

The Lord Speaks

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[0 : 0 0] And then we'll do keep your Bibles open in front of you. As you were seeing, we were kind of dotting around a little bit there to try and make sense of this big section that we're going to look through this morning.

This is our penultimate morning looking through the book of Job. We've spent seven weeks so far in this incredible book. And I think it's right to say, it's right to point out, isn't it, that we can't help but notice thinking what we've just been praying about.

Stuart and Eileen and their family having really their world turned upside down in the space of 24 hours one week ago. That reminds us, if we needed reminding, of our need for this book.

That as we look at Job, a book that kind of focuses in on suffering, we're not dealing here in theoreticals. We really are dealing with life in a fallen world.

And sometimes that is brought home to us in very personal and powerful ways. A quick recap of all that we've looked at so far. Remember, Job is a righteous man.

[1 : 0 6] Job is a good man, but who has suffered massively. We've seen that suffering. We've heard Job in the midst of that suffering, trying to deal with that.

We've thought, as a church, I suppose, about the reality of suffering, that we suffer, that those that we know and love suffer. And as God's people, we need to be able to face up to that.

We want to be honest about that, that we don't always have to pretend that we're fine, that we need to listen to each other as they go through things like that. And so we face up to the reality of suffering.

And the book of Job so far has also been wrestling with the how or the why could that suffering happen. And so we've heard all sorts of people talk about God and all sorts of speculation as to why suffering comes.

Some of it accurate, a great deal of it inaccurate. But where is God in the midst of suffering? Does God really care about suffering? These are some of the questions that have been asked.

[2 : 1 1] But this week, we really hit, I suppose, the climax of the book, as the passage or passages that we're looking at this morning are when God himself makes an appearance, when God himself speaks.

And we might be tempted to think, well, simple. This will answer all of our questions, won't it? God will come and he'll spell out everything in detail. I'm keen to say, kind of right at the beginning again, actually, that is not what happens.

As you'll have noticed, God doesn't so much reply to Job's questions as ask his own questions to Job. But actually, in doing that, he really reveals the truth about himself and above all about his majesty, his power, his greatness, his control.

If there's one thing I hope that we'll take away from this passage this morning, and I'll give you this kind of right up front and trust that you'll keep listening anyway. But if there's one thing that we need to know in times of suffering, in times of hardship, in times when things hurt and we don't understand why, if there is one thing that we need to know to steal ourselves, to keep on going through the darkest of times, it is the ultimate power of God.

The ultimate power of God. These verses are here to give us a big picture of God. These verses are here to remind us that we can all be tempted to kind of shrink God down, to be our wingman or our right-hand man who's there to help us out.

[3 : 40] But actually, we need a big God. We need God as he truly is, the God of all creation. These verses are here to show us God's power. And that isn't some kind of abstract theological concept, but it's actually the thing we need to know most of all to keep us going through the striving and the struggles of real life.

So let's have a look. We're going to look at what it is God says in two halves. God really gives two speeches in this section, but it makes sense, I think, to look at them all this morning.

The first, which is really the whole of chapters 38 and 39. We read part of chapter 38. But this is all about God's sovereign power over creation.

God's sovereign power over creation. Really, that God is the God of the whole universe. And as we start that, first, just a quick look at how chapter 38 begins.

It says, The Lord answered Job. Job and everyone in this book has spoken a lot about God, what God is doing, what God is like. But as God arrives on the scene, it's important to notice that he's introduced as the Lord.

[4 : 48] And if you've got a Bible there and you have a look down, wherever you see that word Lord in kind of little capitals, it's translating the word Yahweh. That's a kind of a personal name that God had given to his people.

It's a name that emphasizes God's connection and his commitment to his people. And so straight away, all that we're going to look at in these chapters about this big God, this God of sovereign power, all of it is in the context of and spoken by this relational God who we can know.

It's really important that we kind of keep that as a foundation of what we're looking at this morning. The fact that this is the Lord, this is Yahweh who answers, shows that we are learning what the God who is for us is like.

