



Swaddled Chaos - Job Part 6

Job 38 & 39

5/21/2023

We are mainly going to be in Job 38 and 39 today.

Job is the story of the man who lost it all in an instant: his children, his fortune, his good name. And then he began to wrestle with big issues.

But Job didn't wrestle with atheism. For Job, there was no question that God exists and He is powerful, but there was serious question about whether God is good, whether God is who he thought he was, and whether God governs the world the right way. So he didn't struggle to believe that God exists, He struggled to trust God.

And this wasn't a unique struggle to Job. As life grinds on, as we experience real evil, as there's pain and suffering in our lives, it would at times be easy to say, "I'm out on God - sure, there must be a creator. But he can't possibly be relied upon, He can't be the one I thought he was, He must not be involved in creation anymore, He surely isn't hearing my prayers, and He can't be good because there's so much bad out there." So we stop trusting Him: we don't pray, we don't read the Bible, we curse that old life we had with God and just settle for a cynical agnosticism.

In his pain and unexplainable loss, Job continued to cling to God. His wife encouraged him to just curse God and die if God would allow him to be treated this way. But Job never gave up his hope in the God who had become so confusing to him.

So we need to learn what Job learned in this story. We need the answers he gets if we are going to continue to trust God, or trust Him again, after calamity strikes us.

So after we tie up some loose ends in the storyline, we will begin today to unpack some of the answers that God gives Job, and by extension, to us, to teach us to trust God

again. And this will be an incomplete sermon, this week and the next two weeks will all go together trying to round out the picture of the answer that God gives to sufferers that can help restore our trust in and relationship with God.

So where we pick up in the story, Job's friends have come to Job to comfort him, and also to elicit some repentance. They're thinking maybe they can help Job, and their speeches have a theme of "Job, fess up, come clean, admit your great sins, because the Almighty doesn't allow this kind of suffering unless you've done something bad. God is just, so you must have done something."

But Job is not going to apologize for something he didn't do. He says "I don't deserve this because I am innocent, and therefore God must be unjust or cruel, or indifferent and absent."

He says some things that sound blasphemous. One commentator summed up some of the things Job said about God by saying Job accused God of being a "merciless hunter, insidious spy, a capricious destroyer, and a sinister ruler!"¹ And "God is an amoral tyrant who takes delight in destroying lives"²

Job 9:22–24

**[22] It is all one; therefore I say,
'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.'**

**[23] When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.**

**[24] The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges—
if it is not he, who then is it?**

He says God doesn't rule justly, he destroys the innocent and the wicked. God is a destroyer of the earth, the bringer of calamity. He laughs at people when disaster brings death. And he gives the world to the wicked to run unrestrained and destroy.

Job has been the victim of God's poor rule of creation, he thinks. And even in all of this despair, he has some hope that one day he will be reconciled to his Old Divine Friend. Listen to this glimmer of hope that breaks through in Job 19:

¹ Ortlund, Eric. Piercing Leviathan (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity, 2021). Page 64.

² Ibid. 34.

Job 19:23–27

**[23] “Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
[24] Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were engraved in the rock forever!
[25] For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
[26] And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
[27] whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me! (ESV)**

So Job says, ironically, I wish all of these things I’m saying could be written in a book or something. Maybe call it the book of Job.

And he wanted this to be written down because he believed he had a Redeemer. It was a go-el, an advocate that could argue for Job before the bench of God’s justice. He had confidence that there was someone who could bring his case to God. And we’re not really sure who this redeemer is when we first read Job, and Job may not really be sure what he is saying.

But he says “at the last he will stand upon the earth.” (25) Which is better translated “triumph over the dust.”³ And “dust” in this sense was used to mean the grave. Job spoke elsewhere of the dust of death (7:21). Job thinks he is about to die, but he has confidence in this mysterious heavenly champion who will triumph over death and plead his case before God. And the result is that he will see God - he will be reconciled with God.

