

Learning to love the decisions God has made for you.

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 January 2023

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Would you please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Job and Chapter 38 of the Book of Job. Now the section of Job that I'll be covering is a lengthy section, not one that we will read, but it really is from 38 to 42.

And it is this sort of, for want of a better phrase, the interaction between God and Job. And I will read verses 1 through to 11 so that we can understand the kind of language that is being used of Job 38.

So now hear God's word. So Job 38 beginning at verse 1. Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Dress for action like a man. I will question you, and you will make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding, who determines its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it? Or what were its bases sunk?

[1 : 28] Or who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?

When I made the clouds its garments and the thick darkness its swaddling band and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors and said, Thus far shall you come and no further.

And here shall your proud ways be stayed. Well, that's just an example of the Lord's language to Job.

And of course, if you go all the way to chapter 42, Job answers. I'll just read this because this is really Job's only response.

And then it says, Then Job answered the Lord and said, this is Job 42 verse 1. So God has been speaking for a long time where he's had a lot to say.

[2 : 32] Job has had to take a lot in. He's had to understand a lot. And then Job answered to the Lord and said, I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Who is this that high counsels that knowledge? Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

So Job is had, for want of a better word, a bit of a telling off by the Lord or from the Lord his God.

And I can assure you, no one likes being told off by the Lord. No one likes to be corrected, even by their neighbor.

But to be corrected by the Lord your God is both challenging and comforting. Now, of course, throughout Scripture, there are many other passages where we have this combination of both challenge and comfort.

[3 : 40] Deuteronomy 29, 29 is also one of those verses where the secret things belong unto the Lord our God. And the things that are revealed belong unto us.

That is, at the same time, both comforting and challenging. And then, of course, the reason why that is the case, it's a bit like John 3, 17.

No one remembers the verse after the verse everyone remembers. But the reason why the secret things belong unto the Lord our God and the things that are revealed belong unto us is so that we may keep the law perfectly.

So there's a reason for it. But the point that I want to sort of stretch out this morning is this idea of being addressed by God.

And I want to do it under a fairly simple heading. And that is, there comes a time where if you haven't learned this lesson already, now is the time to learn it.

[4 : 37] And that is that you have to learn to love the choices that God makes for you. Now I, for one, like making my own decisions.

And even better than that, I like making decisions for other people. And in fact, I think I can make decisions better for others than they can actually make for themselves.

Okay? Not only do I feel this way about my mother or my nan, but I feel this way about all my brothers, my children, even you. And I've got a biblical defense for it as well, given the position of pastor.

But what trumps all of that is that at the end of the day, we have to learn to love the decisions and choices that God makes for us.

Everything from why has God allowed this to happen when I'm in a rush? Why has God allowed that train to be canceled when he knows I have to get there? Why has God allowed this or that to happen?

[5 : 43] Now I'm not just saying this because I got stuck in Paris for ten and a half hours. And I said on Wednesday night that in absolute love and good grace, the French had problems.

There's something about the French that must require a particular grace, I'm telling you. No one's French in here, are they? I love the French.

I just don't like the security guards. The point that I'm trying to conclude with or that I want us to understand this morning is that we, God allows us, or God has ordained rather us to live a life where we make choices all the time.

And we are, suffer the consequences, both good and bad. We don't always suffer. We have the consequences, both good and bad, of the decisions we make. But every now and then, God, when we're not exactly where we ought to be, God makes choices that we perhaps would not have made for ourselves.

Or we would have, but we've just not made them yet. And God makes them on our behalf. Now, I don't want to go down the rabbit hole of the type of culture that we're in now or the rabbit hole of where that will actually lead.

[7 : 03] But there are plenty of people in the church, sadly, who use the phrase when interpreting scripture, but it's the 21st century. As if that what was written in God's word was relevant at the time when it was written, but now must be interpreted in the context of the 21st century.

And, of course, these people, that was then, this is now. These people are everyone who believe in homosexuality to, you know, a number of things involving climate change and all of these things that they misinterpret scripture to fit in line with their pre-desired ways and the way that they think things ought to be.

