

Let God Be God

Job 38:4-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the mandated lockdowns caused us all a tremendous amount of grief. Everyone feared what would happen to us regarding the health risks, our jobs, our church, and our relationships. Amidst the strife of the time, I recall coming up with creative ways to stay in contact and interact with my friends to preserve our relationship and fill the gaps of boredom and anxiety from being stuck in the house all day long. One way of doing this was an activity we came up with called “Wheeling.” Let me explain. “Wheeling” is where all my close friends would get on a phone call, and everyone would select a movie. Then one of my friends would put all the movies on a wheel and spin it to see which one we would watch together from a long distance as we talked on the phone. It was such a fun time and a tradition that still holds today.

Among the few rules of “Wheeling” was that if you put a movie on the wheel, you had to stay and watch, even if it was a movie you were not particularly fond of or had seen. That is, after all, part of the fun. It was originally designed to be a new experience for everyone, and it started great! People were considerate of the tastes of others, and everyone always tried to pick movies that no one had seen.

However, slowly but surely, things started to shift with this activity. As everyone began to learn the likes and dislikes of one another, it wasn’t long before some friends put movies on the wheel to spite one another. People began putting their favorite movies on at the expense of others who had seen and disliked them. Others started to pick films that were so outlandish and weird that no one wanted to watch them. The moral of the story: our friends don’t always have our best interests in mind.

I. Job Must Have Done Something Wrong!

And so, with that in mind, we look at the account of Job. For those of you who have yet to become familiar with this account, Job was a faithful man with much of the wealth and success that many mega-churches preach that faith can give you. Of course, we know that what he had was not due to the strength of his faith but a blessing and gift from God. In short order, Job lost everything. But by the grace of God, his faith was maintained throughout his time of trial and tribulation. During this time, Job had many nagging ninnies in his ear. Despite this and all he had lost, Job, as the scriptures say in Romans 12:12, was “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and constant in prayer.” Job is often quoted as an example of how to be amid the problems we face here. However, the situation that was surrounding him can tend to be overlooked.

What we read just a moment ago for our Old Testament reading is the breaking of God’s divine silence that had plagued this book up until this point. Our Heavenly Father brings to Job a

powerful message of humility and a demonstration of unmatched wisdom. Before this powerful message that we will look at a little later, Job was pestered by his supposed friends who were intent on answering the question of Job's plight. Somewhat like the ill intent of my friend's picking movies (though nowhere near as severe), these supposed men of wisdom were supposed to be Job's friends and have his best interest in mind. But rather, as Job sat mourning all that he had lost, they claimed that Job had to have done something to warrant such punishments. Having lost his family and wealth and having faced physical ailments, he did not humor their retribution theology, that is, insinuating that God was punishing him as vengeance for wrongdoing.

In this world, so many people believe they have the answers to all of life's questions and problems. Or maybe they think they have just the right movie to anger their "friend group!" Countless books, social media influencers, videos, and guides have come out of the woodwork to tell you exactly what to do when life's problems become overwhelming. Their followers praise them as if they have written a new Bible on everything you can do to make your life better, and the following of these individuals grow, convincing more people that the Messiah has come through an article titled "10 Easy Steps for A Successful Life."

Just like these "wise" men in the account of Job, all the answers they have to offer are that you must be doing something wrong if life's problems are not going away. So, play with a puppy, and maybe you'll feel better. By the way, that was a real suggestion from one of those articles. Or worse, you may have someone telling you that God is punishing you for what you have done in your life. That you didn't tithe enough, or that you didn't pray enough, or that you didn't love your neighbor enough. The secular world treats God as if He is the IRS. He knows what we must pay to get to Heaven, but it's up to us to figure it out. And if we don't figure it out correctly, then life here, and life eternally, will only be suffering. Like Eliphaz (one of Job's supposed friends), the secular world says with him in Job 4:8-9 and 5:2, "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed... Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy the simple."

II. God Must Be Making Mistakes!

But as we know, this is only sometimes the case. As Job mentioned in response to his other supposed friend Zophar, "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?" All around us, we have seen the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer. We have also seen the righteous flourish and the wicked perish. So, what is it then? Surely God must be making mistakes! One might ask, "Why is God making me endure this pain and suffering when I didn't do anything to deserve it?"

