

# Job

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Date: 21 November 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] His fruit and rain will ever see. All glory be to God. So do open your Bibles to Job 38.

! We know that's what has happened to Job.

And sooner or later in life, in one way or another, it will happen to us. Death of a loved one. Ill health. Financial trouble.

Here you've got a man, he loses his wealth, his business, his children, his wife, even his own health. A man who loved God and who walked with God, who was pronounced blameless and upright by God.

And we all know that there are some experiences in life that put our trust in God under attack. Notice what I'm saying in that sentence. I'm saying it's not that some experiences in life put us under attack, although they most clearly do.

[ 1 : 23 ] They can precede us, they can threaten to destroy us and overwhelm us, but it's more than that. It's that these experiences can almost completely annihilate our trust in God.

And suffering is a problem for all the world, yes, remember. And it can be an aggravated problem for the believer. We say, don't we, I'm the one that believes in you, Lord.

I believe that you are good, God. I believe that you are loving. I believe, Lord, that you are kind, and yet, and yet this.

You do this to me. Where are you? How can you? Why? How can you be right to treat me so wrong? And notice something else.

In those questions that I've just asked you, in the very last one, I asked that kind of question that Job has begun to ask. And it's really important to see that it's the last kind of question that's drawn God out.

[ 2 : 30 ] It's almost drawn God out of hiding, if I can put it like that. And meant that God has come and spoken to Job. How can you be right to treat me so wrong?

And I've learned these past weeks that these final, glorious, powerful chapters of Job are not about God speaking in answer to Job's questions about suffering.

I think I always thought that before I studied the book of Job. Job suffers terribly. And he's asking God for the reason why. And God speaks to him at the end.

And although I always knew that God doesn't directly answer his questions, I always thought that God was responding to what Job had said about suffering. But actually, God is responding to this. He's responding to what Job has been saying about God. God is responding to what Job has been saying about God. So, you remember in Elihu, in chapter 32, he's angry.

[ 3 : 33 ] He's angry because Job has been justifying himself. And therefore, he's beginning to accuse God of wrong. And you can see that this is what is behind how and why God speaks to Job.

Look at chapter 40 and verse 2. He says, Shall a fault finder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.

Here's what I've learned. God doesn't answer Job's question about the problem of evil and suffering out there in the world or in his own life. He does not make the reason for those things clear.

But he does make something clear. God makes clear what answers are not acceptable in his universe. He makes it very clear that to accuse God of wrongdoing is a very, very serious matter.

And it's always, always wrong. And it's clear that Job learns that. So, look at chapter 40 and verses 3 to 5. Then Job answered the Lord and said, Behold, I'm of small account.

[ 4 : 37 ] What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I've spoken once and I will not answer. Twice, but I will proceed no further. I'm unworthy in beginning to accuse you of wrong. Now, just pause for a moment and reflect on what this means for all of your pain.

So, like Job, I suspect God is not going to reveal to you the reasons why he's done something. Something that has traced a line of deep pain through your life.

But are we prepared to accept that God is saying to us tonight, You may not accuse me of acting wrongly. Unjustly.

You may not accuse me of acting in an unloving way towards you in this experience of deep pain in your life. You don't know why I've done it. And you don't know how I can reconcile my complete goodness and my hatred of evil with allowing this to happen to you.

But you can know this. You can know this. And in sending this to you, I've not done wrong. I've not sinned. And it's worth pausing now in life.

[ 5 : 52 ] Because if you're not at this moment in the grip of terrible heartbreak or a catastrophe, take this in for when those moments do come.

Because when those moments come, God will not have done wrong. It's a very, very deep and wise and mature Christian perspective to adopt throughout all your life.

Whatever happens to me or in God's will, I will not condemn him for it. And I think probably we need to learn that now.

Before we're trembling with anger. Or we're heartbroken with loss. Or despairing of hope and light ever filling our eyes again. Learn it now.

Learn it deeply. Learn it calmly. Learn it quietly. God does no evil. God is not unjust. God never, ever commits a wrong.

[ 6 : 59 ] It is never right to condemn God. Now how can we hold on to that truth? How can we hold on to that truth when our experiences in life put it under attack?

How can we maintain that kind of trust when your life is turned upside down by a phone call or a bereavement? And I want us to notice how wise God is with Job.

He's not gentle with Job in the sense of an arm around the shoulder. All right? And a cozy fireside chat. Look at chapter 38 in verse 1.

