

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Out Of The Whirlwind

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Job 38-42

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Job chapter 38. If you are new today and are just checking in with us on this series, we are looking at the story in the Bible of a man named Job. Job is a good man, a righteous man but he is a man experiencing some serious trouble. In a very short span of time he has lost his business, his prosperity, his health and his 10 children, all of whom were killed in a freak storm. Bad things are happening to this good man and he is wrestling with that and trying to think and pray his way through it. His friends come to bring him counsel and the things they say are ultimately judged by God as being heretical; the things they say are mostly true, but ultimately inadequate and terribly unhelpful in Job's case. Their view is pretty simple. God is holy, people are sinners. The worse you sin, the worse God punishes you. Therefore Job is having a very bad time because he is a very bad sinner. Their counsel to Job is pretty straightforward: STOP BREAKING THE LAW! But Job can't think of any particular sin he's done that would justify his horrible circumstances. He agrees that God is holy and that all people, including himself are sinners, but he doesn't feel that this understanding is sufficient to explain all the complexities of the moral universe. Sometimes good people suffer and bad people

prosper. So what gives? Even Elihu who reached further than any of the rest was unable to settle the matter. We need God to show up. This week, God shows up.

Let me take a minute and set this up visually for you, because this is a very pictorial narrative. Just imagine for a minute these five men sitting around a campfire in the Ancient East. As Elihu is finishing his speech, a storm appears to be gathering off on the horizon and Elihu as a very skilled orator begins to make use of this storm in his exposition. You can easily spot these references. He starts to remark on the clouds that are darkening the sky and hinting of lightning:

Also with moisture He saturates the thick clouds; He scatters His bright clouds. ¹²And they swirl about, being turned by His guidance (Job 37:11-12. NKJV)

Then he starts to remark on the rain:

Likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain of His strength. ... ⁸ The beasts go into dens, and remain in their lairs. (Job 37:6-7. NKJV)

You can easily see this in your mind can't you? As Elihu is describing the majesty of God he sees all of these very handy illustrations. "Look at the gathering clouds, do you understand how clouds form? Neither do I, neither do the beasts but even the animals are smart enough to hide themselves from what is coming. They don't assume God is angry with them, they understand the multiplicity of his concerns but they are smart enough to crawl into their dens to wait it out."

It seems that this gathering storm was quite unusual because it was now both to the north and south of them; they are starting to be surrounded by it:

Why *are* your garments hot, when He quiets the earth by **the south wind**? (Job 37:17. NKJV)

He comes **from the north** as golden *splendor*; with God *is* awesome majesty. (Job 37:22. NKJV)

The gathering storm which provided Elihu with natural illustration has become a cyclone, a whirlwind that surrounds them and all of the sudden they realize that this is no natural storm. This is the appearing of Almighty God. Out of the whirlwind, GOD SPEAKS.

¹Then **the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind**, and said:

² “Who *is* this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?

³ Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. (Job 38:1-3. NKJV)

God speaks out of this swirling storm and he says: “There has been a lot of talk down there about who I am and what I am doing so I have decided to join the conversation. But it will not be to answer your questions, it will be to ask and demand of you some answers.” When God shows up he doesn’t participate in the dialogue, he LEADS IT and REFRAMES IT. “I have some questions for you son, so buckle up.”

God’s conversation with Job lasts the better part of four chapters and so we obviously can’t read it straight through, but if you’ve read it then you know that it is one of the strangest conversations in all the Bible. For 37 chapters Job and his friends have been asking questions about why bad things happen, what is the nature of suffering, where does evil come from, how does God govern the world and distribute blessings and then finally, after 37 chapters of questions God shows up and he doesn’t answer one of them. He asks more questions. He takes Job on a tour of the cosmic zoo and he takes him to the Science Centre and he gives him a tour of the Museum of Natural History and all the while he never bothers to let Job in on the secret we all know. He doesn’t tell Job about the conversation he had with Satan back in chapter 1 that started this whole thing. Not a word. Job goes to his grave NEVER KNOWING ABOUT THAT! This is a very strange ending to a very strange story. So what do we make of the things God said and the things that God did not say? Who is this who speaks in the storm? First of all we are confronted with the fact that this God is:

God Of The Storm

1. He is a God who insists on humility as the starting place for relationship

That’s the major thrust of God’s disclosure to Job. He doesn’t show up with a pad and pencil and carefully catalogue Job’s questions so that they can each be answered in turn. Rather he takes him on a tour of the universe and he says: “Look at that giant sea creature! Could you tame that beast? Could you reel that bad boy in on your hook? How about that giant land animal. Do you even know its name? Could you hook him up to your cart and make him your beast of burden? Look at those stars! Do you understand how they move and why they exist? Where were you

when I made all of this? Where were you when I set limits on the oceans and established the seasons?” It may be that God lifted Job up into a vision or a dream like state or maybe he lifted him up by the hair and flew him around the cosmos, we don’t know, but the point is Job became convinced, if he ever he doubted that God is large and in charge. God asks Job at one point in the tour if he had any further questions and Job in new found humility said:

Then Job answered the LORD and said:

⁴“Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth.

