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The Voice in the Whirlwind #11:  
Will the Contender with the Almighty Yield?  
Job 38-41:2

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The difference between a wind and a tornado is the difference between potential relief on a hot day and the destruction of your home in a single hour. So far in the book of Job the discussion of the subject of God and His dealings, taking place between Job and his four interlocutors - Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu - have largely been like a gentle summer breeze - sometimes welcome and refreshing, often times promising more relief from the heat of Job's suffering than it really delivers.

In this penultimate section of the book of Job, all of that is about to change, however. The whirlwind has begun to blow. This is no longer a discussion *about* God. This is God *Himself* speaking. At last Job has an answer. Job, you may recall, has been longing for this moment. He has been praying and lamenting and complaining that God would not face him. Job has demanded a reckoning with the Lord. He has cried out for a face to face meeting to settle his dispute with God. And now he has it. But as we will see, it proves to be much more than Job had bargained for.

There are two speeches from God here: the first in chapters 38-40:2 and the second in 40:6-41:34. Job replies to the Lord in 40:3-5 and 42:1-6. This morning we are going to focus on God's addresses to Job, and then next week we'll consider Job's response to God. There are four things about God with which Job is forced to come to terms:

1. *The faithfulness of God*
2. *The wisdom of God*
3. *The justice of God*
4. *The power of God*

Let's look at the first of them. The *faithfulness of God*.

Look with me, please, at chapter 38:1, "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind," or look forward to chapter 40:6, "The the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind." Notice first that the *name* of God is used here. The last time the name of God is used was back in the opening two chapters when we were given a window on

the heavenly court room and in the dialogue between God and Satan. Now, however, as God turns to address Job directly, we again meet Him described by His name.

Names, of course, mean very little to most of us. We choose our children's names perhaps because of a family member for whom they are named or simply because we liked the sound of the name. In ancient Hebrew culture, however, names were intended to summarize and reveal the essential character and nature of the person. God's name is the covenant name by which He revealed Himself to Moses. It was the name by which God revealed His unchanging faithfulness to His own righteous character and to His own chosen people. In Exodus 3 God met Moses in the burning bush and declared His name to reassure Him in the crisis moment of His people's need that the God of their fathers had not forgotten them. He said, "I AM WHO I AM." The Hebrew for "I AM" sounds like the name *Yahweh*. In Exodus 34:6, when Moses seeks to see the Lord's glory, God's name is proclaimed, as "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

The name *Yahweh*, indicated in our translations by the word LORD in capitals, is intended to immediately evoke the faithfulness and commitment of God to His covenant people. He is the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. This is the God who speaks to Job out of the whirlwind.

Now look back for a moment to Job 23:2-7. Here is Job's desperate problem: "Even today my complaint is bitter; My hand is listless because of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, *That* I might come to His seat! I would present *my* case before Him, And fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words *which* He would answer me, And understand what He would say to me. Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take *note* of me. There the upright could reason with Him, And I would be delivered forever from my Judge."

Job is aching for God to come to him and speak. Now at last He does. And as He does, we are reminded of His covenant name. Job's cries have not gone unheard. His petitions were not empty or vain. God comes now to him in His infinite mercy to speak to Job. As Derek Thomas puts it, "Whatever else may be true, God wants us who read this book to be aware that He has not abandoned Job, not will He, nor can

He. And why not? Because He is bound by a covenant which He has made.” (Thomas, p286)

What the text is doing here, as we read about God’s final confrontation with Job, is reminding us not to lose sight of God’s character. He is the faithful God of covenant love. Friends, we are being invited, as we suffer and struggle and ask our questions about “why this is happening to me.” We are being invited to cling to the character of God. When you don’t get it, when it is not clear, when you don’t see what possible purpose God could have in our trials, do not let go your grip of the covenant faithfulness of God Himself. This is an invitation to confess faith in God’s unshakeable goodness who has bound Himself to love and care for His people by His covenant of grace. When the whirlwind strikes, remember that the LORD is the one who speaks from the midst. Only those who know the faithful character of God can submit to and endure the storm.

But even more than this being an invitation to affirm again God’s covenant faithfulness, it is itself an affirmation that God is the faithful LORD whether we confess it or not. Job, remember, has strayed beyond the mere defense of His own integrity into accusing God of unrighteousness and injustice in His dealing with him. Job has forgotten that God is the LORD, the covenant God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Job doesn’t see it. And there may be times in the depths of searing sorrow in our own experience when we can’t see it either. How can God be just when this is happening to me?

