

Judges 38

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[0 : 00] So we're in Job 38. I feel like I'm never going to get out of the book of Job. I really hoped that I was going to preach two sermons this week and next week. And I finished it.

I was ending up with a sermon about 50 minutes long. And I couldn't do that to you again. So hopefully by Christmas. Good to finish the Christmas carol service, wasn't it, with the book of Job. Only cosmic power is able to bring about cosmic justice. So children, when there's a problem in the playground, then you need a teacher, don't you?

Someone with authority to come in and solve it. And when there's a problem in the staff room, among the teachers, and somebody is hurt or upset, then you need the head teacher. They need you to take it in hand.

When there's a problem in the management, and a problem in the government, governors, or between the head and the deputies, then the council chiefs get involved to resolve it.

[1 : 04] The scale of the problem points to the scope of authority and power that's needed to put it right. So small problems, small scale problems, can be solved with lower down the chain justice.

But large scale problems, all pervasive suffering, can only be solved by large scale power. So there's an act of terrorism.

Pilate is burned to death, or something like that. The country's king meets with perhaps the most powerful person in the world to discuss it, and flies home to deal with the matter.

There is in our world, and in our hearts, a constant, pervasive, it's often felt very deeply, but there's a question lurking at the back of our minds.

It's huge, and it's difficult. And that is, why does a God of love and a God of goodness allow a world of hatred and evil? And where is he when things stalk our streets and break our hearts?

[2 : 16] I think it's often the main question people have, the kind of main objection to the gospel. How can a God of love and a God of goodness allow what's happened in my life?

That's precisely where Job is reached. And as we've gone through the book of Job, it's taken him right to the edge of collapse. He says, I'm a blameless man. Not a man who's full of sin.

I'm an upright man. He says, I've not committed some unconfessed sin that's led me to suffer all these terrible calamities. And yet I've suffered appallingly.

And God is nowhere to be seen and nowhere to be heard. And he's not answering my cries. And more than that, here is where Job has been sailing very close to the line, remember. More than this, I'm pretty sure that God hasn't got a defense for what he's done.

It's not just that I'm in the right, but God seems to be in the wrong. And that is the direction that Job has begun to travel. It's the question that's on a million lips and a million hearts all over the world.

[3 : 31] As we live on a beautiful, fractured, hurting, wonderful earth, why do I suffer as I do? And so far we've seen three friends and one extra friend all respond to Job.

And now chapter 38, verse 1, God is going to speak. And God is going to respond to him. And God has heard all the words in the book of Job, all the reasons given, all the arguments, all the hot air.

And God is going to answer Job's question. Or is he? And this evening I've just got one point. I've just got one point because I think in the first 21 verses we see something that's so beautiful that I want to take the time to try and show it to us and let us stare at it for a bit.

I thought I'd preach on the whole of Job 38, but this is too important to kind of merge into another sermon. So let me give you the point. And I'm going to back off from it with a few observations about these chapters first of all and then I'm going to try and explain the point to us.

Here's the point. The structure of creation is itself God's poetic device to make us wise. It's very catchy.

[4 : 49] Those who teach homiletics would love this. The structure of creation, it's the way the world is, the way the world has been made, is itself God's poetic device.

It's like a poem to make you wise. Basically, when you go out tonight, we should have coffee outside again, like the good old days of lockdown. It's meant to show us something.

In other words, the very way that God has made the world, the way that he's put certain things in a certain place and the way he does certain things every single day, right in front of your eyes, is one of his answers to the questions that you have.

So do you remember Elihu? God has many different ways of speaking, Joe. Speech. Words in your ear. Or through dreams.

Or through suffering. And now God arrives on the scene in Job chapter 38 and he says to Joe, the very way in which I made the world in which you live, and the way that I govern it, is one huge speech bubble.

[5 : 49] And I'm going to try and help you read it. So you come on one day and you find that your husband has cooked your favorite meal, there are candles on the table, and there's fresh roses in a vase.

You think, what's wrong? But that's a visible word, isn't it? That is a visible word. What we make and create can speak.

You go home. You come home and there's a cake. And the cake is in the shape for children of their favorite toy.

Or it's decorated in a way. And the cake speaks to you, doesn't it? What does the cake say? The cake says it's someone's birthday. What we make and what we create can speak. And God is about to say to Job and say to us, and this is new and beautiful for me, when I made the world, I spoke to you.

