

HE SPEAKS IN THE CHAOS

SERIES: SHATTERED: THE STORY
OF JOB



Catalog No. 20200322
Job 38:1-41
Fifth Message
Dan Westman
March 22, 2020

Job 38:1-41

This past week has been a week of chaos. As the coronavirus continues to spread and we continue to take more and more drastic measures to flatten the curve, it feels a bit like the world is spinning out of control. For some of you, your life has gotten much quieter. You are working from home and all of your social gatherings have been cancelled or moved to digital platforms like this one. Those of you who feel like life has gotten much quieter are clearly those without little children. My wife and I have a one-year-old and a three-year-old at home, and I think chaos is the best word to describe not just global events but my home life as well this past week.

I've been trying carefully not to get too addicted to devices and social media through this all (I think that will be a challenge for all of us over the next few months), but there is some content out there that shouldn't be missed. If you haven't been tuning into the jokes about working from home, you are missing out. My favorite are the ones where you refer to your children as your coworkers and narrate the events of your day. The best one yet came from my friend the other day. His text to me said, "I was working this afternoon, and I heard a strange noise coming from the other room. I walked in to see what was going on and found my coworker wearing nothing but a superhero cape, peeing on the floor." This is what COVID-19 has done to us! Hang in there, folks. We are all in this together.

For the past month, we at PBC have been studying the book of Job together in a series called "Shattered." At the beginning of the book, we saw that Job's life was completely shattered. He lost everything he had in one afternoon. In that moment, life for Job felt like it was falling apart. The term chaos just scratches the surface of what Job was experiencing.

Listening in the chaos

When I think of seasons of chaos in my life, there is one obvious season stands out above the rest. It started soon after my wife, Linzy, and I moved to the Bay Area four and a half years ago. Life was already chaotic. I had just graduated from seminary. We had just moved across

the country. I was starting a new job here. Linzy was starting her own business. Everything was a bit chaotic.

We didn't have any kids at the time, but a week after we got here we found out that we were pregnant. We were ecstatic. We were incredibly excited. We had been looking forward to kids for years. Now it was happening and we were thrilled!

A week later, things start to go bad. Linzy was having some symptoms that made us concerned about the baby's health, so we went into the doctor. They ran some tests and told us that things did not look good. They couldn't see the baby with the ultrasound. We were only about 6 weeks along, but they should have been able to see something. After a week of coming into the doctor for bloodwork every couple days, they confirmed that this was an ectopic pregnancy, meaning that the fetus was growing outside of the uterus—and the baby couldn't survive. Another week went by, and the baby miscarried.

We went from the highest place we'd ever been to the lowest place we could imagine.

The actual day of the miscarriage was the first day that I was supposed to teach for our young adults at Young Adult Fellowship (YAF). I called Paul Taylor, who had been leading YAF, and explained what was going on and told him I don't know what to do, but I can't come teach tonight.

The next few weeks and months were the darkest of my life so far. The grief was overwhelming. Crippling at times. It had an impact on me that I wasn't expecting—it had an impact on my spiritual life. I had been preparing, training to be a pastor for years at that point. I had this burning desire to study and preach God's Word, and now I was in a position to do that regularly. But every time I opened God's Word to study, it felt dry. As I asked the Lord to speak to me, to give me something to share, there was nothing—only silence. This went on for months.

I wasn't angry at God. I didn't start to doubt God's existence or his presence in my life. I just wanted him to speak. To say something. Anything. I just wanted to hear his voice.

Have you ever been there? In the chaos, in the darkness, waiting to the Lord to speak. Listening for the voice of God and hearing nothing? Maybe you feel like that this morning, as it feels like the world is spinning out of control at the threat of this virus.

This is how Job felt. In one afternoon, he lost everything he had. Then, for 35 chapters, Job has been talking with his friends, asking why it is that he is suffering. Job has been asking questions of God, longing for God to answer him. And he has been met with silence.

But now, in our passage for this morning, God speaks. He speaks from a whirlwind. From the middle of the chaos. What does God say in the chaos? What does God say about the chaos? What does God want to say to use in this moment of chaos that we are experiencing? Let's listen to his voice this morning.

God's charge against Job

God begins to speak at the beginning of chapter 38.

Job 38:1-3:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

As Job was talking to his friends earlier in the aftermath of his devastating loss, it became clear that Job no longer trusted God. He believed that his suffering was orders-of-magnitude greater than anything that he could have done to deserve it. He was so convinced that he was in the right and God was in the wrong that he said he wanted to take God to court so that he could argue his case in front of an unbiased judge. Job accused God of injustice.

When God speaks here (in chapter 38), he brings his own accusation against Job. His accusation is in verse 2, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" The word counsel can also be translated "plan" or "design." God is accusing Job of mischaracterizing God's divine plan—his design for the world—and of speaking about what he does not know. In other words, he is saying, Job, you think my plan for your life, for this world, is messed up? You don't have any idea what you are talking about. You've asked your questions of me. Now, it's my turn to ask the questions.

God is bigger than the chaos

God's first question comes in verse 4.

Job 38:4:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding."

