

***When God Doesn't Make Sense: Is God's Response Enough for You?***

Job 38:1-7, 34-41  
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 Georgetown Presbyterian Church

Adversity is a fact of life. We all encounter adversity. Some of you are here today because of some brokenness or sickness in your life. Some are here because you need to find hope in the midst of all the suffering you encounter or witness.

Adversity is a fact of life. We all encounter adversity. The world is full of suffering and pain and tragedy and sorrow. Bad things happen to good people.

That's the story of Job, isn't it? A righteous man suffering from tragedy upon tragedy, none of which he deserved. And Job wants to know: Why? If God is great, and if God is good, why do the innocent people suffer?

Job's friends have tried to help him in his quest for an explanation. They've assumed that he's done something to displease God, and so he somehow deserves all his misery. They've told him he'd better repent and get straight with God. "Confess your sin," they've said, "and God will relieve your misery." For 35 chapters Job and his friends have gone back and forth. None of what Job's friends have suggested to him is satisfactory for Job. And so Job is left with the one question that haunts so many of us when tragedy strikes and when sorrow is our constant companion – Why?

Why did this have to happen? Why did this have to happen TO ME???

Do you ever find yourself asking, Why? Do you ever wonder what God's role is in the midst of suffering and pain and tragedy?

It begs the question: Where is God when it hurts?

All of creation is groaning under the weight of suffering and pain. Maybe you're in the midst of some pain in your own life, and you wonder: Where is God in all of this?

If we're honest with ourselves, I think we'll find that God usually doesn't give us a direct answer to our questions. That's what happened in Job's case. For 35 chapters, Job seeks an audience with God. Job wants to put God on the stand, and make God answer Job's questions about his suffering. When God appears, though, he doesn't give Job the kind of answer Job expects.

After a prolonged silence, God finally speaks to Job. We might expect a more compassionate response than the one God offers. We might have expected that God would say something like, "Job, you've had it rough, for sure. But you're one of my faithful ones, and I'm going to make things right for you." Or God could have reminded Job that suffering and pain are the tragic results of original sin, and nobody is immune. Or God could have explained that all of Job's suffering was part of a great divine plan that would result in a much greater good.

But that's not what Job gets from God. Instead of acting with compassion and gentleness, God becomes the aggressor. It's no longer God who is on trial, but Job. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall answer to me." (vv. 2, 3) And what follows is a four-chapter-long barrage of questions for which Job has absolutely no answer. God doesn't answer Job's questions about the origin and cause of pain; instead, God asks Job some rather pointed questions of his own:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.” (v. 4)

“Who determined the measurements of the earth – surely you know!”  
(v. 5)

“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?” (vv. 19, 20)

“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?” (v. 34)

And it goes on and on and on. For four chapters, God hammers Job with question after question, and Job doesn't even have time to answer before God gets to the next question.

In the end, God really doesn't answer Job's questions, at least not the way we would expect. So what is God saying? If Job has cried out to God in his pain, what can we learn from God's answer? God doesn't give an explanation of the origin and cause of pain. God doesn't reveal some grand plan behind Job's suffering.

But God does reveal himself.

God takes us on a tour of the world and he says, “See all this – I made it, and it's mine, and I am in control.” God is saying, “You are looking at things from your own miniscule perspective. You can't possibly make a judgment based on your limited, finite knowledge.”

There is so much that we can't possibly comprehend. If we can't comprehend how the stars were put in place one by one, if we are unable to command the sun to rise and set, if we can't claim credit for making the hawk able to fly or the fish to swim, if we can't turn on the rain to water where nobody lives – how can we possibly begin to probe the mind of God?

God's answer to Job helps us understand the infinite wisdom and power of God, and it helps us understand how little we really do understand. God's response doesn't explain suffering, but it does show us who God is.

God's response points us to a God who is intimately involved with the world, a God who doesn't let one detail go unnoticed.

And God's response points us to a God of power and might. Never let it be said that the reason behind the pain and suffering of this world is that God is powerless against it all. The truth is, God is greater than the sum of all our suffering. There is nothing we can face that has the power to thwart God's power and purpose in the world.

And God's response points us to a God who is always near. The nearness of God in the midst of our suffering transcends time and space. It is a nearness that fills our heart and overflows within us. A. W. Tozer says that “we should never think of God as being spatially near or remote, for He is not here or there but carries here and there in His heart... [God] fills heaven and earth as the ocean fills the bucket that is submerged in it, and as the ocean surrounds the bucket so does God in the universe He fills. ‘The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.’ God is not contained: He contains.”<sup>1</sup>

What is God saying to Job and to us? God isn't revealing answers to the mysteries of pain and suffering. But God is revealing himself.

<sup>1</sup> The Best of A.W. Tozer, compiled by Warren Wiersbe. (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 52.

Is that enough for you? Is it enough that when God doesn't make sense, God still offers you who he is? Do you have to have all the "i"'s dotted and all the "t"'s crossed in order for you to have faith in God? Does God have to answer your every question, and does God have to justify everything that ever comes your way? Or is it enough simply to know that God is?

The truth is, you will always have these three facts before you: 1) God is good; 2) God is great; 3) innocent people suffer. But it is also true that logically you can only reconcile two of those facts at any given time. Either God is good, but since innocent people suffer God must not be so great; or God is great, but doesn't really care about the suffering, so God must not be that good. Logically, you will only be able to reconcile two of the three facts at any given time. God doesn't try to make sense of it to Job. Nor does God try to make sense of it for us.

Instead of trying to make it all neat and tidy with a once-and-for-all explanation, God gives us himself. God comes to us. God stands in the midst of our suffering with us. In Jesus Christ God has experienced the greatest pain any person could ever suffer. And in Jesus Christ God has shown us that he has the power to transform our pain and our sorrow and make us into a new creation.

God doesn't give us the answer we demand. But he does give us himself. He shows himself to be gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He shows himself to be one who forgives our sins and cleanses us of unrighteousness. He shows himself to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

God doesn't give us the answers we demand. But God does give us himself. Is that enough?

Where is God when it hurts? Phillip Yancey wrote a book with that question as its title. To a world that demands cut-and-dry answers to our profound questions, Yancey says that God doesn't provide that kind of answer for us – God just gives us himself and God wants us to rest in the knowledge of his love and power and faithfulness. At the end of the book, Yancey has this conclusion:

Where is God when it hurts?  
 He has been there from the beginning...  
 He transforms pain, using it to teach and strengthen us, if we allow it to turn us toward him.  
 With great restraint, he watches this rebellious planet live on, in mercy allowing the human project to continue in its self-guided way.  
 He lets us cry out, like Job, in loud fits of anger against him, blaming him for a world we spoiled.  
 He promises supernatural help to nourish the spirit, even if our physical suffering goes unrelieved.  
 He has joined us. He has hurt and bled and cried and suffered. He has dignified for all time those who suffer, by sharing their pain.  
 He is with us now, ministering to us through his Spirit and through members of his body who are commissioned to bear us up and relieve our suffering for the sake of the head.  
 He is waiting, gathering up the armies of good. One day he will unleash them, and the world will see one last terrifying moment of suffering before the full victory is ushered in. Then, God will create for us a new, incredible world. And pain shall be no more."<sup>2</sup>

Where is God when it hurts?

God is right here in our midst, ever and always with us. And God offers himself to us, to be for us a refuge and strength in times of trouble.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 256-257.

God may not give us every answer we demand. But God does give himself to us.  
Is that enough for you?