

Job Chapters 38-42

Holy God, as we meditate on your word today, as we read of your awesome power and might, we ask that you might put an impression of those things onto our hearts. We ask that you would give us a taste of your splendour today, by the grace of your Holy Spirit in our hearts. In flame our imaginations. May we savour you this morning. In Jesus name, Amen.

Have you come across the concept of alternative endings to books or movies? The writer or director chooses from different ways to finish the story. A couple for you- In an early version of Great Expectations, Charles Dickens ended the story with Estella marrying someone else- and so in the final scene, Pip meets her, they have some awkward small talk, a stiff handshake, and Pip leaves with the knowledge that they will never be together. An early script of Rocky had Rocky taking a bribe to throw the fight against Apollo Creed, and using the money to help Adrienne open a pet shop. In each case, a more user-friendly ending was chosen in the end.

I've been working on an alternative ending for the book of Job that's a lot more user-friendly. Would you like to hear it?

Job and his friends finish their conversation, and God appears to Job as a still, small voice. He whisks Job away to a beautiful, sepia-tinged beach, overlooking a glorious sunset. Job is dressed in white, clean and healed. The soundtrack is gentle and inspiring piano arpeggio. And so God- who in my mind is played by perhaps by Morgan Freeman or a misty-eyed Robin Williams, walks along the beach with Job. Over a few hours, God explains everything to Job- the heavenly courtroom, the wager- and tells Job that the story of his faithfulness will be told for thousands of years, and his story will encourage many people in pain through the centuries. God tells Job that through the whole ordeal, he had watched along, experiencing Job's pain with him, and hoping earnestly that Job would be faithful to the end. As the credits roll, Job looks up with the beginnings of a beatific smile on his face.

One of the things we learn as we read the Bible is that God does not conform to our expectations. This isn't the God of psychological projection, the 'I like to think there something out there' God.

I was on an aeroplane recently, for reasons not very interesting, I was in a grumpy. Trying to sleep as best I could. as we passed over central Europe, I looked out the window and saw the snow-capped Alps, popping through the clouds, bathed in this dazzling clean sunlight. Just those glimpses for that couple of minutes was enough to alter something in me. As you see

something truly awesome, you don't think 'I'm great'. You don't think about yourself. You're looking to something else.

We live in a world that is starved of awe; our lives are flattened, buried in triviality. Psychologists tell us that when we live without awe, we become more selfish, more concerned what other people think of us. We spend so much of our lives daydreaming, sleepwalking our way through life- only semi-conscious of the truly solid, the truly eternal; those things that bear the weight of Glory. We suffer from a malnutrition of the imagination. Awe feeds us reality.

Job 38-41 shows us a vision of a God who keeps all the mountain ranges of planet earth as a snow globe on his mantelpiece.

We meet a God who doesn't meet expectations. If we're reading Job for rational explanations to suffering, it's a disappointing ending. Job doesn't get an explanation. Instead, God tells Job of his power and his glory. GK Chesterton writes that as Job listens 'he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design'.

God appears to Job as a whirlwind. Let's stop and think about that for a moment. What was it that killed Job's children? A whirlwind. God arrives as a life-wrecking challenge to Job. Vs 3- 'brace yourself like a man'. King James Bible puts it 'gird up your loins'. Man up. You're in for a rough ride.

Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, who marked off its dimensions? Where you there when the stars sang? Do you fix the sides of the sea like a puddle? Have you seen the bottom of the ocean? Do you tell the sun when to get up? Does the lightning report to you for duty? Have you seen the barns in the clouds where I store the snow? Do you keep fierce monsters as household pets?

In saying this, God shows Job his power over creation, and by implication how different he is from us. And I want to convince you this morning that God being radically different from us is Good News.

God as the mighty creator sees all, and knows all. He's everywhere, all the time. His attention isn't focussed on one thing at a time, like ours. He doesn't get distracted or lose concentration multitasking. When we suffer, he knows about it intimately. He knows each of our lives far deeper than we do.

We wake up in the morning, and we experience need. We need water. We need air. We need food. We need the toilet. We get tired in the afternoon and maybe we need a nap. God has never felt dozy at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

We need love, we need affirmation. God has need of nothing at all. Our love is a bit like Jerry Maquire- 'you complete me'. Even in the purest human love there's a need for affirmation or reciprocation somewhere. God's love for the world, his infinite love for his children comes from sheer overflow. His love for you, even in your suffering, is free and pure.

We start life knowing very little at all, and we learn things as we grow. God has never had to learn anything. He doesn't gather the available facts and make the best decision he can. He knows the full totality of everything, because everything comes from him. Let's think about that for a moment. Think of how much you know, how much you've learned, the knowledge available to you. If your knowledge of the world is this much, how big is Gods? Could it be that there are a few things that you don't know that might make perfect sense of your life?

We change, we grow, and we decay. God doesn't change. He has never had a transformative learning experience. He never suffers. If we think of human suffering like a swamp, it is Good News that God isn't in the mud with us, every bit as stuck as we are. This is a God who can offer true, solid hope.

The sea was huge and frightening to the people of ancient Israel, it represented chaos and darkness. Chapter 38 shows that God has fixed it's limits. The sea is hemmed in. Likewise, in chapter 40, the Behemoth- some terrifying creature- is kept on a lead. That which we call 'natural evil' is something he has set a limit on.

In Chapter 41 we meet the Leviathan; Its snorting throws out flashes of light; its eyes are like the rays of dawn. Flames stream from its mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from its nostrils as from a boiling pot over burning reeds. Its breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from its mouth. It becomes apparent that Leviathan is more than just another creature- but evil itself, a representation of malicious forces, the tempter. It terrifies the mighty and the sword has no effect on it. We underestimate Evil at our peril. And yet The Lord, asks Job- Can you make a pet of it like a bird or put it on a leash for the young women in your house? God has evil on a leash. The demons beg Jesus not to cast them out. And in doing so- see our Gospel reading this morning- Jesus demonstrates that in his death and resurrection, the full, final victory over evil is guaranteed- Hebrews 2:14- Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.

Whatever evils you are up against, whatever tragedies, whatever heartache, whatever condition you face today- If you are a Christian, know that it is good news that God is so much bigger than you are, and so much bigger than your problems. May your sense of God be enlarged today. Might you experience closeness with God, not like holding a stone in the palm of your hand, but you held tightly in his. Cling to Christ and his glorious Gospel today.

And if you're not a Christian, then God's size is a problem for you. Whatever your problems are, however difficult things may be, whatever tragedies you have faced- your biggest problem is that one day you will face to face with this mighty God as an object of his anger. Each of us, Ephesians 2 tells us, are by nature objects of God's wrath. Our hearts are set to treason mode, however well-behaved we consider ourselves to be. And one day the King will have his day.

If that is you, let me invite you this morning that you can know God as your loving Father, his power and majesty working for your Good in every moment of every day. And that is possible through Jesus. It is through Christ alone that God's mighty hugeness and fierce awesomeness becomes for us truly Good News. God's desire is that you run to his loving arms, throw yourself on his mercy. And it starts by exploring the things Jesus did and said about himself. Please come and talk to me, or a member of the team at Christ Church, or any Christian friend, if you'd like to explore that further.

I end with a quote from CS Lewis- many of you will be familiar with the Lion, The Witch and the wardrobe- the human children hear of the King of Narnia, a lion called Aslan.

"ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake" said Mrs Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."