The Book of Job challenges this mistaken idea that personal sin is always the cause of suffering. Questions like these place God in the box of human reason, where God's rule of His creation is reduced to a formula that almost always implies that we did something to deserve worldly consequences. But God does not make mistakes. He is perfect in love and mercy, but He is also perfect in His will and judgment. We want a human answer to what is happening because there is only so much we can figure out. And so, in that, we see what's happening here on earth and not the otherworldly things that are happening otherwise. God is not angry with His children

or making a mistake. But like the case was for Job, God gives us these ailments and struggles as an opportunity to grow our faith and reliance on Him above all else. As the scriptures say in Hebrews 12:6, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Even to us as Christians, the world’s logic, like the logic of Job’s friends, can make sense to us and become very attractive. Practical wisdom can indeed be precious to even the most devout Christian. Just because this wisdom can sometimes make our lives easier or help alleviate our pain, that does not allow us to confine God to our own ideas of Him. That which has been revealed to us in His Word about Himself will always transcend our understanding, and it is also the only thing on this planet that can be considered reliable truth that is not corrupted by the sin of man.

As humans, there is an urge to tame God somehow and make Him say and do what we want Him to do to fit a narrative and push forward. And when He is outside this narrative, we begin to think that maybe He doesn’t love us, or we get angry. There is a tendency to look at Him and see a man instead of God. There’s a classic argument that I’ve heard from many atheists that goes something like this, “If God loves us so much, why does He let bad things happen to good people? God must be making mistakes!” If we don’t allow God to be God, then we will always be confused about what He has to offer us in the forgiveness of our sins paid for us by the blood of Christ Jesus our Lord. To evaluate God in this way is to deny what the scriptures command us about His Will in Proverbs 3:5-8, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”

III. Who Is Really in Charge Here?

And let’s be realistic and ask ourselves a question counter to the argument made just a moment ago. Who is really in charge here? Because in our Old Testament lesson for today, our Lord has an answer for us when we think that we have found the answers to all of life’s questions and have set a perfect life for ourselves. Job ends his arguments against his friends, saying, “Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!” And here are excerpts from the Lord’s response that we read just a while ago. Pay good attention to these words. The Lord responds,

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ... “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? ... Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.”

I ask you again, who is really in charge here? Is it you? Is it me? We all know the answer from these powerful words. Our God is the undeniable and irresistible creator and preserver of the universe who loved us beyond measure to give us an out from the wretchedness of this world.

IV. He Is Really In Charge Here

When God responded to Job, He was not responding in anger, but He responded in a way that Job might cross-examine himself. God was moving Job toward realizing his lack of wisdom regarding the things above. If Job wanted to play God, he must understand what it is exactly that God does. Our Lord moves us to the goal of salvation in all He says and does for His children. Amidst God's response, He demonstrates to Job that while Job may not have the capacity and the wisdom to rule over creation, God indeed does. Job is a human. God is God.

He is really in charge here. He is the one who says to every single person in the world, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13), and He is the one "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1st Timothy 2:4) When I consider the response from the Lord to Job, I often think back to the powerful words of the Lord to Moses in the account of the burning bush. Moses doubted that he could accomplish what the Lord had commanded him to do when it came to the exodus of the people of Egypt. In Exodus 4:10-12 it states, "But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.'"

Our Heavenly Father has undeniably made all things. Though our sin and depravity have corrupted what once was, the Lord God has made us His own by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Blessed be His name! We gather in this sanctuary today and every Sunday to offer our sacrifice of thanksgiving for all that He has accomplished through Jesus. Unlike the secular world that pines after the answer to all plight, we let God be God and follow His command to love one another as ourselves by uplifting one another in the faith. We certainly do not do this for our own self-gain or to serve our self-interest. We do this to be servants. Why? Because "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). Let us follow His example and give ourselves completely to the one who created us. As we await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us be brothers and sisters in His name so that we might all reach our mutual goal of being in Heaven. Let us let God be God.

Amen.