

## **2025 ALL-AGE TALK, 26.10.25, JOB 38, 40, 41 SELECTIONS**

### **GOD SPEAKS – OF BEHEMOTHS & LEVIATHANS...!**

Imagine being on the very top of a mountain & a storm is blowing. A storm more ferocious than the 'Storm Benjamin' we have just come through. There's gale-force winds & vicious hail. There's thunder & lightning & rain coming down in bucket loads... (Forget stair-rods!)... And God tells you: stop sheltering from this storm, but to go & stand out in the middle of it... That's something similar to what God tells Job towards the end of this book, when he speaks: 'Brace yourself, like a man!', God challenges Job. He uses this phrase twice.

I well remember, when I did the 3 Peaks Challenge with Owen Cooper, over 7 years ago now. When we finally got to the top of Ben Nevis, the wind up there sounded like a jet engine. Just standing in the face of it was nearly impossible. We had to find shelter from that howling wind.

But for Job, there is nowhere to hide... Job has complained long & loud, that there was now way he could appeal to God in person; no way to find God's whereabouts. Out of the blue, God turns the tables. Instead of Job speaking to God, the LORD graciously chooses to speak to him. (Now of course, all this time that Job has been crying out in his terrible suffering, God has been listening to his cries, his anguished prayers). But it seemed to Job that God was either far away, or not listening. But all this time, God had been right there, with Job...

Here is just one part of the good news of the Book of Job. If God at times seems far away from us, not listening to our prayers or even not caring about us. Even then, God is caring & listening & close by... Jacob, in the middle of nowhere a fugitive from his family home, wakes up from his dream & declares: 'God is in this place & I had not realised it'. As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 139, 'there is nowhere we can go from God's presence'. And the apostle Paul declares: 'there is nothing in all creation (or beyond this world) which can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our LORD'. Alleluia!

But for Job, right then, the fact that God chooses to speak to him, does not feel like good news. Not in any way... He feels very small & completely exposed, in the face of God's challenge to him. Job thought he was already feeling as bad as he possibly could. The terrible loss of all his family, except his wife. The skin disease that pained & afflicted him. The loss of his outstanding reputation. The loss of any sense of friendship with all those around him. More than anything,

bereft of any sense that God might be his friend. And now he hears the stern rebuke of the God he had despaired of seeing. Could things get any worse for Job? I'm almost tempted to say, they could have got even worse.

God chose not to mention to Job, the reported conversation with Satan at the beginning of this book. How might Job have felt about this? If I had been Job in that situation, I would have been incensed by this apparent agreement between God & Satan. I'm not sure it would have helped to convince him of God's justice... God saying, in effect: 'Actually, I had a wager with the 'auld enemy'. He bet me that if you lost your all family & were afflicted with a terrible disease, that even you would curse me.'

The fact that Satan plays no further part in this story, after chapter 2, suggests to me that the supposed conversation between God & Satan is nothing more than a dramatic device. It's a way of capturing the readers attention. It is, I believe, the way the writer explains to himself the terrible tragedies which Job unexpectedly experienced. This is the explanation the writer comes up with, to try to understand why someone like Job, should experience such terrible suffering. It might help to tidy up for the writer, in one way, the question of suffering. But it then presents us with another equally problematic issue: how can God be just, if the LORD is in cahoots with the devil?

At first glance, with God's resounding rebuke to Job, it seems as if the devil was right in his thinking about Job. Because Job did indeed question the justice of God. But despite all his complaints to God, Job never curses God; he never turns his back on God. And there are moments, in the midst of his suffering, when Job expresses a faith in God – a faith which transcends understanding.

At no point does God attempt to explain to Job why he suffered so terribly. Instead, God simply reminds Job of the limits of his understanding. God reminds Job of the many wonders of the world, which are completely beyond him. This reminds me of Jesus' response in Luke 13, to those who asked him about God's people suffering tragedies, like the Galileans who Pilate had killed, whose blood was mixed with the Temple sacrifices. Jesus makes no attempt to explain why these people suffered & died. Instead, he uses this story & another story, to act as a warning to everyone of the need to repent & believe in God.

But why should we, why should anyone, believe in a God who does not give us straight answers to simple questions?... Is God ultimately like a politician ?

What a thought! But there are two very good reasons for us to trust in God, from the book of Job – and also from the stories of Jesus:

Firstly, God encourages Job to consider the glory & awesomeness of all creation. There is so much for us to celebrate about the world around us. So much that speaks to us - both of God's power & God's goodness. Jesus similarly, told those who came to listen to him, to consider both the simple faith of the birds of the air and the beauty of the flowers of the field.

Secondly, there is the glory of God in Jesus. The One who created all things chose to become like one of us human beings. This is indeed the greatest true story ever told... Jesus the Servant King & the King of Love, who both suffered for us & continues to suffer with us. As he suffered the curtain of God's Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, as a sign that, through Jesus, God has opened a way of forgiveness for all who sin. So that we can all approach God, find peace with God & even enter the Holy of Holies.

I remember one occasion, as a young Christian at Newcastle University. Something had really upset me. I was really angry at God. So I took a walk & spent most of that walk shouting & swearing at God. Of course, like Job, I couldn't hear God as I ranted & raved. After a while I calmed down. I realised how foolish I had been & asked God's forgiveness. God was patient with me. God stayed quiet. God listened. Remarkably – I don't know why – God forgave me & welcomed me back & assured me of His love.

So here is the good news of Job. The good news of the gospel of Jesus: Even though, like Job, we don't fully understand God & are often far from God in our thinking & behaviour. Despite this, our God has chosen to reveal the divine nature to us, through Jesus. We can all speak with God, wherever & whoever we are. We may question God's goodness at times. But God is patient. God promises to listen, even though we may be raving. God promises to welcome us back & show us love, just like the father with the prodigal son in Jesus' parable. Like any father, God disciplines those he loves.

If you reflect on any difficult times you have gone through in your life, you may still have questions about those. But it is good to remind ourselves that God was with us through any suffering we may have experienced. And no matter what you might be going through right now, you can know, because of Jesus, that God is with you. God is your helper. God is your refuge, your strength.

If God is so patient with us, should we not be patient with God, when there don't appear to be any answers? 'Be strong & take heart & wait 4 LORD'. Like Elijah, we are called to listen out for God's 'still, small voice'... (Heb 10:35-37?)