

The Lord Speaks – Who Rules Over All?

Job 40:6-41:34

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For many years as a kid, I thought I lived in the place where Jesus died. Some of you know the Bible refers to the hill where Jesus dies sometimes as Calvary – well I grew up in Calgary. We used to sing this hymn – At Calvary – Calgary. I used to sing along – In Calgary- I remember thinking it was sure an honor to live in the same city where Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead. But then something dreadful happened. I learned to read. I noticed that the Bible stories talked about CalVary and I lived in CalGArY. But did one letter matter that much? I found out it did when I asked my Sunday School teacher “where in Calgary did Jesus die?” He didn’t die here. He died in Jerusalem in Israel. “Israel – is that a community in the south side of Calgary?” No Israel is another country far far away. That’s where Jesus lived and died.

Then I went to the all knowing and all powerful authority to check out this info – my Mom. She confirmed that Jesus was not actually crucified in Calgary but on a hill called Calvary outside of Jerusalem. In a matter of days, my viewpoint had changed. I now believed and told others that Jesus was crucified in Calvary. But I wouldn’t have changed my mind without someone telling me the right information or giving me a greater perspective on life.

I’m sure similar things have happened to you as you’ve travelled through life. Maybe you discover that you thought someone had the name John. But then you find out they are actually Dave and you’ve been thinking they were John for weeks. Maybe you thought that this child went with those parents. But then you see the child get into another car with some different adults. You begin to realize that child goes with those parents.

Sometimes, we discover our attitude or belief about God needs some significant change. What is your attitude towards God today? Where are you at with Him? Distant, hostile, confused, confident, resting, at peace? What do you believe about God today? Is He trustworthy or questionable? Is he competent or blundering? Is He close or far? Is He wise or bordering on stupidity? Is He close or irrelevant? Now – with whatever attitude you have identified – does it need to change? Does it need strengthening? Maybe it needs correction and you don’t even know it.

Our attitudes and belief about God needs require constant monitoring and updating. We are like a computer. Our beliefs towards God need checkups to see if any viruses of disbelief have crept in. We need our beliefs about God updated with continual discovery and deepening knowledge of God from His Word.

That's what Job needed. He began with a belief that God worked and ruled the world a certain way. But then his personal life was devastated and his health torn apart. We have seen him stuck with the belief that God is somehow unjust. We know that Job's suffering was not because of his sin. But Job does not know this. And he concludes that since he has not committed any sin that he is aware of, he must be innocent and the Almighty must answer.

Last week we saw God's initial answer. Through Job 38, God asked Job whether he was present or had the knowledge or was in control of the things in the universe. Then in Job 39, God asks Job whether he is present, has the knowledge or is in control of the wild animals. Job responds in the first verses of chapter 40 by simply saying he's not going to answer. Yet He doesn't repent or seem to change his mind about God. God has shown that He is present everywhere and has more knowledge and has more control. But he still has not answered the question of justice.

In God's final speech, we will see God address this along with a couple of other strange references. After this speech, Job undergoes a dramatic transformation. He completely changes his mind. He comes out with a new orientation. So what did God say that led to this change? And I want to invite you to listen to God's words to see if your attitude or belief about God needs some virus protection or updating. Imagine we're going to do a scan on your beliefs about God to see if there needs any update or virus removal. By the end of our time, I pray that you will see some deep wisdom about God that you can take with you into any difficult situation.

Job 40:6-14 (ESV)

⁶Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

⁷"Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁸Will you even put me in the wrong?

Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

⁹Have you an arm like God,

and can you thunder with a voice like his?

¹⁰"Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;

clothe yourself with glory and splendor.

¹¹Pour out the overflowings of your anger,

and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.

¹²Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low

and tread down the wicked where they stand.

¹³Hide them all in the dust together;

bind their faces in the world below.

¹⁴Then will I also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can save you.

What is God doing here?

He challenges Job to deal with the evil of the world by himself. (40:6-14)

God responds to Job's initial response. The way God responds reveals Job's initial response was not satisfactory. God does not come as a comforter. He does not come in affirmation. He again challenges Job to dress for action like he's going to face a wrestling match. In verse 8, God addresses Job's charge of injustice. "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?" But God does not explain everything that He's doing. He does not reveal to Job exactly how justice works in the universe. Instead, he challenges Job to try to bring justice over the world by himself.

