

At night, you can come across many different animals around town. Cats, dogs, birds, bats, maybe a fox. But can you imagine turning a corner and coming face to face with a lion?

That's what happened a couple of weeks ago to residents of an Italian seaside town, south of Rome. A circus was in town and one of their lions escaped! So for the next 5 hours, this lion prowled around the streets as police and circus staff tried to catch him.

The people from the circus tried to convince everyone that their lion posed little danger. That he would never attack anyone. But as you can imagine, officials were not convinced and warned everyone to stay at home.

And rightly so. Even when they're in a cage at the zoo these animals are terrifying. They make us feel very small and vulnerable.

But if that is the case with a lion, then how much more should we be humbled in the presence of God.

That's what happened to Job. Job suffered intensely when he suddenly lost his wealth, his health and his family. As a result, he was plunged into a deep struggle.

His friends blamed him for his suffering. They said that it was because he was hiding sin in his life. But Job knew that was wrong.

But that still left him with the question that we're all familiar with – the question of why? Why would God let this happen? Why would a good God make him suffer so much?

And so, as we've read, he protested his innocence. He argued his case. But he went further. He put God in the dock and questioned God's justice. He called on God to explain himself. In his final speech he declared: ["I sign now my defence—let the Almighty answer me."](#) Job 31:35

And finally God did that. He answered Job, but it wasn't in the way Job expected. And it didn't produce the outcome Job imagined. Job didn't get the answers he'd demanded. Instead he got a fresh vision of how great God is, and how small he was! He recognised that God is God, and I am not!

Job 38:1-15: ["Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said:](#)

[2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?](#)

[3 Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.](#)

[4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.](#)

[5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?](#)

[6 On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone—](#)

[7 while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?](#)

[8 "Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,](#)

[9 when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,](#)

[10 when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,](#)

[11 when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt'?](#)

[12 "Have you ever given orders to the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,](#)

[13 that it might take the earth by the edges
and shake the wicked out of it?](#)

¹⁴The earth takes shape like clay under a seal;
its features stand out like those of a garment.

¹⁵The wicked are denied their light,
and their upraised arm is broken.

1. The Revelation of God

In the previous 35 chapters, when Job and his friends argued with each other, they all said some things that were right, and some things that were not! So we have to be careful about how we read those chapters. We can't just quote them as something to be automatically accepted.

But chapters 38 to 41 are different. That's because this is God speaking. "Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm." Job 38:1 God's words can always be trusted. And God's words are ultimately what we need. Not the thoughts and ideas of people. But the revelation of God.

And as he often did in the Old Testament, here God spoke to Job out of a storm, a whirlwind, as a demonstration of his power.

But today, God reveals himself to us through his Word as "All Scripture is God-breathed." 2 Timothy 3:16 This is what we need to understand the truth. Not the ideas of experts or philosophers. But the inspired Word of God! As we read the Bible God speaks to us.

But even more than that, we need the ultimate revelation of God. Do you remember how the Book of Hebrews begins? "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Hebrews 1:1-2

Jesus is God's final and complete revelation. He is the incarnate Word of God. And so if we want to know God's truth, then we need to go to him.

2. The Ruler of The World

So this is God speaking. But he didn't say what Job wanted. Job wanted God to answer his questions. He wanted God to explain why his life had fallen apart so disastrously? Why could he allow such injustice? But when God spoke, it was he who asked the questions:

²"Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?

³Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me." Job 38:2-3

When people came to Jesus with their accusing questions, he often turned this around and asked them questions that revealed their heart and challenged their ideas.

And this is what God did here. He questioned Job, challenging what he had said. Revealing that Job had spoken out of ignorance about God and how he ran the world. That Job was not suffering because he had sinned, but that in his suffering he had sinned.

And so he told Job to brace himself. To get ready for the exam that was coming.

And so for the rest of chapters 38 and 39, God questioned Job in 15 sections. So we can't look at them in detail this morning. But each section challenged Job about who is in charge of this universe?

a) The Order

God started with challenging Job about where he was when God properly and purposefully ordered this world: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" Job 38:4.

His challenge was that if God had put this world together so well that "All the angels shouted for joy." Job 38:7, then who did Job think he was to question how it works?

