**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE RIGHT QUESTIONS FOR THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER**

**Job 38-40:5**

**INTRODUCTION**

It has been thirty-five long chapters since the Lord last spoke in the Book of Job. Thirty-five chapters since the Lord said to Satan in Chapter 2, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” The result of those words was thirty-five chapters of intense anguish and debate as God’s finest servant suffered like God’s worst enemy.

The main question in those thirty-five chapters has been, “Why? Why did God do this? Why do the righteous have to suffer so much? Why don’t we see justice in the world?” Job has asked this question in various ways throughout this book:

“Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?” – Job 3:11

“Why have I become a burden to you?” – Job 7:20

“Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?” – Job 7:21

“Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?” – Job 13:24

“Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?” – Job 21:7

“Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days? – Job 24:1

Job has asked, but God has not answered, and this has caused him tremendous pain. In 30:20 he says:

“I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me.” – Job 30:20

But now in Chapter 38, God finally answers him. God may have been silent, but he has been listening patiently, like a father with his upset son. He has waited with compassion for Job to express his anguish and to pour out his pain.

Now that Job is finished, it’s time for Daddy to set the record straight. God will answer his suffering servant. But as he does, he doesn’t give Job the answers he’s looking for. He doesn’t answer the question “Why”. Instead, he asks his own series of questions, not of himself, but of Job.

Job has been asking *why*. “Why have I suffered? Why have you done this? Why do you treat your servants like this?” But God challenges him to begin asking *who*. “Do you know who you’re talking to, Job? Do you know who I am? Do you understand who it is that has ordained the course of your life?”

Derek Kidner insightfully writes:

“God has changed the subject. All the obsessive talk about Job’s plight as punitive is left completely on one side. The inference could hardly be plainer: that Job and his friends have not only found the wrong answers; they have been asking the wrong questions.” – Derek Kidner

That is why these chapters are so instructive for us. They don’t just teach us the right answers. They teach us the right questions. They teach us the right questions to ask of ourselves, and of God, in the dark day of suffering.

The title of this sermon is **The Right Questions for the Righteous Sufferer.**

We will divide our text into three parts:

1. The Whirlwind
2. The World
3. The Wild

(1) **THE WHIRLWIND**

Verse 1 begins:

**1**Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind…

This is the first time since Chapter 2 that God has been referred to as the Lord. Job and his friends have referred to him by the more generic name “God”, but as this God speaks, we are reminded that he isn’t just God. He is the Lord. He is *Yahweh*, the God of covenant faithfulness who keeps his promises to his people. This is the personal name of God, and it reminds Job that the God of creation is *his* God, and that means that he will care for him as *his* God.

Verse 1 says that the Lord answered Job “out of the whirlwind”. Try to imagine what this must have been like. There’s Job, sitting on his ash heap at the town dump. He hasn’t washed in weeks. He is dirty and smelly. His body is covered with boils and worms. Children come by and laugh at him, his friends are fed up with him, and young Elihu is angry with him. But all of a sudden, the sky grows dark, clouds swirl overhead, thunder rumbles in the distance, and the wind begins whipping the dust around and anything that isn’t secured to the ground is blown away. Job himself is getting knocked off his ash heap as the people in the streets take cover, wondering if they’re going to survive. *That’s* when God speaks to him. *That’s* when God finally answers him.

God has done this before. It was on Mount Sinai, as God prepared to give Moses the Ten Commandments that we are told:

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.” (Exodus 19:16)

Job would have trembled as well, especially since it was a whirlwind that killed his ten children. Job was told in Chapter 1,

“Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and behold, a **great wind** came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” (Job 1:18-19)

We may not understand the dangers of the whirlwind, but Job did. In Chapter 30, he compared his pain and suffering to being tossed to and fro in a wind storm:

“You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.” (Job 30:22)

Job is terrified of the storm, and yet here, God speaks to him out of the whirlwind. That may seem harsh or cruel to some, but it’s not. Both the kindness and the severity of God are on display here, because even though God appears to Job in the whirlwind, God doesn’t consume him from within it. God doesn’t lift him up and dash him to pieces. He *speaks* to him out of the whirlwind. God is reminding Job of both his might and his mercy as Job stands before this catastrophic force of nature and *lives*.

