*

This sets the stage for all the questions to follow. Job has been darkening counsel. He's been obscuring the plans of God, and he's in over his head.

His accusations of God don't spring from some deep knowledge of the heart of God. His accusations against God come from his ignorance. His lack of knowledge.

This in itself is comforting.

Even though at times we may sympathize with Job and feel like God is out to get us or really enjoys our pain, we don't want that to be true. So it is good news to hear that Job's accusations *do not* come from some insider knowledge of the truth, but from his ignorance.

When Job accuses God of injustice, it's not because he is so knowledgeable about the plans and heart of God. It is because he is ignorant.

After the LORD asks:

*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*

He tells Job to get ready. Gird up your loins. Dress for action.

The LORD has some questions for Job. It's time for Job to take his eyes off of himself and his misery and consider creation. The LORD isn't going to speak to Job about what's happened, or about what Job is feeling. He's going to take him outside of himself and his pain to consider the breadth of the world.

The first topic the LORD takes up with Job is creation, in verses 4-7.

- Job, were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth?

And of course, Job was not there.

But God was. God knows all the measurements.

When God laid its cornerstone

*The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*

The creation of the earth was beautiful. The angels observing couldn't contain their joy. They sang and shouted for joy. God saw His creation and declared it very good. The angels sang in agreement and burst out with shouts of joy.

That's how the earth began – not out of chaos and anger and distress. But out of order and design and love. And the sons of shouted for joy as they witnessed it.

Then God turns to the sea.

- Job, do you know who shut in the sea with doors? Do you know who told the sea where to stop?

This is more than God merely telling Job about the coastline. The sea is the symbol of evil in chaos in Hebrew understanding.

For example, in Job 7:12 we read this:

*Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me?*

The sea represents more than just the waters. It represents evil. Chaos. Think of how the sea can get swirled up in a storm and threatening.

And God is asking Job: do you know who restrains the sea?

Of course, the answer is God.

God acknowledges here that evil exists in His creation. There is chaos.

**But it is not limitless.** Just as the waves break against the shore and go no further, God restrains evil. He doesn't give it free rein.

When God asks Job about the dawn, He again acknowledges that there is evil and wickedness in his creation.

But the dawn itself, the light of the sun, makes evil more difficult. There are people who seek out the night, and love the cover of darkness. But God has structured the world so that the dawn comes every morning. He hasn't given us an endless night. He brings the sunlight in morning.

God asks Job to consider the springs of the sea, the gates of death, the expanse of the earth.

- Have you begun to understand how vast the world is?

It's not as though it's embarrassing for Job to admit that he doesn't know all these things. God is the one who knows. No human being has this knowledge.

And that seems to be just the point.

Job doesn't know. But God does.

Job doesn't send the hail in times of war. But God does.

Job doesn't water the earth. But God does.

Job doesn't lead the stars out at night. But God does.

Job doesn't send forth lightnings. But God does.

Job didn't put wisdom in the inward parts. But God did.

**Chapter 38 is a walk around different parts of creation where God reminds Job how beautiful and complex the world is.**

There is an order in God's world. And that order is upheld by God. God is much more personally involved in His world than we might recognize or acknowledge.

The sea doesn't know its place apart from God. The sun doesn't rise without the guiding hand of God. The stars don't come out apart from God. The rain doesn't fall without God tipping the waterskins.

And that might naturally lead us to ask: why the storms? Why the disasters? Why the chaos?

Those are real questions. God isn't ignorant of them.

But if we are going to ask those questions, we also have to ask:

Why the sunrise? Why the order? Why the beauty?

The news cycle doesn't celebrate the beautiful, everyday faithfulness of God. It's easy to take God's faithfulness for granted. It's easy to forget the 1000 ways God is intimately involved in His creation, giving

and sustaining life, and to focus on the ways life is difficult and chaotic.

But God is the one sustaining His creation. He is a God of order, and without Him, we're not enjoying a sunrise or a sunset.

To be clear, God is **not** saying to Job:

- Job, your suffering is small.

Instead, we can hear the message more like this:

- Job, you are challenging my character and my way of operating in the world. But do you even begin to grasp how this world came to be? The joy of the angels at creation? Do you realize how many things I am doing in creation at any one moment?

So here is part of the application of this for us:

We have limited perspective. God doesn't fault us for this. It's not embarrassing that we don't have the same understanding of creation as God.

But remembering our limited perspective should humble our complaints against God.

It's helpful to remember that God is doing many things in His creation.

God is speaking directly to Job, but He isn't giving Job some secret knowledge – He is reminding Job of things that Job can discover by lifting his eyes away from his trouble and to the vastness of God's creation.