And I'm speaking still every day. And so when you get out of bed and when you think about the day, you hear God speak to you simply by opening the curtains and looking out to the world.

[7 : 10] So there's the point. Now let me make four observations about this chapter. These are chapters, 38 to 42, about ignorance. About ignorance.

That's what verse 2 means. Verse 2, Who is it that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Who is it that darkens my counsel with ignorant words?

Words without knowledge. God's counsel is his wisdom. His knowledge, his plans, his government. And so he's asking, who is it that has kindly offered to shed some darkness on my light?

Job has spoken, doesn't he, as if he's got cosmic knowledge, as if he's really grasped how the universe is governed. But of course, he doesn't have that sort of knowledge. And God is about to make that plain to him.

Job is about a long journey towards the right kind of ignorance. And can I say, maybe we need to embark on that journey ourselves now before we're suffering.

[8 : 18] It's much easier, isn't it, to accept that you will always be ignorant at a time when you do not have a burning need to know. And so can I encourage you as we look at these chapters over the next few weeks to let them make you very, very, very small and make God very, very big.

Secondly, these chapters are about power. They're about ignorance. They're about power. God alone is the maker of the entire universe. And he alone knows where wisdom is held and why he does what he does.

And unless we've got some kind of conception of the sheer majestic scale of his power, we'll always doubt the certainty and the timing of his justice. Unless we've got some kind of scale and conception of how great and powerful God is, we will always doubt the timing and certainty of his justice.

Thirdly, they're poetical. biblical chapters. That's really obvious, isn't it? They're beautiful poetry. But have you ever wondered why?

Why the poetry after all the pain? And I want to put it like this. We need to learn that sometimes the best that God has for us can barely be put into words.

[9 : 44] We want answers, don't we? We want cool, calm, clear, rational explanations. But God moves our hearts with the grandeur of his majesty.

I think it's like that when you come to the end of the Bible, when you come to the description of the new heavens and the new earth. At the end of Revelation, what happens in Revelation 21-22, when he describes the new heavens and the new earth, he actually tells you what it's not like.

No mourning, no tears, no sadness. Language begins to break down in Revelation 21-22. And we get the literal mixed with the figurative.

Do you remember? You've got a bride coming down and she's like a city at the east end. And it's all a way of saying that being in God's presence is going to be more wonderful and more beautiful than we can ever imagine.

And is God saying something like that to us here? I think he is in 38-42. They're also rhetorical chapters. And so what I mean by that is they are made up of an avalanche of rhetorical questions.

[11:03] And so a rhetorical question is a question that is asked that you don't expect an answer to. And so is the Pope a Catholic?

It's really annoying, isn't it, when somebody says, oh, well, he is actually. Can pigs fly? No, they can't. That's not how they're meant to fit, are they?

They are rhetorical questions. Have you ever given orders to the morning? And all of this, in all of this, God is teaching us something.

Because what has Job been doing all the way through the book? He's been asking questions. Why God? How God? When God?

Where God? Where God? And when God speaks, what does he do in return? He asks Job questions that he can't answer. And you see, a rhetorical question is meant to stop you speaking.

[12:07] It's meant to draw you to the reasoning behind the question and make you think deeply about the logic behind it so that you can then come to the answer to the question yourself. So as we read Job 38 and chapter 42, don't just think that the point is going to be no, no, no, no, no, all the way through.

No, I haven't entered into the storehouses of the snow. Next question. That's not the point. No, I haven't entered them. But I guess you're telling me that you have.

That's the point. And what does that tell me about you? So come back to our point for this evening. The structure of creation is itself God's poetic device to make us wise.

Let's take this apart by showing it to you in the passage. Notice that creation, our world is structured, it's ordered. Look at 38 verses 4 to 7. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determines its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it?

[13:21] 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? Read on.

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 swallowing band and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors and said, thus far you shall come and no further.

And here shall your proud waves be stayed? God is saying, you need to know, Job, before anything else, first of all, before we get to anything else, this universe is my building project.

It's all construction language. Can you see that? this building has a foundation that's been laid. It has measurements that have been drawn out. There's a measuring line to ensure precision.

There are footings. There are bases. There are sockets for pillars to rest in. And there's a cornerstone all so it makes sure that the building holds together firmly. Do you see what's being said?

[14:26] Here is a world that's built to last. Here is a world that is solid and secure and robust. Here's a world that's full of intricate design and coherence.