And out of the whirlwind come these words:

**2**“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
**3**Dress for action like a man;
    I will question you, and you make it known to me.

God’s first question is this: “Who are you, Job? Who are you to darken counsel by words without knowledge?” That is what Job has done. By speaking in ignorance, he has darkened the counsel and wisdom of God that governs the world. Now he must give an account for what he has said. God tells him to prepare himself, to dress for action like a man, because he’s about to summon him before the whirlwind to be questioned.

To be questioned by God is a frightening prospect, but here, it is an act of kindness, because God questions him in order to teach him what is true: true about God, and true about himself. There are far worse things that God could have done than ask him questions, but that is what he does, so that Job would put his trust once again in this Holy God who speaks out of the whirlwind.

R.C. Sproul was once asked what his greatest burden is for the church. He answered:

“I am passionately convinced that the biggest need of the church is to develop a deeper understanding of the character of God. People need to know, cognitively and intellectually, who God is.” – R.C. Sproul

One of the lasting legacies of Dr. Sproul is his steadfast teaching on the Holiness of God. He pointed out that God only has one quality that is expressed in a three-form manner, and it is his Holiness. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts”, cry the Seraphim in Isaiah 6, “The whole earth is full of his glory.”

We must never presume to approach God in a comfortable, presumptuous manner. Instead, we must approach him with fear and trembling, remembering that the only reason why we can approach him without being consumed in the whirlwind of his wrath is because of the mercy of God and the sacrifice of Christ.

(2) **THE WORLD**

As the questions begin, God takes Job on a tour through time and space. He makes Job consider the wisdom with which God founded the world and sustains it with today. This leads to our second point.

In verses 4-7, the Lord asks:

**4**“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
    Tell me, if you have understanding.
**5**Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
    Or who stretched the line upon it?
**6**On what were its bases sunk,
    or who laid its cornerstone,
**7**when the morning stars sang together
    and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

God helps Job see what the earth truly is. It’s not just a big blue marble zooming across space. It’s definitely not just a happy accident created by random evolutionary forces. It’s God’s building project. God laid its foundation, determined its measurements, placed its pillars, and laid its cornerstones. And when he was done, all the heavenly hosts burst out in joyful song and worship. At the creation of the world, the soundtrack that blasted in the heavens was one of joy as the angels celebrated what God had made.

Now God asks, “Where were you, Job? Were you at that birthday bash for the earth?” The answer of course was no. Job didn’t exist. All of humanity didn’t even exist yet. But God was there, and he was building. He was building with wisdom and joy, so that all the earth could be filled with his glory.

Verses 8-11 come next:

**8**“Or who shut in the sea with doors
    when it burst out from the womb,
**9**when I made clouds its garment
    and thick darkness its swaddling band,
**10**and prescribed limits for it
    and set bars and doors,
**11**and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
    and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

This draws our attention to the third day when God created the waters of the earth and separated them from the dry land. Like a master craftsman, God was creating islands and continents and pools the size of oceans and separating them with borders and limits. But where was Job when he did all this? He wasn’t there.

There’s a deeper meaning behind these verses as well. The Bible often uses the sea as a symbol of chaos and disorder. That’s one of the reasons why Revelation 21:1 says that when John saw the dawning of the new heavens and the new earth “the sea was no more”.

It’s a fitting image. The crashing waves and the wild currents seem to have a life of their own, but God says that it’s all under his sovereign rule. Verse 9 says that he “made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band”. It’s a picture of a father tending his infant child. That’s what chaos, disorder and evil are to God. They are completely under his authority. He has prescribed limits the sea, he has set bars and doors for the sea, and he has said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.”

That’s precisely what God did when he set limits on what Satan could do. Satan was no more able to exceed those limits than a baby could revolt against its parents. God is completely and absolutely sovereign, and no force of evil or power of darkness can challenge him.

