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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Insanity of Questioning God

Job 40:1-14

The Book of Job addresses one of the deepest and most perplexing issues in the world... the problem of evil and suffering. How can a good, powerful, and wise God allow such evil and suffering on people who don't deserve it?

As we come to Job 40:1-14, we come to a critical juncture in the Book... Job, suffering intensely, has accused God of gross injustice in his case. Job then represents the entire human race in his bold questioning of God... demanding an accounting from God for his actions.

This is a common theme in every generation... hauling God into court, cross-examining him, evaluating him, and ultimately condemning him – even executing him with the slogan “God is dead.”

Perhaps no one in recent history has been so bold on this topic as Elie Wiesel, the Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, the infamous Nazi death camp where 1.1 million Jews were gassed to death. He said that he observed three Jewish men hold a trial of God in absentia for abandoning the Jewish people in the Holocaust. Inspired by that, he wrote a play in 1979 called “The Trial of God,” set in a Ukrainian village in 1649 after the massacre of some Jewish villagers. In Wiesel's play, three traveling minstrels arrive in the village intending to put on a play, but instead put on a mock trial of God for the massacre.

In his Pulitzer prize-winning book *Night*, Wiesel wrote these chilling words:

“Blessed be God's name? Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? ... But now, I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man.”

We human beings, when we go through suffering, are ready to haul God into court and judge him for his actions. C.S. Lewis, in his book “God in the Dock” (that’s the British expression for “God on Trial”) said this:

Many people “are convinced that whatever may be wrong with the world it cannot be themselves. Someone else must be to blame for every evil. Hence, when the existence of God is discussed, they by no means think of Him as their Judge. On the contrary, they are His judges. If He puts up a reasonable defense (for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease) they will consider it and the trial may end in God’s acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the judge’s bench and God is the one on trial.”

One of the great purposes of the Book of Job is to help Christians put such notions to death. We do not think this Book of Job will cure the rage-filled unbelieving world of such blasphemy... but it is able to cure us Christians of our version of it. God cured Job of questioning him... and the Holy Spirit is ready to cure us as well.

First, let's review where we're at in Job: God shows up in power!

***Job 38:1-3 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind. 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.***

Job in his suffering had demanded a chance to confront God... he was confident he would carry the day, his "day in court" ... he would be able to prove his own righteousness and God's injustice

In Job 31, Job says his righteousness was so pure that he would walk confidently into court to confront God:

***Job 31:35-37 "Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my
 defense-- let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his
 indictment in writing. ³⁶ Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I
 would put it on like a crown. ³⁷ I would give him an account of my
 every step; like a prince I would approach him.***

***Job 13:22 Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you
 reply.***

1. So... God shows up in power to confront Job in his arrogance
2. Then God traces out his achievements in creation, and lines them up with Job's obvious limitations
 - a. Job 38: the creation, sustaining of the inanimate physical world
 - i) The foundations of the earth
 - ii) The creation and limitation of the oceans
 - iii) The creation of the sky with the clouds
 - iv) The ordering of sunrise and sunset
 - v) The shaping of the contours of the earth—the mountains and valleys, the hills and the ravines

- vi) The subterranean regions of the earth, with its aquifers, its hidden water tables, the fountains of the deep
 - vii) The weather patterns—the snow, hail, lightning, thunder, east winds, the rain, the torrential downpours and the light sprinkles... the wisdom in knowing how much rain one region of the world should get and how much another... the dew and the frost
 - viii) The arrangement of the celestial bodies... the constellations, Pleiades, Orion... the distant starlight and all the physical laws of the cosmos by which they are governed
- b. Job 38-39: the creation and sustaining of the animal world
- i) Lions and lionesses... how they hunt for their prey
 - ii) Ravens... how they feed their young
 - iii) Mountain goats... how they give birth
 - iv) The doe bearing her fawn
 - v) The wild donkey, roaming free in the wasteland
 - vi) The wild ox with its staggering strength
 - vii) The ostrich and its foolishness with her young and its speed when it runs
 - viii) The horse with its strength, fierce courage, and breathtaking speed
 - ix) The hawk with its stunning speed in flight
 - x) The eagle with its soaring and amazing eyesight
3. In all of these aspects of creation, God asks Job about his own involvement or abilities
- a. Time: where you there when it happened back at the beginning of creation?
 - b. Strength: do you have the power to do this or that?

c. Knowledge: do you know how to do this or that?

Man's stunning limitations are exposed in this abbreviated survey of God's activities in creation and in providence over creation

B. Summing It Up

Job 40:1-2 The LORD said to Job: ² "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

1. The fundamental issue... mortal and sinful man evaluating and judging and contending with Almighty God
2. In our arrogance, we use our God-given gifts of thinking, reasoning, and judgment as weapons against the God who made them

Job 38:36 Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?

God did! God made our astonishing minds and evaluating hearts... and in our arrogance we turn them as weapons against God

We contend with God, we question God, we judge God!

