

## JOB 1:6-2:10 WHAT ABOUT GOD?

\* During World War Two, a soldier wrote after seeing the horrors of D-Day and its aftermath, “If God’s chief work has been the creation of this earth and man on it, He and His work have been a glorious failure.”

\* After the tsunami that struck Asia and killed hundreds of thousands of people a few years ago, a relief worker wondered, “How can a loving God allow this to happen?”

\* After the Virginia Tech shootings, a Korean pastor said, “Satan is working. We are devastated. God doesn’t seem to be around.”

It is the question of questions. Why is there evil and suffering in this world? If there is a God, why is his world this way? How can we love, or serve, or trust, such a God?

It is a global question, as we live in a world of wars, tsunamis, hurricanes, and shootings. It is a personal question, as we see and suffer and wonder.

It is the question of a father and mother, as they bury their child.

It is the question of a victim, as she prepares to testify in court against the man who violated her.

It is the question of a young person, as he is shattered by the abuse or the indifference of his parents.

It is the question we ask, as we enter the book of Job. Even if you know little about the Bible, you have probably heard the story.

Job is a prosperous man, who loves God and neighbor.

Satan comes to God and challenges Job’s loyalty. He asks to take away most of Job’s blessings. Then, says Satan, Job will curse you.

God permits this, and when the destruction is done, Job is left sitting among ashes, scraping himself with a piece of broken pottery, mourning his losses, and wondering what to make of it all.

Much of the book consists of Job and his friends, trying to make sense of what seems so senseless. Near the end, God enters the conversation.

As we read through the Old Testament, we will spend this week and next week thinking through evil and suffering, and the answers we gain through the book of Job.

Today, we will ponder some of our questions about God. Next week, I hope to explore how we as people respond to this suffering.

It will not be easy. When we open our eyes and see the reality of evil and suffering in this world and our worlds, OUR STRUGGLE is great.

We question God, and we long for answers.

I have found it helpful to frame OUR QUESTION this way: In a world of evil and suffering, is God both good and great? As we see and experience this suffering, we wonder about the character of God. What kind of God allows all of this?

If God is great, we think he should be great enough to stop the suffering and evil we see and feel.

If God is good, we think he should be good enough to stop the suffering and evil we see and feel.

Is he really both? In a world of evil and suffering, is God both good and great?

Here are OUR ANSWERS. These are the answers that we tend to hear, and tend even to say, as we try to sort through this.

One answer: He is great, but not good.

\* In Sri Lanka, after the tsunami, another relief worker said, “My wife is a Hindu devotee and lights oil lamps to the Hindu gods 24 hours a day.

“I, however, have carried 37 bodies on my back. I have big doubts.”

He seemed to sense that God was great enough to have stopped those waves of death, but he did not, so this man was very unsure about devoting himself to any “god.” He is great, but not good.

\* Also in Sri Lanka, there was a Roman Catholic man who lost his home and two close family members in the tsunami. He said that he now hated God, for if God existed, this tragedy would not have happened.

You sense his confusion. At once, he thinks God does not exist, and he hates this God who does not exist! But again, you sense this question: why didn’t he stop this? He is great, but not good.

Have you known someone who responded to a personal tragedy this way?

Maybe a loved one who was devastated by a chronic, painful illness?

Maybe a friend who lost a good job because the boss wanted to cover up an illegal activity?

Maybe a church member who witnessed a crime?

Maybe we say that he is great, but not good, because we see so much. We see “mass” tragedy. We see the “bigness” of big disasters. We learn about so many individual tragedies.

We sense what a huge world this is, and how great God must be, to have made it all. Yet as we see both tremendous disasters, and smaller tragedies, we may wonder about the goodness of a God who appears great enough to stop them, but does not.

One of our answers: he is great, but not good.

Another of our answers: He is good, but not great.

\* After the Asian tsunami, a woman wrote this in the Indianapolis Star: "God was not in the earthquake in Asia...The forces of nature have no moral will. It was not...God's will that caused the sea to swell and the tsunami waves to take so many lives."