God uses more creation imagery to illustrate his sovereignty in verses 12-13:

**12**“Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
    and caused the dawn to know its place,
**13**that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
    and the wicked be shaken out of it?

God commands the morning. He awakens the dawn. Morning by morning, he commands the sun to rise and the dawn to know its place. And this is meant to remind us that justice is coming. The day of justice will come as certainly as the sunrise, when the wicked will finally be shaken out of the earth.

God asks Job, “Can you do that, Job?” Of course he can’t. Job is as powerless to create a world of justice as he is to make the sun rise. So, who is he to question God’s justice?

God’s challenges continue. In verses 16-18, God asks if Job has stood before the gates of death. Answer: No, but God has.

In verses 19-21, God asks if Job knows the dwelling of light and darkness. Answer: No, but God does.

In verses 22-30, God asks if Job knows how to govern the precipitation of the world, so that it can either bring destruction when it falls as snow and hail, or it can bring life when it falls as rain. Answer: No, but God does.

In verses 31-33 God asks Job if he has power to control the constellations, the billions of stars in the galaxy that seem to form pictures in the sky of hunters, and bears, and drinking gourds. Answer: No, but God does.

God rules all things, from the stars in the sky to the rain on the ground. Or as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

God’s providence is

his almighty and ever present power,

whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds

heaven and earth and all creatures,

and so governs them that

leaf and blade,

rain and drought,

fruitful and barren years,

food and drink,

health and sickness,

riches and poverty,

indeed, all things,

come to us not by chance

but by his fatherly hand.

(3) **THE WILD**

That is God’s tour of the world. Now he takes Job on a tour of the wild, leading to our final point.

We were told in Chapter 1 that Job owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He was used to having animals around. But God has a different kind of animal that he wants to show Job. Job’s animals were all domesticated. They stood around in orderly units in their animal pens and cared for by faithful servants.

God wants to take Job out of his nice and neat animal pens and bring him into the wilderness to see animals in their natural habitats, and to show Job that even there, God is at work.

Verses 39-41:

**39**“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
    or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
**40**when they crouch in their dens
    or lie in wait in their thicket?
**41**Who provides for the raven its prey,
    when its young ones cry to God for help,
    and wander about for lack of food?

Once again, the answer is “Not Job. God.” God doesn’t just create these animals and leave them to fend for themselves. He describes himself as hunting prey for the lions. When the baby ravens cry out to their parents for food, they’re really crying out to God. God is so intimately involved with every detail of his creation that even the smallest bird receives its food from his fatherly hand.

God draws our attention next to the mountain goats in 39:1-4. Does Job know when they give birth? Of course not, but God does. He is there numbering the months of the mother goat’s pregnancy. He is there as the young ones grow strong and leave home.

He is there delighting in the wild donkey, which is our next animal. This is a creature that demonstrates both the wisdom and humour of God. In God’s wisdom, the wild donkey lives in the most unlikely of places: the “arid plain” and the “salt land”. It lives in places that do not cultivate life. But that is where the wild donkey thrives. And in God’s humour, the wild donkey has some attitude. Verse 7 says:

**7**He scorns the tumult of the city;
    he hears not the shouts of the driver.
**8**He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
    and he searches after every green thing.

This donkey doesn’t just mope around like Eeyore. It exalts in its freedom. It looks at its domesticated brethren in the city who are driven along to do the bidding of man and says, “Ha, better you than me!” No one is domesticating this wild donkey anytime soon. It will roam the mountains free and feisty as it searches for its food.

Next up is the wild ox in verses 9-12, a beast too powerful and wild for man to tame. It’s as if God is saying, “The wild ox won’t serve you, Job, but it serves me. It won’t return your grain if you set it to work, but it obeys every one of my commands.”

Then comes my personal favourite: the ostrich. Verse 13 says:

**13**“The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
    but are they the pinions and plumage of love?

If you know anything about ostriches, you know that they have impressive wings. The only problem is that they don’t work. They can wave them around and flap them up and down, but the fact remains that they don’t do what wings are supposed to do. They don’t lift the ostrich into the air to fly, which is what wings are for. But God wants Job to know that this wasn’t an accident.

