

Job 38-42 'God is bigger than all our problems!'

This morning we come to our final study in the book of Job - a true story, where grief and grace intersect. Our theme today is summed up in the words of an old gospel song: *God is bigger than all our problems!* That's what Job needed to hear, and so do you and I!

I vividly recall the first time I heard that song - I was preaching at a wee mission hall up country in N Ireland ... it was a dark, cold winter's night, and the hall was packed. The singer that evening was William McCrea, a well-known preacher cum politician ... he played his own accordion and sang these words:

Bigger than all my problems, bigger than all my fears, God is bigger than any mountain, That I can or cannot see. Bigger than all my questions, bigger than anything, God is bigger than any mountain, That I can or cannot see!

I sat there, enthralled and excited ... it brought home to me the reality that God is awesome, he can do anything, he is bigger than all the giants in my life and yours; no matter what issues you are grappling with right now, he is bigger than every one ... and, so far as Job was concerned, this was the message God gave him!

It's incredible all that's happened as the drama has unfolded in the book - there's been a lot of talking, most of it one way traffic from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; then there was Elihu ... and strangely, even though Job has loudly lamented

all that life threw at him, the voice from heaven's higher throne is silent.

In fact, if my calculations are right, 897 verses have come and gone since the sovereign Lord last spoke - that was away back in 2:6 when he gave Satan the green light to go after Job's health, until now in 38:2 ... almost 900 verses - that's a long time and must've covered many weeks! For Job, it felt like an eternity!

Truth be told, so far as I can see, this is actually the first time that the Lord has spoken one-to-one with Job ... he has talked about Job, but what follows is the longest oration in the Bible in which God speaks.

Let me warn you before we get into it - surprise, surprise, there are no words of explanation ... it's not the kind of speech you'd expect to hear from on high; for example, there are no pat answers to hard questions and there are no simple solutions. Never once does he condemn Job - he does not apologise for him having a really tough time - he does not offer one word of sympathy to this man who has lost his entire family and livelihood - he does not answer the big question of suffering in the world - he does nothing to throw light on all that Satan was able to do - he does not explain why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people!

In fact, what God is about to do over the course of two speeches is to ask Job 77 questions - and

they're all about creation! God doesn't answer any questions from Job, he only asks questions! Questions which Job is unable to answer - he frankly admits in 40:4, after the first round, by saying, 'I'm not saying anything, because I just don't know!' And, after the second round, he affirms, 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted' (42:2).

Job is floundering, he's flat-footed, he's out of his depth, this is way beyond him - such is his total humility before an all-knowing and all-wise God. Having revealed his power and his providence over all he created, Job testifies, 'Lord, I don't know ... but you know!' It seems to me, that's an ok place, a safe place, for any one of us to be! In the run-up to this final showdown in the book, Job's three friends, along with Elihu who was an old head on young shoulders, had tried to reason with him - they didn't get as far as they wanted, and some of them took the easy way out and ended up rebuking him and rebuffing him.

See how God goes about it? He gives Job a sensational revelation of himself as the great Creator and Sustainer. In the next few chapters, we have a grand tour of God's wonderful world and Job is bowled over with the sheer magnitude and splendour of it all. In a while, Job will have no doubts in his mind that God rules over everything and everyone.

If you're like me, you'd much prefer to hear God speaking in the sunshine, we want him to tiptoe into our world ... but sometimes he must speak

out of the storm - and that's what we have here in 38:1. That's how he spoke to Israel on Mt Sinai (Exodus 19), and years later to Elijah (1 Kings 19). Ezekiel saw the glory of God in a storm and heard the voice of God speaking to him (Ezekiel 1-2).

At the end of the day, all that matters to Job, and to you and me, is that God speaks - and that we hear what he says. The first of three questions which God asks is:

'Can you make sense of My creation?' (38:1-38)

The intro that we have in verses 2-3 is fascinating for it underlines something of the gentleness and graciousness of God - he knows that Job is at the end of his tether, he's traumatised with all he's been through ... so God asks him, 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words, without knowledge?'

Yes, Job has said a lot - he's said a lot of stuff that he might've been better not saying, but he had to clear his chest and offload on to someone, and that's ok - he's talking as if he knew an awful lot, when the truth is that he knew very little! He was talking out of the top of his head and, in that sense, he didn't do himself any favours!

It's worth noting that the Lord didn't question Job's integrity or sincerity; he only questioned his ability to explain the ways of God in the world. By the time God has finished addressing his servant, he'll know an awful lot more about God - Job was learning the lesson that ignorance is not bliss!

