**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**GOD’S ANSWER TO OUR SUFFERING**

**Job 40:6-42:6**

**INTRODUCTION**

We come now to the Lord’s second reply to Job and to the climax of the entire book. If you have read Job before, you may have found the ending disappointing, because it doesn’t give us what we might have expected. Instead of giving us answers, it gives us animals. We’ve already seen it give us mountain goats, donkeys, ostriches and eagles, and today it will give us an extended meditation on two mysterious creatures called Behemoth and Leviathan. What do they have to do with anything? And how do they help us trust God when we suffer?

We want answers, but God gives us animals. It’s a marked departure from most of the book, which has often resembled a kind of ancient textbook on the philosophy of suffering. Why do we suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who is responsible for our suffering? How do we find meaning in our suffering?

Job and his friends have debated the answers to these questions for over thirty chapters without providing us with definitive answers. But now as God enters the picture and speaks, we expect him to set the record straight. We’re ready for God to reveal all the mysteries of suffering to us so that we won’t have any questions when hardship comes our way.

But God doesn’t do that, because the Book of Job isn’t a book of philosophy that leads us to answers. It’s a book of theology that leads us to worship. And that is what we need when we suffer. God’s answer to our suffering is himself, and that requires us to understand who we are in relation to who God is.

Derek Kidner writes this of God’s reply to Job:

“It cuts us down to size, treating us not as philosophers but as children – limited in mind, puny in body – whose first and fundamental grasp of truth must be to know the difference between our place and God’s, and to accept it. We may reflect that if, instead of this, we were offered a defence of our Creator’s ways for our approval, it would imply that he was accountable to us, not we to him.”

Job questioned God as if he were in the witness stand to be questioned by man, but it turns out that Job is on the witness stand to be questioned by God. That is one of the main lessons of this entire book. We can’t approach God as philosophers, but as children. Jesus said, “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There’s nothing wrong with seeking answers. It’s part of loving God with all your heart, soul, *mind*, and strength. But as we seek answers, we must not depend on those answers to determine whether or not we’re going to trust God. Instead, we must trust the Lord even when we don’t have all the answers, believing that he has withheld the answers from us in love.

The title of this sermon is **God’s Answer to Our Suffering.**

We will have three points today:

1. God’s Challenge
2. God’s Power
3. God’s Servant

(1) **GOD’S CHALLENGE**

God’s second speech begins in the same way as the first. He is still speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, a devastating force of nature that holds back from consuming Job so that he might be reminded of God’s majesty and God’s mercy. The Lord calls Job in verse 7 to “Dress for action like a man”. He is to “man up”, because the Almighty Maker of the Heavens and the Earth is about to question him. “*I* will question *you*, Job. Let’s see how you answer.”

God’s first question for Job is an alarming one:

**8**Will you even put me in the wrong?
    Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

That is what Job has done. He has condemned God in order to vindicate himself. If Job had to choose between God being innocent or himself, he would choose himself.

We can relate to that, can’t we? We would rather charge God with wrong than ourselves. The job that we wanted didn’t go as we planned, or the relationship we entered didn’t unfold the way that we wanted, and we think, “I did everything right. I waited, I prayed about it, I got people’s advice, but it still went wrong. This is God’s fault, not mine.”

When we have moments like that, we must hear God summoning us to stand before him and asking, “Will *you* even put *me* in the wrong? Will *you* condemn *me* that *you* may be in the right?” God is challenging us to consider who God is, and who we are. He is holy, and we are sinful. He is faithful, and we are faithless. He is wise, and we are foolish. He is love, and we are selfish. If that is who God is, and if that is who we are, then who are we to condemn God?

We need to have a healthier trust in the character of God, and a healthier mistrust in the character of man. If we are going to be quick to accuse anyone, it should be ourselves. Not God, not other people, but *ourselves*, because “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

God’s challenge continues in verse 9:

**9**Have you an arm like God,
    and can you thunder with a voice like his?

The arm of God is a symbol of God’s saving power and judgment, and his voice is a symbol of his creative power and authority. So in this verse, God is asking, “Can you do what I can do, Job? Can you save, or judge, or create, or command like I can?” Of course he can’t.

