

## **FGBC: Sanctifying Suffering: Better than the Answer I Sought**

Job 38:1-42:6

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Please grab your Bible and open up to the book of Job. Today we are going to be picking it up in Job 38.

If you are new with us this morning we are in week 4 of a 5-week series through God's training manual about how He uses suffering to sanctify us. Now "Sanctify" is one of those Bible words that refers to the process of being transformed to look more and more like Jesus. This is a long process that begins the moment a person surrenders to making God the God of their life and doesn't end until death.

And as we have seen throughout Job, God is deeply committed to our sanctification. It turns out this is one of a few things that is more important to Him than our comfort or our safety. And we are going to get into that a bit more today.

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So Job was a righteous man. The author describes him as blameless and upright. So Job didn't cheat on his taxes, he didn't have a pornography problem, he wasn't abusive towards his wife or his kids. Job was a good man.

And then one day everything was taken away from him. He lost his seven sons and three daughters when a storm tore the house down. And all his wealth went up in smoke. Then not long after this Job lost his health as he contracted a serious infection that caused him to break out in boils which got disgustingly infected.

So Job had one of the worst periods of life anyone has ever had. And yet he came through incredibly well. Even when his wife urged him to "curse God and die" He testified "The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!"<sup>1</sup> In all this Job didn't sin.

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But then Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar show up. Three old friends who came to encourage Job. The problem is they are bad theologians and so they spend 30 chapters – months really – telling him that the reason his kids are dead is because they were bad, and Job is probably getting off easy for some heinous sin he is hiding.

In the end Job does manage to silence these noise makers by arguing that God causes both the righteous and the wicked suffer, but the weight of the constant barrage of these three counselors wears on him, and several times we watch his faith falter. And this shaking shows up as doubt, and an underlying desire to bring God to task for treating him unfairly.

So Job states:

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<sup>1</sup> Job 1:21

My complaint today is still a bitter one,  
 and I try hard not to groan aloud.  
 If only I knew where to find God,  
 I would go to His court.  
 I would lay out my case  
 and present my arguments....  
 I go east, but He is not there.  
 I go west, but I cannot find Him....  
 But He knows where I am going.  
 And when He tests me, I will come out as pure as gold. (Job 23:1-10)

Job is convinced, he really believes, that if he had the opportunity to present his case, God would be forced to say “I’m sorry. I went overboard. You didn’t deserve what I gave you. Have you ever felt like that in a moment of suffering?

...

But then a young man named Elihu enters to picture and for 6 chapters chastises both Job and his friends. And Elihu’s contribution is the insight that while Job is righteous he isn’t perfect. In fact Elihu says you can be both righteous and at the same time still need to turn from evil and sins of pride.<sup>2</sup> He points out the reality of gray in an assumed black and white world.

For Elihu righteousness isn’t about being sinless, it is about being committed to root sin out of your life. Are you righteous?

...

If you love Jesus, God is committed to your righteousness. He doesn’t want us just avoiding the obvious sins in our lives, but the underlying background ones as well. And so this is why God has allowed Job to go on suffering for months.

Now to be clear, we aren’t talking about obvious sin here. We aren’t talking about overt, active sins where Job did something wrong. We are talking about a man who has spent his life doing what is right such that his only real fault is that he is proud of being a man who has lived his life the right way. And God takes him to task for this.

So I wonder, how do you feel about this? Do you think God over-reacted with Job? Was He too severe with what was really a small problem in the big scheme of things? I mean his sin was that he was proud of being committed to living his life for God’s glory!

If God did this with you – allowed you to encounter extreme suffering for months, maybe even to the point of death, for the sole purpose of rooting out a small underlying short falling that wasn’t even a sin you had committed, but was only an attitude – would you feel you had been wronged?

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<sup>2</sup> Job 36:7-10

I'm not going to make you put up your hand to admit to that, but I want you to feel that tension because that is the tension we are left with as we get to today's text and an incredibly rare encounter in scripture – God comes to answer Job. But the answer He gives is better than the questions Job asked.

Here's the context – as Elihu finishes his speech at the end of chapter 37 all of a sudden a thunder storm begins brewing. Clouds darken and hang low. Wind picks up and then lightning crashes to the ground.

Look at chapter 38 starting in verse 1.

[Read Job 38:1-7]

This is the beginning of one of those – I need new pants – conversations in Scripture. For four chapters God is going to ask Job questions – 77 questions. And this is one of those exams that as you flip your paper over and start reading your stomach just climbs into your throat.