⁵Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.” (Job 40:3-5. NKJV)

The Hebrew word that is translated there as “vile” is *kaw-lal* and it really just means “light” or “small”. Job has come to the conclusion that God is large and in charge and that he is small and should be silent. Job has no more questions. He has seen God and now he sees himself and now he feels at peace in the relationship.

What we learn from this is that God does not debate his existence or authority with arrogant people. The starting place – let me say that again, **THE STARTING PLACE** for a relationship with God is humility. The Bible is uniform in this declaration, Old Testament and New:

But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2. NRSV)

It is not for nothing that the Beatitudes begin with:

³“Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3. NKJV)

James the brother of the Lord said quite simply:

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6. NRSV)

God does not bargain or debate with proud people. There are no proud people in heaven. That is why the ABC’s of the Gospel begin with **ALL HAVE SINNED** and fall short of the glory of God. You cannot be in a relationship with God until you understand that **HE IS HOLY** and **YOU ARE NOT**. Most of the people I know who are unsaved are unsaved for this reason, they will not admit that they are sinners in need of a Savior. They don’t want to be told that they aren’t good

enough. Well, gather in my friends and let me be the first to tell you: YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH. I don't care what your U9 soccer coach told you or your pee wee hockey coach told you or what your kindergarten teacher told you. You are not good enough. Your righteousness is as filthy rags in the eyes of a holy God. Now that is not to say that you have no worth or dignity, of course you do, but it is to say that your worth and dignity does not in any way compare with the holiness of God. It is simply not in that category. You are not just "less than God" you are WHOLLY OTHER THAN GOD. God is Creator, you are creature. That is a whole different kettle of fish. Getting that straight is the only way to begin a relationship with God. He is not your buddy, he's not your role model, he is not the captain of your team. He is your Creator and your Lord or he is nothing to you, worse than that, he is opposed to you.

That is the first and most important thing you need to know. I know it sounds a little harsh but it is what it is and it is necessary. Calvin said it this way:

It is needful, then, that God speaks to us with such vehemence, since He sees that we would never draw near to Him until He had thus prepared us. It is true that He will win some by the simple Word; but when He sees that others are peevish, He sends some trouble, some affliction. (John Calvin, *The Lord Answers Job* from Sermons From Job, Dekker; p. 292.)

God has to be harsh with us because we are naturally proud and arrogant. He has to tell us who he is, in no uncertain terms, and he has to tell us who we are in no uncertain terms. Calvin goes on to say:

When the Scripture shows us who we are, **it is to empty us of all pride.** (ibid., p. 293.)

So let me apply that very directly. If God wants to save a man he must first show him his poverty, his smallness and his helplessness. He must bless the man with the opportunity for humility. Now let me apply that on a macro scale. If God wants to start a revival; if God wanted to start a new, large scale, world wide revival in our day, he would begin by knocking down our idols and battering all our high towers. This by the way is not pure prophesy, it is simple exegesis. This is what the Bible says must precede the day of the Lord:

For the LORD of hosts has a day against **all that is proud and lofty**, against all that is lifted up and high;

¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan;

¹⁴ against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills;

¹⁵ against every high tower, and against every fortified wall (Isaiah 2:12-15. NRSV)

The Bible says that when God wants to start a revival he begins by knocking down everything you trust in, everything that makes you think you are something that you are not, everything that makes you feel secure and god-like. He shows you that you are naked. He shows you that are a created thing. And then and only then will he deal with you as the Creator.

I'm not predicting here, but I am prophesying. I am standing in the truth of Scripture and projecting forward. If God wants to start the great end times revival he will knock over the things in our culture that fool us into thinking we are little gods. He will kick over our idols. He will humiliate science, he will strip and expose democratic capitalism and he will afflict us with poverty, insecurity and plague. It may already be happening.