God continues. He challenges Job to step into God’s shoes and try to do what God does every single day:

**10**“Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;
    clothe yourself with glory and splendor.
**11**Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
    and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.
**12**Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
    and tread down the wicked where they stand.
**13**Hide them all in the dust together;
    bind their faces in the world below.

The thought of Job adorning himself like God is as preposterous as an ant trying to wear the robes of a king. It can’t be done. This isn’t just a child trying on his daddy’s clothes. This is an earthly creature trying to put on heavenly glory. Job is no more able to adorn himself like God than he could wrap the sun around himself.

Job can’t dress like God, and Job can’t judge like God. It would not end well for Job if he tried to bring down the proud or tread down the wicked, because either he would become like them or be consumed by them. Job is utterly powerless to bring about the justice that he so desperately wants in the world, so who is he to criticize or question God?

Job is not God’s equal. If he were, then God says in verse 14:

**14**Then will I also acknowledge to you
    that your own right hand can save you.

God’s main concern here isn’t answering Job. It’s humbling Job. Answering Job will only give him an inflated sense of his own wisdom and judgment. The only thing that will humble Job is a reminder of the infinite distance that separates him from this Holy, incomparable God.

(2) **GOD’S POWER**

God continues to highlight this distance as we move to our second point: God’s Power.

The next section draws our attention to two mysterious creatures named Behemoth and Leviathan. These creatures are meant to inspire fear and wonder. They are massive in scope and frightening to behold. It’s no coincidence that the biggest rollercoasters at Wonderland are named after these two beasts. The animals that God showed us in Chapter 39 – the mountain goat, the donkey, the ostrich, etc. – are like the rides in Kidzville where little children giggle. These animals are the ones that make grown men scream.

Behemoth is a land-dwelling creature. Verse 15 says that “he eats grass like an ox”. He is strong with a long tail like a tree trunk and with thick bones like tubes of bronze. He is an ancient creature, described as “the first of the works of God”, and he is unafraid. He could stand in the rushing currents of the Jordan River and not blink an eye. Most importantly, he is untamable. Verse 24 asks, “Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare?” The answer, like the answer to all of God’s questions like this, is “No, but God can.”

Leviathan is equally wild. You can’t put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook. You won’t domesticate him, tame him, or sell him at the market. If you lay your hands on him, you’ll enter a battle you won’t repeat, either because you’re defeated or you’re dead. This beast has a back “made of rows of shields” that are airtight and impregnable. His face is full of terrible teeth inside a mouth that breathes forth fire. When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid, because all their weapons are useless against him. It doesn’t matter if you use swords, spears, darts, javelins, clubs, stones. They all bounce off his armour. And when Leviathan swims, it leaves such a shining wake that it makes the sea look white-haired.

These are terrifying beasts. But what are they, and what are we to think of them?

There’s considerable debate about the exact identity of these two beasts. Some say that they’re dinosaurs, but I’m not quite convinced by that. Others say they’re exaggerated poetic depictions of common animals, with Behemoth being the hippopotamus, and Leviathan being the crocodile. The problem with that is I just can’t imagine God ending this epic book by calling us to behold the hippo or to consider the crocodile. Both of them are certainly fierce in their own right, but they don’t inspire the kind of terror described in these chapters.

The best interpretation I’ve come across is that these are mythological creatures. They are storybook monsters from the cosmological narratives of the time. We might compare them to the beasts of Greek mythology, like the hydra, or chimera, or the griffin. They are fearsome, untamable beasts that no one can stand before but God.

Whatever they may be, the most important point is not what they are, but what they point to. They point us to the spiritual forces of evil. They point us to Satan himself. They are physical embodiments of evil that really exists, and that is completely beyond our ability to control.

