

September 14, 2008
Pentecost 18

"An Answer from the Storm"

JOB 38:1-7, 31-33, 39:1-3, 40:1-5, 42:1-6

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: ² "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- ⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? ⁸ ³¹ "Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? ³² Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? ³³ Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth? ^{39:1} "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? ² Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? ³ They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. ^{40:1} The LORD said to Job: ² "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" ³ Then Job answered the LORD: ⁴ "I am unworthy-- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. ⁵ I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more." ^{42:1} Then Job replied to the LORD: ² "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ³ You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴ "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' ⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶ Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Remember the scene from the movie Forest Gump where Captain Dan, who lost his legs in Vietnam, pulls himself up with his arms to the top mast of a shrimp boat during a terrible hurricane. Into the howling wind he shouts out his words of rage and anger against God. He shouts and he shouts in anger to God, but there is no voice that calls back to him. There is something about a powerful storm such as hurricane Ike in Texas that makes people feel like they are in the very presence of an all powerful God and they can talk to God.

Our good friend Job experienced such a storm. Only God was really in that storm and God spoke to Job and told him things he needed to hear. Job had pleaded with the Lord to offer some kind of explanation for the terrible suffering that he experienced. The Lord answered Job from this storm, not with an explanation of why things happened the way they did, but with a proclamation that said, "Job look at my creation and believe with all your heart that I am in control and I am taking care of you."

The Lord's powerful proclamation to Job

Listen again to how the Lord challenges Job: "Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace

yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.” Brace yourself like a man. Get ready to enter the cage and fight with me. The Lord wants to overcome Job’s doubt and fear, and convince him that he is in control and he knows exactly what he is doing. As we heard the Lord tell us in our first lesson this morning, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”

Brace yourself like a man Job and look at my powerful and carefulness evident in all creation. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- ⁷while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” Do hear God’s angels singing for joy when they see the way I designed this earth in which you live? Man uses a plumb line like this and a laser beam to set walls straight. God established the earth exactly 93 million miles from the sun. He causes it to rotate completely around every 24 hours and puts it on a perfect slant for season changes. This past week we heard about a large machine in Switzerland costing over 10 billion dollars that smashed some atoms into smaller particles. They are looking for evidence on how the world began, we would say how the Lord our God put it all together. Whether you look up at the stars with a telescope or smash the tiny atom, or look at a cell under a microscope, or take a flower and study its beauty, or think of the miles of blood vessels transporting blood around your body, you have to be amazed at the hand of God that designed the world in which we live.

The Lord was not finished fighting with Job and overwhelming him with his love. “Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? ³² Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? ³³ Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up *God’s* dominion over the earth?” In ages past people spent more time outside under the stars, looking up at the various constellations that marked seasons and years. The Psalmist tells us, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” With a few clicks of the buttons on your computer you can access pictures of the distance stars taken from the Hubble telescope. Amazing, just amazing, how the Lord knows every star in the sky as he tells us in Isaiah 40, “Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing.” If the Lord can track each star, can he not hear the prayers and micro manage the lives of people that he loves? Job I am in control of your life! I know what I am doing.

Job have you seen the mountain goats and deer give birth? “Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended.” See that mountain goat over there in the bushes. She is ready to give birth because God has enabled her to carry a little baby mountain goat in her womb. See that doe over there, twisting and writhing in pain as she pushes out the little fawn and with minutes it is standing and nursing and ready to run with its mother to escape danger from other wild animals. And if you read other parts of these chapters you almost have to laugh as God describes the ostrich laying its eggs on the open ground and ignoring her young, flapping her wings that are useless for flying, but oh, when she runs she laughs at horse and rider because of her speed. Why do we love elephants? They are so strange and different from other animals, yet so majestic, yes even intelligent. They pay tribute to God’s way of providing animals on our earth with

unique attributes to help them survive.

Job, our dear friend Job, do you get the message the Lord is proclaiming to you so clearly? If the Lord creates the animals and provides for them, will he not also provide and care for your life even when troubles come to you? We think of what Jesus said in Matthew 6 where he points to the birds of the air and how they are cared for our heavenly Father. "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

You know the song that starts out with these words. "He's got the whole world in his hands, the whole world in his hands... He has the tiny, tiny baby in his hands... He has you and me in his hands." The Lord provides for us. He places food before us, and we in turn can use the hands and mouths the Lord gives to eat the food. God does his part and we do our part and that's how we stay alive.

In a far more spectacular way the Lord provides for our salvation. That's the bigger picture that the Lord wanted Job to see over and over again. It was Job who was able to say at one of the lowest times of his life, "I know that my Redeemer lives." When you feel like questioning the hand of God that is taking care of you then, dear Christian, look at what the hand of God did to rescue you from eternal death and punishment. I may be able to use the blessings the Lord gives me to feed myself and clothe myself and even shelter myself, but I am totally unable to do anything to save myself. The Lord sees my problem of sin and how far I have fallen short of his glory. He sees me destined for eternal death and destruction, sinking down, sinking down, beneath the dreadful frown. His hand reaches down to me in my lost and condemned situation and takes over the whole process of rescuing me.

The nail marks in the hands of Jesus that he carried with him after his resurrection are the supreme evidence that the Lord our God has done an even more spectacular job of paying for sin than creating the world in which we live. With Job we can confess boldly and confidently, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Job's peaceful resignation before the Lord

How did Job react to this answer from the Lord that came in the storm? "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ³ *You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."* Job realizes the Lord is able to do whatever he pleases, and that nothing can thwart his hand. The word "thwart" has the thought of putting a fence around something and keeping it in. Job wanted God placed into a box so he could examine him and question him. (Hold up box) When trouble comes we want to take God to court so we can examine him, and cross examine him, and find out why he has allowed suffering to reach a level that we find intolerable and inexcusable.

The Lord changed Job so that he could confess with child like faith and trust. "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." In Psalm 46 that begins with the words, "God is our Refuge and Strength" the Lord speaks to us and tells us, "Be still and know that I am God, will be exalted among the nations, I will be

exalted in the earth." There is tremendous peace and joy that comes with being able to sing, "What God ordains is always good; His will is just and holy. As he directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly. My God indeed In ev'ry need Knows well how he will shield me; To him, then, I will yield me."

The Lord really did change Job by leading him to repent of his sins. "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." We have heard Job say terrible things about the Lord such as "He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head." He told his friends, "Have pity on me, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me." Now he repents of his sins. The Lord is still doing that to people today. He leads us to come before him and humbly cry out to him, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner." Forgive me for ever questioning your love for me, or questioning why things are happening my life as they are."

The book of Job is more than a book about Job's suffering, or even Job's faith in the midst of suffering. The book of Job is all about the Lord keeping Job's faith alive in the midst of the most difficult of times. It helps us realize that no pit is so deep that Jesus is not deeper. It helps us realize that in life's lowest moments we can sing with Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives." For a while Job lost some of his integrity, his sense of awe and wonder and God's love. He lost some of the Hallelujah in his life. But God did not lose the Hallelujah in Job's life. Even when the Lord blessed him again with more health, and more children, Job never lost his "Hallelujah" The book of Job ends with the words, "And so he died, old and full of years." His life is a testimony to the words of Romans 8 that "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord." Job left us these words that we can use to face the greatest challenges of life and even death, "I know that my Redeemer lives."