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Job 38-41 (The Message)

“I am God, You are Not God”

Narrator:

Life goes by fast. It is short. It is difficult. And it is unfair.

Job’s tale is one we know well. And his advice-giving friends sound like the people that we know.

Eliphaz says, “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.”

Bildad says, “If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then God will rouse himself for you and restore you to your rightful place.”

Then Zophar offers a bit of proverbial wisdom, “But a stupid person will get understanding when a wild ass is born human.”

So... only wicked sinners are punished. Only the truly repentant are restored by God. And if you don’t realize that goodness is rewarded and evil is punished, then you must be proverbially stupid.

Job rejects all these repeated arguments in favor of his own innocence and in affirmation that he’s not inferior to his friends when it comes to wisdom or understanding. He just may have more courage to go directly to God to get some answers.

It’s a bold action Job takes to fire off such prayers to God, and eventually God is roused to respond, but not exactly as Bildad supposes.

Job says, “Answer me!” and a mighty voice thunders out of the eye of a violent storm.

God:

^{38:2-14} “Job, Why do you confuse the issue?

Why do you talk without knowing what you’re talking about?

Pull yourself together! Up on your feet! Stand tall!

Now I have some questions for you,

and I want some straight answers.
Where were you when I created the earth?
Tell me, since you know so much!
Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that!
Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?
How was its foundation poured,
and who set the cornerstone,
While the morning stars sang in chorus
and all the angels shouted praise?
And who took charge of the ocean
when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb?
That was me! I wrapped it in soft clouds,
and tucked it in safely at night.
Then I made a playpen for it,
a strong playpen so it couldn't run loose,
And said, 'Stay here, this is your place.
Your wild tantrums are confined to this place.'

¹²⁻¹⁵ "And have you ever ordered Morning, 'Get up!'
told Dawn, 'Get to work!'
So you could seize Earth like a blanket
and shake out the wicked like cockroaches?
As the sun brings everything to light,
brings out all the colors and shapes,
The cover of darkness is snatched from the wicked—
they're caught in the very act!

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ "Have you ever gotten to the true bottom of things,
explored the labyrinthine caves of deep ocean?
Do you know the first thing about death?
Do you have one clue regarding death's dark mysteries?
And do you have any idea how large this earth is?
Speak up if you have even the beginning of an answer.

Narrator:

“Stop and consider the wondrous works of God.” That’s what Job was told by the young upstart Elihu who would have the last word before God jumps in. Oddly enough, sometimes that helps when we are in distress. When we are feeling small, insignificant, and definitely put upon by the weight of the world, remember who God is. Stop and consider God’s wondrous works. God is the creator. We are creatures. God is God, and we most certainly are not God. “Speak up if you’d like to jump in – Job.” No yet, you say? God continues his line of questioning:

God:

¹⁹⁻²¹“Do you know where Light comes from
and where Darkness lives
So you can take them by the hand
and lead them home when they get lost?
Why, of *course* you know that.
You’ve known them all your life,
grown up in the same neighborhood with them!

²²⁻³⁰“Have you ever traveled to where snow is made,
seen the vault where hail is stockpiled,
The arsenals of hail and snow that I keep in readiness
for times of trouble and battle and war?
Can you find your way to where lightning is launched,
or to the place from which the wind blows?
Who do you suppose carves canyons
for the downpours of rain, and charts
the route of thunderstorms
That bring water to unvisited fields,
deserts no one ever lays eyes on,
Drenching the useless wastelands
so they’re carpeted with wildflowers and grass?
And who do you think is the father of rain and dew,
the mother of ice and frost?
You don’t for a minute imagine
these marvels of weather just happen, do you?

³¹⁻³³ "Can you catch the eye of the beautiful Pleiades sisters,
or distract Orion from his hunt?
Can you get Venus to look your way,
or get the Great Bear and her cubs to come out and play?
Do you know the first thing about the sky's constellations
and how they affect things on Earth?"

³⁴⁻³⁵ "Can you get the attention of the clouds,
and commission a shower of rain?
Can you take charge of the lightning bolts
and have them report to you for orders?"

Narrator:

How about now, Job? Are you ready to take on God's knowledge as your own? God knows the light from the darkness. God knows the forces of nature. God knows the ends of the universe. God even knows the weather. Tell me, do you know those things? No. You don't. Well, God didn't think so.

God:

³⁶⁻³⁸ "Who do you think gave weather-wisdom to the ibis,
and storm-savvy to the rooster?
Does anyone know enough to number all the clouds
or tip over the rain barrels of heaven
When the earth is cracked and dry,
the ground baked hard as a brick?"