And so what is it that the Lord says? I think this is some of the greatest poetry in the book of Job, which as we said, is really this kind of epic poem. And we read there where God just kind of piles these questions, question after question on Job.

Let's read where it begins in verse four. We read these verses. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements?

[6 : 04] Surely who know? Or who stretched the line upon it? And what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together? And all the sons of God shouted for joy.

Kind of the creation of the universe described as a great building project. And God is asking Job, what part did you play in that, Job? Did you design that?

Did you lay the foundations? Did you get your hands dirty as this universe was being built? And then there are other great sections as well we didn't have a chance to read.

I love verse 22 onwards. Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?

What is the way to the place where the light is distributed? Or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? The power of the elements highlighted there.

[7 : 04] The ongoing forces of nature. Job, do you know where that all comes from, God says? Do you have control over that? And then as we move into chapter 39, the focus is much more on the living world, the animals and the birds.

Again, more questions. Verse 1, Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the carving of the does? Can you number the months that they fulfill? And do you know the time when they give birth?

When they crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young? At the end of that chapter, verse 26, is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads its wings toward the south?

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? These wild animals, which are rarely seen, let alone tamed.

Job, do you know the details of their life? Are they following your design, your plan? Question after question after question. And of course, the answer to all of these questions.

[8 : 08] And there are far more that we didn't have time to read, but the answer to all of them for Job and for us is clearly no. No, Lord. These are things which are far beyond our power or control or comprehension.

And yet God's point is that he, that God alone is in control. That he can answer yes to these questions. He is over and above all of these things.

God is showing his sovereign power over creation. The first part of God's answer to Job in these first two chapters is simply to say, look at me.

Look at how big God is. That whatever comes, we live in a world that God designed, that God created, that God continues to sustain, that God continues to rule over.

It's in the hardest of times that we need the biggest picture of God. And that is what we see in these verses. One of the greatest kind of descriptions of God in the whole of the Bible.

[9 : 12] God's sovereign power over creation. And now we might actually ask, well, in what way does that answer the questions that Job has been answering?

Job has had all sorts of questions through this book. Questions about justice. Questions about fairness. Questions about why. Does what God says here actually answer all those questions?

I think if we were being honest, we'd probably say no. God doesn't take the time to run through all of Job's questions and give him the answer blow by blow. And actually we've said from the start of the book that Job won't get everything answered and neither will we.

But does what God says here make a difference? I think we have to say absolutely yes. Now this isn't the whole of God's answers, we'll see in just a moment.

But these are our verses, these are truths about God that really mean something. Again, remember we said from the beginning, we said throughout this book is poetry. Why is this book written as poetry?

[10 : 19] I think it's because it is designed to meet us on an emotional level. Suffering is an emotional issue. This is poetry that is designed to stir our souls, but to stir our souls with the truth of who God is.

That the Lord, that relational God, is a God that is big enough to deal with any issue, with any trial, that the world might throw at us.

We didn't have time to read all three chapters, 38 and 39, but I can guarantee, and I could really recommend that if you sit down with the Bible, if you open it up at Job chapter 38 and 39, and read those chapters from start to finish, really soak in how God reveals himself, his sovereign power over creation.

Really meditate on who God is, what he has done, how he continues to sustain his world. I can guarantee it will not make your problems or magically disappear, but it does make a real difference as it shows us that we have a big God and it is only a big God, the biggest of gods, that can help us through the hardest of times.

This passage lifts our eyes from ourselves to God who is at the centre of all things. God shows his sovereign power over creation.

[11 : 47] He directs Job, he directs us to look to him in the hardest of times and to take our confidence from him because he and he alone controls our world.

There are so many things about our universe that we don't know and which are completely outside of our control. These questions really highlight that, that God is in control, that God's sovereign power over his creation.

So that's the first thing that the Lord shows to Job, emphasises to Job, his sovereign power over creation. He is the God of the universe. And yet that's not the whole of God's answer.

