

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 5 -- June 28th and July 1st, 2012

Job 38:1-11

¹Then 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. 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? ⁸“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, ⁹when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, ¹¹when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?”

Dear children of our heavenly Father.

We are sinful human beings who are prone to second guess God as if he has no idea what he is doing? For instance, a young woman in the prime of her life is taken away from her husband and her little children and we wonder, “Why would God let that happen?” A couple works long and hard for retirement, but when their “golden years” finally come, one of them is struck with a lingering illness that eats away at their finances and eliminates their dreams. We wonder, “What’s God doing here anyway?” Another couple wanting desperately to have children but unable to do so listens with horror to stories of parents who hideously abuse or even kill their infants. Don’t we join them in asking, “Why would God ever let that happen?” Sometimes we look at our own lives or the lives of our family members, we consider the things that have brought us so much personal pain and heartache, things over which we have had little or no control, and we wonder, “Why? Why would God let those things happen? It leads us to the question we are using for our theme this morning:

Sermon Theme: Does God Really Know What He Is Doing?

1. It’s a question we all ask
2. God’s answer

The question isn’t a new one? As long as there have been sinful human beings on this earth the question has been asked. In fact, it is a question that God has heard so many times that he had an entire book of the Bible written to address it. That book is the book of Job. Most people know some of Job’s story. They know that Job was a strong believer and is described in the Bible as a man who feared God and shunned evil. And people know that Job suffered unimaginable loss. In one day raiding parties carried off 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and 3,000 camels and killed nearly all of the servants. That same day a fire destroyed all of Job’s 7,000 sheep. And then while he was still numb from that news Job learned that a tornado had struck the house where his children were gathered and all of his seven sons and three daughters were dead. Imagine it! You’re wiped out in one day. Your livelihood, your money, your investments, and every one of your children are all gone within hours.

What would you do? What would you say? Do you know what Job said? He said, “**The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.**” (Job 1:21) Even when a short time later Job lost his health, even when his body from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet was covered with painful boils that became oozing running sores, even then Job was exemplary. When his wife urged him to “**Curse God and die**” (Job 2:9), he said, “**Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?**” (Job 2:10) That is the Job that most people know about. That’s why they talk about “the patience of Job.” That’s why we hear people pointing to Job as an example to follow in times of adversity.

But do you know something? What we have said about Job so far is all told us in the first two chapters of his book. Do you know how many chapters there are in the book of Job? There are forty-two chapters and in thirty-six of those chapters Job doesn't come across as quite so patient or exemplary. Over the course of time, Job becomes increasingly perplexed. The more he thinks about his situation, the more whole thing bothers him. At first, he complains to his friends around him, but ultimately, he directs his complaints towards God. He says to God, **"Why have you made me your target?" (Job 7:20)** In other words, "Why are you picking on me, God?" He accuses God of not listening. He says, **"Though I cry, 'I've been wronged,' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice." (Job 19:7)** He says, **"Even if I summoned God and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason." (Job 9:16-17)**

What seems to especially bother Job is why he, a man who tried so hard to live blamelessly before God, is suffering so while all the truly evil people in this world seem to have it so good from God. He says, **"Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? ... Their homes are safe and free from fear, the rod of God is not upon them. ... They spend their years in prosperity and go down to their graves in peace." (Job 21:7,9,13)**

Doesn't it all sound so familiar? Why, Lord? Why me, Lord?" Why aren't you listening, Lord?" Why aren't you answering my prayers, Lord?" "Why do I have to be the one who is so miserable? Why do those people have it so much better than I do?" When troubles come, the questions just flow from our minds. They may vary a little from one person to the next or from one time to the next, but basically they are all the same. They are all questioning God, questioning his fairness, his judgment, his wisdom, his love. They are all in one way or another asking God if he really knows what he is doing?

2. God's answer

While we're thinking of all those questions that we tend to ask God, let me raise a different question. What would any of us do if in the midst of one of our pity parties while we were wondering if God really knows what he is doing, what we do if God came to us and said, "OK, stand up in front of me, you and I need to talk." That's what God did with Job. He said, "Brace yourself like a man and get ready to answer some questions? And then God beginning with our text God asked Job four chapters full of questions.

Listen to the questions God brings to Job, **"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone? ... 'Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"** These questions don't stop at verse 11. They continue for 4 more chapters -- One question after another.

Through these questions God was saying, "Job, take a good long look at the world in which you are living and then see if you still wonder whether or not I know what I'm doing. You think you're so smart and I'm so ignorant, but you can't even tell me where darkness comes from or how the myriad of stars stay in the sky. Do you really think you have the right or the wisdom to challenge me? And if my wisdom is so obvious and so evident in the created world, why do you question my wisdom when it comes to the way I lead you in life?"

See where God is heading? Job may not have sinned by failing to trust God for his salvation. He may not have sinned by leading a lifestyle of open immorality. But Job was sinning when he questioned God's wisdom in running his life. If left alone in his heart, that bitterness towards God could have ultimately pried him away from his relationship with God and cost him his eternal salvation. What a beautiful thing then that God through these questions in his own wise and gracious way, God was leading Job to repentance. And it worked. Listen to these words from the last chapter of the book. **"I know you**

can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ... Surely I spoke of things I did not understand. .. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1,3,6)

Brothers and sisters, as we hear the story of Job God’s will is that we also led to repentance over our questioning of God’s wisdom. Martin Luther once said, “Most Christians have no problem trusting the power of God, but they have a serious problem trusting the wisdom of God.” How often don’t we think about how God has the power to change our lives and then wonder why he doesn’t.

But do we realize how wrong it is for us to do that? The story of Job is in our Bibles to remind us that the wisdom of God is as infinite as his power. From the dust of the earth to the farthest star in the universe, from the depths of the oceans to the rain drops and lightening falling from heaven, from the donkeys on land to the eagles in the heavens – God is responsible for and in control of every last detail of his created world. He knows what he is doing. And the same is true as he governs the lives of his people.

Think of the story of Joseph. For nearly two decades his life seemed to spiral downward and out of control. But God knew what he was doing. He was grooming Joseph for a position of power which would not only keep the nation of Israel alive but with them the promise of the world’s Savior. For 400 years the people of Israel lived in slavery in Egypt. But God knew what he was doing. He used that slavery to bring all the nations on earth into contact with God’s people and the promise of a Savior.

Moses was a man deprived of the company of his mother, his family and his countrymen for eight decades in life. But God was training him to accomplish the greatest deliverance in Old Testament history. Today sometimes God let’s his people know years of unhappiness or loneliness or illness or poverty. But God knows what he is doing. He uses that misery to make his people long for his comforting arms and their heavenly home.

Finally, think of Jesus on Calvary’s cross. How unfair it all seemed. The most innocent person who ever lived suffering the agony of the damned, the epitome of perfection treated as if he were the scum of the earth, the embodiment of love being rejected by God and man alike. But God knew what he was doing. He was guaranteeing forgiveness for all our sins, including our challenging questions. He was making it possible for you and me and all the sinners of the world to have hope and a future in a world where there would be no more sorrow or sin. He was saving sinners us. When we look at the cross, not only are we reminded that God knows what he is doing, we are also reminded that the God who is governing our lives with wisdom beyond question also cares for us with a love beyond question. When we look at the cross, what else can we do but join Job in saying, **“I know you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ... Surely I spoke of things I did not understand. .. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”** Amen