

January 17, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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GOD SPEAKS Job 38-39

Questioning is important to find out what the other person knows, or to identify any gaps or lack of understanding that precludes an accurate conclusion or solution to the problem. I'm not talking about questions from your two-year-old, though their inquisitiveness does give the opportunity to fill in gaps of knowledge. But sometimes questions simply cause more questions. Someone has well said that an argument is a question with two sides and no end.

Picture yourself in a courtroom listening to a trial. The prosecution and the defense are battling with questions. There are not very many indicative or affirmative statements until it comes time to present conclusions to the jury or the judge. In the process, you will observe maybe the defender stand and address the judge. "Objection your honor, counsel is leading the witness with questions." To which the judge will say either, "Objection sustained," or "Objection overruled." Or maybe the prosecutor will stand and say, "Objection, counsel's questioning is irrelevant."

In light of our text, Job might have felt like standing up and saying, "Objection!" In chapter thirty-eight, we discover that when God finally spoke to Job about this incredibly confusing situation, God asked twenty-six questions and offered very little instruction. In the next chapter, God asked sixteen more questions, bringing the total number of questions to forty-two. I guess that should be expected when God finally broke His silence and said to Job, "I will ask you."

Well God certainly did ask Job. But He didn't ask anything that Job or his friends or we would have expected. "This sustained interrogation is not just a formal peculiarity. The function of the questions needs to be properly understood. As a rhetorical device, a

question can be another way of making a pronouncement." (Francis Anderson, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, "Job," Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976, 269.)

And that is exactly what God was doing. God's pronouncement to Job through forty-two questions was quite simple: "I am not going to explain what happened to you, Job. I am going to remind you that I am incomprehensibly powerful and able to do whatever I deem to be right. And I want you to trust Me."

And that is exactly the lesson that God desires for you and me to learn. We make plans and establish grandiose goals without ever considering how God would like for us to serve Him. We end up in painful, hurtful circumstances, vow that it will never happen again, and spend the rest of our lives hiding from relationships or manipulating people to guard ourselves. We face deeply painful disappointments and assume that it is because God is either incapable or uncaring, so we take life into our own controlling hands. We would never admit something so horrible sounding. But that is what we do.

It is a bit odd that we keep ourselves in a dither like Job did trying to achieve, protect, pay back, when God only desires for us to have peace with Him. The only pathway to peace with God is complete trust in God—in all circumstances.

Could God Possibly Have Misunderstood?

What would cause us to even think of such a thing as the possibility that God misunderstood Job? We might wonder because, according to these last chapters in the book, God did not answer Job's requests. But God did speak. God's response to Job is arranged in two different speeches (38-39 and 40-42) with Job's repentance sandwiched between them.

The opening line of chapter 38 is, *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38:1)*. This is not just a reference to God with a more generic title like *el* or *eloah* which the counselors used. Rather, in this case the title is Yahweh. That is the most common name for God in the Old Testament where it is found 5,321 times. It is the more personal name for God, often attached to the trait of His

kindness to provide for His own. The caring but all-powerful and ever-existing God was about to take Job to task.

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. How ironic that much of Job's affliction was the result of the wind (a different Hebrew word) that destroyed his children. This picture is a good reminder that God can speak out of that which is typically destructive, just as He often does in many trials His people face—things or circumstances we think will destroy us.

God asked Job and only Job, "*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*" (v.2). Some of us would really like for that question to apply to any of the three miserable counselors Elaphaz, Zophar, or Bildad. We wish and think it should be applied to Elihu. But God was speaking to Job.

Furthermore, God told Job to act like a man. *Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me* (v.3). The phrase, *dress for action* means "gird your loins" and can be used as a challenge to fight, a challenge to do hard work, or a challenge to run a race. Here God challenged Job to get ready for action, ready to meet His inquisition. It was God's call for Job to step up to His challenge "like a man." Words like that are considered to be an offensive challenge in our age. But, from Job's day (c.a. 2,500 BC) until just before this present day, it was an acceptable challenge for a man to act like a man, step up to your responsibility, do what is expected of you.

