



## **GOD SPEAKS -JOB SQUEAKS**

Text: Job 38 & 40:1-5

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It has been said that you need to be careful what you pray for. God may grant you what you ask. Often, we have little idea of the ramifications of what we ask from God. Job certainly found that to be the case. We know Job suffered terribly even though he was a righteous man. Even God had acknowledged that Job was righteous. So, Job had been demanding to know why he suffered. His three friends said it was because he had sinned so badly. But Job kept on insisting on his innocence. He demanded an audience with God. He was sure that he could prove his case. And now his desire is fulfilled. Here the book of Job reaches its climax as God himself speaks to Job. What an act of grace that God comes to Job's level to personally deal with his suffering.

Now we must not get the idea that Job cried out for an answer and God quickly responded. Job had been struggling for months. The interlude with Elihu was an indicator that God can use any one as his instrument to bring his message. And it's also an indicator that God will come in his own time. He is not at our beck and call. He comes when he decides in his sovereign will. Sometimes it can take years for us to understand why we suffered. If we understand at all. We notice also that God (38:1) *"...answered Job out of a storm."* We see that on other occasions, like when God showed up with Moses and Israel. The storm both reveals and hides God. A storm reveals God by invoking in us a sense of awe and fear. That's what Elihu makes clear in 37:1ff *"At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth."* The storm reveals the awesome majesty of God. But it also hides God, because no one can see God and

survive, as Moses found out. If a hurricane scares us, we haven't seen anything yet till we are face to face with the living God!

So here we are now at the most exciting moment in this drama with Job. Here is God in all his majesty. We wait expectantly to hear what he has to say about why Job suffered. We want to know for Job's sake. But also for ours. What profound insight are we about to receive? Well, at first sight, it's a big disappointment. In chapters 38&39 the writer takes us on a tour of the heavens, the sea, the stars, and various animals. Then in chapters 40&41 the writer focuses on the 'Behemoth', which some think is a hippopotamus. And also, the 'Leviathan', which some think is a crocodile. But it all seems so inadequate. Here is a man who has lost everything, including all his children and his health. He is desperate to know why. And God comes along and says: 'Look at the hippo.' It's all rather surprising! What we see in these chapters is that God gives no answer to Job's questions. There is no apology for having been silent for so long. No hint about God's wager with Satan. No apparent acknowledgment of how much Job has struggled. At first glance, it doesn't seem to make sense.

Or does it? Let's explore what we have. In 38:1 it says that "*The LORD answered Job...*" When we see the word 'LORD' in capital letters we know the Hebrew is 'JAHWEH'. That is the covenant name for God. It's how God revealed himself to Moses. The name means 'I am that I am'. God simply is. God is the ever present, unchanging God. He is always faithful to his promises. The name implies God's personal presence, his steadfast love, his utter faithfulness. This God speaks to Job. Job's worst fears were that God had abandoned him. In the silence and isolation that's how Job felt. In reality, God had been present all along. God could not do otherwise. It would not be possible for God to abandon Job because his own faithfulness keeps him there. That is the most important thing these chapters have to say. It's like the well-known meditation 'Footprints'. When we see one set of prints in the sand we assume God has left us. But he makes it clear that's when he carried us. God never will and never can leave us. Oswald Chambers once wrote: 'A man up against things feels that he has lost God, while in reality he has come face to face with Him.'

Now, let's see what God says to Job. Cf 38:2-3. God invites Job to wrestle him. God is giving Job what he asked for. Job wanted God to show him where he was wrong. Job wanted to have it out with God. Well, now he has his chance. God is saying 'let's go step outside!' But Job needs to be aware of who he is dealing with. God says Job

hasn't really got a clue: "*Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge*". Now God is not threatening Job. He is not going to overpower and humiliate Job. There is a gentle irony to God's tone. His questions are not threatening. They are educative. They are the sort of questions a teacher might ask a child to have them get understanding. It is as though God is taking a walk through his creation and inviting Job to accompany him. 'Do you see this...Do you recognize that? What does it imply, Job?'

We will summarize what God says in chapters 38&39. It's not what you would expect in reply to Job's struggles. In 38:4-7 God focuses on the earth: (4) "*Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand?*" 'You weren't there and you don't know how I did it'. In 38:8-11 God focuses on the sea. (8) "*Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from its womb?*" 'It was I, Job, I set its limits, not you.'. In 38:12-15 the Lord focuses on the dawn: (12) "*Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place...?*" 'Job you never did it. You can't do it. I have always done it. I always will'. In 38:16-18 God focuses on the depth and breadth of the sea and land. 'Job, you have never been to the bottom of the ocean or around the world. And you think you know enough to argue with God?' Then in the second half of the chapter God changes focus from the world below to the sky above. 38:19-21 God queries Job about the origin of light and dark: (19) "*What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?*" You don't know, do you Job. I do, I made light. Then in verses 22-30 God asks him about snow and hail and rain and frost: 'Do you know anything about how to store up hail for the day of battle? Would you know how to cut a channel in the sky to make it rain in the desert where no man is? Or, Job, what if you lift your eyes even higher (38:31-33) and look at the stars, the constellations. Do you know "*the laws of the heavens Job, can you set up God's dominion over the earth?*" 'If not, come back down then and we will talk about the rain again (38:34-38) Can you make it rain? Do you know how to whistle for the lightning? Can you count the clouds with your wisdom? Or do my earthly pastimes stretch your mind a bit far?'