There is a book out right now that makes me laugh. It is called "Abundance" and it was written by Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler. The argument of the book is basically that even though things look pretty bad, it looks like health care costs are going to overwhelm federal budgets, it looks like our supplies of fossil fuels will not be able to support all of the societies that are now industrialised and that we may crash hard back to the stone age, it looks pretty bad. BUT. Science will rescue us! Science will come up with new fuels and new medicines that will allow us to continue living like gods and kings! Are you buying that? Me either. Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

Our gods are already falling. Where are the green energies we were promised? Where is the cure for cancer we've been hoping for? What is the answer to the fact that we can no longer afford to be healthy and that we can no longer afford the peace we used to purchase with overwhelming military superiority? All our gods are falling! Democracy has proven too weak and people too stupid to vote themselves out of trouble. We seem to elect pretty people who are pretty human after all. The problems, all of the sudden, seem bigger than our gods. There is a storm brewing all around us. Even the animals are smart enough to seek shelter and I believe that God is in that storm and that he will speak. He will humble us, he will show us who he is and who we are and it will open a door for Gospel evangelism, the likes of which we have never seen before.

The second thing we learn about the God who speaks in the storm is that:

2. He is not a God who delights to answer every question we may have

As you read through the record of this conversation you cannot help but notice that God doesn't answer a single question that has been asked in the first 37 chapters of this book. It is bizarre, it is surreal and it is the point. God is not obligated to answer our questions. He is not the answer God. This book is not *The Big Book of Answers to Questions People Have*. It just isn't. It is all God delighted to tell you in order to prepare you to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

That's what it is. Now, understanding that is super important. Too many Christians think they have a bunch of answers that they don't have. And as a result they make fools of themselves and they disparage God. When Calvin preached on this passage he said that the wise Christian knows he only knows that which God has taught him.

That is how we shall be wise, being governed by the Spirit of God and by His Word. However, when we shall not find in the Word of God what we wish to know; let us know that we must remain ignorant; and then after that we must keep our mouths closed; for as soon as we may wish to say a word, there will be no knowledge; there will be only deception in us. (ibid., p. 299.)

Limit your certainty to things clearly taught in Scripture. Whenever you feel like talking about something NOT in the Scriptures, DON'T. Shut up for Jesus. As soon as you start talking about something that has not been clearly revealed to you in Scripture you are opening yourself for demonic deception. Wow. There are a 100 conversations we need to bring this teaching into and we just don't have time to do that this morning, so lets just agree that we are not the answer people. We are the faith people. Not in the sense that we are just living without any knowledge, this isn't the blindly stupid church, this is the "Content With God's Word" church. We know what we know but beyond that, we don't know. This is absolutely fundamental. The job of the church is not to invent new and suitable truths for every generation. No. Our job is to steward and pass on OLD TRUTHS that were revealed by God through Jesus Christ and then entrusted to faithful others. We are not in the business of making new truths. We are in the business of stewarding OLD TRUTHS TOLD US BY GOD. That's it. That's all we've got. Now we freshly apply, we constantly study and never exhaust these truths. The Holy Spirit helps us with both. He leads us into all truth and suggests all manner of helpful application and usage but we are not seeking NEW, OTHER, NEXT Revelation. We are not innovators. In fact the Bible says we have to kick out innovators because innovators usher in the devil.

⁹Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;

¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 1:9-11. NKJV)

The Greek word translated as abide there means to remain in. We don't forge new territory, we REMAIN in the truth we were given and if anyone comes to you with a new doctrine then you kick them out of the church or you share in their deceptions. Friends, if you ever hear me say from this pulpit: "I want to teach you something new. I want to share with you a doctrine that Martin Luther never heard of. I want to teach you something so brilliant that Augustine didn't even know of it and that Polycarp was ignorant of and that the disciples never knew of." If I ever say that you need to fire me and burn down my office. A pastor is not supposed to be an innovator, he's supposed to dig again the wells of our Father Abraham, he's supposed to take you back to the rock from which you were hewn and the quarry from which you were dug and to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to him.

When God shows up and speaks to Job he doesn't say anything new. He says old things about creation and Sovereignty and justice and holiness. Things that had been said to Abraham and Moses and things Job already knew. He took him deeper into things he already knew and it was enough. Job finds peace and contentment without new and innovative information. It wasn't about the answers, it was about the truth and Presence of God in things he already knew. The message Christian is this: when you suffer, look deeper into old faith, not further afield for new answers.

Well very briefly, in the few minutes we have left let me quickly complete the story for you.

After God Speaks....

After God speaks four things happen in rapid succession.

1. Job repents
2. God grants a verdict
3. Job prays for his friends
4. The Lord restores and blesses Job

All of that happens in chapter 42. We could preach a 45 minute sermon on each of those things but we don't have time for that so let me just draw out for you from this entire narrative six big picture principles.