Because we could imagine, and perhaps these come to mind for yourself as well, God, we could imagine that in some ways Job might say, well, yes, I know you're in control. I know your sovereignty over all this that you've made and no doubt being reminded of that in such a vivid and powerful way from God himself is, as we said, something that gives encouragement, something that strengthens us.

But what about, back to the heart of this book of Job, what about this kind of intrusion into God's world that Job has experienced in the depths of his suffering?

[13 : 05] The sense that things that aren't supposed to be there have almost snuck in to God's creation. Could it be that God is sovereign over all that he's made, over the seas, over the animals, over the stars, over everything mentioned in those previous two chapters?

But still, there is something else. There is this kind of supernatural evil. There's taken up residence in parallel to all that. There is stuff, really bad stuff, that God doesn't seem to have a handle on.

Now perhaps Job could still ask that question. Perhaps we're tempted to ask that question when we see real wickedness or suffering. Is there somehow a deeper layer of evil outside of God's sphere of influence?

Something that he can't or something that he doesn't do anything about? Well, that's the question that God now answers or turns to in his second speech. And this is mainly chapters 40 and 41.

Here God declares his sovereign power over evil. First, God's sovereign power over creation. Second here, God's sovereign power over evil.

[14 : 21] And again, if you have a look at these two chapters, 40 and 41, these are the kind of passages you turn to in the Bible and it can be a bit puzzling. First read. These chapters have as their kind of primary focus two animals, two great beasts are described.

First in chapter 40 from verse 15, it speaks about Behemoth who is described as this incredibly strong and dangerous and powerful animal.

And then secondly, in chapter 41, much longer, we read about Leviathan. We read some of the verses describing him there, this incredibly strong, dangerous, and even more menacing creature.

So what's happening in these two chapters? Some people have tried to identify these two animals. They said that God is talking about a hippo and a crocodile. There are elements there where you can see where they're coming from.

And the idea, I suppose, is that this is kind of more of the same. God's showing his control over creation. And we probably agree that would be a bit of an anticlimax to the book of Job.

[15 : 27] All we've been through, all that God says, he kind of rounds it up by saying, hey Job, have you ever wrestled a crocodile? It doesn't quite seem to fit as a conclusion. These chapters can't just be more of the same.

And actually, you see that in the language used, don't you? It's talking about more than that. The later verses describing Leviathan, it says, out of his mouth go flaming torches, sparks of fire leap forth.

Out of his nostrils come forth smoke as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals and a flame comes forth from his mouth. We're now dealing with this kind of dragon-like creature, really.

It's so different, so distinct from the descriptions of the natural world that we read in chapters 38 and 39. We're clearly dealing here with something supernatural.

And what is being described in these chapters, in these two animals, is really a personification of evil, of wickedness, and of Satan himself.

[16 : 34] Satan appears at the beginning of the whole Bible in the form of a serpent, Genesis chapter 3. He's described again at the very end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 20, as the dragon, that ancient serpent.

If we were to join those kind of two dots describing Satan, the line, I think, would run right through here. The Leviathan of Job chapter 41.

God is speaking of Satan himself, using this almost mythical creature that the first readers would have been familiar of. They would have known of this Leviathan, using this familiar mythical creature to speak of Satan himself.

And so look at what God has to say then about Satan. Because he doesn't say what we're often tempted to say. Oh, don't worry about that. Don't worry about evil. Don't worry about Satan.

That's nothing. He's a nobody. No, actually, we've read, and if we had time, we could have read more, line after line after line, giving us this terrifying picture.

[17 : 35] Here is this terrifying creature beyond Job or any human's control. And there's opening verses we read. Can you catch him with a hook? Will he listen to you? Will you make him your pet?

Will even kind of harpoons or fishing spears have any impact on him? Well, absolutely not. It's again the answer to all those questions. Verse 9, lay your hands on him.

