

Out of the storm

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[0 : 00] Dorothy, thank you. What do you make of that? How do you respond to the Lord saying this kind of thing? Job answered the Lord, end of our reading and said, I am unworthy.

! What he means is, I am light, I am small, I am of no account. Hearing the questions that you have asked Lord, and hearing what you have said Lord, I realise now that how little I know, and how small I am. I put my hand over my mouth, I will shut up, and I bow before you Lord Almighty. Job, we've been reading over these past month or so, is a long and deep book about suffering in God's world. Do you remember what's happened? Recap, Job, a real and upright believer, has suffered awfully. You remember that from the beginning.

In a couple of days of extreme and appalling tragedy, all the blessings of life were ripped from him. His possessions taken, his children crushed under a collapsed house, his health ruined, and bursting out in dark lament, Job cursed the day of his birth, and he groaned, why?

Now, as we've sat with him these past weeks, I don't know how Job, the book, has connected with you. I think for some of us, his suffering and his groans may have connected with us, sharply, personally maybe.

[1 : 36] Memories from our past, or experiences now, or fears for the future. As we too face the reality sometimes of intense and unexplainable suffering, and we do say ourselves, why, why?

As the book goes on, if you remember Job's friends, they speak wrongly to him. You are suffering because you have sinned. God rules, he's against you, he's punishing you now. Not just wrong to say, but cruel to this believer, to this man who has done nothing to deserve this pain.

And yet some of what they say does stick in him. Because Job is a believer, and he knows that God is God. As I suffer, he holds my life in his hands.

He does rule. And right now, he is tearing into me. And it's not right. Oh, that I could defend myself to him, Job says.

Actually, not just defend himself to God, but as the book goes on, Job says, I have questions for you, God. Because, Lord, I'm meant to be your friend. But you have wronged me.

[2 : 53] What on earth are you doing? Why are you running this world like this? Explain yourself and answer me. We may, we can feel this in ourselves sometimes.

Can we not? When young children lose their dad in a climbing accident, when a cancer diagnosis comes out of the blue, when you're made redundant again, you get injured, or your savings disappear, or your stuff gets nicked and you have nothing left.

When life hurts so very badly, Lord, you have wronged us. I treat the ones I love better than you treat us.

Why are you running your world like this? What, what the, what the hell do you think you are doing, God? In chapters 38 to 41, in the climax of this very, very high stakes book, it is very high stakes, the Lord speaks.

Look at this at the start of our reading, chapter 38, verse 1, Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. Notice two things. First, the Lord spoke.

[4 : 13] He is not some distant deity. He is Yahweh. He's the Lord. He's the God who is personally committed in covenant love to his people, to Job. Notice secondly, he spoke out of the storm.

I guess you might remember the last time you were caught in a storm. Thick clouds, gusting wind, beating rain, the heavens cracking. You felt so small. You trembled a bit before such terrifying power.

The Lord spoke to Job, not in a still small voice, but out of the storm, because we're right to tremble before him. And he said to Job, chapter 38, who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?

My plans means my counsel, the way I run the world. Job, says the Lord Almighty, you find fault with me.

And you darken my ways. Yet you have spoken without knowledge, so brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you will answer me.

[5 : 25] And for Christian believers today, like many of us, many of us at some point groaning, why? Many of us at some point seeking God out and saying, what are you doing?

Even some of us at some point, what the hell do you think you are doing in my life, God? Our Lord, who is for us, would ask us some questions.

Could it be that if and when we begin to find fault with him, could it be that we don't know what we're talking about? Could it be that as he tells us and opens our eyes to his wise and mighty governing of his world, could it be that you and I are brought to realise how little we know and how small we are?

Could it be that in our suffering, in our suffering, before the Lord Almighty, who is for us and loves us, could it be that we are moved to put our hand over our mouth and to bow humbly before him? Could it? Well, let's listen together to this magnificent speech. We can only touch the outer fringes of it in 15 minutes.