Physical beasts are used to illustrate spiritual beings elsewhere as well. The Book of Revelation describes demonic beings appearing as beasts. In fact, Revelation 13 speaks of two beasts. The first is a “beast rising out of the sea” like Leviathan, and the second is a “beast rising out of the earth” like Behemoth. Revelation 12 does the same thing:

**9**And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The strongest evidence for the connection between these beasts and spiritual evil is in Isaiah 27:

In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. – Isaiah 27:1

When we think about the devil, we aren’t just to imagine a little red fellow with horns and a pitch fork standing on our shoulders whispering in our ears. We are to imagine a fearsome, untamable beast like Behemoth or Leviathan consuming everything in its path. And as we try to resist them, we realize that we are utterly powerless to defend ourselves against them. We can’t marshal enough forces, or fashion the right weapons, or create the right strategies. We stand powerless before the awesome power of these magnificent beasts.

And then, we are to consider God’s words in verses 9-11:

**9**Behold, the hope of a man is false;
    he is laid low even at the sight of him.
**10**No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
    Who then is he who can stand before me?
**11**Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
    Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

If we can’t stand before Behemoth and Leviathan, who are we to stand before God? God made Behemoth and Leviathan. They belong to him. Everything belongs to him, whether it be the mountain goats and ostriches or the fire-breathing dragons in the sea. God says “Whatever is under the whole heaven is *mine*.”

We may be powerless before the terrifying forces of evil, but God is not. God stands over and above them as the sovereign, unchallenged ruler of all. In fact, his dominion over them is so complete and unquestioned that he describes himself in verse 5 as playing with Leviathan as one plays with a bird. He can put a leash on him so that his little girls can take him for a walk.

Satan may be strong, but God is stronger. The infinite distance that exists between God and man is the same that exists between God and Satan. God may have challengers to the throne, but he has no rivals. Everything under heaven and earth belongs to him, and to him alone.

(3) **GOD’S SERVANT**

How do we respond to this? How should we respond to this majestic revelation of the sovereignty and power of God? That leads to our final point: God’s Servant.

Job began the book as God’s exemplary servant, and he ends the book in the same way. In between, he has said some sinful things. He has impugned God’s character and doubted God’s goodness. But now, after God speaks to him out of the whirlwind, he remembers his place.

After God’s first speech, Job stood silent before the Lord. He laid his hand on his mouth and committed to speaking no further. That was a good start, but it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough for Job to simply stop saying what was false. God wanted him to start saying what was true.

That is what Job does in these verses:

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

**2**“I know that you can do all things,
    and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

This isn’t just a statement about what God *can* do. Job has known all along that God can do all things. God’s omnipotence has never been in question for Job. Here, Job is finally acknowledging that God can do all things without being challenged or questioned. God can do all things without compromising his justice or his righteousness, and no purpose of his can be thwarted.

Job continues in verse 3 and begins by quoting God:

**3** ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
    things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

Job is showing God that he’s been listening and taking his questions seriously. God has asked, “Who are you, Job? Do you know what you’re talking about?” Job replies, “No, actually I don’t. I thought I did, but I realize now that I have spoken of things beyond my understanding, things that are too wonderful for me.”

Notice what he says here. He doesn’t speak of things that are too mysterious for him, or things that are merely beyond his comprehension, but of things that are “too wonderful for me”. Job isn’t just throwing up his hands and saying, “Fine, you win.” He is bowing down in worship at the wonderful mystery of God’s sovereign plans.

David said the same in Psalm 131:

“O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.” – Psalm 131:1

The mystery of God’s ways ought to be marvelous to us. Our inability to answer all the questions about our suffering shouldn’t just teach us about our limitations. It should teach us about God’s lack of limitations, and that should lead us to stand in awe before this Holy God who knows all and rules over all.

Job quotes the Lord again in verse 4 before we reach one of the most famous verses in the entire book:

**4**‘Hear, and I will speak;
    I will question you, and you make it known to me.’

**5**I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
    but now my eye sees you;
**6**therefore I despise myself,
    and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job finally sees the Lord. He’s not talking about seeing a physical God with his physical eyes. God spoke to him out of a whirlwind, not out of a physical manifestation of himself. Job is talking about the difference between hearing about Niagara Falls, or the Rocky Mountains, or the Grand Canyon, and seeing them for yourself. They’re completely different experiences.