Remember the battle. You will not do it again. You know, you get too close, get too casual. I think this is something under your control. Well, you won't make that mistake twice.

Here is something far more powerful, far more dangerous than what we as human beings are able to deal with. Job, in his experience, has been given this insight into the reality of evil in the world that actually in God's universe, God's creation, a good man like Job can lose his whole family in an instant as happened in chapter 1, can lose his health, have it ripped away from him as happened in chapter 2.

that still today innocent people can be horribly abused, that all sorts of perversions are indulged, that all sorts of suffering is experienced.

[18 : 53] There is something that is not as it should be in our world, and at the heart of that suffering is the reality of evil, and deeper still, the reality of the evil one.

And that is what is being revealed to us in chapter 41. And it is supposed to be a terrifying picture. It's kind of a monster from a fantasy book, isn't it?

And yet the scary thing is it's representing a reality in our world, an evil we cannot deal with. And yet again, as in God's first speech, at the point of these rhetorical questions is to show that what we are powerless over in the face of this adversity, that God has power over.

And there's a few places where we're explicitly told that verse 11, whatever is under the whole heaven is mine. Whatever, including this terrifying reality of evil, is under God's control, God's sovereign power, even over Satan himself.

And so in this speech here, God is reminding us, God is revealing to Job what we actually saw right back in chapters 1 and 2 of this book, that Satan is real, furious, destructive, and yet can only go as far as God allows him.

[20 : 13] It's as if God has Satan on a leash. It says in the verses that can you put him on a leash? And again, the answer is no. And yet God is able to add that restriction. And yet let me say straight away, because perhaps you're already thinking it anyway, that that doesn't explain away evil, does it?

That is not a nice, simple answer. This doesn't answer all our questions. And we've said from the start going through this book of Job isn't going to make everything simple.

In fact, if you've been through suffering on the receiving end of real evil, or for those we know who have been through that, perhaps you might ask even more so after hearing this, well, so why did God allow that?

You know, God has Satan on a leash. We might say, well, why is that leash so long? Why is he allowed to cause such hurt and damage and pain?

Again, we saw back in our first week in Job, the reason why this was allowed to happen in Job's situation, it was to do with showing that God is worthy to be worshipped for who he is.

[21 : 23] God is worthy to be worshipped despite people's situations. He's to be worshipped not just for what he gives, but for who he is. We spoke about that in a bit more detail in week one.

You could go back and listen to that if you wanted. But we also said there, and I've become more and more convinced of this as we've carried on our way through Job, that we can't simply copy and paste that as a reason for all the different suffering that we see that anyone goes through.

We don't know why that is. There's a real sense in Job. We saw it especially a couple of weeks ago when we spoke about wisdom, that there are simply things that we will never know.

That often the reason behind suffering, the reason behind evil, why God allows that, is a mystery and will remain a mystery. We just don't know. I would love to be able to stand here and say why it is that Stuart is in hospital this morning, what God's plan is there, or explain away why other painful events that have shaped people's lives, why they happened, or why some countries are firing rockets and missiles into other countries and innocent people are caught off in that.

I'd love to be able to stand here and explain all of that, why it's happening and where it's going. Yet we can't, can we? We can't explain the detail of that.

[22 : 50] God hasn't revealed that to us. But he has shown, he does tell us clearly here, that he is in ultimate control.

that he has sovereign power even over evil itself, even over Satan himself, that whatever is happening or has happened in our lives or the lives of our loved ones or in our world, that still we can come in confidence to the sovereign God over all things.

God is big enough for whatever you or I or those that we know are going through. And as we see God's sovereign power over evil, it also shows us that that evil will not last.

As we see this terrifying picture of Leviathan, of real evil, of Satan, who we, on our own, are powerless in the face of, actually as we see God's sovereign control where we can know that God has won the victory over him and that one day he will have no more place in our world.

Revelation chapter 20, as I mentioned earlier, again speaks of Satan as the dragon, the ancient serpent. Again, using this picture language to describe him, but it is a chapter all about how he is defeated by God himself, about how he is bound, about how he is destroyed, about how he has no place in the future which is to come.