God also said that in his creation, he placed boundaries for the sea. "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt." Job 38:11 In the Bible, the sea is often a symbol of disorder, danger and death. So God allows evil

and suffering in his world, but he has set boundaries for it. He says to it, this far and no farther – just like he did with Satan in chapter 1 and 2.

But even that will not always be so, because one day evil will be destroyed. Job can't give orders to the morning, "That it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?" Job 38:13. But God can, and God will. One day he will speak light into this world and banish all the darkness.

b) The Sky

Secondly, God challenged Job about his control of the sky. That included his control over the snow and hail "which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?" Job 38:23. Also destructive forces of lightning and wind, life-giving rain, and the bone-chilling ice and frost.

Job wasn't in control of any those things. Only God understands when and why they happen.

That's the same about the stars and constellations and the clouds. No wonder David wrote: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Psalm 19:1

c) The Wild Animals

Then thirdly, God challenged Job about his understanding and control over wild animals.

- "Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions." Job 38:39
- "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?" Job 39:1
- "Do you give the horse his strength?" Job 39:19
- "Does the eagle soar at your command?" Job 39:27

Job used to be a farmer. He had sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. He'd a level of control over them. But he had to concede that these wild animals were outside of his care and control. He was not the ultimate ruler of this world. God was.

And this world still speak to us today: "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 1:20

But these examples also taught another powerful lesson. God claimed that he was the one who provided for the lions, ravens, hawks and eagles. But he did this through the suffering of others. About the eagle, he said, "His young ones feast on blood." Job 39:30

This is the food chain that we learned at school. But this is how God has ordered his world. One lives through the death of another. And maybe this is to show us a deeper truth. That the ultimate gift of life comes from the suffering of another.

Job struggled with the apparent unfairness of his suffering as an innocent man. But this foreshadowed the suffering of the ultimate innocent man, Jesus, who would die so that we could live. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24

3. The Reticence of Job

So God asked all these questions, and he invited Job to give his answer. But look at how Job responded:

"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you?"

I put my hand over my mouth.

⁵ I spoke once, but I have no answer—
twice, but I will say no more." Job 40:4-5

Job recognised that compared to God, the Ruler of this world, he was so small, so unworthy. And because of that, he didn't want to speak any more.

Before this, Job had a lot to say. Chapter after chapter he complained about what was happening. He gave out about the injustice of his situation. He accused God that he was not running this world correctly.

But now, he had nothing to say. In the presence of the Creator and Sustainer of this world, he had no words to argue his case.

4. The Reality of Evil and Suffering

But God had more to say, because he wanted Job to go further. And so he again called him get ready for a second round of questioning. But this time he spoke more directly about what Job had done:

⁸ “Would you discredit my justice?

Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

⁹ Do you have an arm like God’s,
and can your voice thunder like his?

¹⁰ Then adorn yourself with glory and splendour,
and clothe yourself in honour and majesty.

¹¹ Unleash the fury of your wrath,
look at every proud man and bring him low,

¹² look at every proud man and humble him,
crush the wicked where they stand.

¹³ Bury them all in the dust together;
shroud their faces in the grave.

¹⁴ Then I myself will admit to you
that your own right hand can save you.” Job 40:8-14

In his suffering, Job was tempted to think that he’d the right to question God, to criticize his actions, complain about his decisions. In his eagerness to prove his own innocence he’d condemned God.

But God asked him if he could really take his place and be the judge of the earth. Could he really rescue the righteous and punish the wicked better than God? Could he really impose justice on this world and save himself?

It was a bit like the movie Bruce Almighty in which Jim Carrey plays a TV reporter who complains to God so much that God gives him the power and opportunity to try run the world himself. It’s an irreverent movie, but it does show how ridiculous it is for us to think that we could run the world better than God!

a) Two Monsters

And to emphasise his point, God spoke at length about two monsters.

“Look at the behemoth.” Job 40:15

“Can you pull the leviathan with a fishhook?” Job 41:1

Now there are different ideas about these creatures.