[6 : 46] The Lord's first speech, it runs through to the start of chapter 40, chapters 38 to chapter 40, as the Lord, as Job, is questioned by the Lord who rules.

In verses 4 to 21, he is the Lord who rules the entire universe. He's ordered, yet chaos-limiting, vast, light and dark universe.

Can you see that? Follow along with me. In the middle of suffering and despair, our world can shrink into personal pain and gloom.

And that was Job in chapter 3. Turn out the lights, cover me in darkness, may the morning stars become dark and no shout of joy be heard. Pain can make us withdraw into nothingness.

And in these verses, the Lord sort of lifts Job's head and opens his eyes to the beginnings of the universe and the grand, vast sweep of his creation.

[7 : 58] Verse 4. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know.

Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set? Or who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Can you imagine yourself back there? Have you ever seen a grand building project take place? We lived in London 20, 25 years ago. I remember the Gherkin skyscraper going up in the city of London and walking past each day and seeing the surveyors marking out and then the piles driven deep into the London clay and then the structure rising bit by bit and eventually two years later 180 metres tall of curved steel and gleaming glass.

I mean, you think, how on earth do they do that? Just majestic. Takes your breath away as you stand before it. I was there. I saw it.

Verses 4 to 7 is the creation of the whole earth. He marked the dimensions. He laid the foundations. And in his infinite wisdom and power he built all of everything.

[9 : 23] You look out of the windows here. This designed and ordered, stable, beautiful earth we live on. Can you imagine back to the day of creation? And as the almighty creator did his work, he had an audience, you know?

The morning stars sang, wow, it takes our breath away. And all the angels shouted for joy at the sheer majesty of what God had made this world we live in.

Here's the question. Where were you? I wasn't there. Can you understand it? The creation of the universe? No, I can't.

He is Lord of this whole vast good creation. Who next in these verses controls and constrains chaos?

That's verses 8 to 11. Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb? When I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness?

[10 : 25] When I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place? When I said, this far you may come and no farther. Here is where your proud waves halt.

In the Bible, the sea often symbolises disorder and chaos and danger and evil. And when you get caught in the sea, you know why. I used to live in South Wales many years ago on the coast.

And we'd go down to the seafront on the Bristol Channel on a stormy evening and feel the dangerous, unruly power of the waves crashing against the cliffs. Such force.

And the Lord says, Job, think of the Bristol Channel and the raging sea as my baby. at creation, bursting forth from the womb ready to cause havoc.

The sea. And then God wraps up this baby and clothes him in clouds and darkness and puts him in a playpen with doors and bars so he cannot roam free. Ask this, why does the raging sea around the UK not overflow the cliffs and sweep us away?

[11 : 40] You say, well it's to do with air pressure and gravity and the amount of water and the tides and temperatures and so on. And that's right. That's how the sea is kept in place. But why? Why are we not flooded and overwhelmed?

Because, verse 11, God said, this far you may come and no farther. Here is where your proud waves halt. In God's universe of which you and I understand so little, he constrains chaos.

He puts limits on evil. When some evil strikes your life there is comfort here.

Because we have a sovereign God who says, this far and no farther. God's death and yet at the same time notice there is a place for chaos in creation.

And in some sense God even swaddles and protects disorder and the things that attack us. who has the power, Job, to control the seas?

[12 : 51] Not me, my Lord. The questions keep coming. Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?

Have you? No, I haven't. The earth takes shape like clay under a seal. Its features stand out like those of a garment. The wicked are denied their light and their upraised arm is broken.

Every morning our God orders the dawn to come. This is how the world works and light overcomes darkness. A sign that one day he will judge wickedness and evil.

Well now then come to the extremes and the corners of God's universe. Have you, Job, journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?

Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?

Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me if you know all this. What is the way to the abode of light and where does darkness reside?

[13 : 56] Can you take them to their places? Do you know the path to their dwellings? Surely you know you who question my running of the world for you were already born.