If you take a moment and cast your eye down the page to the end of chapter 38, you'll discover

that God is the one who runs the entire show from beginning to end. He has his finger on the pulse of all that's happening, both in the heavens and on the earth.

God rules ... that's the headline message ... in this one-to-one tutorial, Job is on the verge of getting a refresher course on who's in charge ... God lays down the ground rules when he tells him in verse 3 to 'brace yourself like a man' - in other words, 'Man up! Get ready for your encounter with the Almighty!'

That command is quickly followed with a terse note that Job wouldn't be putting God in the witness box - no, God will take the lead and fire all the questions - and Job will give the answers! So Job the plaintiff has suddenly become Job the defendant! Truth be told, that's not what Job had expected, but it's what he got!

And, so, beginning at verse 4, and going on for another 70 verses, down to 40:2, the Lord is the interrogator, he's calling all the shots ... so many questions ... he's the prosecutor; Job must be scratching his head and wondering, 'What on earth have I let myself in for?'

The first one is in verse 4 and it's a real classic, when God asked him: 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?' Talk about putting someone in their place - with a few words, God totally disarmed Job - he left him so that he hadn't a leg to stand on, for he wasn't around on the morn of creation! He was nowhere to be

seen - he hadn't even been born, yet God was there from before the beginning of time.

That's one way to put Job in his proper place - even more so when he says to him, 'Tell me, if you understand.' There's a pause, and a loud silence ...

The next couple of teasers are on the same track when the Lord enquires: 'Job, tell me this, Who marked off its dimensions? Who stretched a measuring line across it?' And, yet again, there is silence from Job - he's humbled when he sees that God is a genius, one who is bigger than he is. Job must have felt a sense of smallness when he couldn't make sense of creation and all that God masterminded.

Verse 6 is a mega challenge to Job when God asks: 'On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?' In other words, Job, can you tell me how it came about - why is the earth not all topsy turvy, why is everything in perfect sync, why were the angels so overwhelmed with joy that they burst forth in singing praises to God?

So far as Job is concerned, God is slowly showing him that he doesn't know very much ... and if he can't answer God's questions, how can he possibly be in a position to give God advice when it comes to real life issues - quite simply, God is boss and he has everything under control. He's in the driving seat! God rules over the earth! He is Lord of all.

Well, that's only for starters - as it were, God is just getting warmed up, so he keeps on going! I don't have time to go into the rest of it in detail, but let me give you a one-line summary of each section ...

God rules over the sea in verses 8-11.

God rules over the sun in verses 12-15.

God rules over the depths in verses 16-18.

God rules over the light in verses 19-21.

God rules over the snow in verses 22-23.

God rules over the rain and lightning in verses 24-28.

God rules over the ice in verses 29-30.

God rules over the planets in verses 31-33.

God rules over the clouds in verses 34-38.

You see, Job is becoming more and more aware of the loftiness of God - he is the great Creator, he rules, he stands alone in time and eternity ... He did it and he keeps it ticking over 24/7 ... like Job, we must never lose sight of the spectacular awesomeness of our great, big, wonderful God! Each of us, like Job, needs to come to the point where we say with Nehemiah, 'Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything ..!' (9:5-6)

'Job, can you make sense of My creation?' That was the first question, and the second one is akin to it:

'Can you superintend My creation?' (38:39-39:30)

From verse 39 down to the end of chapter 39, God shifts his focus to the animal kingdom. He talks about six different animals and four kinds of birds. There was nothing random in God's choice; these were purposely chosen to remind Job, one more time, that his God is bigger than he is! The list begins with the lion, the king of beasts, and it ends with the eagle, the king of birds. Let me show you what's going on ...

God rules over the lion in verses 39-40.

God rules over the raven in verse 41.

God rules over the mountain goats in verses 1-4.

God rules over the wild donkey in verses 5-8.

God rules over the wild ox in verses 9-12.

God rules over the ostrich in verses 13-18.

God rules over the horse in verses 19-25.

God rules over the hawk in verse 26.

God rules over the eagle in verses 27-30.

See what's happening - Job thought he had all the answers - the harsh reality is that he has none of the answers! In fact, if it was left to Job, he'd be asking God all the wrong questions.