We have the advantage of knowing a lot more than Job knows. We know why he is suffering because of what we saw in chapters 1 and 2 that Job didn’t see. And we know who this redeemer is. The One who would go down to the dust of death, and then finally triumph over the dust so that the dead would see and be reconciled to God.

Job doesn’t know how it could all work, but he doesn’t seem to give up hope that this will be set right, and he doesn’t give up his claim that he is innocent.

³ Ibid. 48.

So Job and his three friends are at loggerheads. Job will not be convinced the suffering is his fault, and the friends will not be convinced that it isn't.

So they give up:

Job 32:1 “[1] So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.”

They think he is self-righteous and stubborn. And Job won't budge.

But then, a fourth friend of Job shows up.

Job 32:[2] Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. [3] He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. [4] Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. [5] And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger.

So this fourth friend has been there all along. He is young, and he has been unseen and unheard until now. Because he was younger than the others, he was quiet, deferring to their age and wisdom to correct Job.

But as he listened to their dialogue, he became increasingly angry: angry at Job for not admitting his sin. And angry at the three friends for being totally unable to convince this stubborn, blistered, festering man that he must have done something to deserve this.

And he grows increasingly convinced that he could influence Job better than the friends. So the young tik-tok influencer named Elihu is ready to get this job done. Finally, he has had enough:

**Job 32:19-20 [19] Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent;
like new wineskins ready to burst.
[20] I must speak, that I may find relief;
I must open my lips and answer.**

He says, “My thoughts are like wine fermenting in the wineskins, and it's expanding and ready to burst because there's no vent.” So then, full of anger, and convinced he can do

better than the old guys, he bursts, and spews his angry thoughts at Job. He didn't have twitter so he had to do this in person.

He speaks with youthful zeal and passion, he speaks out of anger, he speaks just to vent and feel better. But ultimately, he ends up saying the same basic thing the friends said:

Job 34:11 “[11] For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him.”

So for 5 chapters, Elihu vents. And nobody ever replies to him. It's like everybody is saying, “OK, we're done. We can stop going around and around. We are getting nowhere.” And we're supposed to, at this point in the book, be feeling like, “OK already - how many times are we going to repeat these arguments?”

There is no solution.

Until God speaks.

God will make two speeches, the longest speeches God makes to a mere mortal in the Bible. After the first speech, Job will shut his mouth and be quiet. After the second, Job will repent and worship and have his trust and fellowship with God restored.

And what God has to say about his rule over creation in his speeches is not only some of the most beautiful poetry in history, but is a huge comfort that restores Job's trust in God. And we desperately need these answers, because they can help restore our trust in Him as well.

Job 38

[1] Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

[2] “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

[3] Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

The Lord answered Job!

Earlier, Job had said that he wanted to go and speak with God, but here's how Job thought it would go:

Job 9:16–20 [16] If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.[17] For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause;[18] he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. [19] If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?[20] Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. (ESV)

Job said, “I’d love some time to argue my case before God. But God wouldn’t listen. He’d just bully me and keep wounding me without cause. I’m right, but he’d run circles around me and make me say I’m wrong. He’d be cruel and make it look like this was all my fault (he’d prove me perverse). God would just humiliate me and own me even if I could speak with Him.

But then God answers Job. And it’s the same phrase used to describe his friends “answering” him earlier.⁴ God doesn’t just come and bowl Job over like Job thought he would. He answers him.

And Job has been saying some harsh things about God:

Job 16[12] I was at ease, and he broke me apart; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target;[13] his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare; he pours out my gall on the ground.[14] He breaks me with breach upon breach; he runs upon me like a warrior.”

So it must have made Job’s stomach sink when God responded to that. (Dang - I did not mean for you to hear that God, I accidentally hit “reply all” on that email, that wasn’t intended for you.”)

But God doesn’t say, “Job you arrogant little fool.”

He says (38:2), “Your words were without knowledge.”

And he says, “Who is this that darkens counsel...”

And when that phrase is used elsewhere, not to get information, but to express a tone of awe.