This is a very great sin, and it is the very sin that Job repents from

BUT it is also a very great damage to us in our suffering... it is not therapeutic, the venting we do when we are hurting – venting, accusing God of wrongdoing

That is the sin that this text is addressing, and it may be the central lesson in the whole Book of Job: WHEN YOU ARE SUFFERING, KEEP TRUSTING IN GOD AND WORSHIPPING HIM... DON'T ACCUSE HIM OF WRONGDOING!

C. Discrediting God to Justify Ourselves

1. As Elihu saw clearly, Job was so certain of his own righteousness that he was ready to question God's righteousness
2. We discredit God to justify ourselves
3. It is hard for us sinners accurately to measure how great a sin this is! For God's righteousness is infinite, and ours is non-existent once we have sinned

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."

4. After walking through God's response to Job, I want to zero in on this issue... GOD IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO US... WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO HIM!

D. Job's Initial Repentance... a Step in the Right Direction

Job 40:3-5 Then Job answered the LORD: ⁴ "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 is instantly humbled by God's overpowering presence and God's mighty words.

He repents... he is deeply aware of his unworthiness, his inability to answer God. He realizes his sinful heart has bubbled up into sinful words. He deeply regrets the things he said about God, and is determined not to speak such sinful words again.

This is a true mark of godliness... this is the man who lived out a stunning level of righteousness as he described in Job 31... staggering levels of godliness. This man who was blameless and upright truly did fear God. Many times the great men and women of the world are proud and very difficult to bring to repentance. It is a mark of true godliness that someone is actually easy to convict of sin, if the issue is true. They don't pridefully argue or defend when confronted ultimately by the Holy Spirit. Job was humbled.

BUT NOT DEEPLY ENOUGH. God isn't through working on him yet.

E. God's Deep Humbling Work in Job

1. God is not about a light, superficial, quick work in Job's heart
2. Sin is deep, with deep roots... it takes a deep work of humbling to root out and destroy all the sinful motions and aspects of a human heart
3. God does not deal lightly with the sins of his people

So he speaks again from the whirlwind, as though Job had not repented at all... the exact same words he began with in Chapter 38:

Job 40:6-7 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ⁷ "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

4. Then he digs in to humble Job more... more humbled than he has ever been in his life
5. Job said "I am unworthy to reply to you!" God essentially said, "Job, you have no idea how unworthy you are. I will show you more how unworthy you are compared to me."
6. The fundamental issue is God's commitment to justice
7. Job has discredited God's justice to establish his own

Job 40:8 "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?"

8. But God's righteousness is infinite:

Psalm 36:6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.

9. The greatest display in history of the righteousness of God is the cross of Jesus Christ

Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice

God would rather slaughter his Son, his only begotten Son, in the shameful and painful death on the cross than allow sinners like us into heaven unatoned for.

God's commitment to justice is like a brilliance of the sun, like the blinding brightness of the noonday sun. We humans, created in the image of God have a form of his righteousness, but our understanding of it is like a flickering candleflame compared to him

So God wants to humble Job further...

Romans 9:20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?

10. From verses 9-14, God is making one central point: I AM GOD, AND YOU ARE NOT.

11. First... the awesome power of God's arm and God's voice

Job 40:9 Do you have an arm like God's

This refers to omnipotence... God's arm represents his power to accomplish anything he wants

O man, what about your arm? How powerful is your arm? Do you have an arm like God's? NO, YOU DON'T!!

And what about your voice:

Job 40:9 can your voice thunder like his?

God can speak as loudly as he wants to...

Thunder is one of the loudest natural sounds on earth... a single clap of thunder can hit 120 decibels; that's ten times louder than a pneumatic jackhammer... it is the equivalent of standing near a jet airplane when it is taking off

Later in redemptive history, God will speak to his people from the fire of Mount Sinai... with the ground shaking under their feet, God spoke the Ten Commandments... beginning with these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of

Egypt!" The voice was so loud and the people so terrified that they begged that no further word be spoken to them

Job, how loud is your voice?

12. Next, what about your appearance?

Job 40:10 Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.

Are you glorious and majestic in appearance? Do people have to hide their eyes because of your radiant light?

Whenever God appears in some limited measure of his glory – never his full glory, because as he said to Moses, “No one can see me and live” ... whenever God appears, the people are overwhelmed with terror and fall to the ground

What about you, Job? Does that happen to you?

13. And can you unleash mighty power to humble the wicked of the earth?

Job 40:11-13 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.

This is the program of God for our sinful human race. We joined Satan in his soaring arrogance, thinking we could rise up and challenge God. But we can't. And in order to save us, God must HUMBLE US TO THE CORE.

God “opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” God blesses the spiritual beggars with entrance into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of Heaven... if they will just be humbled, he will forgive them and accept them. But if they resist and rebel, he will crush them into the dust.

14. So, Job... if you can do all these things:

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

Man is constantly on a self-salvation plan.

The only way he can save himself from the just wrath of God is to be as glorious as God himself. And we sinners cannot.

This is the deep humbling work God did in Job... and through him in all of us

Now, I want to circle back on this issue of thinking that we can accuse God, judge God, condemn God, execute God for his wrongdoings.