I remember walking into my Chemistry 12 final exam, flipping the paper over and my practice was to go through the whole test answering all the easy questions first, before starting over at the beginning.

The problem was that the other practice I had committed myself to was not memorizing formulas. I figured I'm not going to use these things again, I don't want to clutter my brain up with them now. And so there I was at the bottom of the test having answered all the "easy" questions... and still having all the questions left to answer.

Needless to say, it's a good thing the church didn't check my high school chemistry grades before giving me the job.

I imagine these 77 questions that God asks Job would have left a similar sense of dread in him, and they can be broken down into 3 different categories.<sup>3</sup>

In the first section God asks "Hey Job, have you got any idea at all what is going on in creation?" And this is most of chapter 38.

So in verse 17 God says:

[Read Job 38:17-21]

When God resorts to sarcasm things are bad. There are two points I want to draw out of this. The first is that all the while Job has been accusing God of being impossible to find, God has been right there in the ashes with him, enduring his accusations. God had heard it all. This is a bit sobering.

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<sup>3</sup> Outline for the three questions adapted from: <http://media.calvaryvista.com/library/duff-jason/studies-books/18-JOB-2013/18-JOB-038-001.pdf> (Accessed August 4, 2018)

So, how aware are you of the presence of God in your moments of sin? Or maybe let me ask: how hard do you work to put God from your mind when you feel the need to go down the lust trail, or bend the truth, or badmouth someone from church to your spouse?

Have you trained yourself to pretend God is absent in those moments? Or do you practice the presence of God?

Friends, the motivation here is not that God is like a CIA spy who has your phone tapped and is just waiting to catch you in something incriminating. Rather Jesus, who died to purchase your salvation, wants to help you root the malignant cancer of sin from your life. He wants what is best for you. And He is present in your pain and struggle.

...

And so God has seen that Job is unhappy with the way He has been running the universe. It doesn't seem fair to Job. And so God directs the conversation to the second point I want to bring out here, and that is the utter ignorance we have of the world we live in.

God's argument is that there is a lot going on in creation that we are oblivious to. So Psalm 19 tells us "The heavens declare the glory of God." And what that means is that there is a whole lot going on out there that points to someone being in control.

I mean we don't even know how our own brains work. We don't know why or how we are self-aware. We are the only animal that asks questions like "What is my purpose in life", but we don't know why we ask this. And then we know almost nothing else.

So recently I was reading an article on Science and Astronomy which made the remarkable statement: "all the stars, planets and galaxies that can be seen today make up just 4 percent of the universe [that must be there]. The other 96 percent is made of stuff astronomers can't see, detect or even comprehend."<sup>4</sup>

The idea is that the way the universe functions implies that there is a whole lot more mass in existence that we are able to detect – this stuff doesn't react with anything we have access to, not even light, and so it is totally invisible. But not only do we not know what it is, but we don't even have any ideas where it might be. And so everything we know about the universe, every theory we have made up explaining how things work, every idea about origins is based off a foundation which has access to 4% of what we think must exist. Seems a little shaky to me.

And God figures Job's comprehension of what is going on is a little shaky as well. So he just asks for some clarity. So tell me:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.space.com/11642-dark-matter-dark-energy-4-percent-universe-panek.html> (Accessed August 3, 2018)

Who created a channel for the torrents of rain?  
 Who laid out the path for the lightning?  
 Who makes the rain fall on barren land,  
 in a desert where no one lives? (Job 38:25-26)

God is asking “If a tree falls in a forest and nobody is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” And then God takes it a level higher:

Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?...  
 “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?  
 Can you loosen Orion’s belt? (Job 38:32;31)

Can you picture Job as God speaks? How’s his confidence? What color are his pants? So far there just haven’t been any easy questions on this exam. Most of them aren’t even in the realm of our 4%!

But then at the end of chapter 38 God shifts to a second kind of question. This set is a bit more like: “Okay, you don’t understand creation, but maybe you can still take care of it. Let’s see.”

And so God asks a few questions about taking care of animals. The problem is He doesn’t ask about dogs or house cats. Instead His survey includes lions, mountain goats, deer, donkeys and a bunch of birds. And He outlines what He does to take care of each one.

So he talks about satisfying the hunger of lions and watching over mountain goats as they give birth and even preserving ostriches who are powerful runners but so stupid they leave their eggs on the ground to get stepped on. But God watches over them.