What I want us to do this morning is just to follow one simple principle, that God's word says what it says and means what it means. And because God is eternal, therefore the meaning is eternal.

Okay? It's a very simple principle, that because God is eternal, therefore the meaning is eternal. I don't want to accuse God of writing his word or giving us his word as though God hasn't thought about the 21st century or the 22nd century or the 23rd century.

So, oops, you didn't cover that one, Lord. I don't want us to go down that because one of the things that people do to sort of make the word of God no longer applicable to them is to say either God hasn't given them sufficient enough information for them to change their mind, which is just an act of disobedience, really.

[8 : 43] Or they say, yeah, but what about this? What about that? You know, it's the 21st century, right? In other words, people have always got answers for not taking God at his word.

And I guess in order to understand what is happening here in Job 38 to 42, it is almost a requirement. Well, it is a requirement that we just listen to what God says, take it as it says, and that he means what he means.

And I want to do this under the heading of learning to love the choices that God makes for us. Now, that is a difficult line to swallow given the life of Job.

Most of us understand how the book of Job begins. His life is literally turned upside down by permission of heaven, by permission of God, that Satan can do anything that he likes to Job apart from take his life.

And that level of permission given to Satan from God means that God is making a choice for Job, that Job then has to go through and live with the choices that God has made for him.

[9 : 51] So, this sentence may sound comforting to some, but when you actually look at it in the context of Job, you think, wow, this is a big deal to even consider that.

But here's the second thing I want us to consider in light of that. That it is entirely possible for a Christian to live their life as though God is keeping them in the dark. That why don't I know?

Or at least, why don't I know what I think I need to know or I ought to know? Why hasn't God told me? Now, of course, I'm not talking about a spiritual darkness as though you are an unbeliever.

I'm talking about a genuine not knowing. Just a not knowing everything that God knows. That what God is doing is not clear to you.

And it's not clear because you don't have the necessary wisdom to understand. It's not clear because God hasn't revealed it to you. And so, you see the wheels of life turning and you see that God is moving you in a direction.

[10 : 51] You think, I don't understand this. But this is where we have to fall back on the character of God and go, okay, who is the one controlling this? What is his character like?

Because if I don't know what he's doing but I can know what he is like, then I can find comfort in what he's like. So, if I know that God is love and that he is loving and that everything that he does is for my good, then I don't even need to be comforted by the knowledge of what's happening.

I can just be comforted by the fact that whatever is happening, God is going to intend it for my good. Do you understand how important that is? So, we don't even need to know what's happening to still be comforted.

So, the idea is I will only be comforted or I will only be assured once I know everything. That's not entirely true. We can be comforted and assured and be kept in the dark because we have the knowledge of a God who loves us or rather that we belong to God who loves us.

So, we may not know what God is doing but because we know what God is like or who God is like, therefore we can be comforted whatever it is that we go through in the dark, so to speak.

[12 : 09] So, it is absolutely essential that we don't change who God is. It is that we take God at his word, that if God says he is good, that he is love. We don't go, well, it's the 21st century. What if he isn't anymore?

No, God says he is love, he's love. If God says that he works all things together for the good, then he means it. We don't bat it away as though it is a dismissive statement simply by saying, well, that was then, this is now.

Because it leads to all kinds of problems apart from it being obviously an act of sheer disobedience to the word of God.

More importantly, what we're addressing is that my limitations are not God's limitations and that your limitations are not God's limitations. And this is another reason why we pray to God and ask God and expect God to answer.

Because what is beyond our ability to make happen is not beyond God's ability to make happen. What is impossible with man is possible with God. In other words, we're going back to this clear distinction between my inability and God's ability, my finite state and God's infinite state, my finite wisdom and God's infinite wisdom.

[13 : 22] This is the constant contrast here in the book of Job between God and Job. Job knows it, but he has to be told it because he's acting, at least under the counsel of his friends, perhaps in ways or questioning things that he shouldn't.

And Job had lots of questions. He did not sin. In all that he did, he did not sin, but he had lots of questions. Okay? He even was not supportive.