So don't believe the lie that your suffering is the only thing happening in the world. Or the only important thing. Don't believe the lie that it's all chaos all the time. Each sunrise proves you wrong.

I want to be careful here to say that God is not unsympathetic to our suffering. The psalmist says in Psalm 56:8

*You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*

God is not dismissive of Job's suffering. He is not dismissive of your suffering.

But our suffering is not all that is happening in our world. The world is bigger than our experience. That means that the difficulty we face in this life is not sufficient evidence to accuse God of injustice.

We have freedom to ask God our honest questions, but we shouldn't expect to understand all that God is doing. There's a lot going on in His world, and most of it is beyond our ability to comprehend.

So when Job moves from his tragedy to the conclusion that God is unjust, God turns his eyes away from his life and suffering out to the world. God is doing more than overseeing Job's life. He is intimately involved in all His creation. And it's far beyond Job's ability to grasp or evaluate.

**The end of chapter 38 and 39 focus on various animals in the world.**

The end of chapter 38 deals with lions and ravens. Can Job hunt the prey for the lion? Can he provide food for the raven?

The lion is not a tame animal. But God provides for it.

The raven is not a clean animal. But God provides food for the young. God's not just good to doves and deer. He sustains the lion and the raven.

Job is not the one looking after the mountain goats. He doesn't know when they give birth.

But God is watching over them. God knows where the young mountain goats are.

He knows all about the wild donkey and the wild ox, animals that don't find rest in the stable or shelter.

He made the ostrich with incredible speed but no brains. It's not just animals who seem wise and

aware that are alive in God's world. He sustains the foolish animals too.

God concludes with the war horse and the eagle.

Again, these are not tame animals. The war horse is terrifying when it runs fearless into battle.

Did Job give the horse its strength?

The eagle is a bird of prey. It swoops down from on high and kills to feed its young.

Did Job put the eagle high in the sky? Did he command it to nest in the highest trees and cliffs? Did Job give it the eyes to spot its prey from so far above?

Again, Job did not. But God did.

So God takes Job back to the beginning of creation, He asks Him to consider the deep places of the earth and the expanse of the heavens, the lion and the ostrich, the horse and the eagle.

God asks Job lots and lots of questions.

The questions are not difficult for Job to answer.

The answer is always something like this:

*No I was not there, but you were.*

*No, I did not give the order, but you did.*



*No, I do not comprehend it all, but you do.*

*No, I do not provide, but you do.*

**And after all of these considerations God asks Job a question:**

*Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.*

Earlier Job had accused God of being a faultfinder. It seemed like God was hunting Job down, searching for some sin to hold over his head.

But Job is the one acting as a faultfinder. His sense of being wronged by God has led him to accuse God of harshness, injustice, unkindness. He's not paying attention to all of the ways God is upholding creation.

He can only see his unjust treatment.

Job has become the faultfinder, blind to the obvious goodness of God in the world and preoccupied with what seems like God's wrongdoing.

When God asks Job this question He wants a response. He says to Job:

*He who argues with God, let him answer it.*

So Job replies in 40:4-5

*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.*

Job recognizes his place. He is of small account.

Notice the contrast in the response here to Job's response to his friends. The friends couldn't quiet Job's protest. They only emboldened Job more.

But when the Almighty comes and speaks to Job, he quickly recognizes and acknowledges his place.

How can Job argue with God? He won't continue to press his case. He is quiet before the LORD.

After the LORD's speech, Job again recognizes and appreciates the vast difference between the Creator and Sustainer of all and the creature. He is a creature.

The Creator has come and responded to his questions and complaints. How could Job ask for more? He's already pressed his luck.

So Job lays his hand over his mouth.

But God wants more from Job than his silence. God wants His worship.

God wants more for Job than submission. God wants Job to gladly submit and trust Him.

So God will speak again. There is a better restoration that God will bring than Job's silence.

But what should we learn from this first speech?

We do well to humble ourselves with Job. To acknowledge that God is far beyond us. We are not in a good position to bring accusations against the One who made us and sustains us. We have incredible freedom to ask questions.

But our accusations against God don't show our wisdom or deep knowledge of His heart. They show our ignorance. They are words without knowledge.

We also do well to remember that God is aware of the evil and chaos in His creation. He knows, and He is actively limiting and restraining the evil in His world.

So we can humble ourselves with Job. And we can wait beside Him for God to speak again.

God wants more than just silence. He desires our worship.

He wants more for us than silent submission. He wants our glad obedience and confidence in Him. That's the hope of the gospel. God didn't send His Son to silence us, but to deeply reconcile us to Him.

So God won't stop speaking because Job is silent. God wants His worship. He wants His servant to gladly trust Him again.