Look at what God is saying about himself. He's saying, I'm the architect. I'm the architect who has designed it. I'm the surveyor who's laid it all out. And I'm the builder who's constructed it.

And do you know, Job, it's beautiful. It's beautiful. Don't you love verse 7? And when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, that first dawn, what happened in heaven?

The angels in heaven were nuts. They sang. They rejoiced. Now this is and is not an answer to Job, is it?

When I set the cosmos in place, those who could see it happening and those who witnessed what I was doing, they rejoiced, Job. And they were right to rejoice. And Job, you and I are right to rejoice even today.

[15 : 40] God made the world. He's in charge of it. And what he's made and what he's done is beautiful and praiseworthy and it should cause us to sing with joy. And we live in an ordered universe, not a chaotic one.

We live in a structured world, not a random one. And you are not right, Job, to look at the world and see only my absence and to think, I don't know what I'm doing. The structure of creation is God's poetic device to make us wise.

And yet, and yet, that was how God made the world at the start. But of course, sin has come in, hasn't it, and broken it and cracked it and torn it and soiled it.

You might have made it good, God. You were a good architect, a good surveyor and builder, but you've not been a good landlord. You might have been a good builder, God, but you've not been a good landlord.

You've presided over ruin and decay and destruction. Okay, let's keep going. Because now the Lord has got more to show Job about the structure of creation. And here's what I want to show us.

[16 : 46] There are two things that God has put in the world to symbolize wonderful truths about himself. So the red rose in the vase is lover's poetry.

It's about love, about love, isn't it? The red rose speaks. Now God says, there's two things in this world I made which poetically they must speak to you. They speak to you about your pain.

Number one, the sea. Number two, the sun. And this is wonderful stuff. Look at verse 8 to 11. Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb.

And when I made clouds its garments and thick darkness its swaddling band and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors and said, thus far you shall come and no further and here shall your proud waves be stayed.

Poetry is doing two things. First, there's the language of clouds and darkness connected to the sea. And it's pointing to the way that the Bible, in the Bible, the word sea is often understood as a place of evil and the wild forces of evil.

[18 : 02] It's how symbolism works. So the darkness of the plagues in Egypt, remember them? The darkness when Jesus dies at midday, it's a symbol of God's anger and of God's wrath.

And your darkness and connection with the sea is a way of referring to the place of evil. So back in Job 7, verse 12, Job said this to God in great bitterness, Am I the sea or the monster of the deep that you put me under guard?

Who lives in the sea? Leviathan, the great sea monster. Which we're going to see in a few weeks. In Daniel 7, four great beasts rise from where?

They rise from the sea. Isaiah 57, the wicked are like the tossing sea which cannot rest whose waves cast up mire and mud. Or Psalm 74 talks about crossing the Red Sea.

You broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of the Leviathan. And in the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible, John sees a dragon, the ancient serpent, standing where?

[19 : 05] On the sea. On the sand of the sea. And a beast comes from the sea and there's a prostitute enthroned on many waters. All of this is at the end of Revelation 21.

And we're told, aren't we, wonderfully, that there'll be no more death in the new creation. Along with no more mourning or crying or pain. But we're also told there'll no longer be any sea. And it's symbolic language for saying it's not just suffering is gone but so too evil will be gone.

the sea is where the serpent lives. Where the dragon come from. Where the beast resides. It's a place of deep, dark, mysterious power.

So just for a moment, when Jesus is asleep on the boat and he stands on the boat and he says to the sea, peace be still, be still.

and when Jesus walks on the water, it's saying to you something much, much deeper than isn't just Jesus amazing. It's not just a nice little bit of poetry at the end of Job about the ocean.

[20 : 25] But the second thing here to note about this poetry, look how powerful it is. What does God actually compare it to here? Can you see that? He says a sea, well it's like, look what it is, it's like a baby.

Strange image, isn't it? Verse 8, it bursts from a womb. To me, God says, the vast oceans of the world that you would drown in which terrify you with all their mighty power and wildness, with all their monsters which are so magnificent that they've come to represent evil and wickedness, those seas to me are just like a woman's waters breaking in childbirth.

And when the waters break, what happens next? A baby's on the way. So what do you do with it? Verse 9, you make garments for it, you wrap it in swaddling bands. That's what I did with the sea. I laid it here in the world. God says, here's my little sea and it's swaddling bands. I fixed limits for it, I put it in its crib behind its bars and I said, night night to the sea. I'm in charge, here's how we do things around here.