He had a very unsupportive wife who, you know, cursed God and died. You know, that's not the type of woman you want to be married to, is it? When you're struggling, when you go through a trial of faith, as it were, and then your wife turns around and says to you, just forget about this whole God thing.

Okay? So be careful of your friends. So Job 38 begins with God addressing Job.

Now, God knows more about Job's circumstances than Job knows about himself, even though Job has experienced it all. God knows the reason behind all of it, and Job is at least trying to understand the reasons behind it, but he never gets there.

[14 : 43] Now, God responds to Job as though, if I can put it this way, he's framing up to Job. Even to the point in verse 1 where he says, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

In other words, Job, stop right there. Who are you to question me? How can what is made say to its maker, Why have you made me like this?

To put it in the words of Paul in Romans. How can you do that? Even a mother could say to a young child, you know, don't teach your grandmother how to suck eggs.

You heard that phrase? You know what it means? Right. That's kind of what God is saying to Job. Steady the horses. You are darkening counsel by words without knowledge.

Then notice what he says in verse 3. Dress like a man. Dress like a man, I will question you, and you will make it known to me. And so what we have is that God is almost framing up to Job.

[15 : 57] That Job has come before God with these questions, and God's not one to back down. The all-powerful is no match for Job.

Now, God loves Job. God is not going to destroy Job. But notice the confrontation that we have here between God and Job.

God knows that he has no equal, and therefore God knows that Job is not his equal, and therefore Job must come to understand that he is no match for God.

And this is in the context of a framing. They're not fighting, they're not fighting, but they are, as it were, sizing each other up. Or rather, God is stood before Job so that Job would understand the size of God that he is dealing with.

And this is something that we all fail to understand, that who God actually is, who it is that when we ask God questions like these, that we are actually framing up to.

[17 : 11] As though we are somehow a match for God. And I've met plenty of men and women who believe that they are a match for God, and their questions or testimony goes something like this, that when I meet God, I'm going to ask him, really?

Really? You have no idea who you're framing up to. You have no idea where you stand and how you stand before, which reminds me of the parable that Jesus told.

I'll remind you. He says, what king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000?

In other words, take a look at yourself, take a look at your opposition, and then recognize you're no match for what comes against you.

And yet, how many Christians and non-Christians are so bold down here towards God and fail to recognize that that same boldness will not be with them when they meet God face to face?

[18 : 27] How bold we are before God. And it's a bit like, it's a bit like, you know, the kind of illustration is, you know, like a young boy saying, oh, if that person turns up, I'll show him, I'll show him.

And then, of course, the man walks into the room and he goes quiet because he was all big and boastful when the man wasn't around, but as soon as the man turns up, he hasn't got a peep to say.

Okay, we can all be stronger than we actually are as long as we don't have to prove it. And this is kind of like what has happened. Now God's turned up. Job is silent before God.

Now the term for this of understanding God and understanding our limitations is a theological term called, just one long word, okay, delicatessen is a longer word.

So the word that I'm about to give you is shorter. Okay, so don't think I can't handle long words. Delicatessen is a long word. You know what delicatessen means? Yeah, do you go to a delicatessen?

[19 : 31] Have you ever been? Right, so it's not a problem, is it? You can handle long words. Incomprehensibility. Wow. I can say it. Don't ask me to spell it.

The incomprehensibility of God means this. God is infinite and we are finite. When something is incomprehensible, it means that we cannot understand.

Now it doesn't mean here that it cannot be understood, but rather we cannot understand it. So what is incomprehensible to us is not incomprehensible to God.

And this word allows us to see the limitation of man and the limitless God that we belong to when it comes to understanding. God knows everything.

We don't. And the reason we don't know everything falls into two categories. The first category is that God is infinite in wisdom. We are finite.

[20 : 32] And therefore you cannot take something infinite and put it into something finite and make it fit. It doesn't work. The second reason is is that there are secret things and then there are known things.

Now the point is is you could know the secret things if they were told to you, but you don't know because they're not told to you. So there are two reasons why we don't know. Firstly, because what we can know is too wonderful for us and we just couldn't comprehend it.