So God first asks if Job has the power to do it. Do you have a powerful arm and a powerful voice? Then He calls Job to dress up or make himself majestic and glorious like the Lord Himself which of course Job cannot do. Then in verses 11-13, he calls on Job to exercise justice over the world. "Pour out the overflow of your righteous anger at the injustice in the world. Deal with everyone who is proud and bring them down. Tread down the wicked in their tracks."

"Bring down the drug lords. Stop the human trafficking. Put an end to Ebola. Overthrow the evil governments. Shut down the terrorists. Expose those who steal from the company. Convict those who abuse their position of power. Uncover the corruption in an institution. Deal with every bully on every school yard. Call to account the gossips and show them their destructive words. Can you do that Job? Can you render justice over this world? If you can I will acknowledge you. I will admit you have a claim against me."

Of course, Job cannot do this. No human can perfectly carry out justice against all the evil in the world. We struggle with being just in our own homes with a few children let alone bringing justice to a city or province or nation. God continues.

Job 40:15-24

¹⁵"Behold, Behemoth
which I made as I made you;
he eats grass like an ox.

¹⁶Behold, his strength in his loins,
and his power in the muscles of his belly.

- ¹⁷ He makes his tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are knit together.
- ¹⁸ His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like bars of iron.
- ¹⁹ “He is the first of the works of God;
let him who made him bring near his sword!
- ²⁰ For the mountains yield food for him
where all the wild beasts play.
- ²¹ Under the lotus plants he lies,
in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh.
- ²² For his shade the lotus trees cover him;
the willows of the brook surround him.
- ²³ Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened;
he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.
- ²⁴ Can one take him by his eyes,
or pierce his nose with a snare?

What is God doing here?

He describes Behemoth – a massive land creature that Job cannot control. (40:15-24)

Behemoth is a super beast. He is a hard, strong and impressive creature. Job is invited, in his mind’s eye, to “behold” him, to look at him, to fill his mind with the sheer strength of this creature. But who or what is Behemoth? The most frequent identification of Behemoth with a real animal is a Hippopotamus. They eat grass. They are strong and powerful. They go into the water and swim around looking for shade. They can withstand rushing water.

But there are problems with this interpretation. Look at what God says about the tail. Verse 17. “He makes his tail stiff like a cedar.” Hippos don’t have very long tails. And there are other questions. Do hippos spend time in mountains to get food? Do hippos lie under lotus plants

These questions have led to other interpretations. Could this be something more like a storybook creature that God describes to make a point? God could describe this creature to help Job get an image in his mind of some massive and powerful land animal. Like CS Lewis with Christ portrayed as Aslan the Lion. The image impresses upon Job that he couldn’t control it. That’s what God implies in verse 24 “Can one take him by his eyes or pierce his nose with a snare?” The answer is no. Job can’t do that.

Scholars have come up with different ideas for what Behemoth symbolizes. One suggests that it could be death. Death is powerful and all consuming. It is strong in that that it has power over any life that tries to resist it. It is not frightened by adversaries nor can a human tame it. Another argues this may be God's picture of what he wants Job to be like. Job should be someone whose trust in God allows him to rest in the shade and face turbulence without fear.

But whatever Behemoth is or represents, the ultimate point seems to be that Job cannot control it. Job cannot leash it. Yet God can. God rules over it. God created it as he was a work of God. If God wanted to, he could take this Behemoth by his eyes or nose. God goes on to conclude his speech in Job 41.

41 "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook
or press down his tongue with a cord?

² Can you put a rope in his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?

³ Will he make many pleas to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?

⁴ Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant forever?

⁵ Will you play with him as with a bird,
or will you put him on a leash for your girls?

⁶ Will traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him up among the merchants?

⁷ Can you fill his skin with harpoons
or his head with fishing spears?

⁸ Lay your hands on him;
remember the battle—you will not do it again!

⁹ Behold, the hope of a man is false;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.

¹⁰ No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he who can stand before me?

¹¹ Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

¹² "I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.

¹³ Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who would come near him with a bridle?

¹⁴ Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth is terror.

- ¹⁵ His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.
- ¹⁶ One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
- ¹⁷ They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.
- ¹⁸ His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.
- ¹⁹ Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.
- ²⁰ Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
- ²¹ His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.
- ²² In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.
- ²³ The folds of his flesh stick together,
firmly cast on him and immovable.
- ²⁴ His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the lower millstone.
- ²⁵ When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid;
at the crashing they are beside themselves.
- ²⁶ Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail,
nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
- ²⁷ He counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.
- ²⁸ The arrow cannot make him flee;
for him sling stones are turned to stubble.
- ²⁹ Clubs are counted as stubble;
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.
- ³⁰ His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire.
- ³¹ He makes the deep boil like a pot;
he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
- ³² Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be white-haired.
- ³³ On earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.

