

January 24, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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WOULD YOU INSTRUCT GOD? Job 40:1-42:6

It is not unusual for an illustration or a simple statement to be so profound, so catchy that it overshadows the point of the speech, conversation, or sermon. For example, many Americans are familiar with statements that former presidents made that have become cliches. Like Theodore Roosevelt's poignant statement on foreign policy, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Or Ronald Reagan's famous statement, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'"

The same thing happens with sermons. I heard Alistair Begg tell the story about a sermon he had preached. In the middle of the sermon, he decided to give an impromptu illustration about helping others. He told how he had been at the zoo with his children watching the monkeys pick fleas from each other. A couple weeks later he said that he was in the foyer after a service when he overheard two women talking. One woman said to the other, "Oh, be sure to get a copy of the monkey sermon." It wasn't a sermon about monkeys. It was about helping in ministry from Romans 15.

Many of us might testify that the same thing happens in the Job story. These last chapters teach us the importance of God proving that He is almighty and Job finally conceding that he needed to humble himself and submit to God's will. But what gets all the attention? Behemoth and Leviathan! Much debate surrounds these two creatures. What were they? Are they still around? Did God speak of actual creatures or are these simply references to common mythological figures of the ancient world, made-up creatures to help Job understand how insignificant he was?

We will consider the conversation between God and Job after the Lord's first speech, then briefly spend just a few minutes attempting to identify Behemoth and Leviathan, and then move on to the important lesson of the text.

The LORD's Response to Job's Response (40:1-14).

Let the arguer answer (40:1-3). It seems pretty amazing but Yahweh still spoke to the arguer Job. *And the LORD said to Job: (40:1). Why? Why did the Lord bother to continue working with someone who argued with Him? This is a reminder that God shows grace when He chooses and rejects when He chooses. Here God shows grace to Job like He often did to David and does to us. There are multiple examples in the psalms of David complaining or arguing with God. But the psalms don't end with the human complaint. Rather David always arrives at the conclusion that God is sovereignly correct. Likewise, we see examples of how Abraham and Moses debated with God, but always conceded to God's authority.*

A popular trend for religious writers is the encouragement to argue with God and pour out complaints like Old Testament saints did. But there is very little instruction or recommendations about always pressing toward the goal of submitting to His sovereign control. That the Almighty, Eternal God condescends to speak to us at all is a wonderful display of grace. And yet He continues to speak in His word even though we often do not appreciate it and generally don't deserve it.

God wondered to Job if the complainer will continue to argue with Him. "*Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it*" (40:2). In this simple question and statement, God used three words to describe Job's fault. First, Job was a *faultfinder*. The Hebrew word speaks of one who would correct the wrongdoer. The faultfinder is quite sure he or she is correct and anyone or anything that does not measure up must be wrong and ought to be pointed out. That becomes a real problem when the one correcting is a mere human trying to correct the all-knowing, wise Creator.

Second, God revealed that Job *contended* with the Almighty. The primary use of this Hebrew word describes physical combat,

going to do battle. However, as in this case, the word also refers to battling over words, ideas, as in a courtroom setting. That Job launched this attack against the Almighty was pretty foolish.

Third, God told Job that he was guilty of arguing. Again, this Hebrew word could describe a courtroom setting where evidence is presented in order to disprove. This happens when we gather all the evidence that proves that God does not _____. Fill in the blank with whatever it is that you think God has failed: to keep a promise, not been aware of your circumstances, not been fair, and so on.

Then the LORD said, *Let him answer it*. We will see in the next section how God would use what almost appears to be absurd arguments about Behemoth and Leviathan to help Job and us see how ridiculous it is for us mere humans to argue with God. The LORD was trying, testing Job to bring the dross of pride to the surface. So often God's test is to bring out the existence of pride so deeply engrained in us. It is God's goal, it is intent, it is for our good. Therefore, God's response to Job, "*Let him answer it*" is not unkind or a snide remark. In light of the examples of powerful beasts who God controls, it seems that God sincerely meant, "Job, think about this, are you really as powerful as I am?"

Our text is showing the important principle of progress toward humility (40:4-5). It is good for us, like Job, to acknowledge our comparative insignificance. *Then Job answered the LORD and said: "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?" (40:3-4a)*. We might feel like breathing a sigh of relief at this point. Finally the tested saint is getting it. Yes, but even this was a somewhat tentative or even evasive response. It is true that Job admitted that compared to God he was of small account. Who among us is not quick to acknowledge that about ourselves right now? It is true that, in light of God's mighty power, it is better for us not to try to answer. But still Job has not come to the point of dealing with his pride about insisting that he was right (even though he was).

In response to God's lesson about Job's insignificance in the larger picture, Job at least decided to learn in silence. He said, "*I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further*"(40:4b-5). Yes, it is good to get to the point that we stop arguing with God. But this is not the same as confession of sin and repentance.