And secondly, God hasn't told us. So we might be able to know if God told us, but he hasn't told us. And so when we think of God creating the world, which is probably a good illustration, is that when God created the world, he put X amount in the world and then he said, go forth and multiply.

So he understood that the world that he created contained trees, valleys, hills, mountains, fish, birds, everything that he had made. And then he said to man, go forth and multiply as though that the world can handle more, make more things.

So there's space for you to make things. But the world, even though it is big as what it is, still is a limited space. You can only fit so much in the world.

[21 : 56] But God says, you can fit a lot more in than what I've created. Go and make things yourself. That's really the creation. So the point here is, is to understand the incomprehensibility of God, which means, that God has a knowledge that you could never have because you could not understand it.

And therefore, when God makes choices and we are to love the choices that God makes for us, he does so with a knowledge that we could never, ever have because we are finite.

Our brains and our hearts and our minds could simply not take it in. We just couldn't grasp it. But what God has told us about himself is enough not to get God wrong.

In other words, that what God has revealed about who he is means that we are able to worship him correctly. We are able to worship him in spirit and in truth.

In other words, if God hadn't revealed who he is clearly, then we could end up treating God as an idol. You know, the golden calf is one such example. The God's people did not believe for a single second that the golden calf brought them out of Egypt.

[23 : 18] That was not the sin. The sin of the golden calf was making God in an image that they have chosen. That was the sin because Aaron says, this is your God who brought you out of Egypt.

In other words, the golden calf was to represent the true God, which is the very thing that they are not allowed to do. And so the thing is, it's important as a Christian not to worship God according to your own imagination.

You may not be building a physical golden calf, but if you are building an image of God in your mind that is not reflecting the true God, then you are doing exactly the same as building a golden calf.

You are worshiping God according to your own imagination. But of course, that is sinful. So God has to give us enough knowledge so that we don't commit adultery and so that we don't commit idolatry, so that we don't steal, so that we don't bear false witness, so that we don't make images after the likeness of God or pretend that this is the likeness of God.

We have to have this knowledge because without it we cannot live. So if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth, God has to reveal clearly who he is.

[24 : 39] But when it comes to choices and God making choices on our behalf, then we have to deal with our limitations. And our limitations are not God's limitations. And the choices that God makes for us are choices that we ought to learn to love.

And many of them we are never going to understand. Many of them we just don't know why. Perhaps sometimes we can look back on a vent and go, I know exactly why that was the way that it was.

I know exactly why that turned out the way that it turned out. Just wonderfully the way that God has worked those things together. I've even had things written down in the diary and perhaps you have as well thinking, I wonder why that's there.

And then you get to that event and you think, God's actually made space for that to happen. God's actually made space months ahead for that event to happen.

An event that I could never foresee. The incomprehensibility of God. Now the secret things. God has decided not to tell you everything.

[25 : 52] Those secret things which belong to God do not belong to us. And whatever reason God has for not telling you them is going to be a good and loving reason.

And the reasons that you do know what you know or what rather you can know if you read God's word and pray and ask for wisdom is given to you in God's grace that you may keep and obey his law perfectly.

So when we speak of revealed things we're speaking all of those things that we can know and we should know. Now the trouble is is just because they are revealed it doesn't mean that a person knows them.

For instance, you can only live according to the word that you know. Okay? You can only live according to the word that you know. So for instance, if you've only read 30% of the Bible you may not even live according to that 30%.

But you certainly cannot live according to the 100% of the Bible because you haven't read 100%. You've only read 30%. And you may not even live to that whole 30%.

[27 : 02] So even if we have read the whole 100% of God's word we still may not be able to live according to the 100% because of the amount that we have to take in.

So my point is is that whenever a Christian can be challenged by God or challenged for instance in the community of God's people it's always going to be in accordance with God's word.

Why aren't you seeking first the kingdom of God? And they say well I am. And you go well no because that's not what it looks like. And the reason we know that's not what it looks like is because these things have been revealed.