³⁴ He sees everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.”

What does God do here?

He describes Leviathan – a powerful sea creature that Job cannot control. (41:1-34)

We first met Leviathan back in chapter 3. When Job first responds to all that has happened to him, he wants someone to stir up Leviathan and obliterate the day of his birth. But what is Leviathan? Some again try to identify him with an actual animal. The most common animal chose is the crocodile. It lives in water. It has scales on its back that look kind of like shields. So it’s harder to penetrate the back of a crocodile with spears or harpoons. The crocodile can certainly inspire fear especially if you’re in the water near one.

But there are many other pieces of this description that do not fit the crocodile. When he sneezes, light does not come out of his nose. Nor do his eyes glow like the dawn. Fire does not come out of the crocodile’s mouth nor does smoke leave his nostrils. Though crocodiles are much larger than people, they don’t seem to inspire such a fearsome picture as the creature pictured here.

God describes something that brings great terror to man. In verses 1-2, there appears to be no hope of taming this creature. Job can’t catch it with a fishhook, put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook. And this creature has no intention of showing any kindness to Job. It won’t become a pet or a play thing. Nor can Job catch him and then sell him in the market. Any sort of attempt to catch him will be a mortal battle according to verse 8. And looking at the creature steals away the hope of man. Though Job wanted to stir Leviathan up on chapter 3, verse 10 here declares that fierce people don’t dare disturb him.

God describes the creature’s strength and his terrifying teeth. His back contains these unpierceable shields. More disturbing images follow. It’s like this creature has fire inside of it. When he sneezes, light sprays out. Its eyes glow and he shoots out fire from his mouth. This is the image of fire breathing dragon that lives in the sea.

His heart is hard like stone perhaps indicating his coldness towards any other creature. Any attempt to bring him down seems destined for failure. Iron is like straw to him. He would snap bronze like rotten wood. Arrows do not scare him. Big stones just turn to rubble when flung against his side. Javelins cause him no fear.

It also seems like he has no weak spot. Unlike crocodiles that have a soft underbelly, this creature has a sharp hard underbelly. When he swims he makes the sea boil maybe because of the heat he generates or the bubbles that he

causes with his great disturbance of the sea. He leaves a wake behind him like a ship. He has no equal among the creatures on the earth nor does he fear them.

So I conclude that Leviathan is another storybook like creature that was well known in the Ancient world, something amusing, terrifying and way beyond Job's control. And this creature lives in the sea – a symbol of chaos and rebellion against God. God's description helps Job paint this picture in his mind. We see Biblical support for this interpretation later in the Old Testament. In Psalm 74:13-14, the Psalmist speaks of the exodus in terms of God breaking the heads of sea monsters and crushing the head of Leviathan. It reads "You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters; you crushed the heads (plural) of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness." So here Leviathan is pictured as an enemy that was conquered.

Then in Isaiah 27, the prophet speaks about the Lord saving Israel. And in Isaiah 27:1 he states "In that day, the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea". So the development of Leviathan through Scripture points to an image of something powerful, terrifying and opposed to God. But even in this description given to Job, the creature is still a creature. Isn't it interesting that in Revelations 12 – who is described as a dragon but Satan himself! He is not a threat to God. Though Job can't put him on a leash, God certainly can. With that description of Leviathan, God's speech ends.

How does Job respond?

Job 42:1-6 (ESV)

42 Then Job answered the LORD and said:

²"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'

⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;

⁶therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

This is the man who demanded a hearing with God. This statement comes from the man who came on the verge of accusing God of injustice? But now Job's attitude towards God has completely changed. He first speaks of something that he now knows. "I know that you can do all things and no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Instead of the questioning and doubting of God, Job suddenly has confidence in him. It seems that Job has gained some understanding that God has deeper purposes than he can understand.

Then Job admits he spoke of something he did not know. He quotes God's challenge – "who is this that hides counsel without knowledge." He admits clearly and explicitly that he has done exactly that. He uttered things too wonderful for him. Wonderful here refers to something only God can do according to His power and only He can understand according to His wisdom. He admits he has said things that he ought not to have said. He has made accusations he ought not to have made. He has spoken as if he understood things that he does not understand.