Jeremiah 46:7-8 “Who is this, rising like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge? 8 Egypt rises like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge.”)

⁴ Ibid. 61.

Psalm 24:8 “Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle”

So Job has said some harsh and even foolish things. But he kept persevering, and wouldn't give up his desire to have a relationship with God again. Maybe there's a little bit of that Fatherly pride in Job we heard back in Job 1:8, "Have you considered my servant Job, there is none like him in all the earth."

Now Job has been tried, he has failed in some ways, but overall he has been faithful and wouldn't give up trying to get to his God.

That seems to be the tone God sets here, Job has mostly passed the test, and God's tone is stern but not condescending. Not harsh. He won't excuse some of what Job said, but He is not at all the divine bully that Job thought he would be.

And there is a note of challenge, "Dress for action like a man," "Get ready to spar here, Job," but he is engaging him more like a worthy challenger and not Job is just scum that's so far beneath Him.

Then God goes on to ask Job questions - which is what you do when you want to open a dialogue. He isn't out to humiliate and own Job, God is inviting Job in, speaking to him like a friend. God condescends, and he is way more kind than even Job thought he would be.

So let's pause there and take this in:

Job has been praying and sharing some serious accusations about God and the way He runs this place. And when God speaks to Job, God is kind, at least kinder than Job's words deserved.

And maybe you've been inwardly raging against God. God I thought you would fill me up and make me happy all the time, and it hasn't been my experience, you've made my life worse. You were supposed to answer my prayers and I've prayed for a spouse or a job, or for the sickness in my loved one to heal, or for clarity and guidance and the answers aren't coming. And you feel this increasing anger against God growing in you, and you feel the distance growing between you and God, and you assume that He must only have a whoopin in store for you because of your life that has now become so far removed from Him and his ways.

But what if, when you return, you find a God who is kind? Who is eager to forgive. Who never stopped, for one second, pursuing you with His steadfast love.

Jesus said,

Matthew 11:28-30 [28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

We have in Jesus the exact imprint of the nature of God - Jesus is God among us, and when we want to see clearly what God is like we look to Jesus. And He is gentle with us - far more gentle than we deserve. He wants to give us rest for our souls.

So don't let fear that God will only smite you keep you from returning.

The first thing we should see here that helps us be reconciled to God is:

I. God is Far Kinder Than We Expect or Deserve

So God begins now to question Job:

**Job 38:[4] “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
[5] Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
[6] On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
[7] when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?**

Remember Job had said God is the cruel destroyer of the earth? Here, God says, “I founded the earth. I laid its foundations.” He uses these architectural metaphors to show his care and attentiveness to creation. He's the kind Creator, not the cruel destroyer.

And the response to His creation was not for the angels to tremble at the chaos, but to shout for joy.

II. God Is Attentive to His Creation as the Good Creator

And as God asks all of these questions of Job, one intent in all of them is to reinforce the fact that God is far bigger than Job, and God understands things that Job doesn't even have the capacity to understand, so that Job would be humbled.

I preached through Job 12 years ago, and I essentially saw this as the only answer God gave to Job. Job railed against God and His good governance of creation, and God said, "Job, were you there when I made it all? No? Then why don't you be quiet."

I thought Job just had to learn of his smallness and God's bigness and that was the answer he needed.

Now that is part of the answer he needed, but definitely not all that he needed. In fact, Job never really doubted that God is big and he is small. That's why he was so upset: how could omnipotent God punish me for something I hadn't done?

Job needed to be reminded of God's bigness and Job's smallness, but he did seem to already have a good sense of that.

So it's not just that Job said, "God you're not doing it right!" and God said, "Yeah, I made ostriches, can you do that?" and Job said, "OK, no, you were right all along, I'll be quiet." The answer is much more complete.