Job's basic sin: thinking he could arraign God before the bar of his own justice... FOUR LESSONS:

I. Lesson #1: God Is Not Accountable to Man

A. When We Suffer, We Think to Bring God to Account

1. We think to make him answer for why he didn't heal our child, or why he allowed the hurricane to destroy our home, or why the drunk driver survived and our beloved mother was killed...
2. We have a certain boldness in this questioning, as though we are on the moral high ground, and God is below us, having to answer for what he's done
3. But the fact is... God doesn't owe anything to his creation at all

B. God's Bold Action With Job

Job 40:6-7 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ⁷ "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

God seizes the initiative, because he is God... God is not answerable to Job

C. Clear assertion in Job

Job 41:11 Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.

That about says it!

God will never owe anything to any human being!

We cannot DEMAND AN EXPLANATION from God!

God made the universe and he can do with it as he sees fit

D. Clear Assertion in Daniel

Daniel 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

In other words, God is not accountable at all to any creature. No one can DEMAND an explanation from God.

Now, of course, many people actually DO say to God "What have you done?" But God is under no obligation to answer.

He is the Creator and King... we are his creatures to do with as he pleases

E. Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith captures the sublime independence and awesome glory of God's person better than any other theological writing in the history of the church

God hath most sovereign dominion over every creature, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth. ... He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.

So... God is not accountable to man.

II. Lesson #2: Man Is Accountable to God

A. Look At How This Begins

Job 40:6-7 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ⁷ "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

God appears to Job in a whirlwind... answers none of Job's questions, and instead asks him a series of questions.

B. All Creatures Are Accountable to God

1. God made men and angels with moral natures and with varying powers, and he placed them in various positions of responsibility
2. Then, God holds each angel and each human being for what he has entrusted to him
3. God will bring each one to account for their choices
4. So, to borrow Nebuchadnezzar's words... though no one can say to God, "What have you done?", God does say it to us:

Genesis 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 4:10 The LORD said [to Cain], "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

5. We are absolutely answerable to God!

Acts 17:31 For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing

before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

On Judgment Day, every careless word we have spoken, every action we have done, all the ways we have spent our money, all the ways we have spent our time... everything we ever did in the body, whether good or bad will be judged by the holy eyes of Almighty God.

III. Lesson #3: Christ Alone Enables Man to Survive God's Accounting

A. Not One of Us Can Survive Such a Judgment!

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

Job knew that we could not answer God's accusations once in a thousand times!

Job 9:3 Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand.

B. Christ is Our Only Hope... Christ Our Mediator

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When God showed up in the whirlwind, Job realized his righteousness was not enough...

So it is with us sinners whom God is saving... we stop accusing God of injustice, and instead seek from God the righteousness we so obviously lack... this comes from faith in Christ alone

C. Christ's Suffering Both Atones for Our Sins and Allows Him to Understand Our Suffering

The enraged human race accuses God of injustice because he doesn't understand what it is to suffer... so they say

But by his incarnation, Christ has entered into our sufferings fully

He is “Immanuel, God with us” ... immersed in a sea of sorrow and suffering and sickness and pain and death

He was born into poverty... a member of a despised and subjugated race... he was reviled by his own neighbors; his own family thought him insane at one point; the authorities thought he was demon-possessed; he had dedicated enemies who plotted to kill him; he was arrested and tried illegally at night; he was convicted based on the testimony of false witnesses; he was spit on, punched, beaten by his own people; they turned him over to the Roman governor who knew he was innocent but chose to save his own life by condemning an innocent man; he was led through the streets of Jerusalem carrying his own cross as the people heaped insults on him; he was crucified outside the city surrounded by two thieves; he was mocked by those who passed by; he died alone, crying out in his agony. The infinite dimensions of his suffering under the wrath of God can never be fully appraised in this world.

Make no mistake at all... Jesus’ credentials of suffering greatly surpass our own... he has the right to speak to us in our pain!

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

IV. Lesson #4: God Will Freely Explain Everything in Heaven

- A. Though God Does Not OWE Anyone An Explanation, to His Children, He Will Explain EVERYTHING... in heaven
- B. Whenever Anyone Suffers... what they always want to hear from God is the answer to the question “Why?”
 - 1. Why did you let my loved one die?
 - 2. Why did you take my home from me?
 - 3. Why didn’t you heal me of my disease?
- C. We Cannot Imagine That God Had No Good Reason!

D. But Will He Explain Everything to Us?

1. Certainly he is under no obligation
2. But I really believe in heaven he WILL explain everything!
3. Why do I say this?
4. Because the overall direction of our salvation is God opening himself up to us, revealing himself to us, giving himself to us, and yes, explaining himself to us

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Genesis 18:17 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

E. William Cowper

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain

God will interpret his own decisions in providence, however deep and mysterious they were to us when we experienced them. And he will make plain what each detail was for, what it accomplished in his overall perfect plan. Wonderful! But *when* will he do that? Certainly not with any finality and minute detail here on earth. Job was never told by God of the challenge issued by Satan, nor why all ten of his children had to die. We know more of those details now than Job did then. But we can't possibly believe we know more now than Job knows in

heaven... or will know when God does his full interpretation to all the elect of all his detailed plan. "He will make it plain." Just not on earth; the full explanation will come in eternity!