And the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. Verse 3. Be dressed for action like a man. I will question you and you make it known to me. But he doesn't crush Job either.

I will condemn him. And he knows that Job's pain is such that there is a way of handling Job that allows him to reach his own conclusions. He takes Job on a whistle-stop journey of the world.

[ 8 : 04 ] That is actually a journey of self-discovery for Job. And he is sobering Job and humbling Job. And that is an astonishing thing. Think about it. So are you and I prepared to be humbled to the point of silence before God in the face of tragedy?

But isn't that what we want to do? And without squashing Job, you know, the way an angry parent might do who's in the right and he shuts down all conversation, even when the child is trying to speak, rather than shutting Job down and not allowing him to speak, God leads him by the hand to the point where he doesn't want to speak.

Because he sees he was wrong. Do I have no answer? Now, how does God do that? Let me take you through three sets of images. In this passage. And then finish kind of trying to explain what God is saying through those images.

When our experiences put our trust in him under attack. So, from 38.16 to verses 38. The words that Job hears are all about the extremities of the world. Geographical extremes.

In three different directions. There's deep down beneath him. There's east and west. There are two far off horizons. And then thirdly, there's the extremes of the sky above him. Because it's not just the canopy overhead that God is talking about here, but what lies beyond it.

[ 9 : 33 ] The stars, the storehouses, where all the elements come from. So, three extremes. God is speaking here about the outermost reaches of depth, width, and height. The important thing to see here is scale.

God is at the edges. And Job himself has actually used this language about God. Look at chapter 26 and verse 14. I'm hoping that's the right reference.

Job 26 and verse 14. Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways. They're just the outskirts of his ways.

And how small a whisper do we hear of him, but the thunder of his power. Who can understand?

Have you ever seen one of those scale images of the universe? You can look at it up on Google.

Where you see the earth. And of course, from our perspective, we see the sun and the moon and the sky. And we think, we're big. We think, we're big, aren't we?

[ 10 : 32 ] And the sun, as you drive home, will look really small. Or the moon will look really small. But when you see the earth as part of the solar system of planets, you realize that the earth is tiny, isn't it?

It's minuscule. Compared to other things all around it. And that's what Job is saying here. The clouds, the moon, the oceans, the heavens, the skies. They're just the outer fringes. They're just the outskirts of God's work.

Our little world, with all its wonders and mind-blowing size and scope to us humans. Well, it's just a little sideshow. It's just the very edge of the universe.

While all the major work is going on elsewhere. It's incredible. So, thousands and thousands of years of human adventure and discovery and progress. And we're learning and learning and learning all the time that we're just at the outer fringes of what God has done.

And so now, here in chapter 38, it's as if God turns the table on Job and he says, Yes, you're right. The world is just out there on the edge of what I can do.

[ 11 : 35 ] Let me take you now. Let me take you across the world to all the other sides and the extremes of what you can see. Let me show you a few things. So, the first thing he shows is the deep. It's obviously the depths of the sea that he's talking about.

But you can see that God is using that image, isn't he, as itself, as an image for the place of death. It's as if the seabed of the deepest, darkest ocean is itself the boundary line between the sea and the place of the dead.

God is saying that there's another world, Job, beyond this one. The place where the dead go. Once they pass from this life. Do you know where that boundary line is, Job?

Have you ever seen the doorway into the next world? This phrase in verse 18, The vast expanses of the earth. Probably, first of all, in your mind, you imagine the vast deserts, the stretched out spaces of the earth, or the kind of vast expanse of the sea that you can see beneath you as you look out of the airplane.

But actually, the phrase refers not to the surface, of the world, but to what lies beneath the world. To the vast expanse of the underworld. You think, Job, that what you can see is big?

[ 12 : 56 ] Have you any idea about the size of the parts of the earth you can't even see? So we read, don't we, of scientists discovering more about the earth's core, even now.

It's too deep to drill down into. So they bounce sonar waves off it. And they can tell from meter readings about its substance.

God says to Job, Have you seen the latest findings of what they're talking about the core of the earth? God says to Job, Look at the army of brilliant scientists doing their best.

It's quite brilliant. But can you see, Job, there's a vast part of the earth that you can't even see, you know nothing about. It doesn't make it any less real.

It's there. Do you know it? So the wildlife program that sends a probe down into parts of the ocean, it sends a probe down into the ocean to the parts which are too deep and too dark for any human person to get down into.