The evidence in this book shows that Job had stood strong like a man in the face of his wife's chiding him to curse God and die, telling her she was foolish, which she was. Job stood staunchly, unwavering in his conviction against all of his friends' false accusations. But now God challenged Job to step up his responsibility. God's challenge flowed from Job's repeated expression of his desire to question God. It is as though God called Job's bluff. As if God said, "Okay Job, you want to talk, you want an answer? Answer these questions."

In the multitude of questions, God spoke about His amazing governance of His whole creation. It almost appears like God just threw out a random sampling of many different parts of His Creation. But it was far from random. God questioned Job's involvement in, knowledge of many various aspects of creation, which we all interact

with every day. God's questions referred to some animate, some inanimate parts of creation—but all stuff we take for granted all the time.

Let's look at the list. In chapter 38 God questioned Job about the earth (vv.4-7), sea (vv.8-11), morning (vv.12-15), the underworld (vv.16-18), light (vv.19-21), snow (vv.22-23), storm (vv.24-27), rain (vv.28-30), constellations (vv.31-33), clouds (vv.34-38), the lion (vv.39-30), and ravens (v.41). Coming to chapter 39, we see that God questioned Job about the Ibex (vv.1-4), wild donkey (vv.5-8), wild ox (vv.9-12), ostrich (vv.13-18), horse (vv.19-25), hawk (v.26) and falcon (vv.27-30).

Of everything that is mentioned, only the horse was domesticated by humans, and there is no certainty that God didn't mean wild horses here. Everything in the list was/is beyond Job's or any other human's control. It is true that we domesticate animals, but we have no control over them in their natural wild habitat. Our fellow humans have become quite accurate in predicting the movement of stars or planets and weather patterns, but no one controls them. But God has every detail of every part of His creation under perfect control.

God asked pertinent, soul-searching questions, but He didn't address any of Job's requests. Why did God launch into these long series of questions about creatures and elements of creation? Why didn't God answer Job's particular requests? Job desired to argue his innocence to God. He said, "*But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God*" (Job 13:3). Job wanted to speak his side of the story and then have God answer him. "*Only grant me two things, then I will not hide myself from your face: withdraw your hand far from me, and let not dread of you terrify me. Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me. How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy?*" (Job 13:20-24). Job just wanted his side to be heard! "*Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!*" (Job 19:23-24).

The suffering saint was very confident that if God would communicate with him, God would pay attention to him and agree

with him. He pled, *“Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge”* (Job 23:3-7).

At the very least Job longed for God’s written indictment against him. It is almost as though Job cried out to God, “Just tell me what I have done wrong!” Specifically we read, *“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! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me as a crown; I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him”* (Job 31:35-37).

In essence, Job’s argument was threefold: 1) He desired for God to give a clearly stated indictment about his sins or wrong doing; 2) He desired for an opportunity to meet God in court where he could defend his righteousness; 3) He wanted an explanation from God about why he suffered so much affliction.

But, in two lengthy replies God did not address any of Job’s concerns. The overall tenor of the speeches from the counselors, but especially from Job, have centered around authority, justice, and righteous judgment in reward and punishment. Are those not within the sphere of God’s righteousness? Yes, but at first glance it would appear that God’s words and questions do not even address the reason for Job’s affliction while he was doing everything humanly possible to maintain a right relationship with God.

Nor did God present a list of Job’s sins. Job’s supposed friends certainly didn’t hesitate to point out his sin. They hinted at sins and named possible sins. They concluded that Job’s sin was the cause of God’s justifiable punishment. Elihu bluntly told Job, *“But you are full of the judgment on the wicked; judgment and justice seize you”* (Job 36:17). The finite, ignorant, unknowing friends had no problem accusing Job of sin. But omniscient, omnipresent God did not mention Job’s sin. The closest God came to identifying a sin of Job was His opening statement, *“Who is this that darkens counsel by*

words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). And yet because he was human, Job had to be guilty of something.