So far the answer is that God is kinder than Job thinks, God is more attentive to his creation than Job thinks, and Yes,

III. God is Far Above Us and Can Comprehend What We Cannot, so we Aren't In a Position to Be His Judge.

**Job 38:[8] "Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
[9] when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
[10] and prescribed limits for it
and set bars and doors,
[11] and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"**

The sea, which we'll talk more about in a couple of weeks, came to symbolize chaos. Which makes sense, especially in their minds: it is vast, and unpredictable. You could be out on a boat, and could there be anything more terrifying than a massive storm coming up suddenly on the massive sea while you're totally helpless. The sea is uncontrollable, unpredictable, chaotic.

And look what God says about it:

Verse 8: I shut it in with doors (I contain the chaos.)

Verse 9: I swaddled it with darkness.

What a picture. Here's the raging sea - this almost infinite chaos from a human perspective. And to God, it's a little baby, and God wraps it in swaddling cloths.

I remember when our children were babies, they'd cry and fuss and rage, and we'd swaddle them up tight to subdue them and calm them and constrain them.

And this raging sea, this illimitable chaos, is swaddled and constrained by God. It's supposed to be an absurd metaphor: God wrapping the ocean up in swaddling cloths like a baby.

But it's a picture that sticks in our heads to remind us that chaos and evil in God's creation is limited and constrained by God.

Remember, Job accused God of allowing evil to run amock, of being the evil destroyer of creation. And God says, "There is evil and chaos in My creation. But I swaddle it up like a baby, I soothe it, I constrain it."

He says in verse 11 that he says to the ocean's waves, "Thus far shall you come and no farther."

There is evil in God's creation, but it is not unlimited. It doesn't run amock. It is limited by God. And it isn't all there is to His creation.

IV. Chaos and Evil Are Limited by God.

**Job 38: [12] "Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,**

**[13] that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?**

**[14] It is changed like clay under the seal,
and its features stand out like a garment.**

**[15] From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.**

In their days, and probably in ours, most evil deeds were done at night. Thieves came in in the night so they could abscond with your stuff and be hidden by the darkness. Adulteries usually happened at night under cover of darkness. Secret plots to do evil were hatched in the night so nobody would see the perpetrators coming and going. We wake up and read the news to see what evil happened overnight.

And every day, God gives order to the morning, He sets the dawn in its place. It's like he says, "Enough" to the evil doers, and constrains them like he constrains the sea, commanding them, "This far and no farther."

And the dawn shakes creation like a long skirt that got crumbs all over it, and the evil are shaken out and limited. And now it is day.

This says two things for us to know in our suffering:

V. There Is Still a Lot of Good in God's Creation

Remember, Job was saying, "Shut this whole thing down - turn out the lights, shut off the stars" (Job 3:9 "Let the stars of its dawn be dark..."), it's all bad.

But it isn't all bad. There's darkness, but God tells the morning to do its work.

We are Western New Yorkers, so we have a regular annual rhythm of enduring long, hard, dark, cold winters. And by the end of winter, which if you're new here, is typically Memorial Day, we are saying things like, "people weren't meant to live in these climates." We are vitamin D deprived, we're depressed, we're looking at houses in Florida on realtor.com, because Rochester is unlivable.

But then summer hits. And summer here is usually glorious. Just hot enough in the day, cool enough at night, everything stays green most summers, we move family life out onto the deck, we'll eat our meals out there. It's perfect. Rochester is the best place to live.

It's easy, in winter, to almost not be able to fathom going outside in shorts and having sunshine on your skin. It's easy to think that doesn't exist here. Until it does.

And when we experience suffering, and evil, it's easy to believe it's only always winter. But God here acknowledges that there is real evil, real pain and suffering, in His creation. But it isn't everything. There is also a lot of beauty and goodness. And to see God as a chaos monster who spends his days hunting us is to get it totally wrong. He's the God who didn't create the evil, who constrains the evil, and who gives orders to the morning to shake it out.

We'll all experience the grief and pain when someone we love dies, and it's awful, full stop. But if we were offered one more week: they could come back to us for one more week together, but at the end of the week we would have to lose them again and suffer like that again, most of us would say, "I would go through that again for one more week."

