**Job 38:1-11** August 8, 2021

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*Job:381Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said:*

*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.*

*4“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?*

*Tell me, if you understand.*

*5Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!*

*Who stretched a measuring line across it?*

*6On what were its footings set,*

*or who laid its cornerstone—*

*7while 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,*

*9when I made the clouds its garment*

*and wrapped it in thick darkness,*

*10when I fixed limits for it*

*and set its doors and bars in place,*

*11when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther;*

*here is where your proud waves halt’?*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**God’s Answer for Those Who Demand an Answer**

When things go wrong, what do people say? “We want answers.” Yes, that’s what the powerful love to say, preferably in front of cameras with lots of people watching: “We demand answers!” But we have seen this dog and pony show before. We can be pretty sure that whatever answers there will be will be a long long way down the road, severely slanted by bias, so long after the fact that everyone will have lost interest, and finally just another reason for one side or another to push their agenda, or litigants to fill their pockets. But in the immediate aftermath of disaster or scandal, every politician knows what to say: “We demand answers.” And hey, in that moment, that’s what we want too. Can’t blame them for knowing their audience!

I’m not going to give you a list of tragedies and injustices that make us demand answers. You can imagine them or maybe even remember them. You also know that when you start talking with people about the answers you feel others owe you, it’s like wind on a wildfire. It’s very easy to go from wanting answers to demanding justice to thirsting for revenge.

At the point our reading begins, Job had gotten himself worked up to demanding answers and more. If you are a veteran warrior of the Christian faith, you know the story. Job had been an immensely wealthy man, and a most godly man. (BTW, this is just one of numerous Scripture examples that godliness and wealth *can* go together, if both are kept in their proper place.) Job *had* been prosperous. But then the Bible narrative gives us a peek into the throne room of heaven and we see God sign a permission slip for tragedy in Job’s life. All Job’s wealth gone, his children gone, in a day.

Job’s initial reaction was something that only the Holy Spirit could lead someone to say. He said, *“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”* What faith! But after seven more days of sorrow, the façade began to crumble. Job bared the sorrow of his heart to his friends. *“May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ That day—may it turn to darkness.”* In words more poetic than you or I can come up with, he said, “I wish I’d never been born.” And we understand that, that feeling.

Then his friends started to poke and prod. They offered all kinds of hare-brained rationale for his sufferings. Job couldn’t stand it. You know how it is when you are sick, in pain, and people say dumb things. It makes you angry. And when you are sick and in pain and people say dumb things, maybe you lose your patience and you say things you shouldn’t. That was Job. Sometimes Job said good and godly things about his sufferings, but more often not. It was: Job, then his friends; his friends, then Job. The stupid factor in the room kept escalating until finally Job said—and these were his last words before God speaks in our reading—*“Let the Almighty answer me… I would give him an account of my every step; like a prince I would approach him.”* Whoa! Job! I’m going to step aside while this bolt of lightning strikes! “God, I demand answers!” said Job.

Can you believe it? Well, yes, I can. I can’t condone it. But I can understand it. Lose your life’s savings in a day, all that you have worked for for decades, and now you have nothing. Now your retirement goal is to not end up in the homeless shelter. “I want answers, God!” We understand. Your kids walk out the front door one sunny summer morning shouting the usual “See ya, Dad!” and they never come back, none of them. “I want answers, God!” We would understand. You’re just sitting there watching the red light. Someone on her cell phone rear ends you. Car’s totaled. You’re flat on your back in the hospital. That beautiful life you had in front of you? Who knows? “I want answers, God!” We understand. We know people shouldn’t talk that way, but in that moment we understand.

We understand. And God is patient with our sorrow. Remember from the Gospel reading how Jesus delivered his disciples from the storm. They had chastised Jesus, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” They doubted. But Jesus was patient. He delivered them.

Yet there is a time when sorrow and weakness cross over into a place that God is no longer patient and merciful. And that’s what we have here in Job chapter 38. Job’s sorrow that God knows and, in a sense, makes allowances for, had crossed the line from sorrow to disrespect and revolt. I don’t know where that line is, and our duty as God’s children is not to get as close to that line as we can, but stay as far away as possible.

We go through all of this because we have to understand what caused God to speak the way he spoke to Job, otherwise we might misunderstand. Otherwise we might think that God’s attitude toward our hardships is “Put up and shut up!”, and it’s not. We have a right to sorrow. Jesus, too, shed tears on this earth. But we have no right to demand answers from God. And God says so.