Then in verse 4, Job again quotes God's charge. "I will question you and you make it known to me." Job has seen the Lord with a clarity he has not approached before. And in response to this aural (hearing) vision, he repents for the first time in the book. It is a surprising response from the man who has steadfastly refused to repent of the supposed sins of which the comforters have repeatedly accused him. This is the climax of the book.

But what has God said that has led to this? How do these two terrible portraits of Behemoth and Leviathan bring such a change in Job? Remember he is still on the rubbish heaps scraping his wounds. He is still surrounded by unhelpful comforters.

Why does this speech result in such a transformation in Job?

Well first of all, I think we must recognize that **this speech is not about comfort but correction.** Remember God is speaking from a whirlwind. He challenges Job. He does not come to Job as a gentle shepherd ready to wrap a wounded lamb in his arms. God reveals Job's limitations when it comes to dealing with evil. Through the great beasts God reminds Job of great forces of evil and chaos that Job does not control. Yet it's not beyond God's control. He is dealing with evil. He is bringing redemption to the world. He is accomplishing His purposes. Justice will be ultimately served when Christ comes back. No forces of chaos or evil on land or sea are beyond his control. God reminds Job of all this through this speech.

But God doesn't do this to prove His superiority to Job. It's not about saying "I'm God and you're not so just deal with it." God corrects Job's error of deciding to blame God for all that's happened. **This speech directs us to guard against taking the easy solution of blaming God for doing wrong.** We have seen God has much deeper purposes and wisdom than we would could ever hope to grasp. He does not reveal everything to us. We are called to trust Him and trust His wisdom when we don't understand and face perplexing times.

This speech also teaches us to **guard against the conclusion that "God is incompetent."** From our vantage point we think we could do better. But when faced with the challenge of dealing with all of the evil in the world, we realize we must entrust it to Him. Kelly Lemon was asked about a primary purpose of the book of Job. She writes, "**Job trains our minds so we can be prepared for suffering and crises.** When musicians prepare for a recital or concert, they engage in many long hours of practice. A pianist trains her fingers to know the music so that when it is time for the concert, they go through the right movements subconsciously. If the pianist has to think about each transition and each fingering, the recital will not be a success. The body must be trained to act instinctively. Such a feat can only be accomplished through mental and physical discipline." So if we learn that God's wisdom and purposes go far deeper than we can hope to understand. If we accept that Christians are not exempt from experiencing the suffering of this fallen world, we can better cope with those times when they come. Instead of turning away from God in these desperate times, we can turn to Him in faith and trust even through our deep valleys.

This was the perspective of a friend of Joni Eareckson's. She writes about Peter Summer who directed the Christian Blind Mission in New Zealand. Peter himself was visually impaired at an early age and spent decades in darkness. But a miracle happened when a specialist performed a corneal graft on Peter's eyes. Suddenly, after years without sight, he was able to see. Peter relished brilliant sunsets and smiles on the faces of friends. He told her that he never imagined yellow to be so . . . yellow.

But then Peter suffered a setback. The corneal graft developed an ulceration. It reduced his vision significantly and was rather worrying. He writes "Sight, I have found is quite addictive and the thought of losing it all once again was very difficult to bear. I'm pleased to say that my condition has stabilized. At the present I can still read letters with the help of a strong light and magnifying glass.

Then Peter inserted a line from a poem by William Blake in his letter to Joni – **“He who binds himself to a joy, does the winged life destroy; but he who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity’s sunrise.”** Peter then added, “Joni, I have had to learn not to bind to myself the joy of sight but to kiss this winged blessing as it flies through my life. At times, the urge to grab and hold onto it is overwhelming, but in my heart of hearts, I realize one has to develop a certain detachment to joys of all kinds to escape the poison of bitterness and despair.” It seems to me this is a person who has grasped some of the lessons from Job.

God’s speech calls us to humble ourselves before the all-powerful, loving, all knowing, sovereign God who we can entrust our lives and perplexities to. This is not a comforting speech. But it is a perspective-gaining speech that can lead to comfort if we will heed it’s message. God is still in control and wise. There are things we must entrust to Him. Yet He still works with us and brings us to that place of deeper faith. So Christian, will you come to our Almighty God and bring in faith and entrust to Him your perplexities. If you don’t know Christ, will you come to Him so that you enter into relationship with this Almighty God?