And again, these are parts of the answer God gives here, incomplete by themselves, but this part of the answer to suffering is to acknowledge it, but also to say, "There is a ton of beauty and good in creation, and if we have to suffer to experience that, it is good enough to be worth it."

So there's a lot of good in creation.

God limits the evil. And, specifically here, God limits evil people.

VI. God limits evil people

They don't just run amock. It isn't always dark. God turns on the lights so they have to scatter like roaches for another day.

So we'll stop here and pick this up next week.

But to sum up what we've seen so far:

- 1) God is kinder than we expect or deserve**
- 2) God Is Attentive to His Creation as the Good Creator**
- 3) God is Far Above Us and Can Comprehend What We Cannot, so we Aren't In a Position to Be His Judge.**
- 4) Chaos and Evil Are Limited by God.**
- 5) There Is Still a Lot of Good in God's Creation**

6) God limits evil people

Job got God wrong. And God, kindly yet sternly, draws Job out to draw Job in, and shows Job that He is far better, far kinder, far more in control and good than Job could ever see.

So in application:

Do you think that after these many years of raging against God he will just shut you up and own you? What if when you return to Him you find a God who is far more kind than you expected? A God who really does love you?

Do you think chaos reigns? Have you considered that you haven't considered the whole story? Or all of creation? That perhaps, yes, you are in a very real storm and it is all you can see, but that storm is not the sum of all reality, and not the whole of your story (though it may feel that way).

Do you think that your perception that God doesn't care, God isn't involved, and that God is disinterested could just be wrong? That your feeling that God is absent could be inaccurate?

And that the God who seems to be a "merciless hunter, insidious spy, a capricious destroyer, and a sinister ruler" might be your kind redeemer?

And the truth is there will eventually be some suffering that takes all of us out - we will all die from the chaos that is allowed within Creation for now.

But we have a redeemer, who triumphed over the dust and rose to life again.

God allowed the chaos to strike Him, too. But God has such good control over the outcome of the chaos that He turned it for good upon the cross.

So if Job was given reasons to trust God again, how much more do we have? We know who the redeemer is! We know what He did! We know that even if our suffering ends us, we will rise again and live on the new creation.

And there,

Revelation 21:4 “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

And through the book of Job, God is:

Calling you in
Coming down to your level in Jesus
Inviting your prayers
Inviting your questions and pain and crying and tears
And desiring to make Himself known to you.

And when we bring him our raging untamable hearts, he swaddles them, and coos, and subdues them, and tells us, “I’ve got you. Trust me.”

And to sustain and build our faith, God has given us the Lord’s supper. It’s an observance for Christians that preaches the truths that are at the heart of our faith.

We have a redeemer, who died to redeem us, but triumphed over the dust and rose to life again.

God allowed the chaos to strike Him, too. But God has such good control over the outcome of the chaos that He turned it for good upon the cross.

So if Job was given reasons to trust God again, how much more do we have? We know who the redeemer is! We know what He did! We know that even if our suffering ends us, we will rise again and live on the new creation.

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we confess our lack of trust in you - we don’t trust your kindness, we don’t trust that you are paying attention, we don’t trust your goodness. In our arrogance, we think that we are in a position to be your judge when things don’t go our way.

Jesus we thank you for perfectly trusting your Father. Thank you that you died to not only constrain, but in the end, destroy evil and remove it completely from your creation.

And Spirit, we pray that You would give us eyes to see your goodness, the goodness in your creation, and the goodness of your plan. When we can’t comprehend you, teach us to trust you.

Assurance:

Psalm 28:6–7 [6] Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.[7] The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

Questions for Sermon Discussion:

- 1) How could God be kinder than we expect when He is also just and can't stand our sin?
- 2) How is God's ongoing attentiveness to us a comfort?
- 3) Discuss the 6 main things demonstrated to Job in this message. How do they strengthen our trust in God?
- 4) How have you experienced God's limits on suffering and evil?
- 5) Job is silent at the end of God's first speech. Why is that not enough? What else is God after in Job?