***“The Lord answered Job out of the storm.”*** God was not content to speak to Job in a gentle whisper. The sacred record doesn’t describe this storm, but I would imagine the deepest darkest cloud roaring in from the west with ice-blue patches where you are pretty sure there is hail and hoping there isn’t any upper air rotation. God thunders, ***“The Lord answered Job out of the storm, ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’”*** It becomes graphically clear that we have no right to demand these answers because in answering Job, God actually answers nothing. God did not owe Job an explanation and he offered none.

Ever have one of those half-hour in-depth discussion with co-workers and you just can’t figure it out. In walks this guy still slurping down the last of his Dr. Pepper to wash down a Subway sandwich he is still chewing on and he spouts off his awesome solution to the problem—except that he is completely clueless. “Who let that guy in the room?” That’s what God is saying about Job. ***“Who is this [guy] that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?”*** “You are so clueless, Job, that you don’t even know what you don’t know.” That’s what God thinks of people who demand answers from him.

But God is not done, ***“Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”*** “You want a piece of me, Job? Come get it.” I’m not being silly. God is going to have none of this “We demand answers” stuff. God owes Job nothing.

The Lord highlights Job’s insubordination by asking, ***“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”*** Oh, yah. You weren’t born for a few thousand years yet, and you’re a little wimpy to move a continent. ***“****Where were you when…* ***the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”*** Oh, yeah. You’re just Job. You weren’t there! ***“[Where were you]*** ***when I said [to the sea], ‘This far you may come and no farther?’”*** It goes on for pages, God reminding little Job that he has no right to make demands and no clue about how any of it works.

If all this sounds harsh, then remember what Jesus did—our Good Shepherd with the heart that sympathized with all the diseased and oppressed, the distressed, even the demon possessed. But when people challenged him, *“We want to see a miraculous sign from you,”* he rebuked them, *“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign.”* Another time Jesus entered a village, but *“he could not do any miracles there… and he was amazed at their lack of faith.”* (Mk 6:5-6). Not that Jesus was unable, but he could not reward their lack of faith with gifts of God’s grace. We forget about that Jesus. He could spoke very strongly and directly to people who questioned God’s ways.

The problem with “I demand answers!” is not the fact that someone is asking questions. The problem is that that question comes from a faithless heart. That person no longer trusts God’s goodness – that God is in control, making sure that *“all things work for the good of those who love God.”*

God forgive us for our impatience and doubt!

If the problem is a lack of faith and a disrespect of God, then what is the answer when you find yourself in Job’s place, when you have lost what is near and dear, when you have had as much as you can handle?

Here, reading and knowing your Scriptures is such a blessing. For in them we see Job’s initial reaction before he started complaining to his friends. His first reaction was the right reaction. *“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”*

In the Scriptures we discover Hannah, among the most godly of women, the Mary of the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel. She was married, but she was unable to have children. Because her husband was a pretty stand-up guy for his time—and here I am not condoning what he did, but simply saying he did way better than most—he didn’t divorce her for having no children, he just took a second wife. The second one had children. Of course, rivalry developed, and the second wife made Hannah feel miserable and useless. How did she handle the awful turns of her life? *“In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.”* She committed herself to the Lord. *“And the Lord remembered Hannah.”* (1 Samuel 1)

Examples abound: Paul with his thorn; Abraham twenty years in the promised land and childless; David hunted down by Saul for years on end. Each of these believers suffered patiently, often wronged by others, entrusting themselves to the Lord’s care through all their sufferings.

That is the flipside of what the Lord was saying to Job. While the Lord showed off his power to Job, it was more than a rebuke. It is also the reason that the Lord can be and is to be trusted. His power and wisdom as seen in the created world, his many blessings seen in our lives mean we can trust his power. His love is exemplified in Jesus who died to pay for our sins, tells us that we are treasured by God. His sympathy is displayed in the Son of God taking on human flesh to share our weaknesses, tempted in every way just as we are—yet without sin, it tells us we have a shoulder to cry on. Therefore, we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence. We *will* receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:15-16)

Thank God, that is just what Job did. For after the Lord had rebuked Job, Job didn’t go on demanding answers. Face to face with the Lord he confessed, *“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand… Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”* (42:3,6) And the lord restored Job. He didn’t crush him; he stored him.

In Job, we have a man who suffered greatly. This book of the Bible says that while our sinful nature wants to demand answers from God when we suffer, the correct attitude is to trust in God, no matter what happens. That is faith. And there is reason for that faith.

As to God’s reasons for letting things happen—some of them we find out in the short term, some in the long term, and some of them will remain a mystery until we get to heaven. But when you trust God, that is okay. Faith doesn’t demand all the answers. That would not be faith. Faith is content to know God’s love and care, and to entrust itself to him in every joy and sorrow. Amen.