You've lived so many years. But of course I don't know because I was born in Preston, Lancashire in 1975. These questions that the Lord Almighty asks, where were you?

Have you? Have you seen? Do you know? Do you get a sense of what these questions do to Job and to us? What they do is begin to open up the massive gulf between us and the Lord.

They open up the enormous gap between what you and I know and what he knows. where were you?

I wasn't there Lord but you were. Who shut up the sea? Not me but you did. Have you ever commanded the dawn? No but you have.

[15 : 09] Do you know? I don't I don't think I've learnt this lesson I don't know how many years it will take me to learn this but it is so tempting to think that God is just a slightly bigger version of us.

Do you know what I mean? I'm six foot he's a nine foot version of me. My big friend or a decent father my conversation partner the God of the universe here to bless me and help me and when life goes terribly wrong it's obvious surely that he is doing a bad job.

You've got it wrong God it's not meant to be like this what do you think you're doing? I could do a better job than you what is going on? But he is not just a slightly bigger me he is the eternal sovereign Lord of all he rules wisely and powerfully over this vast and ordered stable joy bringing creation he commands he constrains chaos and evil he orders the door he breaks the wicked he sees all he reigns over life and death and light and darkness today in 2023 right now today at the start of December he rules over this good world marked by chaos and suffering he is the Lord Almighty do you think you know better than him?

will you find fault with him? we'll move quicker now in verse 22 a slight shift so from the starts and the sweep of creation God now calls on Job and us to look upwards to the skies to the the trouble and life bringing skies above us because in this world about which we so know so little both trouble and life pour down on us from above we know that don't we?

have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail which I reserve for times of trouble for days of war and battle what is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed!

[17 : 34] or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth snow and hail which come from him batter and lightning burns at the very same time who cuts a channel for the storm to water a land where no one lives an uninhabited desert to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass who does that?

you do Lord does the rain have a father? yes it's you who fathers the drops of dew? you do from whose womb comes the life threatening ice that freezes people from your womb who gives birth to the frost from the heavens when the waters become hard as stone when the surface of the deep is frozen or consider the stars Job the Lord is moving quickly here many of us will have looked up on a cloudless night and just marvelled can you bind the chains of the Pleiades no I can't can you loosen Orion's belt can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the bear with its cubs do you know the laws of the heavens can you set up God's dominion over the earth I can't and nor verses 34 to 38 am I able to command and count the clouds and bring life-giving waters on the earth because there is so much I don't understand so much

I've not seen so much I cannot do yet you can Lord the Lord he rules the universe the Lord he rules the skies finally both disturbingly and wonderfully he rules the animals the the hunting untamable terrifying stupid blood-drinking wild animals of his he rules them we in our house over here we own a few fish and a couple of guinea pigs as you know they are domesticated animals they're sweet and furry the guinea pigs not the fish and they and they and they hold no threat unless they give you a little nip Job owned sheep and camels and donkeys they are farm animals they are under his control on his farm and yet beyond Job's ordered farm and outside the reassuring control and order of our lives and our pets there is a world of terrifying wildness threatening to break in and hurt just like when suffering invades our safe spaces there is a whole wild world which

God himself rules and sustains more questions for you Job because I'm not finished 38 39 do you Job hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket do you no I don't who provides food for the raven when it's young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food can you picture that you know those David Attenborough nature documentaries high definition the little cuddly looking lion cubs are hungry they look so sweet you want to stroke them they need their food and the camera shot changes and the lioness crouches eyeing the unsuspecting herd of antelopes little baby antelopes who have mummies and daddies and she chases and she separates a weak youngster from its mother and then she tears it apart and there's blood and flesh everywhere as the little lion cubs feast before the ravens dive in and pick through the leftovers and it's beautifully filmed and the young are fed the young lionesses who cry out to God and yet at the same time it's vicious and it's brutal and it's