So challenge on a Christian Christian level iron sharpening iron can only ever happen along the context of what has been revealed. And therefore I've ran into a number of Christians throughout the years and perhaps you have who claim that they have had a particular word from God from me.

And I've always struggled with the idea of why didn't God just tell me? Why did he have to tell you? Why am I going to listen to you? Why would God because that would be my first question to a person who said to me I have a word from the Lord for you.

[28 : 18] My question to them is always and why do you think the Lord believes that I would listen to you more than him? Okay so things that are revealed are clear but the things that are only revealed to one person okay as though I'm to trust you or your interpretation or whatever it is as though it is from God means that I am treating you like Moses or Malachi or Isaiah do you speak with the same authority that Isaiah does?

Well no then why should I listen? Because Isaiah was given words from God for his people so was Malachi so was Jonah and do you speak with the same authority they have?

Well no then why should I listen to you? So now it becomes an authority issue it doesn't take long to undermine people who want to elevate themselves in areas where the Bible clearly says they can't secret things are secret things revealed things are important and the more you know the more you understand what other people cannot know or cannot claim to be true so the incomprehensibility of God means this that there are some things we can know and some things we can't and the things we cannot know is because we simply could not comprehend them the secret things means there are things we can know and things we can't know but the secret things we could know God doesn't want us to know he doesn't want you to know now I want to illustrate this with someone who I probably disagree with more than any other theologian and that is Carl Barth I've got

I've got all of his books all of his theological books Carl Barth is brilliant at asking the right question and arriving at the wrong answer he's okay I'm not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater but Carl Barth wrote over six million words on theology now I couldn't even compare to that although I think he could have scaled it down a bit because most of his answers are wrong in a lot of areas but this is what he was said when he was asked by students at a Bible college and he says out of all the words that you have written on theology what is the one thing you know what is the one profound thing that you have ever learned in your study of theology and this is what he said Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so six million words he wrote on theology and the one answer that he gives when asked what is the most profound thing that you have ever learned was Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so in other words at least his heart and head was screwed on there the very basic of understanding he understood that whatever he didn't understand he knew that God loved him well let's conclude let's conclude with a conclusion and that is that Christians are tempted to draw conclusions ahead of time we are all tempted to draw conclusions just like

Job did and just like Job's friends did way ahead of time without the necessary understanding as though we are trying to get the right answer with not all the some inputs you know we've got the additions we've got the subtractions but we don't have the divisions and all of a sudden we cannot get to the right answer because we do not have all the necessary answers all the necessary inputs all the numbers that we need to be able to work it out and Job in Job 42 arrives at this conclusion and he says that whatever conclusions his friends have arrived at which were wrong Job says this doesn't he I know that you can do all things I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted so what

[32 : 35] Job is saying is that at the end of the day at the end of the day I understand this one thing that whatever it is is the will of God because it cannot be thwarted by man it cannot be ordered or changed by man whatever God does he is doing for a reason it's a reason that you may not be able to understand or it is a reason that he may not want you to know but what you must know is that Jesus loves you this you know for the Bible tells you so and so we are a people who not only do not know everything we are a people who cannot know everything but we are also people who know enough not to get God wrong we are a people who know enough to know how to live the Christian life the way God wants us to live it we know enough to know that

God does keep us in the dark but he keeps us in the dark not because he's hiding something from us necessarily but rather because it's just too much for us to be able to handle we know two things that the incomprehensibility of God simply teaches that my limitations are not God's limitations that I can only handle so much and God can handle so much more the second thing is that there are secret things and while I could know them God has decided that I shouldn't know them and so when Job comes to the point of absolute clarity the clarity that he actually comes to is I don't know everything when Job comes to a full understanding the understanding that he has is I cannot understand everything but I know the God that I belong to so we know enough never to get God wrong but we don't know enough to get everything right and this is why we should learn to love the choices that

God makes for us because we cannot get everything right and so God makes choices for us and those choices are choices that we should love because we belong to a God who loves us amen well may the Lord bless you and keep you and may his grace be upon you both this day and the days ahead in Jesus name amen Amen and good to sails and let with