This is such an important point in the testing process that we dare not miss it. At this point, Job does not back down from his claim that he was totally innocent and, therefore, God was wrong to test him. He teaches us that it is possible to be fully convinced that it is in our best interest to stop arguing, but not repent. Deciding to stop the pain does not mean that we are submissive. This is like crying, "Uncle." When we wrestled with our siblings and friends, we would be pinned down and unable to continue the match. But the match wasn't over until we said, "Uncle." Don't ask me why.

In the same way, I can respond to God's testing by crying, "Uncle" so that He will withdraw the test. But that does not mean that my heart has been truly humbled. It simply means that I realize I can't win. Does God take away the test when we finally say, "I am smaller than You are God"?

As we progress in the story through chapters 40-41, God will continually move Job to complete humility. There is so much about God's world that Job cannot explain. And finally he will come to the conclusion, there is actually so much about life that he claims to control that he actually cannot explain . . . but not yet! The real necessary spirit in silence is what Samuel demonstrated in his relationship with God. *And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10)*. Job was not at that submissive stage yet.

Therefore, we read in the next paragraph about the Lord's continuing challenge (40:6-14). It is foolish to exalt self. Job hasn't fully dealt with that yet. And that is why God continues to press the wrestling match even though Job said, "Uncle."

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: (40:6). Job needed to learn more about what he didn't know about himself. God said to him, "*Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me*" (v.7). Now God drives to the root of the problem to reveal how proud Job was. "*Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?*" (40:8) Job's arguments and his friends' arguments focused on God's justice. They claimed that God revealed justice for punishing Job for unconfessed sin. Job claimed that God was not showing justice because he had maintained righteousness.

God, the perfectly just One, speaks and asks if Job intended to condemn God's justice so that he (Job) would look like he was right? "Throughout the book, Job's focus has been on his righteousness. He has not been interested in regaining his goods or his status, or in being relieved from his suffering. He wants to be declared righteous and receive acknowledgment that he did nothing to deserve the tragedies that he has experienced." (John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary*, "Job," Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, 405.)

To argue that point is a way that robs God of His justice, His doing right, and is a serious attack against God's character. This is exactly what we are arguing when we claim, "God isn't fair!" Consider Job's complaint. "God isn't fair to allow this massive affliction when I have tried to be righteous." Does that not sound like some of our complaints? Like, "God isn't fair to give me a spouse who is difficult to live with." Or "God isn't fair to give me a rebellious child." Or worse, "God isn't fair not to give me a child." "God isn't fair to give me this physical, or mental, or emotional sickness." And God says to us as He said to Job, "*Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?*" (40:8)!

It is foolish to argue against God. You can't win a wrestling match against God because you will never be as powerful as God. "*Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?*" You will never be as majestic as God. "*Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor*" (40:10). You will never be able to exact vengeance on those who deserve it. God says, "*Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below*" (40:11-13). . . . if you can! When you can do this, then maybe God will agree with you that you can save yourself. "*Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you*" (Job 40:14).

When we judge God regarding His wisdom, His justice, His righteous acts, we put ourselves in the same place Lucifer was in when he decided to make himself like God. We so easily try to usurp

God's glory. To question God's justice and authority is to rob Him of what is rightly His by virtue of being our Creator.

"Here, if we have rightly found the heart of the theology of the whole book, is a very great depth. There is a rebuke in it for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses." (Francis Anderson, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, "Job," Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976, 287.)

When I can adorn myself with divine majesty, stretch forth my arm of authority and control all the matters of the universe, both obvious and secret, when I can render perfect justice, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, when I can render perfect eternal judgment, then God might consider the possibility that my own right hand can save me.

God Illustrated His Power (40:15-41:34).

First, God described to Job the power of Behemoth (40:15-24). What was this animal like? It was a herbivore (v.15) that was powerfully built (v.16). It had a large and powerful tail (v.17) to go with its massive strong frame (v.18). The creature lived in the marsh (v.21) and lived under lotus trees and willows, which were not extremely tall trees (v.22). Because of its might, this animal was unafraid when the river floods (v.23) and was too large or powerful to trap (v.24).

So what was it? Some scholars have suggested that maybe God described what we call the hippopotamus or maybe the elephant. But neither of them have large, powerful tails, and in ancient times humans did trap them and overpower them. Some conclude that God referred to a brontosaurus. But it seems like they would have been extinct in Job's day, if indeed Job lived sometime around Abraham. Maybe the best conclusion is that we can't say for sure what the animal was, but we can be certain it was more powerful than Job.

Then there was the creature called Leviathan. Its characteristics were even more impressive than the previous creature. It was too powerful to be controlled by humans (vv.1-6). Humans could not kill it with common weapons (vv.7,26-29). Anyone who dared attack it

paid a price (vv.8-10) because it was incredibly large and powerful (vv.12-14). Its outward skin is like shields (vv.15-17). It was some kind of weird fire-breathing creature (vv.18-21) that made crashing sounds as it walked (vv.22-25). It lived in the mire and when it swam in the sea it left a huge wake behind it (vv.30-32). Oh, yeah, and it was tall (v.34).

