

## Sermon- Where Were You?

Scripture: Job 38:1-11

Sunday, August 9, 2020

Friends today we are returning to the book of Job to examine the conclusion of the matter. The matter I am talking about is the question of why innocent people may suffer especially when a good God is keeping watch over it all. Now three of Job's friends took a stab at it and in different forms you will remember they came to the simple assumption that the only possibility is that Job or his family did something wrong in the past. Then Elihu the mysterious forth character appears and gives three very plausible explanations for the existence of suffering in general. Explanation 1. so that God can get our attention, 2. so that He can disciple us and thirdly so that he can shape us in such a way as to makes us resistant to the temptations we might face in the future. These are all very interesting explanations for the existence of suffering, but the Bible does not tell us that they were applicable to Job or whether they cover the explanation for all suffering. But I mention these three points because Elihu is the only one who is not condemned by God when God starts speaking.

So in the end, after all the speeches were completed, it is God's turn to take the stage. God addresses Job's suffering in a very different and unexpected way. God reframes the whole conversation by counter questioning Job. You see Jesus do this all the time in the Gospels. And the purpose of this counter questioning is not to dodge the original question but to elevate the thinking of the questioner in such a way that the questioner is able to see things from a perspective in which the original question is not so relevant any more.

God open's his speech by asking Job, "where were you when I laid the earth's foundation, when I marked off its dimensions?", "Where were you when I set the earths footings and laid its cornerstone, while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

God's speech goes on for four whole chapters. What I am going to do is translate some of God's speech into today's scientific understanding.

Where were you when I said **let there be** and brought forth the entire universe in one joyous big bang? Where were you when I set up the quarks and bosons and all the tiniest particles that make up all matter and defined all the forces that drive the universe? Did you advise me when I set up the speed of light to be  $3 \times 10^8$  m/s, or defined the strength of gravity to be a value precise to 11 decimal places?

Did you help me figure out how to create the hydrogen that became the fuel for the stars you cannot even count in the sky? Did you tell me what kinds of stars to create or for long they should glow? Do you give me the recipe for making the elements you are made off? Can you explain to me the physics of making elements heavier than iron in the periodic table? Can you write out the equations for me that explain how carbon, oxygen, potassium and sulphur are made without which there would not be no living thing?

Let's bring is closer home to the solar system that you live in. Did you tell me how best to position planet earth so that it gets the right amount of sunlight and be protected from large asteroids with the help of planet Jupiter? Did you advise me on how to put the right amount of iron in the earth's core to create a protective magnetic field around it, or how to place the right amount of water that would support life? Or what about the instructions to make just the right kind of moon that helps life on earth flourish in ways you do not understand?

I am not going to let you off so easily. I have a few more questions for you. You think you know a lot about the DNA so that you are already playing God with it. Even so can you explain what 98% of the DNA in your body is for? Do you know how 70% of your DNA looks exactly the same as the banana you eat for breakfast or 70% of the earthworms you think nothing of. Why you are even 96% similar genetically to the

chimpanzee. So everything that is special about you I placed inside just 4% of your entire genetic code. Can you tell me how that works?

Now as special as you are, let's talk about some other creatures and special places right on planet earth. "***Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?***" Did you know that under the ocean where no sunlight reaches there are hydrothermal vents that support whole ecosystems that survive by eating hydrogen sulfide and nothing else? Or that there are bacteria that lie buried under the seabed where energy is so scarce that they are designed to use a billion, billionth of the energy than your cells use. And there are many such fascinating creatures who live in areas no human being lives and you know nothing about. But I do, says God. I provide the food for every creature in every ecosystem on earth, whether you know where it is or not. I control the weather everywhere, whether it is in remotest parts of the earth or on Jupiter or Pluto or planets in other galaxies.

And speaking of the universe again, everything you have ever observed accounts for only 5% of the universe. 68% of the universe is made up of forms of energy you know nothing about and 27% of the universe is made of matter you know nothing about. And yet it all works perfectly together.

So where were you Job when I designed and built this universe? End of translation 😊

So let's step back and take a look at what God is saying in this series of questions. He is saying three things.

When you are overwhelmed by your problems, stop and think about God's capacity. It is very easy to get overwhelmed by your problems. After all, the problems surround us from every side. There are work issues, family issues, health issues, financial issues, justice issues. Issues of every kind. And it is easy to ask, why did God let this and such happen. Remember it is ok to cry out to God with our "why" questions, because even

Jesus Christ did that from the cross. However, once you do cry out to God, that is not the end of the process. Remember after Jesus cries, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” in the end he prays, “father, into your hand I commend my spirit”. That is what we need to do as well. After we cry out to God, we need to remember God’s universe crafting capacity and simply release our lives and problems into His hands.