She seems to be saying that somehow there is something outside of God, that God either cannot or will not control. Large and small tragedies are the result of "the forces of nature," not God. He is good, but not great.

\* I have never forgotten an incident in Minnesota, where a young woman disappeared, and was eventually found dead. A pastor spoke at the service about how God did not want this, and God could not stop this, and God simply looks on helplessly with us, and weeps. He is good, but not great.

This is a very modern, very "American" answer. The better we get at overcoming nature with our technology, the smaller God seems. For most of human history, people have been awed by how great God is, and how we are helpless and weak. People have understood the "otherness" of God.

But now, even as Christians, we emphasize our similarities with God. In our minds, he has become a lot like us.

Some Christians, in fact, have reduced their image of God to the point that they don't even think God knows the future. He did not know Katrina would be so bad. The shootings at Virginia Tech surprised him. The illness that just engulfed your family, is news to him, too. So they say.

He is good, but not great.

Now...do you see how both answers leave us still struggling?

\* If God is great, but not good, why should I worship, serve or love him? He seems more evil than good. I cannot look to him for comfort, or help, or hope. He has heartlessly brought me this evil, and he may bring me more!

He heartlessly struck me with this disability.

He heartlessly allowed that thief to steal my identity.

He heartlessly multiplies suffering around the world.

If that is so, I want nothing to do with him!

\* If God is good, but not great, why should I worship, serve or love him? He is nothing but a big weakling. I cannot look to him for comfort, or help, or hope, because I cannot trust that he is big enough to deal with this!

He cannot carry me through the valley of depression.

He cannot protect me from the tornado plowing through the cornfields.

He cannot turn the heart of my relative who performs Satan worship.

I will just rely on myself, or my friends, or the stars, or anything but him, to deal with the evil and suffering I see and experience.

No matter how we say it, or no matter how we have seen or suffered it, this is the struggle. In a world of evil and suffering, is God good and great?

Now let's explore GOD'S ANSWERS.

Job's friends have answers. But when they have finished giving their answers, God speaks out of the storm, and he answers Job.

Or does he? Yes, he does. But not by solving every mystery or giving a detailed answer to every question. Instead, he reveals his glory to Job: the glory of his greatness and his goodness.

Let's see how he does this.

Yes, he says, I AM GREAT.

He shows his greatness as he demonstrates the greatness of his creation, and the greatness of his providence.

In the first part of chapter 38, we read of his creation.

God says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" Then God declares how he set the bounds of the seas, and made the clouds, and fixed limits upon the forces of nature.

What does Psalm 19 say? "The heavens declare the glory of God."

In Jim Roszell's Sunday School class on the Holy Spirit, he has shared these words with us:

"Scientists know that light travels at the speed of 5.87 trillion miles a year. They also know that the galaxy of which our solar system is a part is about 100,000 light years in diameter - about 587 trillion miles.

"It is one of about a million such galaxies in the optical range of our most powerful telescopes. It has been estimated that in our galaxy there are more than 200 billion stars. The sun is one of them...traveling in an orbit at 135 miles per second, which means that it will take about 250 million years to complete a revolution around the galaxy."

See my creation, says God. I am great.

Also see this greatness in providence.

If you read on in chapter 38 and into chapter 39, you will read of God's providence over creation. He sustains the creation. He orders the creation. He provides for the creation. For example...

\* "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no man lives...?"

\* "Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?"

\* "Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?"

What is God saying? I am great! I am great in the creation I have made. I am great, as I provide for creation.

You are not great. You are a speck before my measureless greatness.

So do not doubt this: I am great enough to rule over what I have made. Do not imagine that my world is somehow outside my control.

As readers of Job, we really learn this at the start of the book. We read these bizarre scenes where Satan comes to God and asks to bring the tragedies upon Job that will test his devotion to God.

