

## Facing God

### Job 38

Intro: In 1966, Elisabeth Elliot published a novel, entitled *"No Graven Image"*. It's a story about an intrepid 25-year-old woman, named Margaret, who determined that God was calling her to missions and set out for the Andes Mountains of Ecuador to start her ministry. She saw little progress at first, but eventually gained a hearing. Her primary goal was to translate the Bible into the unwritten Indian language – but first she needed to develop an alphabet.

Tim Keller writes, "Key to her work was the discovery of a man, Pedro, who knew the unwritten dialect she needed to learn in order to translate the Bible into that particular language. He began to teach her the language and her painstaking work of systematically recording and documenting it moved forward."

She is thrilled that God has blessed her with Pedro and one day was consciously thanking God for this answer to prayer as she made her way to Pedro's house. When she got there, she found that Pedro had a painful, infected wound in his leg. He clearly needed an antibiotic – and, in God's good providence, she just happened to have some penicillin in her bag with her. Pedro asked her for an injection and so she gave some to him. However, unbeknownst to her, Pedro was highly allergic to penicillin, and immediately began to experience anaphylaxis. He began vomiting and convulsing. She pleaded with God to spare his life. She reminded God that if Pedro died, so would the work of translating the Bible. But he did die, right there in front of her and his wailing wife and terrified children.

And that's basically how the story ends – there is no silver lining, no moral lesson, no explanation or event that would make sense of this senseless tragedy. There is just a confused young missionary struggling with the fact that her work was finished and that God had allowed Pedro to die - by her own hand.

What are we to do with a God like that? As Margaret grieves by Pedro's grave, she asks:

"And does He now, I asked myself there at the graveside, does He ask me to worship Him?"

Have you ever asked a question like that? What are we to do with God when he does devastating things in our life? As we stand beside the wreckage of failed marriage, or grieve the loss of a loved one or suffer the betrayal of a friend, does God - the God who allowed and even ordained these things to happen – does He now expect us to worship?

That is very similar to the question Job has been asking. Job's life has been decimated, by God, and it has shaken his faith. He believes that the world is not being run as it should be. God is treating him as though he were a great sinner – but Job is not a great sinner. This should not have happened. And Job would like God to acknowledge that fact. He has asked repeatedly for a chance to meet with God, for a chance to make his case, and to have God answer him.

31:35 "Here is my signature, let the Almighty answer me!"

Well, in chapter 38, Job gets his wish. The Lord comes to answer him.

## I. The Appearing

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind ....

God appears in a surprising way. He comes in a mighty storm – with booming thunder and lightning and a fierce, whirling wind. It is very possible that Elihu had seen this great storm approach; he speaks of it in chapter 37:1-5,

"God thunders wondrously with his voice."

It is very likely that this storm has now arrived and God speaks from the midst of the thunder and lightning and whirling winds. It is an appearing that is intended to shock and awe. When God appeared like this at Mount Sinai the people were terrified and shrank back with fear.

It is surprising in that it is not how we may have expected God to appear. Remember, Job is his most beloved, cherished servant. We know that from chapters 1 and 2. And Job has suffered tremendously – by the permission of God and the hand of the Satan. We may have expected God to appear to Job his wounded, suffering servant with a kind, gentle voice – much like a mother seeking to comfort her hurting child.

But He comes robed in His overwhelming majesty, making it clear that He has not come to comfort Job but to admonish and challenge him.

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

The verb used here for "dress for action" is to dress for a wrestling match. God is going to enter into a contest with Job. And God tells him the rules. "I will question you and you make it known to me". God isn't there to answer questions. He's there to ask them. And, in rapid-fire succession, the Lord goes on to ask Job question after question – 77 in all. It is a contest between God and Job. Who is in the right?

## II. The Test

- 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?

Derek Thomas points out that these questions seems unfair and irrelevant. Job is grieving. He’s been decimated by the loss of his children, the loss of his health, the betrayal of his friends, and the silence of God. Why now does God ask him about things he can’t possibly know – things like the moment of creation or the deeps of the sea or the storehouses of snow or and constellations of the stars? How are any of these questions relevant to the issue on the table? What about Job’s pain? Doesn’t his unjust suffering deserve a forthright response? Why doesn’t God answer Job’s tear-filled, broken-hearted questions instead of pounding him questions of His own?

This is precisely where many people walk away from the faith. The primary reality in their world is their pain and they demand God to respond to it. And if he doesn’t, they want nothing more to do with Him. Some of you may have been tempted to do just this. Others of you will be so tempted. But the primary reality in our world isn’t our pain. The primary reality in our world is God. The primary purpose in the world isn’t our comfort. The primary purpose in the world is the glory of God.

This is an incredibly relevant text for our day. This is where the god of the prosperity gospel and the therapeutic gospel and the social justice gospel show that they are not the God of Scripture. Those gods exist for our purposes. They are defined by our desires, our pain. They are designed to meet our expectations. We make an idol of God when we require Him to meet our expectations.