Ok next I want you to think about this question from the mouth of God in verse 22 and 23. ***“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?”*** It is not possible to understand the literal meaning of this verse but its implication is this. Do you understand the plans of God? No just as we cannot understand fully how God makes everything work on earth or in space, we cannot fully understand the way He makes everything work in human life. And because of that, if something unexpected or disastrous happens we don’t need to be in despair but simply trust in God’s plans to transform a terrible situation into a good situation. The story of Job is a great example of just this. Even though God does not explain why Job went through what he did, in the end God does transform Job from the pit of misery into a life of abundance. This is important for believers to internalize. Whenever the situation seems overwhelming, remember that God has a plan for that. What God expects of us, in overwhelming situations is not to be a sell out. In extreme situations we will be tempted to compromise our faith as a whole. Or be tempted to compromise on our call. Or sometimes our compromise may even be smaller. Like giving into the temptation of the moment. Whatever you are going through, be it big or small, remember that God has a plan for that. God’s plans are higher than our plans.

God does have incredible capacity, and God’s plans are higher than our plans. But there is one more thing that God reveals about himself that is very intriguing.

Nestled within God's plans for the world is his method of keeping evil in check. Let me highlight the verses for you. God says this in verse 12 to 15 of chapter 38

***Have you ever given orders to the morning,***

***or shown the dawn its place,***

***<sup>13</sup> that it might take the earth by the edges***

***and shake the wicked out of it?***

***<sup>14</sup> The earth takes shape like clay under a seal;***

***its features stand out like those of a garment.***

***<sup>15</sup> The wicked are denied their light,***

***and their upraised arm is broken***

What these verses are saying is this. There are factors that influence evil activity in the world that God is watching out for.

According to a research paper published by Towers<sup>1</sup>, Chen, Malik and Ebert after analyzing 14 million incidences of crime in the city of Chicago from 2001 to 2014, they find and I quote,

*“significant dependence of crime on time of year, holidays, and weekdays. We find that dependence of aggressive crime on temperature depends on the hour of the day, and whether it takes place outside or inside. In addition, unusually hot/cold days are associated with unusual fluctuations upwards/downwards in crimes of aggression, respectively, regardless of the time of year”.*

According to the US Department of Justice, the highest amount of Adult<sup>2</sup> violent crime occurs from about 7 PM to 9 PM and then the rate of incidences reduces from there. It hits the lowest level at 6 AM when the sun begins to come out.

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<sup>1</sup> Towers S, Chen S, Malik A, Ebert D (2018) Factors influencing temporal patterns in crime in a large American city: A predictive analytics perspective. PLoS ONE 13(10): e0205151. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205151>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/offenders/qa03401.asp>

In other words those who study factors influencing crime have seen that time of day and weather play an important role in how much violent crime takes place. But here is the thing. God is saying that he controls the arrival of the dawn so that the wicked can be shaken out of the earth. The coming of the dawn is like denying the wicked the light they need to continue their work or having their arms broken, so as to stop many acts of wickedness. And just as God has very carefully set the universal constants like the speed of light in place and designed with perfection the architecture of the universe so also God has made very careful plans for how history rolls. And even beyond that he has also taken the same amount of care in controlling the factors that set limits on the wickedness that He allows to take place on earth.

Remember God has designed the foundations of the earth, made plans for history and is tightly controlling evil on earth with the utmost care.

So what does all this mean for us? Well it means three things.

Firstly, when we are overwhelmed, we have to place our problems next to God. To us are problems are big and God is nowhere to be seen. But this is a failure of our imagination. The fact is our problems may be big for us, but God is even bigger. Most people are masters of using their imaginations to amplifying their problems. We use our imaginations to think about 200 worst case scenarios. But as Christ followers, we need to use our God given imaginations in a God driven way to instead think about the immense capacity of God. That is what it means to magnify God. Magnifying God is not literally increasing the size of God. Magnifying God is to increase the size of God in our minds because our picture of God is too small. And to help us correct the size of God in our minds he uses a kind of shock therapy by asking us the question “where were you when I set in place the foundations of the universe?”. When we place our problems next to the true God with the help of our faith and imagination, then and only then will our problems look small in comparison to God.

Secondly, when we are stuck we need to ask God to show us His plan for us. Remember, God has a plan. And we have to access it. This takes prayer and it takes trusting in God's timing. It also takes avoiding the temptation of taking things into our hands, like Abraham did when we decided to have a child with Hagar instead of waiting for God's timing. Don't taken things in your own hands but trust in God's plan. Because know this, whatever you are going through, God has a plan for that.

Thirdly, sometimes we get overwhelmed by the evil we see. Innocent people are hurt and killed, those who lie seem to prevail and there is so much injustice in the world. It may seem that the enemy has the upper hand. But the fact is, evil has been defeated on the cross of Jesus Christ. God knows all the factors that enable evil to flourish and he has a very tight handle on it. If God did not keep evil on a leash we would all experience what the Cold War term, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) predicted. You simply have to take it by faith that God has a handle on evil. When you are appalled by the evil in this world, know that even evil is on a leash and is limited by God. Don't be overwhelmed by evil but know that God has overcome it.

Living a righteous life requires that we have an appropriate understanding of the capacity, plans and goodness. May we be a community that knows our God's capacity well, trusts His plans and is not overwhelmed by evil but is able to overcome it. Let us pray.