³⁹⁻⁴¹ "Can you teach the lioness to stalk her prey
and satisfy the appetite of her cubs
As they crouch in their den,
waiting hungrily in their cave?
And who sets out food for the ravens

when their young cry to God,
fluttering about because they have no food?"

39 ¹⁻⁴ "Do you know the month when mountain goats give birth?

Have you ever watched a doe bear her fawn?
Do you know how many months she is pregnant?
Do you know the season of her delivery,
when she crouches down and drops her offspring?
Her young ones flourish and are soon on their own;
they leave and don't come back.

⁵⁻⁸ "Who do you think set the wild donkey free,
opened the corral gates and let him go?
I gave him the whole wilderness to roam in,
the rolling plains and wide-open places.
He laughs at his city cousins, who are harnessed and harried.
He's oblivious to the cries of teamsters.
He grazes freely through the hills,
nibbling anything that's green.

⁹⁻¹² "Will the wild buffalo condescend to serve you,
volunteer to spend the night in your barn?
Can you imagine hitching your plow to a buffalo
and getting him to till your fields?
He's hugely strong, yes, but could you trust him,
would you dare turn the job over to him?
You wouldn't for a minute depend on him, would you,
to do what you said when you said it?

¹³⁻¹⁸ "The ostrich flaps her wings futilely—
all those beautiful feathers, but useless!
She lays her eggs on the hard ground,
leaves them there in the dirt, exposed to the weather,
Not caring that they might get stepped on and cracked
or trampled by some wild animal.
She's negligent with her young, as if they weren't even hers.
She cares nothing about anything.

She wasn't created very smart, that's for sure,
wasn't given her share of good sense.
But when she runs, oh, how she runs,
laughing, leaving horse and rider in the dust.

¹⁹⁻²⁵ "Are you the one who gave the horse his prowess
and adorned him with a shimmering mane?
Did you create him to prance proudly
and strike terror with his royal snorts?
He paws the ground fiercely, eager and spirited,
then charges into the fray.
He laughs at danger, fearless,
doesn't shy away from the sword.
The banging and clanging
of quiver and lance don't faze him.
He quivers with excitement, and at the trumpet blast
races off at a gallop.
At the sound of the trumpet he neighs mightily,
smelling the excitement of battle from a long way off,
catching the rolling thunder of the war cries.

²⁶⁻³⁰ "Was it through your know-how that the hawk learned to fly,
soaring effortlessly on thermal updrafts?
Did you command the eagle's flight,
and teach her to build her nest in the heights,
Perfectly at home on the high cliff face,
invulnerable on pinnacle and crag?
From her perch she searches for prey,
spies it at a great distance.
Her young gorge themselves on carrion;
wherever there's a roadkill, you'll see her circling."

Narrator:

Yeah, God has his eye on more than just the sparrow. God is watching us, and all the creatures of the earth. God is not God of only the human condition, but God of earth and space, of sea and sky and air. We don't get to choose God's domain or interests. God gifts all of God's creatures in wondrous ways, and Job got himself all panicky focusing on the big question presented by Psalm 8, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" Job actually prays for God's mindfulness to stop. It's caused him suffering, so he thinks. "Turn yourself away," Job asks, but we find out that God's turning away might actually leave all creatures in the dust, not just us. God gets to another stopping point, "So Job, now what do you have to say for yourself? Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?"

³⁻⁵ Job answered: "I'm speechless, in awe—words fail me. I should never have opened my mouth! I've talked too much, way too much. I'm ready to shut up and listen."

⁶⁻⁷ God addressed Job next from the eye of the storm, and this is what he said:

God:

"I have some more questions for you,
and I want straight answers.

⁸⁻¹⁴ "Do you presume to tell me what I'm doing wrong?

Are you calling me a sinner so you can be a saint?

Do you have an arm like my arm?

Can you shout in thunder the way I can?

Go ahead, show your stuff.

Let's see what you're made of, what you can do.

Unleash your outrage.

Target the arrogant and lay them flat.

Target the arrogant and bring them to their knees.

Stop the wicked in their tracks—make mincemeat of them!

Dig a mass grave and dump them in it—

faceless corpses in an unmarked grave.

I'll gladly step aside and hand things over to you—
you can surely save yourself with no help from me!

Narrator:

We think we want that power, the power to smite the wicked, at least as we see the wicked. We want to punish the arrogant and unleash our outrage on the unjust. We want to lock up the criminals and annihilate our enemies – but even in this flash of power and might – God is waging on Job's sense of compassion. His suffering has led him to be sympathetic to the plight of others, especially the needy. In a flash of understanding, Job says to his friends and to anyone who will listen, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Though he complains that the mediator is nowhere to be found to argue his case, the umpire not available to call the strikes as he sees them, he knows deep down that God is a God of love and salvation. He hears God's word that he cannot really save himself. We don't understand human hearts as God does. It simply isn't possible. Being that God wants to make sure Job gets it, the voice continues:

God:

¹⁵⁻²⁴ "Look at the land beast, Behemoth. I created him as well as you.