Big Picture Principles:

When you are suffering and going through difficult trials:

1. Deal in what you know

There is such a tendency to think that if you knew the answers you would feel better or have peace or be able to move on, but that is just not true. Peace is not found in the answers. Peace is found in God alone. That's why God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. Do you remember what kind of natural disaster took the life of Job's 10 children? A whirlwind. God is saying: "It isn't answers you need, my son, you just need to know that I was in that storm. I was. I am. Lean into that."

That is really all you need to know about this book. The message of this book is that healing doesn't come from finding the answers. Most of the answers people offer aren't true anyway. Healing comes from knowing that God did not have a nap when these things happened to you. He was there the whole time. He is large, he has always been in charge. He is good. He loves you. He sees you. He hasn't changed. Healing and peace are found in that place. Lean into the things that you already know and trust that those things are sufficient for your trial.

2. Receive all suffering as education

As we read through the arguments we agreed with Job and Elihu that not all suffering is punishment for sin. Some is. There are predictable consequences for stupid and sinful behaviour. We do often reap what we sow. But. Not all suffering should be received as punishment for sin. However, all suffering can and should be received as education. Whether you brought this on yourself or whether this is some special, mysterious outworking of God's Sovereign plan, doesn't really matter when it comes right down to it for you personally. God is

speaking in it, either way. So embrace the learning. Let the sickbed be the amphitheatre of revelation. Search out your heart and see if there is any sin in there. Learn something new in the unchanging Word of God. We can't always know the cause, but we can always partner in the consequences. Why-ever it be, let it be for your growth, your sanctification and for God's glory.

3. Remember to worship

When bad things happen to you that you do not understand the natural tendency is to run away. Its no different than when we were kids. When our parents chastened us or refused to give us something we wanted, what did we do? We packed a little bag of stuffed animals and fishy crackers and we ran away. Maybe we got to the end of the driveway, maybe we made it to the neighbour's house but we all run away! Its human nature. Its also stupid and unhelpful. Turn around and go back. The answer is not at the neighbour's house and it takes more than fishy crackers to survive out there in the big bad world. Lean into worship. You don't need new friends or new answers, you need an old friend and the old answer, now more than ever.

4. Look for his appearing

Don't lose hope, God will show up. Jesus was always warning his people to stay awake, to stay watchful, to look for his appearing. Don't be like the bridesmaids who fell asleep, don't be like the servant who got distracted, look for his appearing. Long for his appearing. Cry out day and night to the Lord: "How long o Lord! When will you come?" These are good prayers and the Bible is full of them.

The scoffers will tell you that your waiting is stupid and that God doesn't care or that God doesn't exist. Peter told this truth to a group of suffering Christians:

³knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

⁴and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? ...⁵For this **they willfully forget**: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

⁶by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water.....

⁸But, **beloved, do not forget** this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward ^fus, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise,

and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:3-10. NKJV)

God's delay in appearing is related to his concern that as many people as possible come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. God may have reasons to delay but he will come. He will come and you will have what you seek. Do not forget what you know is coming.

5. Minister in the meantime

Use your pain to make you better at love. Paul said:

³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4. NKJV)

Do you know that if God wanted to raise up a church that was really good at ministering to people who were going through confusing and destabilizing tribulation, he would likely cause those church people to suffer various and temporary afflictions. Why-ever suffering comes, embrace it as an opportunity to get better at love and ministry.

6. Believe in final justice

Many pagan scholars who study the Book of Job just as an outstanding piece of ancient literature actually hate that at the end God blesses Job by restoring his health, his wealth and by blessing him with a gaggle of beautiful children in his later days. In typical post-modern fashion they would prefer a story with a more tragic ending. Why shouldn't Job just be happy to have seen God? Why should he be rich, healthy and happy again? But this wasn't a story written to amuse Post-modern grad students, it was a man's life! And sorry to disappoint you, but God does bless and show kindness to his children. We are soul and body and God blesses us spiritually and physically – IN THE END. That is really the last lesson we should take with us as we leave this book. In the end, God will bless us spiritually and physically. The promise of eternity is not just that we will worship God and see him face to face, it is that, but it is also about streets of gold, banquets, children who never die in infancy, houses that are too large to imagine and rivers that provide fresh water for everyone and trees whose leaves heal every disease. Those are physical blessings and if you don't want them, pass them over. There is a reason that these promises are

at the end of the Bible and at the end of this book of the Bible. We need to know this and we mustn't forget it. There is a recompense. Evil is punished – no one gets away with anything. And righteousness is rewarded. You lose nothing in the end. You may be parted with things or loved ones for a season, but if you are in Christ you can LOSE NOTHING. All is waiting for you, and more on the other side. The Bible tells us to comfort one another with these words. Peace is found in this place. It is not “pie in the sky” though it is foolishness to those who are perishing. For me, for you, it is strength in the storm. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.