

I Choose to Bless "God's Sovereignty: The Eclipsing Answer"

Job 38:1-42:6

Mark Vroegop

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. 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? 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'? 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. 16 "Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? 17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? 18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this" (Job 38:1-18)

If you want help in suffering then, aside from the Bible, you need to read old books or at least books about people who lived in the previous generation. They understood something significant about the sovereignty of God and suffering. Let me give you two examples of what a man and a woman said on the death of their spouses.

First, George Mueller, who preached his wife's funeral message after 39 years of marriage. He spoke from Psalm 119:68 – "Thou are good and do good." His outline was "God was good and did good":

- 1) In giving her to me
- 2) In so long leaving her to me
- 3) In taking her from me¹

¹ <http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Voice/George.Mueller.of.Bristol/George.Mueller.Bristol.16.html>

He said:

"I miss her in numberless ways, and shall miss her yet more and more. But as a child of God, and as a servant of the Lord Jesus, I bow, I am satisfied with the will of my Heavenly Father, I seek by perfect submission to His holy will to glorify Him, I kiss continually the hand that has thus afflicted me."²

Secondly, consider Sarah Edwards. She was the wife of Jonathan Edwards who died at 54 after 31 years of marriage. Sometime after the funeral, Sarah wrote the following to her daughter:

"What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hand on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had him so long. But my God lives; and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband and your father has left us! We are all given to God; and there I am, and love to be."³

George Mueller and Sarah Edwards understood that God's sovereignty or His control over all events – even bad ones – is the eclipsing answer in suffering. In other words, the substance of who God is and trusting in Him can triumph over pain, suffering, and unanswerable questions. The beauty of the "Who?" question can eclipse the pain of the "Why?" question.

I choose the word "eclipse" intentionally. It captures the fact that the pain and questions remain; in some cases those never go away. However, something greater can eclipse the pain of suffering, and then your attention and affection shifts to the greater object. What is the object? It is the infinite majesty and worth of a loving and mysterious God. The aim for this series has been to invite you to choose to bless or to see "Who?" as more satisfying than "Why?"

Chapters 38-42:6 record the moment when God finally breaks his silence, and he directly answers Job's charges. After 37 chapters of argument, speculation, complaint, and man-made solutions, God brings the discussion to an end. And we see that once Job encounters God he has a different perspective.

God Speaks!

Job wanted God to answer him. Remember what he said: *"Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!" (Job 31:35)*. Apparently there was a storm approaching when Elihu was rebuking him (see 37:1-5), and it becomes a whirlwind, a violent storm similar to a hurricane.

² John Piper. "Job: The Revelation of God in Suffering," July 28, 1985. www.desiringgod.org

³ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness – Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2008), 73.

The same word is used to describe the storm in Jonah 1:4, a storm so violent that it threatened to break apart the ship.

From this tremendous display of power and force, God speaks:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me" (Job 38:2-3)

To darken counsel by words without knowledge is to make statements about things that you don't fully understand and to draw incorrect and arrogant conclusions because you think you know what is going on. Job didn't understand God's ways, and his conclusion was that God's actions toward him were arbitrary and without regard for what is fair. Job's fears clouded his thinking about God's purposes.⁴

What are we to make of God's opening statement? What is God's posture toward Job? I don't think that God is angry; rather, he uses rhetorical questions, irony, and a massive display of power to break through Job's bitterness. He knows that Job's heart has grown proud and bitter, and so he talks with Job with words indicating that he is way out of his league. God is going to rebuke Job for the audacity of thinking that he could dispute with God as an equal.⁵ Job's suffering has revealed his pride, and God is taking it head on.

Now it is gracious and merciful that God even speaks to Job. He is under no obligation to do so. His aim is to call Job back from the brink of self-sufficient destruction and to prove Satan wrong again. His ultimate aim is to pull worship out of Job's heart so that he can once again prove that Job's worship is not rooted in the gifts but the Giver.

God is about to start asking Job some questions.

Round One: Questions about Nature

Job 38:4-39:30 are a series of questions regarding Job's knowledge of the creation and provision in the natural world. God uses the world that Job can see, touch, and feel as series of courtroom exhibits. God's overarching points are clear: 1) he created the world in wisdom and he governs it wisely, in justice and with compassion, and 2) he rules supreme over the world, knowing and controlling every part of the universe.⁶

God uses the following categories to prove his wisdom and supremacy:

⁴ John Hartley, The Book of Job – NICOT, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 491.

⁵ Hartley, 489.

⁶ Hartley, 515.

The creation of the world (38:4-15) – He asks Job where he was at the beginning and if he has power like God. *"4 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding' (Job 38:4). 12 'Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place' (Job 38:12).*

The boundaries of the universe (38:16-24) – God inquires about Job's knowledge regarding the outer recesses of the created world. *"16 'Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? 17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? (Job 38:16-17).*

The control of nature (38:25-38) – Next God presses Job on his understanding of his ability to provide for the needs of the earth. *25 'Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt, 26 to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, 27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass? (Job 38:25-28).*

Additionally, God wants to know if Job can command the clouds and lightening. *34 'Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? 35 Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? (Job 38:34-36)*

The provision for animals (38:39-39:40) – This section is a wide-ranging list of mighty, majestic, and interesting animals that are cared for by God.

The lions and ravens are given food (38:39-41). Mountains goats give birth by God's command (39:1-4). Wild donkeys are set free (v 5-8), and wild oxen are subdued (v 9-12). Even the ostrich is made by God (v 13-18) with her foolish actions (e.g., flapping wings that cannot fly, leaving eggs exposed, and dealing cruelly with her young). The ostrich illustrates the point that there are some creatures that God made just for fun. Additionally, he lists the horse and its might (v 19-25), and the hawk with its ability to soar while seeing prey on the ground (v 26-30).