God who hunts the prey and it's God who feeds the ravens that is how things work in God's world do you Job hunt the prey no Lord you do in chapter 39 we meet the mountain goats God knows them he cares for them God lets the wild donkeys go free in 39 verse 9 will the wild ox consent to serve you Job will it stay by your manger at night the wild ox was six feet tall with two long horns the wild ox gores its enemies and breaks bones Job there is wild stuff out there it's dangerous can you tame it no but you can the ostrich 39 13 onwards do you know there are animals out there that are so strange and harsh and stupid and yet verse 18 when she spreads her feathers to run she laughs at horse and rider and then consider the war horse verse 19 do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane do you make it leap like a locust striking terror with its proud snorting you and I do not live in an age where we're faced with a cavalry charge of war horses terrifying who gives the horse its strength you are its master lord and then finally in verses 26 to 30 come back to the food chain there's predator and prey does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread its wings towards the south does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high it dwells on a cliff and stays there at night a rocky crag is its stronghold from there it looks for food its eyes detected from afar its young ones feast on blood and where the slain are there it is that's a way to end isn't it young hawks slurping up blood from the prey from the hawk whom God has given wisdom to what do you make of the lord's speech this is new to me this week I thought it just said god is big so much more than that it is the lord god who rules this vast ordered chaos limited universe of life and death he commands it all and he cares it is the lord god who rules the skies and holds the stars in place and delivers the freezing or the life-giving rain it is a teeming

powerful world a destructive and bloody and terrifying wild world out there which he rules and he cares for and he oversees and you and i are here and we know so very little and we have seen so very little and in our suffering we simply cannot fathom his wise ways this god who made all and holds chaos and feeds the predator and will break the arm of the wicked in chapter 40 verse 1 the lord said to jake will the one who finds fault with the almighty correct him let him who accuses god answer him what should i say like i don't think all of us are sitting here this morning going god you're a monster you're a monster we suffer we grow why we seek him we say what are you doing there will be times there may be times when we think to ourself what the hell are you doing

[25 : 42] to which the lord would say let me ask you some questions sometimes when i preach that in a bible passage it's 20 minutes long and there's a very simple thing to do and to believe and go away and i think to myself tick yes i know that okay off i go into my life i don't think job 38 and 39 is like that i think it's a lifetime of getting to grips with who we are in god's world i think i know a lot more than i do and i seek to humble myself before my lord but i do quite a lot of the time live as though he's just a slightly bigger version from me who knows just a touch more and given a few years maybe i will discover almost as much as it's not like that it's not like that i know so little i think to myself maybe i should spend time thinking about the creation of the world that's what job 38 is can i imagine myself back there almost incomprehensible as he marks off the heavens and creates all of this and could i imagine that day when the morning stars sing and the angels shout for joy that is this world we live in even now today i understand that so little this teaching here that there is chaos and evil and disorder in the world and yet the lord swaddles it and constrains it it's beyond me almost i feel so neat and safe in my house at home and then something breaks in and i think that's not right it's not fair it's not a neat safe world god's universe and i don't grasp his ways and were i be tempted to say at some point it's your fault you are wrong you're a monster you well now is the time for me to stop and put my hand over my mouth he's not against me this god who i fathom so little of he's not against me he's the lord he's my covenant god yet when i and you suffer so badly what should i do i must not curse him to his face i must not find fault with him job 38 and 39 what should come out of it in job 40 verse 3 job answered the lord i am unworthy how can i reply to you how little i know how small i am how great you are the skirts of your greatness i can barely comprehend i shut my mouth i bow before you and i trust that as you care for the wild animals and feed the young you the covenant god you will care for me and before me and you will restore me but for now i will sit in silence and shut my mouth before you and let me lead us in a prayer let's pray together our father you know

and you see the depths of misery which might be ours now which may be ours at some point you are the lord and you see all and you know all and we say to you today that you are beyond our fathoming you are greater than we imagine your ruling of this world more complex than we can see but you are our god please make us those who find our place before you please save us from finding fault with you please humble us before you and then in due time lift us up we ask in jesus name amen