Grazing on grass, docile as a cow—
Just look at the strength of his back,
the powerful muscles of his belly.
His tail sways like a cedar in the wind;
his huge legs are like beech trees.
His skeleton is made of steel,
every bone in his body hard as steel.
Most magnificent of all my creatures,
but I still lead him around like a lamb!
The grass-covered hills serve him meals,
while field mice frolic in his shadow.
He takes afternoon naps under shade trees,
cools himself in the reedy swamps,
Lazily cool in the leafy shadows

as the breeze moves through the willows.
And when the river rages he doesn't budge,
stolid and unperturbed even when the Jordan goes wild.
But you'd never want him for a pet—
you'd never be able to housebreak him!"

41 ¹⁻¹¹ "Or can you pull in the sea beast, Leviathan, with a fly rod
and stuff him in your creel?

Can you lasso him with a rope,
or snag him with an anchor?

Will he beg you over and over for mercy,
or flatter you with flowery speech?

Will he apply for a job with you
to run errands and serve you the rest of your life?

Will you play with him as if he were a pet goldfish?

Will you make him the mascot of the neighborhood children?

Will you put him on display in the market
and have shoppers haggle over the price?

Could you shoot him full of arrows like a pin cushion,
or drive harpoons into his huge head?

If you so much as lay a hand on him,
you won't live to tell the story.

What hope would you have with such a creature?

Why, one look at him would do you in!

If you can't hold your own against his glowering visage,
how, then, do you expect to stand up to *me*?

Who could confront me and get by with it?

I'm *in charge* of all this—I *run* this universe!

¹²⁻¹⁷ "But I've more to say about Leviathan, the sea beast,
his enormous bulk, his beautiful shape.

Who would even dream of piercing that tough skin
or putting those jaws into bit and bridle?

And who would dare knock at the door of his mouth
filled with row upon row of fierce teeth?

His pride is invincible;

nothing can make a dent in that pride.
Nothing can get through that proud skin—
impervious to weapons and weather,
The thickest and toughest of hides,
impenetrable!

¹⁸⁻³⁴“He snorts and the world lights up with fire,
he blinks and the dawn breaks.
Comets pour out of his mouth,
fireworks arc and branch.
Smoke erupts from his nostrils
like steam from a boiling pot.
He blows and fires blaze;
flames of fire stream from his mouth.
All muscle he is—sheer and seamless muscle.
To meet him is to dance with death.
Sinewy and lithe,
there’s not a soft spot in his entire body—
As tough inside as out,
rock-hard, invulnerable.
Even angels run for cover when he surfaces,
cowering before his tail-thrashing turbulence.
Javelins bounce harmlessly off his hide,
harpoons ricochet wildly.
Iron bars are so much straw to him,
bronze weapons beneath notice.
Arrows don’t even make him blink;
bullets make no more impression than raindrops.
A battle ax is nothing but a splinter of kindling;
he treats a brandished harpoon as a joke.
His belly is armor-plated, inexorable—
unstoppable as a barge.
He roils deep ocean the way you’d boil water,
he whips the sea like you’d whip an egg into batter.
With a luminous trail stretching out behind him,
you might think Ocean had grown a gray beard!

There's nothing on this earth quite like him,
not an ounce of fear in *that* creature!
He surveys all the high and mighty—
king of the ocean, king of the deep!"

Narrator:

Just in case you were wondering about Bigfoot and Godzilla and the Loch Ness Monster, and all the fear those mythical creatures can dredge up from the human unconscious, God is way, way bigger than any monster than may charge into our space, and God takes these monsters and keeps them as docile pets. Does that say anything to you? This is a not-so-subtle image of our fear and foreboding, and this story seeks to be a reminder of how little those huge things appear when compared to the God of the universe. Job was legitimately in a downward spiral, true. His journey was taking him to the pit of despair. His problems were significant. He had lost everything, including his own health and well being. This wasn't just a rant about some first world problem where he loses it over not being able to afford the latest iPhone. He had every right, so we see, to complain bitterly to his Maker. He took on that challenge in spite of his friends' discouragement to do so. And his reward is an odd one. God speaks to Job in his distress, but offers precious little in the way of comfort.

Rather, what God offers is confirmation of the things Job already knew.

Life goes by fast. It is short. It is difficult. And it is unfair.

I am God, and you, most certainly are not God.

Got it? Good.

And that's where we're going to end, today, with the absolute certainty of our uncertainty.

We really didn't know what it was we didn't know, so God reminds us.

God is God, and we are not God. Thanks be to God. Amen.