God reminds him, again, of his greatness - God is bigger than he is! When God posed the big one in 40:2, Job honestly admits that he's out of his depth, that the sovereign Lord knows all there is to know, and he always does what is best! Job is facing up to his insignificance when compared to the superior greatness of God. That leads us on to the final question ...

'Can you subdue My creation?' (40:6-41:34)

Job probably gasped a sense of relief thinking it was all over and done with - but God says, 'Job, I'm not done yet!' And off he goes for his second speech, where the bottom line is: 'Job, do you have to make me wrong so you can be right?'

Job has questioned God's justice and fairness in all that happened to him. So God challenges him in verse 6, 'Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his?' I reckon there's a chuckle in heaven, a wry smile on God's face, when he challenges Job to an arm-wrestling contest. I mean, there's only one winner, and it ain't Job! Like Job, we don't need justice, we need mercy and grace!

Then from verse 15 down to the end of chapter 41 we're introduced to two super beasts - one is Behemoth and the other is Leviathan. Different people have different ideas as to who they are; for me, I think Behemoth portrays death itself, and Leviathan represents the Satan.

The take home lesson is that the strong and mighty God is the only one who can subdue such creatures. He knows how to handle them and he gets on with it without making any fuss. Again, a powerful reminder to Job that when it comes to him grappling with the real issues of life, that our God is in a league of his own. Our superhero. He is unbeatable. He is unstoppable. He wins, hands down, every time!

And that's what dear Job needed to realise - and, in chapter 42, the penny has finally dropped. He's

starting to see that God owes him nothing, not even an explanation for all his ups and downs. All 77 questions were intended, not to stimulate Job, or even stir his mind - their aim was to get him to a point where he would bend his knees. And he did just that! Same for you and me!

That's often the reason why bad things happen to God's good people - on a human level, when your life and mine falls apart, the Lord can pick up the scattered fragments, and all the shattered pieces, and put them back together again - you see, when the chips are down, we can look up to him, knowing that he is bigger than all our problems. Like Job, we don't need to know the reason why, all we need to know is that God is with us in it.

See what happened in verses 7-9 ... the tables have turned. God is not best pleased with Job's three friends - in fact, they have misrepresented him and spoken a lot of nonsense. God is angry with them and he doesn't hide his emotions - he tells it like it is.

Here's the amazing bit - these guys have to offer a burnt offering and then, wonder of wonders, see this, God wants Job to pray for them! Didn't expect that, did you? And then he refers to Job four times in the space of 3 verses as 'my servant' - hmm, that says a lot, doesn't it! That's what he called him away back in 1:8 and all these months later, he still calls him 'my servant.' He suffered in the will of God as the servant of the Lord.

God has vindicated Job and these three friends have been made to eat humble pie, these guys

who kicked him when he was down - I imagine, they'll think twice in future before they open their mouths and put their big feet in it!

The final few paragraphs in the book indicate how much God blessed and prospered Job - he gave him twice as much as he had before! On top of that, he had another seven sons and three daughters - a second family in later life. He and Mrs Job were hugely honoured by the Lord - all the family were so enriched by the faithfulness of a good and generous God. Every blessing lavished upon him is a token and a gift of God's grace.

Don't you just love the epitaph in verses 16 and 17 ... all's well that ends well - Job had a good life, a long life, a fantastically blessed life, a full life ... and his legacy lives on, even today, in your life and mine - we're talking about Job this morning, but we're talking about Job's God and Saviour too. God used Job greatly - and still does - he is a hero in the Old Testament, and he is the poster boy for patience.

For Job, for Paul, for you, and for me, it's at the throne of grace that we come to understand the meaning of the thorn of grace ... it's there, down on our knees, that we discover that God is bigger than all our problems ... how true it is, we cannot drink the grapes, they have to be crushed.

You see, Job learned what we need to learn, we are never going to understand or comprehend the ways of God - in the midst of our trials and troubles, we must learn to trust his character. So true, isn't it, just like Job, we never know that

God is all we need until we discover that God is all we have!

Let me say this in closing, it was the American revivalist preacher, A W Tozer, who said that 'God never uses a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply.' Ask Job, he knows all about it. He knows it's true. Alongside that truth, it was D L Moody who said, 'Let God have your life; he can do more with it than you can.'

So next time a storm comes into your life, as it invariably will, hear these upbeat words from Job's own lips: 'God knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.' (23:10) There's the glorious prospect of a happy ending - eternity with the Lord.

Whatever lies before us, remember this - just like Job, your life and mine is a story where grief and grace intersect, and it's all to the glory of God.