So what was it? It sounds like some kind of huge fire-breathing dragon. We can't say for sure what it was, but it was so powerful that humans were insignificant in comparison. We cannot lose sight of the whole point of the illustrations. God created and keeps under complete control animals (monsters) that Job could never hope to control. A small part of God's creation would cause terror to Job. And yet God spoke the creatures into existence. They live, they reign, they cause fear—for a season—and then die because of sin's curse. If Job cannot control something so obvious, how could he expect to control the deep and secret workings of God in the world, in circumstances, in himself? The question comes to us, "Do you really expect to control the working of the Spirit of God even within yourself?"

Job's Repentance (42:1-6).

After God's second illustration-filled speech, Job concluded, "I know" (42:1-3). Coming to know is a process. *Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (42:1-2).* Job thought he knew already before this point. Sometimes Job assured his friends that he knew and he was exactly right (9:2; 13:18; 19:25). Sometimes Job said he knew but he was wrong (9:28; 10:13; 30:23).

But after hearing God's lessons, Job knew. He really knew. The word translated *know* is the great Hebrew word *yada*, which means to know thoroughly, to know intimately. Often the word applies to knowledge of facts or experience in life. But more important, it applies to personal intimate knowledge and understanding of another or others. Most important, this is the word that speaks of personal, deep, intimate knowledge of God.

Job's new knowledge, our intimate knowledge of God, is not really just a supernatural miracle that happens to us. God brings us to

knowledge of Himself through His creation. He reveals Himself most plainly to us through His Word, the Bible. He uses the experiences of life to affirm His Word. Ultimately, God brings us to know Him intimately through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

The reason knowing God is so important is because to know God is to know self. Job showed us what it looks like when he repeated God's accusation. "*Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?*" (42:3a). Again, that accusation could have applied to the counselors. But Job admitted that he was the man at fault. "Yep, that's me!" He admitted that he yammered on thinking he knew what was right, what was wrong, who was right, and who was wrong . . . and He was right.

We need so much, so often to repeat God's accusation about us, that, *The [my] heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).*

Facing God's accusation against us helps us draw the right conclusion about self. Job concluded, "*Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know*" (42:3b). Paul concluded, *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out (Romans 7:18).* Knowing God helps us learn these sad truths about ourselves.

Job learned because he heard (42:4-5a). Notice how he repeated his own foolish challenge to God. "*Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me*" (43:4). He was learning how to be honest about himself. "*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear*" (42:5a). Job had heard (26:14 a faint whisper). We, on the other hand, hear God speak plainly in His Word.

Hearing God is good because it helps us to see God (42:5b-6). "*But now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes*" (42:5b-6). Spiritual sight is critical. Job was not speaking of physical, literal eyesight. He means that he now saw the character of God clearly with his spiritual eyes. We must beg God to open our spiritual eyes to see Him as He is so that we can see ourselves as we are. We need to pray with the psalmist, *Open my*

eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (Psalm 119:18).

We need wide-open, spiritual eyes so that we will not be like religious hypocrites who have eyes but can't see. Jesus described His relationship to the very religious people. *"This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive'"* (Matthew 13:13-14).

Spiritual sight is so important because it reveals the truth about us. And we may well conclude like Job did, *"Therefore I despise myself"* (42:6a). No good "Christian" writer, blogger, counselor in our day would ever recommend such a conclusion. But if we falsely accuse God of being unfair and unjust, we ought to despise ourselves. However, having acknowledged how desperate we are, we must not stay in the pit of self-pity, we need to change. God brings us to a clear understanding of our pitiful spiritual condition so that we will want to change.

Truth should lead to repentance. Job admitted that he was a sorry rascal *and repented in dust and ashes* (42:6b). It is interesting that Job did not repent of particular sins about which his friends accused him. He didn't repent of overt sins as Eliphaz had accused (22:2-11). He didn't repent of covert sins like Bildad implied he had done (18:11-18). Rather, Job simply turned around in his heart and mind. That is what *repent* means. Before this point, Job had felt the great need to justify himself before God. Before, Job had felt like God owed him some kind of explanation for his suffering. Before, Job had sensed a great need to be vindicated.

But now, in humble repentance, the sufferer understands that God can do more than he can imagine. He learned what Nebuchadnezzar would learn many years later (Daniel 4.35) . . . that God's plan cannot be thwarted. He learned, therefore, that whatever God does is good and right.

Job changed his mind because he realized that he was a whole lot smaller than he had imagined, and that God was not nearly as small as he had imagined. When God graciously reveals Himself to us so that we know Him intimately, we too will be pretty disgusted

with what we see in ourselves. That is when we turn from living for self, defending self, demanding what self wants, to submitting to God as our owner and authority. And he takes us to Himself, washes away all our selfish filth, holds us in His arms, and tells us how much He loves us.