Hence the title of Elliot’s book *“No Graven Image”*. It’s taken from the second commandment. You shall not make for yourself any graven image. It’s a command against idolatry, fashioning god according to our preferences and assumptions. The point of the book is that while young Margaret was busy rescuing the Indians of Ecuador from their pagan idolatries – God was working to rescue her from hers.

If we are honest, we have our own, West Michigan middle-class expectation of what God should do in our life. We, like young Margaret, have a “god-of-our-plans”, a god who exists to help us attain the life we desire.

This is the challenge of God’s response. We feel the weight of Job’s cause. We feel his pain and we would like God to make that pain His priority and use his divine power to comfort him. But the God of Scripture doesn’t do that. He comes to rebuke him.

Anderson, “Here is a very great depth. There is a rebuke in it for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses.”<sup>1</sup>

Make no mistake. This is a rebuke. From God’s mouth to Jobs’ ear.

:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me.

:5 Who determined its measurements – surely you know.

Job had been publicly questioning God’s integrity and justice. In his complaining, he had acted as though he had knowledge about how the world should be run; knowledge which freed him to challenge the way God was going about it, and the Lord calls his bluff.

- “Remind me, Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know.”
- Verse 18 “have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare if you know all this.
- 19 Where is the dwelling place of light?..<sup>21</sup> you know for you were born then.

This is a rebuke. All the questions God asks reveal both the infinite wisdom and power of God and the incredible miniscule knowledge and ability of Job.

Who actually oversees all the events of nature - the clouds, the lightning, the rain, the snow and ice. Who orders all this?

- Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and way for the thunderbolt?
- From whose womb did the ice come forth? (29)
- Who has given understanding to the mind? (36)
- Who can number the clouds by wisdom? (37)
- Who provides for the raven its prey? (41)

God and God alone. In verse 31 and following God asks repeated questions pertaining to Job’s abilities.

- 31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?  
 32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,  
     or can you guide the Bear with its children?  
 33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?  
     Can you establish their rule on the earth?  
 34 Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you?  
 35 Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?

No. Job cannot. Only God can do these things.

We need to understand; God isn't mocking Job. He's rescuing him. He's bringing Job to a deeper understanding of who He, the Living God actually is. Job had molded God into the box of his own expectations – and God will not be bound that way. That's not who He is. He is God. He is not like us. He is not obligated to us. He exists for His own purposes and glory. And He knows exactly what He is doing.

### III. The Point

Notice how God ends his first speech.

**40:1–2** And the LORD said to Job: <sup>2</sup> "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it."

The point is simple: God knows what He is doing. There is no fault in Him. He is the Creator of all things, the Sovereign Lord and Ruler over all things, the God who ordains all things – and He does all things well.

But here's the stunning thing: God makes that speech to the man whose life has been utterly devastated by suffering and evil.

**Ash**, "Amazingly and soberingly, to the man whose wealth God has confiscated, whose family God has taken away, whose greatness God has removed and whose healthy God has ruined, God says in summary, "I have made no mistake....My counsel is perfect; I have got nothing wrong." (Ash 402)

Gods' speech does not answer Job's questions – at least not directly. He doesn't explain to Job why He has done what He has done. He simply reveals that Job didn't have "knowledge". Job doesn't see what God sees. He doesn't know what God knows. And he had no right to call God to account. The fact is that God did not owe Job an explanation. And He doesn't owe us one either.

**Derek Thomas**, “He doesn’t have to bend down and accommodate himself to our way of understanding and provide us with answers. He doesn’t. We have to trust him.”

To trust God when you do not understand Him is to treat Him as God. That’s what Margaret came to, at the end of the novel.

“God, if He was my accomplice, had betrayed me. If, on the other hand, He was God, He had freed me.”

Elisabeth Elliot had a hard time getting her novel published. Christian editors insisted that God would never treat one of His children like this. The story didn’t ring true. But, it was true. In fact, the novel was a retelling of Elliot’s own experiences. God does do hard and inexplicable things in our lives – and He calls us to trust Him and yes, even to worship.

**Tim Keller**: “Few people have expressed this idea better than Elisabeth Elliot, who, thinking back over her life, the deaths of two of her husbands, and countless inexplicable tragedies and troubles, reflected on the end of Job and wrote this:

“God is God. If He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in His will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to.” (Keller, 287)

Some of you are struggling in your faith because God’s ways don’t make sense to you. You can’t understand why your prayers aren’t being answered, why heartaches and tragedies and trials continue to pile on. You love the Lord. You desire to please the Lord. You just don’t understand why He seems to be dealing so harshly with you.

Let the Lord speak to you out of the whirlwind of your life. Lift up your eyes from your troubles and see Jesus. It is His voice in these verses. We know from Colossians 1:16 that “by Him all things were created”. He created this world and sustains it by the word of His power. The Jesus who is ruling this world and ordaining every event of your life is the same Jesus who went to the cross and laid down His life to make you His very own precious child. The Jesus who didn’t explain himself to Job came to this earth to die for him. He loves us. He knows what He is doing. He calls you to trust Him. To worship Him. Will you?

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Job, p. 287 quoted from Tim Keller *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, p. 286