Now we need to stop for a moment and consider how this text applies to us. What do you demand from God? Surely we all have burdens. We deal with relationship issues with friends, co-workers, family that weigh heavy on us. We struggle with health issues that seem unresolvable. We face financial stress that no amount of work or planning seems to alleviate. Or many people fight the silent war with a particular sin that we would like to have out of our lives. And on and on the list goes.

Struggling with affliction or stressful circumstances is not a strange thing for God’s people. No doubt we all cry out to God for relief and then wait for His answer. What reply has God given you? Surely we have talked to God about the burden. Surely we have asked Him to give us wisdom and even to miraculously change our circumstances. Surely we have found promises in God’s Word that give us hope. And what is the general nature of the promises we find in the Bible? The answer to that question leads us to the critical question.

The Critical Question.

“Do you trust Me?” Why would God imply that question to Job of all people? It would be easy to conclude that Job had faith. There is little doubt from the opening introduction to the man named Job, that he had faith in God. The brief testimony about him leads us to believe that Job served God faithfully. There is no question that his faith in God motivated him to try to live purely before God.

In fact, based on Job’s responses, it would be easy for us to conclude that Job trusted God completely. Consider his initial response to the shock of trial. *And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”* In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:21-22). Later he was even more adamant about trusting God and concluded, *“Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face”* (Job 13:15a).

None of us would even think of accusing Job of not trusting God. Doubtless nearly all of us would have given up trusting God by this point. But at the same time, Job looked quite human in some ways. Is it at all possible that Job struggled with control issues? He does look like a helicopter parent when he even made sacrifices in behalf of his adult children in case they had sinned (1:5). That would be kind of like you giving a tithe for your children just in case they are not and God might not bless them. Is this a control issue?

Was Job so determined to have an audience with God because he wanted to influence God about the circumstances of his life? Does it sound like Job wanted to give God advice like we often do? On one hand, he had such faith in God; but on the other hand, Job still wanted to maintain control. Having expressed complete trust, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him;” Job then told the truth about his feelings. The next thing we read is, *Yet I will argue my ways to his face*” (Job 13:15a).

That brings us to the even more important question. “Do I trust God?” Certainly, I can believe incredible truths about God. I can identify the affliction in my life and even acknowledge that God at least allowed it even if He did not author it. I can beg God to make it go away . . . but He doesn’t, and the problem doesn’t go away. I can read all the promises of God in the Bible but nothing seems to change. I can argue about why I am justified for being angry or hurt, but the anger or hurt is still there. I can sulk, weep, grow bitter, plan revenge until I finally destroy my ability to think correctly, become a victim to my own emotions, and eventually become almost nonessential in life. And finally I don’t hear God speak any more.

The answer to the important question, “Do I trust God?” is, “I don’t trust God until I die to myself.” God allows, yeah authorizes, the trials in our lives to increase our faith in Him. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (James 1:2-4).

We cannot increase dependance on God and keep our controlling hand on our circumstances too. That is an error being taught in the Evangelical church today. Often people are being taught

to trust the promises of the Bible, but at the same time being taught in detail how to control circumstances and people who impact them. Full, complete trust in God begins when I lay down my arms of rebellion against God and take up His case against myself.

That is exactly what we will discover Job the righteous man finally figures out. *Then Job answered the LORD and said: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further”* (Job 40:3-5). This is why God did not answer Job with a detailed explanation of his problems. God’s greater desire was the saint, Job, would move closer to Him by letting go of what he could not control anyway and trusting God completely.

It is important for us to consider Job’s conclusion, which we will do in detail next week. However, his lesson for us today is revealed in that he was content to have God not explain why circumstances were so harsh and nonsensical. The child of God is beginning to understand the truth about God when he or she is able to rest in Him regardless of the extent or intensity of the unfavorable circumstances. We need to trust our Good Shepherd enough to sing sincerely:

Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart,
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets, supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings,
Thine is love indeed.
(*Jesus I am Resting*, Jean Pigott)