The great God grants permission. But while God permits Satan to do this and that to Job, Satan is NEVER outside God's control. God is ALWAYS the Lord who is greater than the evildoer.

Satan's leash is no longer than God allows. The "forces of nature" are God's forces, coming from his hand, ordained by his will. He is great.

But in his words to Job, he also declares, I AM GOOD.

After God's descriptions of his greatness in chapters 38 and 39, we read of more dialogue between God and Job at the start of chapter 40.

Then God speaks again:

"Brace yourself like a man: I will question you, and you shall answer me."

Then what does God want to talk about? He asks, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify myself?"

Good questions, about goodness. Are we to tell the great God of creation and providence, about justice?

Then God describes two monstrous creatures.

\* One is the "behemoth." He may be like a buffalo, or a hippopotamus. We don't know. We do know he is strong and secure.

\* The other is the "leviathan." He is a sea creature. He may be like a crocodile, or he may be like a huge monster. We don't know. We do know no one will stop him, and all fear him.

Then God finishes the description of the leviathan by saying, "He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud." I wonder whether he is talking about the leviathan there, or himself!

What is the point? God is just, and justice is at the core of goodness. We see evil and suffering, and we wonder if there is justice for all of this.

God seems to be saying that he is something like those creatures. Just as nothing will stop them, nothing will stop him as he pursues justice.

You dare not question his justice, and you need not worry over his justice. He will bring justice. He will bring it, because he is great, and good.

We see this most clearly in the cross. In the midst of his struggles, Job declares that he knows his redeemer lives, and that he will walk on the earth. Like all the faithful of the Old Testament, Job waits for the coming of Jesus.

The cross of Jesus, is where we see God's justice. We don't often think of it that way. We think of the cross, and we think only of mercy.

But before mercy, there is justice. Paul writes in Romans that God sent Jesus to the cross to "demonstrate his justice."

God punishes sin. God administers justice for evil. The glory of the cross is that Jesus suffers justice not for his sin, but for the sin of his people.

Through faith in Jesus, I know he took God's justice, in my place, for my sin. So now I hope in his promise that one day he will bring justice for wrong.

He will bring justice - to the abortionist.

He will bring justice - to the thieving liar.

He will bring justice - to the cruel father.

Either they will pay for their sins, or they will turn in faith to Jesus, and he will pay for their sins. He is just. He is good.

Now...where does that leave us?

We still wonder, "Why does it have to be this way?" It's great to know that God is great and can help us through seasons of evil and suffering, and it's good to know that God is good, and that he cares enough about wrong to provide justice. But why did everything have to get so messed up at all?

That is the question God does not answer. Notice that he does not tell Job why Job had to suffer, and he

does not tell us why all must be, as it is.

We know evil is real. We know human sin is real. But we do not know why God has allowed and ordained them to be real.

So what do we do? Our call is to cling by faith, to the One whose character is revealed as both good and great.

His goodness is still good, even though he has said it will be this way.

His greatness is still great, even as he promises to end this age of evil and suffering.

We confess that he has not revealed all we would like to know, and we trust in what he has revealed. He is great. He is good.

His great Son has come, so that he might be good to us. The great day will come, when goodness will prevail, and evil and suffering will be no more.

Job says to the Lord, "I know that you can do all things, and that no plan of yours can be thwarted." His plan was for evil and suffering to come to this world, but his plan is also for evil and suffering to one day leave forever.

We know this to be true because of Jesus' first coming, where the defeat of evil and suffering are secured.

We will see this to be true, in Jesus' second coming, where the defeat of evil and suffering will be complete.

It is the question of questions. How do you ask it this morning? Why do you ask it this morning?

The answer is in the character of God. He is great, and he is good. With his help, can you believe in him?

That Korean pastor at Virginia Tech, after saying that God did not seem to be around, said this: "We have to seek his lovingkindness."

Amen! He is great, and he is good. So in this world of evil and suffering, we seek him, and we trust him.