Job 38:1 and 40:6 are there to say to you in those moments, whether you recognize it or not, this is who God is. You may have lost sight of it. You may be unable to believe it. But God remains the faithful God of covenant love who works all things together to the good of those who love Him, whether in the crisis of our own deep wounds we can see Him to be so or not. God will not and cannot let you go, suffering Christian. He has bound Himself to you by His covenant. You are held in His hand. Your pain cannot break His grip.

Then secondly, we meet here the great wisdom of God.

Job has demanded a tribunal with God in the dock. He wants to prosecute his case against God. He wants to call God to face cross examination. What becomes immediately apparent to Job as soon as God does come to him and begins to speak is that God is not the one who will face interrogation. Job 38:2: “Who is this who

darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man, I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” The same phrase recurs again in 40:7: “Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”

Job appears to have forgotten the creator-creature distinction. He has overlooked the fact that we are the work of God’s hands. God is the Lord, and there is no other. Job, in his desire for justice, has demanded that God give an account of Himself to Job, forgetting that we all must give an account to God.

My wife and I once shared the gospel with a friend who seemed very interested in the Christian message. After returning from vacation, however, her interest had died away and gone completely cold. Her reason for rejecting the gospel was that, upon reflection, she decided she could not believe in a God who condemned homosexuality as a sin. She rejected the Christian faith and embraced a spirituality of her own devising instead.

Job’s error is as common in our day as it ever has been. We like to remake God in our own image. We reconfigure our ideas of Him to conform to our preferences. We make God meet our own criteria and answer to our norms. We make God fit into our lives comfortably, and we demand that He meet our standards of what is reasonable and right. We want God to step into the dock and face our cross examination to determine if He meets the standards we have set up for Him.

But God is about to teach Job, and us, a vital lesson in humility. He tells Job here what Paul teaches his detractors in Romans 9:19-21. Against God’s total sovereignty in salvation, Paul’s opponents have said, “Why does God still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But notice Paul’s reply, “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have the power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

Who are you, O man, to reply against God? God is Creator, you are His creature. There are things you will not understand about Him or His ways and works. It becomes the creature of God not to stand in arrogant accusation against God, but to bow in humble submission to the wise ordering of the Lord.

And in chapters 38 and 39 we have a beautiful and humbling resumé of God's wisdom in action. We are taken on a tour of creation. In 4-21 God asks Job about the earth. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know!"

Then in 22-38 He asks Job about the heavens. "Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? By what way is light diffused or the east wind scattered over the earth? Who has divided a path for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt to cause it to rain on a land where there is no one, a wilderness in which there is no man; to satisfy the desolate waste, and cause to spring forth the growth of tender plants?"

Verse 31, "Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades or loose the belt of Orion?"

And in verses 39-39:30 God asks about the animal kingdom, "Do you know the time when the wild mountain goats bear young? Or can you mark when the deer gives birth?" Verse 19, "Have you given the horse strength? Have you clothed his neck with thunder?" Verse 26, "Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, and spread its wings towards the south?"

God, says Calvin, "is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us", as "nurses commonly do with infants." (*Institutes*, I.XIII.I, McNeil, 121) His self revelation in Holy Scripture is accommodated to our finite creaturely capacities. God is taking Job and us on a tour of His creation and saying – look at that! Did you see that! How about that storm? What about the snow on the mountains? What about that creature? How about the way that light works? Do you understand the complexities of the world I have made?

Here is vital pastoral advice for any suffering, depressed believer. Look at the wonder and complexity, the beauty and grandeur, the intricacy and variety of the created world. Get out and get a sense again of how small you. Have a look at the Pleiades and the belt of Orion and the Great Bear and remember again that there is much that you do not have even the beginnings of an understanding of. When you ask your "why me" question of the Lord, when you shout, "I don't understand" at the heavens, remember the lesson Job was being taught, that all creation ought constantly

to teach us: not understanding is part of what it means to be a creature. You don't know now; maybe you will never know.

God doesn't answer Job's why me questions, does he? Instead, He asks questions of His own, and they all drive home the foolishness of Job and the wisdom of God, the littleness of Job and the vastness of God. When we do not understand, we do need to keep hold of the fact that not understanding is part of what it means to be a creature. Only God understands. And He is the LORD, the God of covenant love. You can trust Him.

