

Job - Out of the Whirlwind

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[0 : 0 0] Our gracious God, we thank you for the book of Job. We thank you for the insights it gives us into your character and your love and your relationship with us.

And we pray today that you'd help us to learn new things. And, Father, we pray that the things that we learn, you'd be at work in us so that we might put in practice. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please sit down. The story, as we know, is straightforward enough, isn't it? God was meeting with angelic beings.

And as he did this, an interloper appeared. And Satan, the adversary, is in attendance and God sees him. And he points out Job to him and points out his righteousness.

Satan, though, disputes with God. He charges God with putting a protective hedge around Job. We saw this in week one. That is, he accuses Job before God. Maintaining that Job is in relationship with God for what he can get out of it.

[1 : 0 7] It's a sort of a commercial relationship. God denies the charge. He says he has confidence in Job. Nevertheless, he lets Satan have his way with him. Job, therefore, loses family and possessions.

Satan maintains that really God hasn't tested him enough and he needs to expose him even more. And so God allows him to have his way again. And Job's own body is affected.

He falls ill. He suffers. His wife urges him to deny God since God has clearly forgotten him. His friends then visit him. At first they wait and then they debate with him.

Basically, they side with Satan's point of view and they charge Job with sin. He must have sinned because he's suffering as he is. And so they urge him to repent so that God can bless him again.

And they argue on and Job argues on and it goes on for many, many chapters. And then a young man, Elihu, says his piece and he adds some things that the others hadn't said but doesn't really answer Job's plea that God come down to him.

[2 : 1 3] Eventually, all fall silent. And that's where we are in Job 38 and I'd urge you to have your Bibles open from this point on. Let me summarise what I think the book has said up until this point.

The author, I think, is interacting with a fairly simple thesis. And the thesis goes something like this. God created the world. He's set up the world in a certain manner.

He's set up his relationship with the people of the world in a certain manner. He's established, as it were, various laws that run the world and God's relationship with human beings.

Those laws are foundational laws. And one of those laws is that what people reap, sorry, that people reap what they sow. What a man sows, what a woman sows, that shall they reap.

Now, if the logic were followed rigorously with regard to Job, it would look something like this. Human beings, like you, Job, reap what they sow.

[3 : 13] Evil results in evil. Good results in good. That's God's way of running the universe. Job, you are reaping suffering. Therefore, you must have committed evil.

You are receiving evil. You must have done evil. It's clear that Job will have nothing of that. He cannot accede to that. He wants to maintain his innocence. Now, it seems to me that given that, there are two responses.

If the underlying law is in fact true in all circumstances. Option one is that Job can admit that he's got it wrong. In other words, he can cave in and acknowledge, all right, I am not innocent after all.

Option number two, he can throw the whole thing back in God's face and accuse God of not acting according to his own rules if the rules are set rules. In other words, he can acknowledge the truth of the rules.

Yes, they're good, right rules. But at the same time, declare, God, you've broken them. I haven't. You have. You've acted unjustly. Now, we've heard throughout the book that Job can't exceed, can't accept to option number one, that he's done any wrong.

[4 : 22] No, he will not admit that he's not innocent. He's maintained his innocence all the way from the beginning. He says, I have not done wrong. Or at least I've not done the wrong that would reward, that would get me this sort of reward.

And in a long series, if you read chapter 31 in particular, in a long series of if statements, he makes very clear that the ifs all expect the answer no. If I'd done this, if I'd done this, if I'd done this, if I'd done this.

But I haven't. Therefore, I don't deserve punishment. What he's saying is that he's questioning, therefore, I think, the justice of God. He's questioning whether God has been just in this situation.

In effect, I think he's also doing more than that. He's saying, I want a hearing with God. I actually want to have God face to face in front of me and to call him to account, to ask him to defend his actions, as it were.

In other words, I think Job is wanting to bring God into court. And that's his final plea. And finally, God responds in the chapters we're going to look at today. Now, I think he doesn't respond in court.

[5 : 28] In our language, he comes to an out of court situation. There's no court in session. But God says, let's go aside here and we'll have a little chat about this, as it were.

I think that's what's going on. Not in court. He comes in an out of court way. And he comes to Job personally. Job had wanted him to come personally. He does. And when he does, he challenges Job to think again.

