

## **God's Response to Job**

### **Job 38-42**

Theme: In response to difficult and perplexing circumstances in our lives, we're encouraged by Job to be silent in awe before and trust in the Lord, acknowledging that he is much more than we know, that we are not the center of the universe, and that God's supreme concern is for our good.

Introduction: This morning I wanted to discuss a question that has been asked by each one of us at some point in our lives, and has also affected people throughout every stage of history. Why should a righteous person suffer? I heard of a man who had dedicated every area of his life to serving the Lord. He was a loving and committed husband and father who faithfully taught his children the ways of the Lord. He was a responsible and honest businessman who conducted his business affairs uprightly. He served faithfully in the church. He was even a benevolent neighbor who had a good reputation in his community. In every area of his life he was considered a noble and godly man. Yet this man suffered tremendous hardships all at once in his life. In a very short period of time—a matter of months, he experienced the loss of all of his possessions—his home, his property, and his savings. In addition, all of his children were tragically killed in an accident at one time. He had lived his life according to God's laws and had experienced unimaginable hardships, leaving him with that age-old and daunting question, Why has God allowed all this to happen to me when I have served him faithfully? He then entered into a crisis in which he seriously doubted God's goodness and justice.

In case you haven't guessed already, this is the biblical story of Job, a man whose life was marked by remarkable godliness and integrity, and yet who lost everything in a tragic series of events as the result of an apparent contest between God and Satan. To this story I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles as we look at the end of the story—at God's response to Job's complaints, as Job had spent many, many chapters (we're not sure the course of time that passed) moaning and crying out against the Lord. This is the story of a real man who suffered real hardships and who expressed his true feelings. I think most of us can relate to Job's feelings at some times in our lives when we feel that God has turned against us and has wronged us.

### **God is Altogether More than We Conceive Him to be**

God's speech to Job teaches us several things. It teaches us first of all that God is bigger than we think that he is. Job had made the mistake that we very often make: he thought that he had God figured out, that God should fit into his preconceived notions of what life should be like, and that

God was bound to act in a way that fit with his model of justice. I realize how warped we can be in our thinking as I listen to people who aren't living godly lives talk about how they think God should be. We think that we have God figured out.

It is as true for us as it was for Job: God is not altogether different than what we know him to be, but he is definitely altogether more than we know him to be. God isn't deceptive or schizophrenic; God is as he's revealed himself in Scripture, in Christ, and in our lives. But make no mistake: we don't know everything about him; he is much more than what we now know him to be. The illustrations from nature are found right here in God's words to Job. We think that because we've learned a few nuggets about the natural world through scientific research we can easily explain God away. We believe that because we've read the Bible through a couple of times or have walked with the Lord for some time we know everything about him. God's message to Job was largely, "I am much more than you think that I am."

I've had the opportunity to be around a few powerful or prominent people. In a few instances, I knew them before I knew the full extent of their position. It was striking when I found out exactly who they were and what kind of power they wielded; I saw them in an entirely different light. [Tony Gonzalez]

I wonder if in our casual and laidback culture, where we hate pretension, authority, or aloofness, we've lost some sense of an awareness of God's awesome holiness. [David's questioning of the giving of the law at Sinai] God is who we know him to be and no other, but that is not all. He is infinitely more. In the words of C. S. Lewis, he isn't a tame God. I'm convinced that when we arrive in God's homeland and we lay eyes on him, whatever our imagination had previously led us to believe won't even begin to touch who God truly is.

God's words to Job were aimed at pointing out how Job—as we often do—had overestimated his own abilities and knowledge. God would indeed speak a message of encouragement and comfort, but first Job had to understand his place. We're not truly in the position where we can match wits or fists with the Lord. Even his creation overwhelms us. And it is fitting for us, whenever we want to cry out to the Lord, to first of all bow before him in humility as we realize that he is God in heaven and we're here on earth. (By the way, this is one lesson that I've been a long time in learning.)

### **We Are Not the Center of the Universe**

Another item this passage teaches us is that planet earth doesn't revolve around us. I think we know this scientifically and objectively, but I wonder if in the course of our daily lives and in our private thoughts we actually are under the impression that life and this world are all about me—at

least my primary concern is about me. (I think that I accept this notion for the most part) I wonder if even when we're doing so-called noble deeds, our primary concern is upon our fulfillment or recognition. What if—just what if—this life and this world revolve around something that isn't even related to our happiness and well-being? What if the center of all things wasn't me but was something—or someone—else entirely?

I'd like to take you for a little visual journey just for kicks for a few minutes. This is my neighborhood...my county...my state...my nation...my world...the milky way galaxy. As difficult as it is to believe, I don't seem to figure into the middle or the most prominent part of the scene. As a matter of fact, I seem quite insignificant in it all.

