

Where is God?

Job 23:1-9

INTRODUCTION

- A. A man once visited an orange grove when an irrigation pump had broken down.
1. The season was unusually dry & some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water.
 2. The tour guide then took the visitor to his own orchard where irrigation was used quite sparingly.
 - a. “These trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks,” he said.
 - b. “You see, when they were young, I frequently kept water from them. This hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. Now mine are the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at a greater depth.”
- B. We all need deep roots of faith, for everyone of us will suffer intensely in this life.
1. I am confident that there isn’t a one of us here who hasn’t already greatly struggled in this life, but if not just wait—it will come.
 2. I know that suffering will come, because it came to Jesus.
 - a. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Is 53:3).
 - b. “And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me’” (Mt 26:37-38).
 - c. If God did not keep sorrow away from his only Son, who do I think I am that God should keep it away from me?
- C. But, when we are suffering we often have questions for God.
1. Throughout history many righteous people have had questions for God.
 - a. When the Philistines killed about 4,000 Israelites in battle, the elders asked the troops, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?” (1 Sm 4:3).
 - b. The psalmist asked, “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps 10:1).
 - c. From the cross, Jesus himself cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).
 2. In this morning’s passage, Job questions God.
 - a. Specifically, there is one question that Job wants answered: “God, where are you?”
 - b. Four friends have arrived to comfort Job.
 - 1) Yet, instead of providing comfort, these friends provide accusation after accusation.
 - a) In antiquity, the idea was that if you were suffering, you were being punished by God for a specific sin.
 - b) Thus, Job’s friends are firmly convinced that Job has sinned & sinned greatly.
 - 2) Eliphaz has just laid it on the line & said that Job is nothing but a dirty, rotten scoundrel: 22:5-11.
 - c. In this morning’s passage, Job has had it.
 - 1) He’s tired of listening to this friends destroy his character, and he’s tired of God’s being silent in this debate.
 - 2) Job really wants God to show up & tell his four friends that he is innocent of all the charges they’ve brought against him.
 - 3) Thus, Job says: READ TEXT.
 - a) This morning, we want to take a good look at Job as he questions God on his whereabouts.
 - b) In looking at Job, we shall see him as DISCOURAGED, as a DEFENDANT, & as DISTANT.

JOB IS DISCOURAGED, vv 2-3

- A. “Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!”
- B. Job is quite discouraged.
1. In his discouragement, Job’s complain is bitter.
 2. In his discouragement, Job has a heavy hand.

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- a. The idiom of a falling or heavy hand is used in the Old Testament to speak of one's discouragement.
 - b. "We have heard the report of it; our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor" (Jer 6:24).
- C. Why is Job so discouraged? It seems there are two very likely sources for Job's discouragement.
1. His friends' accusations had to take the wind out of his sails.
 - a. Over & over Job's friends accuse him of wrongdoing.
 - 1) In his first speech, Eliphaz says, "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed" (4:7-9).
 - 2) Zophar says, "Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment?" (20:4-5). In other words, Zophar says, "Job, the reason you had such short joy is that you are godless & wicked."
 - b. Imagine being in Job's shoes!
 - 1) You have lost your livelihood, your family, & your health. Those who should have lifted you up in such suffering tear you down & blame you.
 - 2) Perhaps some of you here this morning have experienced such discouragement. Maybe those who should have been the greatest source of strength & encouragement never came to you, said the wrong thing, or just cold to your cries for comfort.
 - c. We as the people of God need to be those who comfort the hurting.
 - 1) That is the way of Jesus. A leper implored Jesus to heal him, and Mark records, "Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean'" (Mk 1:41).
 - 2) Jesus expects his disciples to demonstrate compassion.
 - a) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-4). God comforts us in order that we might be able to comfort others.
 - b) "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15).
 - 3) Let us, my brethren, commit ourselves to being solid comforters for the hurting!
 2. Job could also be very discouraged with God.
 - a. It doesn't seem that in this passage Job is upset with God over his suffering, per se.
 - b. Rather, he is quite discouraged that God has not yet come to vindicate him.
 - 1) Job's friends have raked him over the coals for all his supposed iniquity.
 - 2) Job has held fast to his integrity, & he just wants God to show up to silence these "friends."
 - c. Maybe we have experienced similar discouragement with God.
 - 1) We have done what we knew was right, but that made us the subject of scorn & ridicule.
 - 2) All we wanted was for God to show our accusers that we had done the right things in his eyes.
 - a) In the end, Job gets his vindication from God: At the end of the Book, God says to Eliphaz, "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7-8).
 - b) In the end, we too shall get vindication from God:
 - i. "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2 Thess 1:6-7).
 - ii. Vindication may not come in this life—God never promised that it would—but vindication shall come, and we can place our confidence in God.