[ 14 : 03 ] Do you know what it's like to go for a stroll down there, Job? In those parts of the world, you don't, do you? Remember the device for the rhetorical question. We saw it last week. What is God implying to Job?

You don't know, Job. But I do. I do. Now another extremity, or another pair of extremities, you've got the horizons of the east and the west.

It's as if God is saying very poetically, there's two homes, one for light and one for darkness. And every day they go on a journey from one place to the other. They go back to where they belong. And somewhere in the east, there's a home for the light, and somewhere in the west, there's a dwelling place for nighttime. Do you know, Job, how each one gets home? Phoebe is very, very occasionally at that stage of being beautifully, easily led.

Not often, I should say. But she is at that stage where she will say, she'll reach for my hand, and I will take her to wherever she wants to go.

[ 15 : 06 ] Have you ever done that with the light, Job? Ever taken the light by the hand? Just taken it by the hand and said, okay, come this way, light. Come this way, son.

Just notice something. God is not talking to Job about some things he's got no experience of. He's not introducing new phenomena into the world.

Every single day, Job sees light, and he sees darkness, and yet here is the very point. There is so much about what you see that you do not know.

You do not know. You can't control it. And so he's taking Job down to the depths of the earth, and he's taking him to the farthest widths of the earth.

Where does he take him now? Verse 22. He takes him up to the highest heaven. And most of these next images are to do with water. One of them is to do with the stars.

[16:02] And again, that is a familiar thing to Job. We live and die for water. It's all around us. It's a common part of Job's world.

He knew all about it, and yet God says, and yet you know virtually nothing about it. Snow and hail, which you've got no control over. I keep them in sheds at the back.

God says. Have you ever seen them? Do you know how to unlock the gates and send the snow and the hail crashing out over the earth?

Where does the lightning actually come from? I know you can do your scientific experiments on the physics of it, and the pressure forces which combine with light to cause it, but tell me, can you actually pinpoint the place where it comes from?

Or the place where the wind begins? And where it blows across the earth? Where is it that that point starts? It's beautifully put, isn't it? Look at verses 34 to 35.

[17:06] Can you lift up your voice to the clouds that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightning so they may go and say to you, here we are.

Simeon verses 31 to 33. The idea is that God poetically speaking the stars and the constellation of the stars, it's that they're controlled by cords or chains.

It's like God has tied them up with a bow and bound them up during the nighttime, but at nighttime he unleashes them and he sets them loose across the sky. Can you do that, Job? What do you do in nighttime, Job?

Do you light a candle or two? I send the stars out to play. It's actually the same image here as leading the light and dark by the hand across the sky.

It's one thing, isn't it, to have one child behind you, walking behind you. But you've seen it, haven't you, in Ealing and occasionally on the school trips.

[18:10] Those teachers out on a trip with kind of a long string of children behind them, hand in hand, walking as they cross the road wearing their kind of luminous little vests.

God says, that's me with the stars. They all follow behind me. Observe this. In all the beautiful poetry about God controlling the water and the weather and the stars and the sky, the point is this. It's not just that he knows where it comes from, but he's wise enough to use it for different purposes. You see, that snow and hail for times of war, but also torrents of rain, in verse 25, to irrigate the parched earth and satisfy a desolate wasteland.

God is saying, it's not that I can just lift my voice and tip the buckets over that store the water in the sky, but that when I do, I know what the effect will be. It will have on the earth.

I know when and where to use it. Do you see how all of God's power is connected to all of God's wisdom? Look at verse 36. Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?

[19:22] Who can number the clouds by wisdom or who can tilt the water skins of the heavens when the dust runs into a mass and the clods stick together fast? So look what's going on here.

In all this beautiful material, God is not simply giving Job a lesson in geography. Let's work out what we've seen. God is saying to Job, that the parts of the earth that are so remote and so hidden from you that you can't even begin to imagine them, they are known to me.

You live on earth, Job, and you see everything there, but I am present at the edges. I know what happens everywhere, even in the most neglected, secret, darkest parts of the world.

For the ancient world, the sea was the great unknown. For us, it's space, the kind of final frontier. Pick your place, says God. In any era of world history where we look at the cosmos and say to ourselves, that place is out of reach to us, wherever it is, God says, I hold it in my hands.

The point is this. Whoever controls the edges has control over the hole. Isn't that right? Whoever controls the edges has control over the hole.