God uses all of these examples in nature to reveal Job's impotence. The answer to every question reveals the stark difference between God and Job. God created the world; Job wasn't even there. God knows the boundaries of the universe; Job doesn't even know where to look. God controls every element of nature, providing for majestic, mysterious, and curious animals; Job is powerless.

God Speaks Again

After this blistering display of majesty and power, God asks a penetrating and pointed question to Job: *And the Lord said to Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it" (Job 40:1-2).*

God levies the charge against Job. His suffering has caused him to be a faultfinder, a contender, and an arguer with God. And the point that God is making here is a choice that Job must make: either trust that God wisely rules the world or continue to pursue his complaint which is exalting himself about God.⁷

Job's answer reveals that God's majestic display has started to humble him: *4 "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4-5).*

Perhaps Job thought or wished that his encounter with God would be over now. However, God is not finished. He presses the case even further:

"Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. 8 Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? 9 Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? 10 "Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. 11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. 12 Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. 13 Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. 14 Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you (Job 40:7-14).

God identifies the core issue that caused him to speak: Job's sense of self-sufficiency and pride that were revealed in his suffering.

Therefore, the next series of questions focus on the difference between God's power and Job's.

Round Two: Questions about Power

God talks about power for a very specific reason. Job considers himself innocent, and he has charged God with being unjust. A mortal man is accusing the immortal God of not governing wisely. This is a serious charge, and Job needs to back it up.

To make the point, God points Job to two mammoth beasts: Behemoth and Leviathan. His purpose is to awaken Job to dire implications of his statements and to convince Job to submit to his lordship and rule.⁸ God's argument is if Job cannot subdue these mighty creatures, then what place does he have in charging God with wrong.

Listen to what God says:

⁷ Hartley, 517.

⁸ Hartley, 521.

15 "Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. 16 Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly...24 Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare? (Job 40:15-16, 24).

41 "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? 2 Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? 3 Will he make many pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words? 4 Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant forever? 5 Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls? (Job 41:1-6).

Now we are not sure what creatures God is referring to, and in some cases (41:18-20) God may be playing off of legends or speaking metaphorically. Regardless, the point is clear: if Job cannot subdue the great creatures of the earth, what business does he have in accusing God? Job is being called by God to decide whether he is going to continue to press his case or if he will choose to trust in a sovereign God.

God's case is now closed. We wait for Job's response.

Job's Response: Worship and Humility

Job has been overwhelmed with the majesty, power, and glory of God. The arguments of his friends have ceased; God has answered Job himself. What is Job's response? The book reaches its climax here.

42 Then Job answered the Lord and said: 2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

Notice four statements. Four statements that we need to remember when suffering comes:

- 1. "You can do all things" (v 2).** Job is confessing his encounter with the sovereignty of God. Lions, mountain goats, wild donkeys, horses, hawks and even ostriches have taught him that God is amazingly powerful. Light, rain, morning, the sea, and ice have all proclaimed God's majesty and might. Job received a tour of God's creative powers, and his conclusion is compelling: "no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job has now come to terms with the eclipsing power of "who?" over "why?"

The giving up the “why?” for “who?” only comes to those who understand and love the sovereign control of God in their lives. They cannot always make sense of what is going on or what the immediate purpose is. However, they are content to know that God is in control. Oh, how liberating this could be for some of you today – to decide that God is worthy to be trusted.

- 2. “I have uttered what I did not understand” (v 3).** Suffering can create words that are beyond your understanding. We need to be warned of this real danger. Beware of presumptuous words:

“I see no reason for this!”

“Nothing good can possibly come from this!”

“It’s just not fair”

“I can’t handle this”

“You are being cruel!”

How often those are the words which are quick to flow from our painful hearts! Learn from Job here: there is much to life that you do not fully understand. One lesson that we have to take from this book is the fact that there was another story behind Job’s life. And there is another story behind yours. You may not see it now, but you will one day.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

- 3. “Now my eye sees you” (v 4).** Suffering had led Job to a face-to-face encounter with God. Clarity, for Job, did not come with the answer to the “why?” question. It came by understanding what God is like. Now you might think, “Well, I would too if I had an encounter with God like Job!” And I think Job’s reply to you would be: “Do you realize how much more you have in the Word of God and in the person of Christ?”

Do not short-circuit the amazing power of the Scriptures, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and a personal relationship with Christ. New Testament believers have so much more reason because we have so much more revelation. A key to learning to bless in saturating your mind and heart with the revelation that God has given us.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a

little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7).

- 4. "I repent" (v 6).** Here is the final conclusion of the matter. Job humbles himself and repents. He changes his mind about his disposition toward God. He sees that all of his pursuits of know "why?" paled in comparison to knowing "who?". God has mercifully and forcefully showed him this. Job finally commits his life into the hands of his gracious God knowing that he can bear any fate, if he knows who is really in control.

So that raises a very interesting and final question. Why did God not tell Job the whole story? Here is why. If God had told him why it would have not addressed the ultimate question: Is God worthy to be worship absent of what he gives? Can God be worshipped regardless of his gifts? The brilliance of God here is amazing!

By not telling Job the story behind the story, he pulls from Job the one thing that is more worthy of anything in universe: humble worship of God! Job teaches us that humble worship of God is more valuable than answers and more valuable than his gifts. In the end, Job renounces all personal claims that would somehow put himself above God.⁹

Job found and embraced the eclipsing answer of God's sovereignty – his control. Sarah Edwards found and embraced it. George Mueller found and embraced it. We must as well.

Suffering calls us to humble ourselves before God believing that intimacy with him is more valuable than an easy life. In other words, we have to choose to bless.

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⁹ Hartley, 537.