[24 : 24] God's sovereign control over evil ultimately points out to us that one day there will be no more evil. And we can know that that will be true in the future because actually that victory has been won in the past.

When Jesus died upon the cross he suffered for all the evil of our world. He paid the debt that is due. The debt that actually each one of us have to pay as this ultimate evil of Satan, Leviathan, has if we're brutally honest and painfully honest kind of worked itself out to us in certain ways.

We've been culpable. There's been times for all of us where we have added to the suffering of this world rather than being the cure. We've been agents of this evil we might say and yet Jesus dies taking that debt and that debt that is death itself and then rises again winning victory over Satan, over evil, over suffering, over death.

The book of Colossians in the New Testament written after Jesus speaks about how God disarmed the rulers and authorities of evil and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Christ, in the cross.

The truth of the resurrection of Jesus returning to life is the proof that victory that means that even in the deepest darkness, even when evil seems insurmountable, even when we recognize that the hold it has over us or the way it has shaped us that still we can turn to Jesus that we can cling to Jesus knowing that we will find forgiveness that we will find restoration that we will find life now and forever and that one day because of God's sovereign power over evil worked out in history at the cross that there is a world without evil to come a world without suffering to come which we can be part of if our trust is in Jesus and in his victory so we see God's sovereign power over creation his sovereign power over evil we also read the first six verses of chapter 42 where we see

[26 : 41] Job's response to all that Job has said two minutes just very quickly but we'll finish with the response to God's sovereign power chapter 42 it says this then Job answered the Lord and said I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted Job recognizes God's complete sovereignty what God says here really makes a difference and he goes on in verse five and six I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes I think what Job means here is yes I'd heard things about God there have been lots of people saying lots of various different things and we've heard a lot of those things in the book of Job itself and there's been all sorts of talk about God but now through God himself speaking Job has this much truer much fuller picture of who God really is this big picture of the majestic sovereign powerful God and that is what he has needed most of all and that really makes a difference that is what changes

Job's attitude and Job says finally that I repent I repent in dust and ashes that word repent it really just means to turn around Job repents from going away from God from speaking as he has done as if God was his problem as if God didn't care about what was happening instead having seen this fuller revelation of God turning to him coming to him recognizing his need of him that God is the ultimate and only solution and that's where we'll finish this morning these chapters are here that we might see a big God a sovereign God a powerful God what is our response to him and what is our response in our time of greatest need and surely it should be like Job's to turn to him and know the assurance that we can trust him whatever happens that God reigns that he is in control even in the hardest of times and through that not to find all of our questions easily answered but instead to find our comfort in him to put our trust in him and to continue living in him let's pray together let's pray holy father as we just ask this morning that whatever we're going through or have been through or know what others are going through lord we ask this morning that you would give us a big enough picture of who you are to sustain us to keep us going and to give us hope in the midst of that lord we're not asking for an inflated picture of you but rather for the true picture of you the god who has sovereign power over all things and the god who is sovereign even over evil which one day you will do away with forever lord as you reveal that true picture of yourselves to us we pray that we would respond humbly as Job did we pray that we would repent that we would turn to you that we would trust in you knowing that what we need most of all is not all the answers but is the god who we can rely on and that we have that in you and we thank you that when we look at the cross we cannot doubt your love for us and we cannot doubt your victory over satan and that perfect future that awaits those who trust in you so lord in light of all that we've looked at we pray that you would continue to be helping our minds to grasp that we pray that you would continue for your holy spirit to be changing our hearts by these truths that we've looked at we pray you continue to be working in our lives and that you would continue to be with us this week lord we ask that you would be building our confidence in you as we rest in your great power and love for us and we pray all these things in the precious name of jesus who has shown your sovereignty and your victory over evil and who will one day return to remove it from your world forever and we pray all these things in that jesus's name and for your glory amen