Part of Satan's strategy back in Eden when He tempted Adam and Eve was to suggest that they ought to be like God. He suggested that they reject God's lordship and take matters into their own hands. In eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were saying we reject the right of God to determine what good and evil is, and we claim that right for ourselves.

The instinct that wants God to explain Himself in our own private courtroom is but the latest manifestation of that same ancient impulse. We want to be god, and we struggle to accept our creatureliness. Part of the path to peace in the midst of trials is to climb down from the throne and take your place in the dust as a mere creature again and enthrone the Lord as the only wise God.

Then notice *the justice of God*.

Look at God's second speech in chapter 40 verses 8-14. "'Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself *with* majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone *who is* proud, and humble him. Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low; Tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, Bind their faces in hidden *darkness*. Then I will also confess to you That your own right hand can save you.'

There is a scene in the political drama series, the *West Wing*, where the central character, President Bartlett, asks to be left alone in the National Cathedral after the funeral of his lifelong secretary and friend Mrs. Landingham. In rage and grief at his loss, the President walks towards the central altar demanding answers and

condemning God, “Have I displeased you, you feckless thug?” He shouts. “3.8 million new jobs, that wasn't good? Bailed out Mexico. Increased foreign trade. Thirty million new acres of land for conservation. Put Mendoza on the bench. We're not fighting a war. I've raised three children. That's not enough to buy me out of the doghouse?”

I don't deserve this is how he felt. God is guilty - I am good. Job has been railing against God, demanding to know why he should be treated with such injustice in much the same way, hasn't he? He has accused God of wrong in his rush to defend himself. But look at God's response. He does not explain Himself to Job. What He says is, if you are so righteous as to condemn me, then you take up the role of cosmic judge. If your justice is so impeccable then, you execute justice on the wicked. But if you are more righteous than me, there are implications. If I am accountable to you, well then, verse 14, “I will confess to you that *your own right hand can save you.*”

What a devastating exposé of our hearts that is! Do you see what God is saying to us here? If you come to loom so large in your own eyes and I become so small, if you become judge and God becomes the defendant, well then you had better be ready to be your own savior. You have just declared yourself beyond the need for God. Verse 14 exposes the idolatry and inconsistency of our hearts. We want to judge God when we think He fails us, and we want Him to save us when we think we need Him. But you can't have it both ways.

Either you bow in creaturely humility before the infinite wisdom of God, clinging to the covenant faithfulness of God, confessing the perfect justice of God and rest in the saving plan of God, or you do not. There is no middle ground.

Then finally, there is *the power of God.*

Look at chapters 40 verses 15-41:34. Two creatures dominate these chapters: Behemoth and Leviathan. Now a great deal of ink has been spilled over the exact identification of them. The most common is to identify them as the hippopotamus and the crocodile respectively. Others have pointed out their similarity to the supernatural beasts of pagan mythology, which, when they appear in scripture are used as metaphors for Satan and his minions. Whether they are metaphors for Satan or real beasts is beside the point. The two chapters declare that God is mightier than they.

Behemoth and Leviathan are depicted as the most ferocious and powerful of God's creation. But nestled in the center of the description of these two creatures, God makes His point: verses 10-11, "No one is so fierce that he should dare stir Him up. Who then is able to stand against Me? Who has preceded me that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine."

The echo, in Romans 11:33-36 that we read earlier, of Job 41:11 is instructive at this point. God said to Job, "Who has preceded Me that I should repay him?" Paul says to us, "Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has been His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to Him? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever, Amen."

The message in both passages is the same: Get your perspective right. The Lord is mighty. You are not. The Lord is in control. You are not. The Lord is righteous. You are not. Bow before Him in trials as well as in triumphs and give Him glory.

What ought our response be to God's self disclosure here? Derek Thomas puts it well, "There is a rule in the kingdom of God which runs counter to natural law: in order to grow up spiritually, we shall need to grow downwards, to grow up into Christ we shall need to grow down into lowliness, or humility. As Packer puts it, 'Christians...grow greater, by getting smaller.'" (Thomas 290)

As hard as that process is, especially when we hurt, as we engage in it, we must not forget the almost shocking fact that the God of faithfulness, wisdom, justice and power revealed to Job here, and before whom we are rightly humbled, made *Himself* of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, *He humbled Himself* and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, in the person of Jesus Christ, as Philippians 2:7 and 8 remind us.

The God of wisdom, power and justice is the God of covenant love who has marshaled all His vast resources and employed them in your redemption in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Amen.