**Drama During Difficult Times Series**

**“Act Eight – The Lord Takes Center Stage”**

**Introduction**

For the past two months we have been looking at the book of Job. We have been considering the book of Job as a series of nine acts played out on the stage of life. Each act shows us more and more what Job went through and gives us guidance as we seek to navigate difficult times. Since chapter four we have seen Job’s three friends, who had traveled from surrounding countries supposedly to sympathize and comfort Job, make a series of well-rehearsed speeches. Each of their speeches accused Job of being a hypocrite and his friends insist that God was punishing Job for actively engaging in sinful behavior. Job responded to each speech as he sat on an ash heap suffering physically from a life threatening disease and mourning the lost of his family and possessions. But through all the drama these speeches created the fact is that neither Job nor his friends knew anything about the real drama that occurred behind the curtain of human reality in chapters one and two. Last week we consider the speech from a fourth friend, Elihu. Elihu’s speech went on for six chapters never allowing Job to respond. Eventually, the Lord Himself steps onto center stage, which is probably the only thing that stopped Elihu’s rant.

**The Lord Takes Center Stage**

Welcome to Act Eight – The Lord Takes Center Stage. The Lord takes center stage and gives two speeches directly to Job and allows Job to respond to each speech. (Job 38.1-42.6) What is interesting about the Lord’s speeches is that He never attempts to answer the question regarding the reason for Job’s suffering. When you look at the book of Job you will discover that thirty-three chapters were given for Job’s friends to falsely accuse him of willful sin as the reason for his suffering and for Job to defend his integrity. After thirty-three chapters of presenting a false narrative behind Job’s suffering the Lord never mentions the reason why Job is suffering. That’s strange – right? Yes, on the surface it might seem strange but I believe the reason why the Lord doesn’t address the reason for Job’s suffering is to underscore the fact that God’s ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher that our thoughts. (Is.55.8-9) I believe that the Lord doesn’t comment on why Job is suffering is to underscore the fact that no one has ever known the mind of the Lord and no one has ever been His counselor. (Rom.11.34) I believe the Lord makes His speeches to underscore the fact that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways are beyond human comprehension. (Rom.11.33) As a matter of fact I believe that if you ripped those thirty-three chapters of Job’s friends and his responses out of the book of Job I believe you would clearly come to the conclusion that God’s ways are incomprehensible and there are certain things that happen that we will never understand why. If you read chapters one, two, and three and then jump to chapter thirty-eight and read to the end of the book you will discover that a person has no right to answer back to God. And that the thing molded has no right to answer back to the Potter saying, “Why did you make me this way.” (Rom.9.20)

So why does the Lord allow those thirty-three chapters to be written? Well, let me give you two reasons. First, the Lord does not want His children to be tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and deceitful scheming as we see in Job’s four friends. (Eph.4.14) The Lord records those thirty-three chapters because He wants to make sure that no one takes us captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Col.2.8) Those thirty-three chapters were written for our instruction to teach us that through perseverance we can have hope. (Rom.15.4) As I said in the first sermon of this series: “Even though life is full of a multitude of pleasures to enjoy, we sometimes find ourselves smitten and afflicted by bereavement, poverty, and ill-health. During these difficult times people offer explanations of why we experience suffering and pain but these explanations are often inaccurate and mostly insufficient. But the Lord Himself stands in the center of the stage of world history and at the center of the stage of our lives and He will bring restoration, therefore I will wait on the Lord.”

The second reason why I believe the Lord allowed those thirty-three chapters to be written is because during those chapters we have seen the accusations against Job intensify but we have also witnessed the fortification of Job’s faith. From the beginning of the book to the end we see Job holding fast to his integrity. I’m not saying that Job never questioned God or that he handled every thing perfectly but we have seen that even though Job struggled to understand he never let go of his faith in a sovereign God. The Lord Himself told Satan in chapter two that even though Job had lost all of his possessions and his family he still held fast to his integrity. And we see that after months of suffering Job makes the firm confession in chapter twenty-seven, “*till I die, I will not deny my integrity.”* (Job 2.3; 27.5) So, I believe these thirty-three chapters are written so that we would hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Heb.10.23)

**The Lord’s First Speech**

So in the Lord’s first speech instead of answering the most central question about suffering the Lord poses a series of questions to Job that focus on the fact that God’s ways are incomprehensible to mere mortals. The Lord poses a series of questions to show Job that he, as well as we, lacks the capacity to fully understand why some things happen. In the Lord’s first speech He drives home the point that there are certain things that happen that we will never understand.

The Lord will make two speeches directly to Job, allowing Job to make a response at the conclusion of each speech. (40.1-5; 42.1-6) Let’s look at the opening words to the Lord’s first speech.

*Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?* (38.1-2)

The Lord doesn’t want to speak to Job’s friends but rather the Lord wants to speak directly to Job. The Lord answers Job out of a whirlwind demonstrating the mighty power of His word. (38.1) The Lord is ready to speak to Job because there has been too much talk, too *“many words without knowledge.”* (38.2) Each one of them – Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu – spoke without accurate knowledge. We shouldn’t think that God expected them to know what they could not know; rather, the Lord expected them to appreciate that there are certain things that happen that are hidden from man and only the Lord knows.

The Lord will begin each speech with the statement, *“Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”* (38.3a; 40.7 NIV) Remember Job is at the lowest point in his life after sitting in misery for months. He is physically and emotionally drained of all strength and energy. Physically he has been in the fight of his life fighting against this terrible disease that was ravaging his body. Emotionally he has exhausted himself trying to present a proper apologetic to his theologically messed up friends. But now the Lord is calling him out. *“Brace yourself like a man!”* Stand up like a man! Pull yourself together! Be a man! The Lord is not insulting Job or taunting Job but rather the Lord knows Job’s heart and fortitude. Remember that it was the Lord who told Satan twice, “*Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth.*” (1.8; 2.3) It is comforting to know that the Lord is intimately acquainted with our strengths as well as our weakness. The Lord then sets the terms saying, *“I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”* (38.3b)

So after getting Job’s attention and setting the terms the Lord begins His first speech by asking a series of questions. The Lord will present these questions using statements like, “*Where were you?” “Have you?” “Can you?” “Do you?”* The Lord begins His questioning by asking Job where he was when the Lord laid the earth’s foundation.

*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?* (38.4-7)

Then Lord asks Job if he had ever commanded the sun to rise or set saying, *Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?* (38.12)

Then Lord asks Job if he had ever journeyed across the oceans or walked on the bottom of the ocean floor saying, *Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?* (38.16)

After considering the depths of the sea the Lord turns His questioning to the stars in the heavens asking, *Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?* The Great Bear is the constellation in the northern hemisphere, Orion is in the southern sky, and the Pleiades are in the east.

The Lord then turns His questions back to the earth asking, *Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’?* (38.35)

*Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn?* (39.1)

*Do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane?* (39.16)

*Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread its wings toward the south? Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high?* (39.26-27)

At first the reader might think that the Lord has taken the same sarcastic tone of Job’s friends. But a closer look reveals that the Lord began both of His speeches using His covenant name, “Yahweh,” translated “Lord.” (38.1; 40.6) The Lord wants those who read this book to know that He has not abandoned Job, nor will He, nor can He. *Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.* (Dt.7.9) *Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.* (Is.54.10) Job’s circumstances had not changed. He was still in sitting in misery. But now things are different because while he once felt that God had forsaken him, he now felt and knew that God was with Him. Job’s greatest agony was that he felt that God had abandoned him, and now he knew he was not abandoned. The Lord appearing on center stage proved to Job that he had not been abandoned. His witness, his advocate, his intercessor was right there with him speaking to him as a friend. (16.19-22) *For He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”* (Heb.13.5)

In the Lord’s first speech the Lord calls for Job to remember that there so many things he just does not have the ability to understand. As a matter of fact if Job were honest he would admit that even the things that he thinks he understands he really doesn’t fully understand. I must quote again the question form the Heidelberg Catechism that asks, “What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?” And the answer is, “That we can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.” Brothers and sisters, as we live in a world filled with problems and dangers it brings great comfort to know that God upholds and governs all things. Sometimes it is difficult to see or understand how God could be in control but God’s Word tells us that He causes “*all things work together for good to those who love God*.” (Rom.8.28) So, when things seem to be going against us, we must have confidence in God’s covenant love and that He is working all things together for good even if we are unable to see it.

And how does Job respond to the Lord’s first speech? *Then Job answered the Lord: “I am unworthy—how can I reply to You? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.”* (40.3-5) It seems that the Lord’s questions got Job’s attention. After giving nineteen chapters of responses to his friends Job now understands that he has nothing to say to the All-Knowing and All-Powerful God. Job simply covers his mouth in the presence of the Almighty. The Master had come and the one who had contended for so long with his so-called friend sits calmly and worships His Covenant God by covering his mouth. Brothers and sisters, we clap and lift our hands in worship to God but have you ever considered putting your hand over your mouth as an act of worship? Maybe we should.

**The Lord’s Second Speech**

The Lord begins His second speech telling Job once again to, “*Brace yourself like a man”*and by setting the same terms as before saying, “*I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”* (40.7 NIV)

In His first speech the Lord used question to show Job his lack of understanding and lack of knowledge but in His second speech the Lord calls on Job to consider his inability and lack of strength to do anything about his situation. Only the Almighty can save him.

*Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like His?**Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.**Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at all who are proud and bring them low,**look at all who are proud and humble them, crush the wicked where they stand.**Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave.**Then I Myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.*(40.9-14)

Of course, Job knows that he cannot do any of these things. He doesn’t have the strength or the authority do any of these things. Only God does. But before Job can respond the Lord says, *“Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox.* *What strength it has in its loins, what power in the muscles of its belly!* *Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit.* *Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron.* (40.15-18)

Hey Job! Look at the Behemoth (dinosaur, hippopotamus) – can you defeat that beast? The picture is clear. If Job cannot contend with this fellow creature, how could he ever contend with the God who created the creature? And what about the Leviathan (sea monster, crocodile), *“Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook?* (41.1-2) *I will not fail to speak of Leviathan’s limbs, its strength and its graceful form. Who can strip off its outer coat? Who can penetrate its double coat of armor? Who dares open the doors of its mouth, ringed about with fearsome teeth?* (41.12-14)

Again the picture is clear. If Job cannot contend with this fellow creature, how could he ever contend with the God who created the creature? The Lord is telling Job, “Job, you don’t have the strength to overcome these creatures let alone overcoming your current situation. But the One who can master both of these creatures can also defeat the enemy that seeks to destroy you.” Brothers and sisters, we must come to the point in our lives where we agree that the battle belongs to the Lord and allow Him to come to our defense. (Pr.21.31; Ps.28.8)

*Then Job replied to the Lord: “I know that You can do all things; no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures My plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You.**Therefore I humble myself and repent in dust and ashes.”* (42.1-6)

Job admits that the Lord is the Almighty saying, *“I know that You can do all things; no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”* Job submits himself to the sovereignty of God. It sounds easy doesn’t it? But in reality surrendering to God’s sovereignty can be difficult to do. But once a person gets to the point where they can submit to God’s sovereignty a great burden is lifted off of the heart and mind so that they can walk in the newness of life. Job confesses saying, “*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”* Job confesses that he is finite and that there are some things that are beyond his understanding. I love the way he puts it, *things too wonderful for me to know.* Job acknowledges that the Lord had set the terms saying, “*Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”* And now Job is ready to answer the Lord saying, “*My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You.”* This reminds us that the most powerful aspect of Job’s encounter with God was not just what God said but also God’s simple, loving, and powerful presence. This wonderful presence of God has allowed Job to say, “*Therefore I humble myself and repent in dust and ashes.”*

In his sermon, “Job Among the Ashes,” Charles Spurgeon suggested that Job could have repented of five things: 1. Job repented of the terrible curse he had pronounced upon the day of his birth. (3.3-10) 2. Job repented of his desire to die. (3.11-26) 3. Job repented of his complaints against God. 4. Job repented of his despair. 5. Job repented of his statements he spoke beyond his knowledge and ability to know. (38.2ff)

The Lord through His speeches had caused Job to confess that he had limited understanding about the ways of God and lacked the strength to fight the enemy in his life. So, with a broken and contrite heart Job repents before the Lord. (Ps.51.7) There is a rule in the kingdom of God that runs counter to natural law that goes like this: in order to grow up spiritually, we need to go downwards; to grow up in Christ we need to go downwards in humility. JI Packer puts it like this, “Christians . . . grow greater by getting smaller.” John the Baptist understood this when he said in reference to Christ, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (Jn.3.30)

**Closing Thoughts**

Brothers and sisters, the Lord’s word had brought Job to the altar of God. Next week we will conclude this series seeing the Lord restoring Job’s health, his possessions, and his family. But this wonderful restoration begins with Job repenting at the altar of the ash heap. The place where Job had sat for months in misery now becomes a place of worship and adoration to God. The place of Job’s calamity becomes Job’s church. What made the difference? God showed up and took center stage in Job’s life. No longer were Job’s losses at the center. No longer was Job’s disease at the center. No longer were his distracting friends at the center. God showed up and took center stage. And the Lord is here today ready to take center stage in your life. Not the pandemic. Not the lost of a job. Not the lost of a loved one. Not the uncertainty of the future. None of those things can be at the center any longer. The Lord is here and He desires to take center stage in your life. Will you come to the altar this morning and surrender to the sovereignty of God?

As the worship team comes up let me ask, Are you hurting and broken within?
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Have you come to the end of yourself?
Do you thirst for a drink from the well? Let me encourage you this morning to leave behind your regrets and mistakes and come today, there's no reason to wait. Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy. From the ashes, a new life is born. Jesus is calling. O come to the altar.

**Call to Prayer**

*“Cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you.”* (IPt.5.7)

**Benediction**

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.* (Rom.11.33, 36)