Nor is it an accident that the ostrich is a terrible mother. Verses 14-15 say:

**14**For she leaves her eggs to the earth
    and lets them be warmed on the ground,
**15**forgetting that a foot may crush them
    and that the wild beast may trample them.

That’s the ostrich for you. We know its wings don’t work, but it appears that its brain doesn’t work very well either. It just lays its eggs in the sand and says “Good riddance”.

But that wasn’t an accident. Verse 17 says she’s like this

 **17**because God has made her forget wisdom
    and given her no share in understanding.

The ostrich lacks wisdom because God has ordained it to be so. She flaps around without flying and lays her eggs where they can be trampled because of God’s sovereign plan. She can do one thing well, however. She can run really fast. Verse 18:

**18**When she rouses herself to flee,
    she laughs at the horse and his rider.

That’s what God has made. He has made a bird that can’t fly but can run faster than a horse. This is what God has done in his wisdom, and we have not. We wouldn’t dream up such a creature in a million years. So how can we question his wisdom?

Speaking of horses, God leads Job to consider them next in verses 19-25. This mighty beast used in warfare didn’t get its strength and beauty from man, but from God. God has given the horse his might and clothed his neck with a mane so that it laughs at fear and charges into battle.

Lastly, the hawk and the eagle in verses 26-30. They don’t just soar and hunt and build nests by naturally evolved instinct. They do so because of God’s understanding and by God’s command.

In summary, everything in the world and in the wild is the way it is because of the God who speaks out of the whirlwind, from the silly ostrich to the noble eagle.

In light of God’s immense knowledge, wisdom, and power in the world and in the wild, God asks Job one more question:

**1**And the Lord said to Job:

**2**“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
    He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

In chapter after chapter, Job has found fault with God. He has argued with God, presuming to teach God a lesson about how the world should work. But no longer. After this tour through space and time, Job’s response is exemplary:

**3**Then Job answered the Lord and said:

**4**“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
    I lay my hand on my mouth.
**5**I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
    twice, but I will proceed no further.”

That is how we should feel as well. We should feel small. In a world that is obsessed with inflating the ego and building up our self-esteem, it turns out that the remedy we really need is to stand in awe and wonder in the presence of a Holy God and feel small. Everything that we see around us is under the sovereign superintendence of God, so who are we to think that we could ever fathom the mind of God?

We are small, but in the wonderful mercy of God, we are also precious. We who are small, weak, and limited are also so precious to God that he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, so that those who are nothing could be treated as God’s very own children. It’s only in the cross that we see both the depravity and the dignity of man. It was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross, but it was his love that made him willing to suffer. The world shows us that we are small, but the cross shows us that we are infinitely valued and loved by the God who created it.

**CONCLUSION**

God has given us an incredible gift here in these chapters of Job. He calls us to look up at the stars, to look out at the wild animals, and to look at the wonderful cross, because that is what will make us lay our hands on our mouths and worship.

Derek Kidner helps us once again when he writes:

“[These words] will reassure him that his Maker is unimaginably wise and of infinite resource; but it will also bring it home to him that his ash-heap is not the center or circumference of the world, and that his perplexing role is intertwined with that of innumerable others.” – Derek Kidner

Whatever you’re experiencing, you need to know that your ash-heap is not the center or circumference of the world. It may seem so, because pain can become all-consuming, but it is not, because the same, sovereign God of the whirlwind, the world, and the wild is the same God who watches over your life. He is doing far more than we know in the world, and he is far more than we know in our lives.

When we suffer, it’s inevitable that we will ask “Why?” and that’s ok. But the more important question we need to ask is “Who?” Who is this God who created the world? Who is this God who feeds the lions, and instructs the eagles, and commands the stars? Who is this God who sent his only Son to die for sinners like us, so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God?

God is worthy of our worship. God is worthy of our obedience. God is worthy of our trust. So let us trust him today.