And so He wonders, “How about you Job? Have you advised any eagles on where to soar to catch the updraft recently? Do any wild oxen serve you? No? Really? So what can you take care of Job? Your business? Your family? Your health?”

...

At this point, at the beginning of chapter 40, God pauses to give Job a chance to respond. And Job starts putting the pieces together. Look at verse 1.

[Read Job 40:1-5]

Maybe I’ve been a little presumptuous to say that I’ve been wronged. I suppose if I’m only aware of a fraction of 1% of the 4% of everything that exists in the universe maybe I shouldn’t attempt to be god in my own life.

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I don’t know if you ever do this, but sometimes I find myself reading blog posts online, often around the topic of astrophysics or astronomy. And after an insightful article from some guy with 6 PHD’s there is a section for comments. And I like reading these just as much as the blogs because there is always some guy named Kevin from Nebraska with a high school education and an interest in reading Star Wars who needs to comment.

And it is hilarious! Like why do we need to talk when we know nothing about what we are saying? Isn't humanity funny?

Job comes to this realization, but God isn't finished. Next He shifts to a third kind of question for Job. This time He asks whether Job has any control over creation at all. And God asks this because Job had questioned God's control. Either God wasn't good, or maybe He wasn't in control at all. And so God fires back:

"Will you discredit My justice  
and condemn Me just to prove you are right?...  
All right, put on your glory and splendor,  
your honor and majesty.  
Give vent to your anger.  
Let it overflow against the proud.  
Humiliate the proud with a glance;  
walk on the wicked where they stand.  
Bury them in the dust.  
Imprison them in the world of the dead.  
Then even I would praise you,  
for your own strength would save you. (Job 40:8-14)

Job you see the wickedness in the world, but are you capable of doing anything about it? I am, you just don't see it. I'm venting My anger, I'm humiliating the proud with a glance, I'm imprisoning the wicked in the grave. But you... I'm not sure you are in control of any of this.

Okay, maybe you can't control wickedness and injustice. How about something simpler like a couple beasts? And then God makes reference to two animals that He has obviously taken care of since then because they aren't around.

He talks about the Behemoth and the Leviathan. Now if you've got a study Bible you might have a note at the bottom that says these are hippos and crocodiles, but I don't but it. I've never seen a hippo with a tail like a cedar, or a crocodile that snorted fire.

But either way, God's question is, Job can you even control these animals? Can you control anything? How about your future? How about your health? How about your family? Anything?

And as God questions it becomes obvious that the illusion of control we have is incredibly limited and fragile. And oh how humbling it is for powerful wealthy people like Job, like us, to meditate on this. And so in all this God's point shines in Job's face. And Job once again proves he is a righteous man. As he is confronted by the ignorance of his pride and self-righteousness Job is committed to rooting sin from his life.

Look at chapter 42 starting in verse 1.

[Read Job 42:1-6]

As Job's revelation of who God is increases his response changes.

Now here's the crazy thing, God hasn't answered any of Job's questions from the previous chapters. Job spent all this time asking why bad things happen to good people, but God's answer is better than he wanted. God answers with Himself.

And as soon as Job sees God he realizes "I'm not good." And if you are not good then anything good that happens to you is not justice, it is grace. And when difficulty comes it isn't punishment, but rather, in God's wisdom it is there to point us to Him – it too is grace.

And so as Job comes to see God his complaining stops and his worship picks up where it left off back in chapter 2. And friends, this is what we need. Whatever it is that you are facing today. Whatever pains plague your body or your spirit. Whatever unknowns lie in your future. Whatever brokenness hangs over your relationships, what we need is a better answer than the questions we are asking. We need the ability to see Jesus.

So the call of this text is to increase your hunger, not to answer the question "why", but to trust that God is the "Who" behind whatever it is you are facing, good or bad.

God is sovereign. There is no struggle in heaven. And God has everything mapped out in your life for the increase of His glory.

But He isn't just sovereign, He is good. And so that means that simultaneously He has everything mapped out in your life for the increase of your good. Now it isn't your comfort and safety that He is interested in, but your ultimate good – your Christlikeness. This is good that is going to matter 10,000 years from now.

And so with this in light let your suffering humble your heart to repentance. Repent for all the times you have questioned God's goodness in the midst of your pain. And ask God to bring to light even the areas where you don't know you have sinned. Be a righteous woman or man. Be committed to rooting sin out of your life at any cost. This is where the abundant living God wants for you really begins.