See what God is saying to Job? He's saying the very thing you fear most in the world, evil, wickedness, the presence of uncontrollable destructive forces which you think are running wild, they're as limited and as controlled as the sea is in my hands.

[21 : 46] And if we can put it like this, I think we need to say it carefully, God is telling Job, and I say this really carefully, God is telling Job, evil is my baby. What I mean by that is it's shocking, it's the evil is his baby, it's very real in the world, yes, and any parent who's here can tell you that a presence of a baby in a house can dismantle the home from top to bottom and things can be in a real mess, can't they?

But at the end of the day, who's in charge? And God is saying, I am, Job, I am. So here is this remarkable truth that even disorder and chaos and suffering and evil and death and destruction, even those things have a place in my order.

Is that what God is saying? Let's look at the second image and then I want to come back one last time to the single point.

Look at verses 12 to 15. He says this, 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. The imagery changes and so instead of God the architect, the builder, the surveyor, instead of God the disciplinary parent, now we have God the commander or the general.

[23 : 22] Beautiful. The dawn or the morning is personified as an infantryman awaiting orders. There's a sleepy soldier called down.

It's called the morning. and God shakes the dawn in its bed and tells the dawn it's time to get up again, time for the sun to rise, time for light to flood the earth again.

Come on, get going. And so in verse 13 the dawn gets to work again. So we get a new image. Imagine a tablecloth. You've had your breakfast at the table and you've got eight children. Imagine that. It's covered in crumbs.

You need to clear the table. So what do you do with a tablecloth that size? What do you do? You grab it by the edges and you take it outside and you shake it outside and all the debris goes.

[24 : 30] Well, God tells the sun to take its place in the sky and he tells the dawn to get up and get moving and he's saying that the light coming throughout the earth is like the taking hold of the earth and shaking it free of all the wicked because the wicked remember they love darkness rather than light because their deed is evil.

Look at verse 14. Do you see the image? It's of the sun rising in the sky and you've been pitch black and you can't see anything but now your eyes are clear and you can see everything and everything around you begins to take shape just like flat clay becomes three dimensional when you impress a seal into it and light is spreading and the wicked who are about to do evil find that light is not their friend.

It's denied them. Instead, it exposes them and it prevents them doing it. Their upraised arm is broken. Verse 15. Now that is just amazing. So what is God saying here?

He's saying this that every time the sun rises it is evidence that there's a judgment to come. and we get little hints of it now don't we every day.

Where do burglars do their work usually? Do they work at night time? And every time God puts the sun back in the sky normal daily business takes place takes center stage.

[26 : 00] Where do the riots happen? Riots happen at 7 in the morning they don't do they? They happen as it gets dark. But God puts the sun in the sky and normal daily business takes center stage and the wicked are shaken back into the darkness.

But of course one day the upraised arm of the wicked will be broken completely. And every time the dawn takes its place God is speaking to you.

He will speak to you tomorrow morning. But the very poetry of creation is to say darkness will not last forever. each day is proof that darkness evil sin and wickedness will have no place in the created order.

Revelation 21 there will be no night. Is there a thought like this? Go outside when you have your cup of coffee.

The very night sky through those windows is a symbolic representation to us of evil and wickedness and one day it will be gone. Tomorrow morning when you get up out of bed and you see the sun or at least you know that it's there somewhere behind the clouds you know it's dawn.

[27 : 19] It's daytime. And when that happens as your feet touch the floor and you pour your first cup of coffee hear the poetry of the world you live in. Hear what God is saying.

One day there will be only dawn. One day there will be only light. One day all that is evil will be gone. You ever thought like that about the sea?

Go down to the beach sometime. Walk along the shore. Hear the poetry. Hear what God is saying. Look at how it crashes against the walls and the shore but it has a limit.

And it stops here. And it does not go any further. And hear God saying to you that evil and wickedness in the world is in his hand and it goes only as far as he allows it.

And so next time when you fly over an ocean and all you can see for miles and miles is water. And you imagine the seas beneath you and the incredible world of murky magnificent mysterious creatures who live in its hidden depths.

[28 : 27] and then you hear how God is speaking. Read the sea as a poetic symbol of evil. And God is saying to us its presence is real.

Its power is great. Its destruction can be catastrophic. It has depths and power we cannot imagine. But to God it is like holding a cup of water in your hand.

and evil will never ever have the last say or the final word. The structure of creation is itself God's poetic device to make us wise.

Let's pray. Amen. Mm-hmm.