And in my view, this is my summary. The divine response goes something like this. It's a paraphrase, but I want you to follow through and I'll give you the verse numbers as we go. Here it is.

God says to Job, as it were, okay, Job, you think that I am unjust. You think my rule of the universe is done unjustly.

Well, I want you to think through the implications of this, Job. The implication is what? Well, it is that you are wiser than me. You're saying, I haven't done a good job and you could do it better.

[6 : 24] In effect, you're saying you're God. You are saying that you are the one who determines what is good and evil. You are the one who determines what's just and unjust. Well, says God, let's see your credentials, Job.

Let's see how God-like you really are. Let's see how good you are as a God. Let's see the stuff that God's made of. Come on, Job, be God.

Wear the clothes that God wears. Do the things that God does. Now, look at verse 3 of chapter 38. God says to Job, okay, brace yourself like a man and I will question you and you shall answer me.

In other words, you've been doing a lot of questioning of me. Well, how about I do some questioning of you, Job? Basically, I think God is saying to Job, Job, you've said much.

You've questioned much. Now it's my turn. Let me put you under the microscope for a little while as you have put me under the microscope. Then God launches into his questioning.

[7 : 26] And just look at what he says. This is marvelous, these chapters. Let me summarize and show you the verses. God says to Job, you tell me, Job, were you present at creation?

Where were you, by the way, when the created order was established? Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Who marked off its dimensions?

I surely know. You know, you know, since it appears as though you were there. On what were the footprints, footings of the earth set? Who laid its cornerstone?

Who did this while the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy?

Verses 6 to 7. Where were you when the chaotic sea was tamed? Verses 8 to 11. And are you, Job, the one who separates light and darkness, both physical and spiritual?

Verses 12 to 15. Look at verse 18. I think it's full of sarcasm and rebuke. Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me if you know all of this.

[8 : 26] And while you're at it, Job, how well do you control the inner workings of the cosmos? Verses 16 to 21. Again, since the rebuke and sarcasm in verse 21. Surely you know.

For you were already born. You've lived so many years. Then he goes on to the physical universe even some more. He effectively asked Job.

By the way, Job, how are you going in your control over the inner workings of the cosmos? I suppose you know. And you're sovereign over. Snow, hail and wind. Verses 22 to 24.

Rain, even in the desert. Verses 25 to 27. Rain, dew, ice, snow. Verses 28 to 30. The constellations. Verses 31 to 33.

Clouds and rain. Verses 34 to 38. Now look at chapter 38, verse 39. God continues unabated. He now turns to the creatures of the earth.

[9 : 24] Since Job is so close to asserting that he's overseer and judge of all. God asks him, how is your control going of this part of the world? Job. The implication is that any God who's worth his salt knows all about them.

And God who can rightly be called God. Any God who can rightly be called God knows and controls the animal kingdom. So let me paraphrase again and just move through the chapter.

God continues his questioning or cross-examination. And notice the tone of sarcasm again. How's it going, Job? Do you know about the creatures of the earth?

Do you hunt the prey for the lioness? Do you provide food for the raven when it's young? Cry out to you. Do you oversee the birth of the animals of the earth?

Verses 1 to 4 of chapter 39. And then God gets down to some specifics. How's your knowledge and control of the untamed wild ass going? Verses 5 to 8.

[10 : 24] What about the wild ox? Verses 9 to 12. Oh, and that great creature, that great bird, the ostrich, verses 13 to 18. I suppose it's you who made horses the magnificent creatures that they are, verses 19 to 25.

And what about hawks and eagles, Job? Verses 26 to 30. How's your knowledge and supervision of them going these days? Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom, verse 26, and spread its wings toward the south?

Can you hear the sarcasm? Does it do it by your wisdom, Job? Does the angel soar at your command and build its nest on high? Let's now move to chapter 40.

Job, God pushes Job even further. He forces Job to look at his charges against God and to look at them in the face. The Lord said to Job, verse 2, Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?

Let him who accuses God answer him. You see, Job takes the point at this point. He admits that he's not divine. Look at verses 4 and 5. He says, I am unworthy.

[11 : 35] That is, I'm nothing beside you and I'm nothing before you. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer twice, but I'll say no more.

