

Job 38:1-7, 34-41
Job's Journey:
Beyond the Whirlwind

What is it God wants from us?

Is life a matter of certain rules, a matter of keeping God happy so God will keep us happy?

Or is God so far removed from us that what we do really doesn't much matter at all?

Or is God a forgiveness machine?

Or is God a slot machine that dispenses miracles to lucky winners?

One way or another, we all answer those questions and form our own ideas about what God is like.

"There lived in the land of Uz a man of blameless and upright life named Job, who feared God and set his face against wrongdoing."

Remember? "Blameless and upright" speaks of integrity, of a true devotion to God.

And a little bit afraid. Offered sacrifices for all his children, just in case.

And when he lost everything—wealth, family, health—

all he had left was his integrity, his belief in God, his trust that this God has indeed intended well for him.

Job and Abraham (Isaac's sacrifice)

His three friends offer their answers, their explanations for Job's suffering.

Think of themselves as God's spin doctors.

Or maybe as God's accountants.

On God's ledgers, Job, you have come up short. God's got something against you. There's no other explanation.

Need to get right with God.

Are they right? Is there a ledger somewhere with your name on it?

What does God want of us?

Could we answer that question?

Job's friends understand God. God is keeping score.

But Job won't buy it.

His friends want to talk like accountants. Job approaches the situation as an attorney.

If I could face God, I could make my case, and God would understand me. I know my heart; I know where my allegiance lies, and it is with God. Let me make my case to God.

But God is nowhere to be found, Job says.

And Job is wrong.

God, of course, is much more concerned about Job's life than Job thinks.

God pointed Job out to Satan ...

Satan's response

Good question.

God is very concerned with how Job will fare.

Elihu's speech:

"The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore, mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit."

If this were a script, the next words would be "Enter God."

A whirlwind

Pentecost: "And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rushing of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."

God knows how to make an entrance.

God speaks.

Read vv. 1-4

God asks questions. Is this dismissive? Certainly there is some tone of putting Job in his place, but it's more than that. This is also a way of teaching. Socrates used it. Rabbis used it.

So did someone else.

The Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

In reply Jesus asked them: "What did Moses command you?"

A rich young man asked: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus asked him, "Why do you call me good?"

The Pharisees asked: "By whose authority do you do these things?" Jesus asked them, "Tell me, was John's baptism from God or from men?"

Does God answer the question of "Why?"

What could God have said that would answer that question?

How could God explain the loss of 10 children and all that Job had?

Sin? No. The punishment is disproportionate.

God's will? Then what kind of God is this?

C. S. Lewis: "The conclusion I dread is not 'There is no God,' but 'So this is what God's really like.'"

God doesn't give Job a policy statement. God gives Job a **vision** of the power at the center of all that is.

God leads Job into the mystery of creation.

The images:

"foundation of the earth"

"Who shut the the sea in with doors?"

"storehouses of the snow"

"numbering the clouds"

"hunting the prey for the lions"

"Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?"

"Is the wild ox willing to serve you?"

the ostrich

gives the horse its might

the wisdom by which the hawk soars

the command at which the eagle mounts up

Leviathan: a whale and more

"Pied Beauty"

Glory be to God for dappled things
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced--fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
 All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him.

- Gerard Manley Hopkins

I am God, God says, and you are not.

The wildness of the images, pictures of nature beyond human control, the rawness of power:

This is not the God we confine to definitions and dogma.

This is the God who constructed the mountains and arranged the stars, whose mark is on every molecule, whose breath gives life to every creature. This God is life.

Isaiah: "My ways are not your ways."

To the spin doctors for God, Job's friends, who insist upon playing accountant with other people's sins:

My ways are not your ways.

To Job, who feels it necessary to plead his case, to meet God in some holy court of law:

My ways are not your ways.

We keep wanting to make God a score-keeper, when, in fact, God seeks something more, something wondrous—a depth of relationship.

Job is led into that depth of communion:

Known in part in his earlier life, blessed and protected,

But more wondrously now, in his nakedness, in his raw honesty and hurt, in the bitterness of his tears, in the honest confrontation with God.

Job, here is what you have longed for all along,

When you made sacrifices for your children,

When you sat in tears and anger and confusion, hanging on with all your might to your faith in God,

When your friends offered their easy answers and you dismissed them.

This is what you wanted. You wanted the real, the depths of life. You wanted God.

"Here I am," God says.

And when you and I call out in our confusion and anguish,

The God who created all that is,

The God who is our breath, the Holy Spirit, the rushing wind and the still small voice,

The God who walked among us, emptied of divinity, human like us, the one on the cross looks down and says,

“Here I am. Come unto me.”