[20:37] So you think of an army. It defends a spherical kind of base camp. It circles the wagons on the prairie. If you control the edges, you're in control of everything that happens inside of it.

And so this leads us to say this. I'm going to try and flesh this out over the next couple of weeks. Here is the beginning of God's answer to Job. What God is doing to Job is showing him that he does not have all the information at hand to allow him to accuse God of wrong. He does not have all the information at hand to allow him to accuse God of doing wrong. And the way that God does this for Job is not by revealing all the information that God has about why Job is suffering.

That's not what God does. Rather, he does it by increasing Job's awareness of how little he knows. He increases Job's awareness of how little he knows.

Do you see it? The lesson is this. If you're ignorant about all sorts of things that you can perceive with your eyes, Job, the sea, the sun, the light, the dark, the stars, the rain, the lightning, you see them, but you don't really know them.

[ 21 : 55 ] If you're ignorant about those things which you can see, is it possible that you might be ignorant about what I know when it comes to the suffering that you can see and can feel?

Is it possible that there are things I know which you do not know which explains why things happen the way they do? It's a long journey, isn't it, the book of Job, to the right kind of ignorance.

And look how God is doing it with questions every and each and every time. Job is meant to stand back and to reflect. The end of Job is to make us think and to try and join up the dots.

If I don't see all that there is to see with that and I don't know all to know, all there is to know with this, might I not know all there is to know about my pain?

And I think that's really helpful. I think it's a really helpful perspective to begin to learn to adapt for ourselves. I wonder if God is showing Job that life is like a bit like one of those whodunit mysteries.

[ 23 : 18 ] I know you've been in the mousetrap, I've only been in the mousetrap once in the West End. It's brilliant. I think it's one of the best things. It's really, really good. But when we went to the mousetrap, at the start, you think, oh, I know who did this. It's obvious. It's obvious he or she did it.

And you think, as you watch the start of the whodunit, you think, oh, I know who did it. It's obvious. So obvious. What's the big fuss? Why has this been going on for about 60 years? And you think you know it all.

But then slowly you begin to discover that there were clues you didn't spot. There were things that you didn't see. There was evidence you were not aware of. And an investigator or a judge who's far more cleverer than you puts the pieces and all the evidence together and comes up with a totally different verdict.

And it's the right verdict. It's what happens with the best of judges, isn't it? It's what we want. No verdict until all the evidence is in. Innocent until proven guilty.

And God is saying to Job, can you trust me, Job? All the evidence is not in. All the evidence, Job, is not in front of you.

[ 24 : 31 ] Do you know what God is doing to Job here? What he's doing, God is collapsing the trial. He's not declaring Job guilty.

He's not sending Job away punished. He's simply saying to him, you do not have all the evidence. You do not have all the evidence to make the kind of accusations you're making. And God says to us, stand down, your inner prosecutor.

Stand him down, stand her down. Why did whatever happened in your life happen? You don't have all the evidence. There are things about this world and about how and why God does what he does that you do not know and neither do I.

And what kind of God am I that does this? I think the imagery of chapter 38 and verse 29 is probably the most beautiful image or my favorite.

Verse 29. from whose womb did the ice come forth and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?

[ 25 : 51 ] To you, Job, rain and dew, frost and ice, they're just water. But I fathered them and I mothered them.

They come from my womb. fathers know best, don't they? You children who are you, you're probably often perplexed and confused by the wisdom and the love of your parents.

The wisdom and the love of your parents sometimes causes you pain because you don't understand. But it is wisdom and it is love and it always knows best. Some experiences in life put our trust in God under attack.

And when that happens, here's what to realize. My experience is not all there is.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves as we approach this passage.

[ 27:07 ] We are on the edge of what we can understand. We thank you for the beauty of the poetry and the images that you give us. and we want to confess our creaturehood, our limitations, our ignorance, Lord.

There's a desperate need for us to acknowledge that we do not have all the evidence. We do not know as you know. And yet, we praise you tonight that in the midst of that we can trust that you are good, that you're wise, and that you're loving and that you are sovereign.

And we don't say those things lightly. Heavenly Father, help us to learn these lessons of who you are and our limitations.

We thank you for reminding us that we are but dust, but that we are dearly loved dust. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's sing a hymn of praise to God to round out the day. God, we praise you. God, we bless you. God, we name you sovereign Lord. Amen.