It's probably about time, actually. But now look at verses 7 and 8. God pushes the point home to Job. It's clear that he sees that Job has discredited him.

He's condemned God in order to justify himself. And look at these verses. He says, brace yourself like a man and I'll question you and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice?

Would you condemn me to justify yourself? In effect, I think God is asserting that Job has claimed to be God himself. And God questions Job's right.

Again, he pushes Job to recognize that he, God, alone has the right to be called God. He alone, you see, is the determiner of right and wrong. The determiner of justice.

[12 : 34] He alone is just. Not Job, but God. Listen to him speak. I challenge you, Job, is verses 7 to 8. Be like God. Come on, Job.

Exercise your power. Unleash your wrath. Take control of humans' eternal destiny. You do it and I'll recognize that you are in fact God. Verse 14.

Do this and I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you. Then God pushes on again. It's as though he says, and while you're at it, Job, how about doing what I do?

How about making pets out of deep sea creatures like Behemoth? Some have thought it's a hippopotamus, but it's probably just, you know, a deep sea creature that people feared. Verses 15 to 24.

And how are you going in your taming of the crocodile? Verses chapter 41, verses 1 to 34. And in effect, I think God is saying, show me your stuff, Job.

[13 : 32] Show me what real gods are made of. Be like God if that's what you are. The implications are clear, you see, and Job cannot avoid them. If he can't do these things that God does, then he's in no position to discredit God.

God can and does do these things. God daily demonstrates he is Lord of the universe. And if he does this, if he does control all the forces of the universe, earthly and cosmic, then he controls everything, even the forces of the underworld, and even the elements that brought about Job's affliction.

Job's therefore faced with two decisions, isn't he? He can accept that God is God. That means submitting to him. That means giving up his avowal of innocence.

Means relinquishing his complaint against God's just government of the world. Accepting his trust and trusting God's blessing and curse, riches and ash heaps. Or alternatively, he can decide to argue his case in court against God.

A decision would be to go to court. It's a decision to face a God who really is God. A God who really is the creator of the world, the sustainer of the world, and who knows what justice is.

[14 : 50] A God who's rightly the determiner of justice and injustice. It would be a futile existence or decision. Not only this.

This is a great part of Job. It's an exercise Job has no interest in when pushed. For all he wants is to relate to this God. And with that we move to chapter 42.

And a change emerges in Job. He moves from wanting vindication to just wanting continued relationship with this God. Job expresses his dependence upon God.

He realizes that his zeal for vindication has erected a barrier between him and God that needs to be turned away from. God has now revealed himself and all Job wants to do is relate to him.

So he surrenders everything to God, including his just grievances and his lack of understanding. He does so to avoid sinning against God by assuming Godhead himself.

[15 : 50] In essence, I think Job admits he's not God. And no longer does he want God to listen to him. Now all he wants to do is listen to God. Look at verses 2 to 6.

Chapter 42. He repents by putting himself in the place of God. Job replied to the Lord, I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted.

You ask, who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Then he says, surely I spoke of things I did not understand. I will. You said, listen now and I will speak.

I will question you and you shall answer me. Well, my ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. In other words, I get it. I understand. Therefore, I despise myself.

That is, I'm I. I stop exalting myself. I despise myself and I repent in dust and ashes. I turn away. From the course I've been pursuing. See, Job now sees God in a way he had not previously.

[16 : 54] He had knowledge of God, but it was imperfect and flawed. Now his eyes see truly. Now what I want to do by way of closing is to make some reflections about us and our situation.

See, I think Job offers us a great opportunity to do this. See, no matter who you are, there will be have been some time in your life when you will have argued with God. If you haven't done it yet, you may yet.

Do it. At some time in our lives, we come to God and we either implicitly or explicitly argue with him. And those arguments, I think, take a variety of forms.

I'll just give you some examples. Some of us come and some are legitimate, some are not. Some of us accuse God of unfairness and injustice. Some are merely charging God with not revealing his ways to us.

For example, and they come in a variety of forms. For example, we might hold a grudge against God for not providing us with a spouse, a partner. We might be angry with him for not converting a particular person despite all our prayers.

[17 : 59] We might not understand why he allowed a person particularly close to us to die or to suffer. We may wonder why we can't have kids or why when we do, they have abnormalities, deformities or are missing the gifts that we wish they had.