If I were to tell you about some beautiful place, you might say, “That sounds amazing.” I guarantee that you won’t say, “Can you describe it for me again, and again, and again?” If you’re truly amazed by it, you’ll book your tickets and go see it for yourself. And when you’re there, you will stand there and stare. You’ll immerse yourself in it and feel its beauty and wonder for yourself.

That’s what Job is talking about. He had heard of the Lord by the hearing of the ear, but now his eye sees him. And the absolutely amazing thing about this is that Job finally saw the Lord through what he heard. God’s awesome majesty was proclaimed to him. It wasn’t the whirlwind that led Job to worship. It was God’s words.

**CONCLUSION**

The same is true today. God still reveals himself to us through his Word. We are meant to go from hearing of the Lord to seeing him for ourselves when we read and hear his Word, a Word that culminates in the one the Apostle John called the Word made flesh. When we hear the Scriptures foretell the coming of the Messiah, or we read about his perfect life, or we dwell on his substitutionary death on the cross, or we rejoice in his glorious resurrection, we are to turn from hearing of God to seeing him.

And when we do, the only appropriate response is to repent. When we finally see the Lord, we repent of our sin like Isaiah when he beheld the glory of the Lord in his Temple and cried out, “Woe is me, for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips”. We repent like Peter when he saw Jesus perform the miracle in the Sea of Galilee with the fish bursting out of the nets and cried out, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” We repent like Job who encountered the God of Behemoth and Leviathan and cried out, “Therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the doors of the Wittenberg Cathedral, his first thesis was this:

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.” – Martin Luther

Repentance is nothing more than turning away from our sin and turning towards the Lord. We repent when we acknowledge that what we’ve been doing is wrong before the Lord, and we commit ourselves to living differently and obeying his commands. Repentance means that we stop trying to find our significance and satisfaction in the idols of this world and find them in God alone. We’re never going to be done repenting, because we’re never going to be done sinning. Not in this life. The entire life of believers should be repentance, because the entire life of believers continues to be polluted by sin.

If you don’t care about repentance, then Job helps you understand why. You’ve never truly seen the Lord. You may have heard of him, and you may think that you believe in him, but you don’t. Not really. You must go from hearing of the Lord to seeing him. The Bible describes this in various ways. You need to be born again. You need to be converted to Christ. You need to go from spiritual death to life. You need to repent and believe.

Perhaps you grew up in the church but have no idea what it means to live in daily repentance. Or perhaps you say that you’re a Christian but your life and priorities don’t reflect your profession of faith. If that’s you, then Job’s message to you is this: you need to be transformed. You need to go from hearing of the Lord to seeing him with your own eyes, because if you don’t, you’re not going to last. The fires of affliction and the temptations of this world will tear you apart and reveal that you never truly knew him. You need to see the Lord in his majesty and his mercy, you need to repent of your sins, and you need to put your trust in Christ.

For those who are suffering, Job has had many lessons for you, but the final one is this: you don’t need more answers. You need more of God. God’s answer to your suffering is himself. You’re not going to find freedom from your suffering by dissecting your pain, or deconstructing your childhood, or going out into the world to find yourself. You’re going to find freedom by being lost in the wonder and majesty of God.

And just like Job, you may find yourself seeing the Lord for the first time, not despite your suffering, but because of it. It’s when we’re walking through the darkest valleys that the light above shines the brightest. Your suffering is the scalpel that God is using to remove the scales from your eyes, so that you can finally see that Behemoth has been chained. Leviathan has been pierced. Satan is under the sovereign authority of God, and nothing will enter your life that God has not ordained. Every struggle, every trial, every ounce of suffering has been carefully measured by your Heavenly Father, and that should bring you tremendous comfort.

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

“It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity.” – Charles Spurgeon

The Book of Job assures you that you do not ever have to feel this “sharp and trying experience” of believing that God has lost control over your life. Everything under the whole heaven is his. We may not have all the answers, but we have all of God himself, both now and forevermore. So trust in him, see him with the eyes of faith, and worship.