JOB IS A DEFENDANT, vv 4-7

- A. "I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge."
- B. Job uses the language of a court to declare that he wishes to go before God with a host of arguments.
 1. Job believed he had every reason to contend with God.
 - a. He had suffered so very intensely. In his deep mental & physical anguish, Job has three friends accuse him of wrongdoing.

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- b. God hasn't answered Job's friends to vouch for his integrity. God hasn't explained why all these things have befallen Job.
2. Job really wants to take all those argument before God and lay everything out on the table.
- C. But, Job says this isn't going to be a one-sided argument.
 1. He will listen to what God has to say—Job would know & understand what God had to say.
 2. Something we often overlook in the Book of Job is the author's absolutely marvelous use of irony.
 - a. Job's statement here is one of the best uses of irony in the entire Book—Job will understand what God has to say, and God will not contend with Job "in the greatness of his power."
 - b. Yet, when God does finally answer Job, we find exactly the opposite.
 - 1) God certainly contends with Job in great power.
 - a) "The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind" (38:1).
 - b) Talk about power! A tornado arrives on the scene & the LORD begins speaking to Job out of it.
 - 2) Job does not understand what the LORD has to say.
 - a) God appears & begins questioning Job about the Creation: 38:1-7.
 - b) Job then says, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further" (40:4-5).
- D. Here's the whole point: Job had conceived a picture of what God was supposed to do in such circumstances, and God did not act according to Job's wishes.
 1. We dare not believe that we can put God in a little box where we have him all figured out.
 - a. God acts according to his will, not ours.
 - 1) In the Garden, Jesus himself prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26:39).
 - 2) James reminds us that we need to seek the Lord's will in our lives: "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (Js 4:15).
 - b. God has far greater wisdom than we in carrying out his will.
 - 1) "Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you" (Jer 10:7).
 - 2) "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:25).
 2. God may not act the way we'd like.
 - a. He will respond in his way, according to his will, & out of his great wisdom.
 - b. The fact that God acts in his great, great wisdom should provide us great, great comfort.

JOB IS DISTANT, vv 8-9

- A. Job is distant in that he is far removed from God: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him."
- B. Because God did not act according to Job's wishes, Job believed he was separated—distant—from God.
 1. But, we know that God was greatly involved in Job's suffering.
 - a. When Satan first tested Job, the devil was not permitted to harm his body: "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand" (1:12).
 - b. When that test failed to get Job to curse God, Satan was allowed to inflict physical pain upon him. Even then, however, Satan was not permitted to take Job's life: "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life" (2:6).
 2. Without God, Job's suffering would have been much, much worse.
- C. When we are suffering, if God doesn't act according to our desires, we dare not believe that God is distant, for he is so very near.
 1. Without God, our suffering would be so very much worse.
 - a. Perhaps the Lord is preventing some greater catastrophe from befalling us as he did with Job.
 - b. Perhaps the Lord is using us as an example of how to endure suffering as he did with Job.
 2. We know that God works wonders through our suffering.
 - a. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).
 - b. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Js 1:2-4).

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- 1) James says that when we face trials, we need to be joyful.
- 2) How can we be joyful when we are suffering? Because we know that when we get on the other side, we'll be better people.
3. Gary Richmond was standing next to the zoo animal keeper watching an Angola giraffe giving birth.
 - a. She was standing up, and the calf's front hooves & head were already visible.
 - b. Richmond asked the zoo keeper, "When is she going to lie down?" "She won't," he answered.
 - c. "But her hindquarters are nearly ten feet of the ground!" Rich said. "Isn't anyone going to catch the calf?" "Try catching it if you want," the zoo keeper said, "but its mother has enough strength in her hind legs to kick your head off."
 - d. Soon the calf hurled forth, landing on his back.
 - 1) His mother waited for about a minute, then kicked her baby, sending it sprawling head over hooves.
 - 2) "Why'd she do that?" Richmond asked.
 - 3) "She wants it to get up."
 - a) When the baby ceased struggling to rise, the mother prodded it with a hearty kick.
 - b) Finally, the calf stood—wobbly, but upright.
 - i. The mother kicked it off its feet again!
 - ii. "She wants it to remember how it got up," the zoo keeper offered. "in the wild, if it didn't quickly follow the heard, predators would pick it off."
 - e. The trials that giraffe faced prepared it for its life to come. Likewise, our trials prepare us for the great things God has in store for us.

CONCLUSION

- A. The title of this morning's sermon is "Where is God?" for that is the question Job wants answered.
 1. However, I find it quite interesting that Job has already answered that question: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" (v 3).
 - a. God's seat refers to God's throne: "But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness" (Ps 9:7-8).
 - b. No matter what struggles come our way in this life, we can know with confidence that God reigns & all his well.
 - 1) It is he who will see us through every struggle.
 - 2) It is he who will provide an eternal home when we lose the struggle against death.
 - 3) It is he who will resurrect our bodies with the same power he used to raise his Son.
 2. We know where God is: He is enthroned in heaven.
- B. Do you need to come this morning & submit to his will in order that God might bless you in your suffering?