It doesn't matter what we are talking about it's clear Job is ignorant and impotent. He doesn't know where any of these things came from. He doesn't know how to make them. He is surrounded, above and below, by mysteries. And so are we. Despite all our scientific advancements in the last 200 years it's all like a bucket in the ocean. Any one

who is well read begins to know how much he doesn't know. We should be humbled by our ignorance not impressed with our science.

But God hasn't finished with Job yet. He comes down to his level a bit more to talk about the world of animals. In 38:39-41 God asks (41) "*Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?*" 'I do Job- all over the world. Can you do that?' (39:1-4): "*Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth?*" 'I do Job. I am on top of all these things. Think of it Job! When a man sees a work of God, like your suffering, can he see its connection to ten thousand other realities in the world like I can? If not, how will you dare to judge my wisdom?' Whether we consider the prey of the lions, the birth of the mountain goats, the freedom of the wild donkey, the insubordination of the wild ox, the stupidity of the ostrich, the might of the war horse, or the flight of the eagle, the upshot is the same: Job is ignorant and impotent. He did not make them. He does not know how to control them. He cannot see what they are doing. And yet this ignorant Job presumed to question God! If God knows so much about the animals, and cares for each and all of them, wouldn't God be doing that even more for human beings, those creatures made in his own image, those for whom God's own son would suffer and bleed and die?

God in 40:1-2 gives Job a chance to reply: "*The Lord said to Job: 'Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Let him who accuses God answer him!'*" 'Job, in the midst of your suffering you implied I had done wrong. You wanted an opportunity to have it out with me. Well, what do you say now? Note 40:3-5: "*Then Job answered the Lord: 'I am unworthy-how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer-twice, but I will say no more.'*" Job is saying: 'God I can see that I am not in the same league as you are!' Job has come down quite a few pegs. In his frustration and pain Job has pushed the limits in his struggle with God. In Job 31:35-37 as he made his final plea he said "*Oh, that I had some one to hear me! I sign now my defense- let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. I would give an account of my every step; like a prince I would approach him'*". Job's sufferings have stirred up the dregs of pride. Approach God as a prince? In our

pain and suffering we can get so upset we become arrogant. But now God says, 'So let's wrestle then'. Job puts his hand over his mouth, silenced. He is not up to it.

This, itself, is a significant outcome as a result of Job's suffering. To grow spiritually we need to grow downwards. To grow in Christ, we need to grow in humility. I know that's strange in our culture of wealth and success. J.I Packer once wrote: 'Christians grow greater by getting smaller'. Job's encounter with God is a shrinking process. John the Baptist too, said of Jesus, *"He must increase while I must decrease"*. This is so important. If we shrink before God, we come to a much better understanding of who he is. We see more clearly how great he is. We see how much we are dependent on him. That is how we develop trust. It is to let God be God and to trust him in what he does. That is the first step in getting relief in suffering. It is to step aside from ourselves, our self pity, our self absorption, and see God and what he is doing. He is in control. He is with us.

When we speak of getting smaller before God, we are not talking about losing self-esteem. It's not about us being worthless or useless. For despite our smallness in relation to God, Jesus became just like us. He humbled himself and became our servant, all the way to the cross. And Paul tells us that we are to be just like Jesus, *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus"*. So, in a sense, Job is getting his rough edges knocked off so he becomes more like Jesus. The more we doubt God in our suffering the more we shrink our view of God. Thus, the more we strip ourselves of our hope. What can a weak God really do for us? But if in our suffering, we are reduced in our pride, and made smaller, then the more we are in awe of his majesty. Then we get more hope and comfort. God's power means he has it all in hand. God's love, seen in Jesus, means he deals with us in grace. In such an awesome, loving God we can trust.

There is a practical pastoral application we see in God's actions with Job. Job was focused on his misery and complains. God takes him outside for a look at creation. The sheer grandeur and majesty of it all changes how Job sees things. We can most help those suffering by helping them draw nearer to God. Not with doctrine or a sermon. But walking them around the garden. Taking them to see a waterfall or sunset. Getting them to see a rich panorama of God's creation. Let them see the handiwork of God. Let them see the majesty of the God who has created everything and looks after

all of it. Then again, they can see the wonder of the God who loves them. We are so small in comparison. But he is so majestic, so overwhelmingly awesome. That God loves us. He cannot, not care. For he is Yahweh, the faithful God whose own Son died for us.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- When was the last time you had a real look at creation and were awed at the greatness of God? Do you need to do it more often?
- How did all God's questions help Job? How might they help you?
- What is meant by: "A Christian gets greater by becoming smaller"? How is that happening in your life?