What God was trying to teach Job was that there are vast and important matters that operate in this world that we call home. And as special as we think we are, we really are (even with all of our modern technology and science and knowledge) incapable of affecting very much of even this planet's processes, let alone any other planet. We think that we're powerful, and we boldly declare our worth before God and others. I hear pride reflected every day in people that I talk with and hear about on the news: "Do you know who I am?! You don't know who you're messing with!" People boast about their greatness and accomplishments. To them, along with Job, God would say, "Go ahead, command just one of the stars. Give orders to the ocean. Let's see how well they respect you." After thousands of years of studying and research, we can just barely explain some of the natural occurrences of the world which happen every day without our control or understanding.

Have you ever stood out beneath a night sky or in an open field and been mindful of how small you feel in your surroundings. I remember when we lived in Lone Pine and I would hike around the mountains. I remember feeling so small in relation to the vast rock walls that towered above me, the enormous trees that overshadowed me, and the miles and miles of mountainous terrain that stretched beyond my ability to see. What a humbling feeling. I wonder if that's somewhat how Abraham felt when God told him to look up at the stars—the innumerable sparkles in the sky—and to consider that God could count each one.

That feeling—far from giving me the impression that God is aloof and unconcerned about me—makes me overwhelmingly aware that God is big...and loving. *Big teddy-bear?* Possibly. But more accurately he's big enough to contain the span of this place I call planet earth—which happens to be rather vast and I'm reminded of that at times—in the palm of his hand, and he's concerned about me. That makes me feel pretty safe. I'm very concerned about my wife and sons. But every night, as I'm tucking them in bed and checking to make sure the doors are locked and that all the windows are shut and that they're safe and snug, I have to acknowledge to myself that I'm pretty

limited in my ability to truly protect and care for them. I can only do so much. But I'm well aware that there are people and forces that are much stronger than I am, that can do damage to my family and I would be fairly powerless to do anything about it. God isn't limited in that way, and that's why it's good to know that my family is kept by much stronger hands than my own.

You know, this is true not only in reference to space, but also to time. There have been times when I seriously thought that my situation was beyond God's control. And there have been times when God—quite humorously on his part—spoke to my heart and said, "Gosh, Zach. I've dealt with untold numbers of human predicaments for thousands of years across history and societies. I've handled world events and taken care of people in dire tragedies that would make your stomach churn. Yet I guess you've finally stumped me; I've finally met a situation that I just don't know what to do with." In other words, my situation—as important and as troubling as it is to me right now—is only a speck in the panorama of God's great plan that he's working out throughout world history to bring things toward his desired end. God is concerned with my troubles, but he's dealt with far bigger problems than mine.

This is the God who sat with Paul in his Roman dungeon, unaware what would be the outcome of his trial. This is the God who stood with Martin Luther as he was summoned to appear before the German court for his supposed heresy. This is the God who listened to the prayers of and provided for George Muller and his orphanage in Bristol, England. This is the God who today listens to billions of prayers lifted up to him, many from people in war-torn and deeply impoverished nations and whose problems are much more serious than my own. Is there any possibility that I can come up with a predicament that poses a challenge to the Lord?

And yet...

### **God's Supreme Concern is My Good**

The most powerful and the most important part of this passage is that God's supreme concern is my good. Most of you know the end of the story of Job: following God's daunting speech where he points out Job's insignificance in light of the vast cosmic forces that God controls, God does indeed bless Job with many more possessions and vindicates his servant by showing his concern for and approval of Job. Far from being a miserable pawn in God's cruel bet with Satan, Job was actually the recipient of God's profound love and concern. All throughout Job's ordeal, God had been patiently and carefully working out his plan in Job's life. Job, unfortunately, wasn't aware of the why's and reasons for his predicament. But God did have a special plan and the center of it all was, in

fact, Job.

It's a healthy to remember that this world is much bigger than Zach Schoening's wish-list, and that there are important operations and affairs that God oversees that don't touch my life at all. (For example, keep in mind that right now, God is sustaining some isolated creek in the mountains or some arctic system in isolated tundra even as he listens to my groaning.) But it's also important to remember that even as he controls these things, he's supremely concerned about me and my most intimate thoughts.

Even as I stand in that vast open field or beneath a starry sky and contemplate my smallness in relation to the universe's greatness, I'm somehow a very special piece in this gigantic puzzle we call life and the world.

Am I the center of the universe? I don't know about that. But let me tell you, as a father, I may be aware of significant political, economic, and social issues, I may be somewhat in control over what happens in some circles (albeit very small circles), and I may possess a limited degree of prominence, but when I'm with my kids, they are the only issue or people that matters to me. I'm not trying to be too sloppy with my theology. But I think that Scripture makes it very clear that if God is concerned about anything—as terribly powerful as he is—he's concerned about me.

Tragedies happen every day to believers who are genuinely committed to serving the Lord, just as Job endured a horrible series of tragedies. These kinds of events—we know—rarely make any sense. But if we're willing to stand in Job's shoes for just a moment, we can understand a little better how that God is altogether more than we know him to be, how we're not the center of the universe, and how God's supreme concern in all things that happen in the milky way galaxy is our good.