Or we might have an illness which is incurable, which God refuses to deliver us from despite the fact we know that he could. Or we may not have the gifts or abilities that we would like.

Or we may not get the job or financial resources we think we have every right to have. He may have lumped us with a physical shape or a personality that we wish were different.

Or academic abilities that are short of what we'd like. Perhaps he's calling us from a situation we find secure and comfortable to one we know we're going to find difficult. No matter what it is, and you can write your own if you like, no matter what it is, we all find God at some times incomprehensible, don't we?

Or we find him unjust or harsh or unfair and we react and we resent him and we argue with him. Maybe quietly.

[19 : 13] Maybe not with our mouth but in our hearts. And we call him and his decisions into question. And in doing so, I think we make Job's mistake.

We step out from being creatures at that point and we take our stand above him and we start arbitrating. We say, I'm God.

I'm the author of what is, I'm the arbiter of what is just and unjust. I'm the determiner of good and evil and I know what's good and what's not. And I don't think what's happening to me is what ought to be.

And God responds. And that's where he comes to us out of court and he says to us, oh really? Why don't you step outside with me for a moment? Take a look around.

I suppose it was you who made the DNA molecule the way that it is. I suppose it was you who sends electrons spinning the way that they do.

[20 : 13] I suppose it was you who caused the grass to grow and photosynthesis to occur. I guess it's you who holds the planets in space. I guess it's you that knows every planet and star in existence and even the ones that human telescopes have not yet seen.

And you supervise their movements and motions. And by the way, when was the last time you said to the wind, stop and it stopped? But more than this, since when have you understood human personality in all its complexity?

Since when have you been able to deal with human nature? And tell me, what plan have you got to deal with human propensity for evil? Tell me how you're going to rid humans of greed and of lust and of violence.

What is it that you're going to do to deal with sin, which is human's prime problem? When is it that you are going to devise a way whereby sinful men and women will be able to live with a holy God?

When is it that you are going to do what I have done in my son Jesus? Friends, do you see what I'm saying? God is saying to us, when you can do all of this, then come and tell me what to do.

[21 : 38] When you can do all of this and all the other things I, God, do, then I'll admit that you're God. And it ain't going to happen.

Friends, do you see in here what we are often doing in our questioning of God? Do you see how God responds here in the book of Job? It's a model for his response to us.

He's saying to us, Friends, I am God. There is no other. And I know what I'm doing. And there are things at work in my world which you know nothing about.

There are forces at work which you are not aware of. But be assured, I am the creator. I am the sustainer.

I am sovereign. I am in control. And I do know what I'm doing. But what's more? I love you. And if words are not enough, if you still doubt me, if you still need reassurance, then come outside again with me.

[22 : 50] Travel back in time. Take a look at the cross. I love you. I love you. This is my son. My only son. The son of my love.

And he's dying. He's dying for you. He's dying so that you and I can be friends. He's dying so that the world can be restored back to the way I intended it to be.

He's dying so that there will be a day when there will be no more pain. No more suffering. No more misunderstanding. No more confusion. If you cannot believe my words, then believe my actions.

I do love you. I am in control. And I am God. Friends, let us go to this God in prayer.

We will not always understand his ways, but we can understand that. Let us go to this God in prayer. And the way I want to do it today is for you to find a prayer book.

[23 : 59] In the pew in front of you. And I want you to turn to page seven. This is an ancient prayer called the Te Deum Laudamus.

It's often used at morning prayer in the prayer book. And I want you to join with me in saying it. So let's say it and pray together. Page seven, prayer book.

We praise you, O God. We acclaim you as the Lord. All creation worships you, the Father everlasting. To you, all angels, all the powers of heaven, the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you. The white-robed army of martyrs praise you. Throughout the world, your holy church acclaims you.

[25 : 03] Father of majesty unbounded. Your true and only Son, worthy of all praise. And the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Lord Christ, are the King of glory. The eternal Son of the Father. Father, when you took our flesh to set us free, you humbly chose the virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. You are seated at God's right hand in glory. We believe that you will come to be our judge.

Come then, Lord, and help your people. Bought with the price of your own blood. And bring us with your saints to glory everlasting.

And we pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.