- Some think they are describing, with a bit of poetic licence, real animals that are around today – usually the hippopotamus and the crocodile.
- Others think that they are prehistoric animals that were around in Job’s day but have now become extinct.
- Others think they’re mythological creatures, that God used to symbolise death and the devil. Revelation 12:9 says: “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”

b) God is in Control

But whatever answer you come up with, Job seemed to know what God was talking about. And the point of this was that although no person can tame these huge, powerful and terrifying monsters, these are God’s creatures. They’re under God’s control.

About the behemoth, “He ranks first among the works of God, yet his Maker can approach him with his sword.” Job 40:19

About the leviathan, God said, “No-one is fierce enough to rouse him.

Who then is able to stand against me?

¹¹ Who has a claim against me that I must pay?

Everything under heaven belongs to me.” Job 41:10-11

If people have to humble themselves before the power and strength of the behemoth and leviathan, how much more should they humble themselves before God!

So whatever these creatures were, the message is clear. However terrifying and dangerous they were, God is more powerful. He is stronger. He is in control.

And that was a powerful message for Job. He’d experienced the terrifying impact of evil and suffering. He could not protect himself or his family from it. It was beyond his control.

And yet, however overwhelming it was, however meaningless this felt – God was in charge. The powerful forces that attacked him were under God's control. They were accomplishing his purpose and plan.

c) God Will Overcome

And so although none of us can defeat the powers of evil and suffering in this world, symbolised by the behemoth and leviathan – God can. And God will.

One day evil will be overcome. One day suffering will come to an end. One day Satan will be defeated.

And this morning we've celebrated this reality because this victory over evil and death was accomplished on the cross. There Jesus *"disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* Colossians 2:15

Of course, we're still waiting to experience the fullness of that victory in our lives. But it is coming. And next time we will see it foreshadowed so wonderfully in Job's own restoration.

5. The Right Response of Job

I don't know how much of this Job understood, but he understood enough. He said, *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."* Job 42:5

Job had always believed in God. He'd heard about him and trusted in him. That's why he was *"blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."* Job 1:8

But now Job saw God with much greater clarity. He better understood his power and wisdom.

a) Reverence

And as a result he bowed before God in renewed reverence:

*"I know that you can do all things;
no plan of yours can be thwarted."*

³*You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?'*

*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know."* Job 42:2-3

This was God's answer to Job's questions about evil and suffering. God is God, and we are not. He works out everything in conformity with his will, but we don't have the understanding, knowledge, wisdom, perspective to condemn this. We can't judge him because his purposes are higher than what our minds can take in.

b) Repentance

So Job repented. *"Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* Job 42:6

In the presence of God, Job realized just how wrongly he had spoken and he repented of it. This was Job being restored to a right relationship with the Lord. Back to that life of wisdom – of fearing the Lord and shunning evil. Back to accepting who God is and humbling himself in worship and dependence and trust.

Conclusion

And that is where we need to get to. When we struggle with the reality of evil and suffering in this world, we may think we need to know why these things have happened. We may want to understand what God is doing so that we can decide if he is good or not.

But instead, what we really need is to be restored to a right relationship with the Lord. We need to again see that God is God, and we are not. See that he is

- The ruler of this world,
- The Designer, Creator and Sustainer of life
- The one who is in charge, even of the monstrous and terrifying forces of evil and suffering.
- So he is the one who works out everything in conformity to his will.

And so we need to humble ourselves before him and put our trust in him!

And how can we do this? Well, we can look at creation as God instructed Job to do. But we can also look to Jesus, the one

who said, [“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”](#) John 14:9

It is when we fix our eyes on Jesus, that we see the true power and wisdom of God. Not displayed in awesome acts of strength and might. But in the apparent weakness and helplessness of the cross.

It is at the cross that we see Jesus

- Defeating the powers of evil.
- Bringing life from death.
- Fulfilling his good purpose through the wicked actions of others.
- Doing more than we could ever have asked or imagined.

And so if this is who our God is, then surely we should humble ourselves before him today. Trust him with all of our struggles and unanswered questions. Leave them in his hands for him to deal with. And hold onto the assurance of his unconditional and unchanging love. And that [“In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”](#) Romans 8:28

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November 26th 2023