Job, where were you when I created the world? Were you there? I don't remember. Do you understand why I created the world the way that I did?

Many people read God's reply here (and in what follows) to be harsh and intimidating—like some kind of cosmic bully. "I am big and powerful. You are small and weak. I'll do whatever I want. Don't question me!"

But that is not what God is saying here. He is not trying to intimidate Job. That will become clear as we look at what else God says. Rather, God is trying to reframe Job's thinking. He is trying to give him some perspective. He does this by asking a series of rhetorical questions, first about the physical world and then about the animal kingdom.

First, God talks about the earth itself, as we saw in verse 4. Let's look again.

Job 38:4-7:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

In this series of questions, God is establishing that he is the creator, and Job is not. It is God who created all that is. And he has created the world with order. Did you notice the way that God describes his creation of the earth? He describes it like the building of a house of a house. It has a foundation, a cornerstone. It has specifics measurements and has been carefully constructed. The world is a place of order.

We see this with the material world and the laws of physics (i.e., gravity, electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force). We also see this in the immaterial world with things like morality and justice.

God is the one who has created all that is, and he is the one who determines how it all works together. That's a big job, and it's a job that Job knows nothing about.

We might think that because God has created this world in an orderly way, with rules and laws and structure, that the world would also be free from chaos. But that is not the case. As God continues with his questions in the rest of chapters 38 and 39, we see that God has not created a world that is without chaos. Chaos is a reality. Uncertainty is a reality. Danger is a reality. He mentions of the wild ox that cannot be tamed by any human (39:9-10). He talks about the war horse that charges into battle with fierceness and rage (39:19-25). He speaks of extreme weather — thunder and lightning and storehouses of rain and hail that have been reserved for the day of war (38:22-23).

In the Bay Area, our lives feel chaotic because of things like traffic. Traffic is the worst. And because we are driving our children to soccer practice and swim practice, math tutoring and piano lessons. And that's just Monday.

These things may bring chaos, but we they are things that we are doing to ourselves. But if you're ever witnessed a tornado in the Midwest or a hurricane in Florida or a blizzard in Tahoe, then you realize that chaos is not just something that we do to ourselves. Chaos is a part of the world; the world that God has created and designed.

And yet, even in the midst of the chaos, God reminds us that he is bigger than the chaos. God is bigger than the chaos. Yes, the world is full of chaos. Life is hard. Life is painful. But God is bigger. God is stronger. This is God's universe. This is the world that he created. Our planet is a dot on the map of God's great universe. This moment in time is blip on the radar of an eternal God. You and I are but a breathe in the atmosphere of an infinite God.

There is no amount of chaos that we could experience in this life that is a threat to the God who created it all.

It doesn't always feel like that, does it? Coronavirus seems to be taking over the world. A global pandemic that has killed thousands, infected hundreds of thousands, caused markets to crash and schools and businesses to close. It feels like the world is being brought to its knees. Life is being put on hold. Chaos is surrounding us. This seems huge to us. It is small to God. God is bigger than any chaos we may face.

God controls the chaos

The idea that God created a universe of which chaos is a part can be a little unsettling for us. Does that mean that God is not sovereign? Does that mean that God is not in charge? No. As God continues with his questions to Job, that becomes clear.

Job 38:8-11:

“Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, 9 when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, 11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?”

Here, the topic of God's questions shifts from the earth to the sea. In the ancient world, the sea was a symbol of chaos. It was the epitome of uncertainty. People depended on it for food, travel, and commerce, but it was unpredictable, dangerous, unknown.

My family and I were at the beach a few weeks ago. There were signs out warning people of strong currents and advising people to stay out of the water. Why? Because the sea is powerful and sometimes unpredictable.

It's dangerous if you don't know what you are doing. But God does not let the sea run wherever it pleases. He does not let chaos cover the whole land. Rather, God controls the chaos. He shuts in the sea with doors. He binds it with bands. He sets the limits and says, “Thus far you shall come, and no farther.” Yes, God may allow for chaos in the world, but he is the one who sets bounds on the chaos. God controls the chaos, not the other way around.

When Linzy first started having symptoms of a miscarriage, we called the doctor immediately and ended up going in to see the doctor shortly after. As I mentioned before, they couldn't see the baby in the ultrasound. In order to determine what was going on, they had us come back every forty-eight hours for blood tests. What they found through these tests was that Linzy's pregnancy hormone levels were rising, but not nearly at the rate they should be. This is what confirmed it was an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy is very dangerous for the mother. If the baby continues to grow outside of the uterus, eventually something would rupture, and the mother could die. There is nothing that can be done to

save the baby in ectopic pregnancy. Sometimes ectopic pregnancies resolves themselves and the baby miscarries naturally. But in our case, Linzy's rising hormone levels meant that the baby was continuing to grow. The longer this continued, the more risk there was for Linzy.

It was clear that the baby could not survive no matter what we did. The doctors told us that our only choice was to terminate the pregnancy, and that we needed to do it right away. The thought of actively ending the life of our first child was more than we could bear. Even if we knew that the baby could not survive, taking that action was too much for us. We asked the doctor if we could wait for 24 more hours and do one more hormone test just to be sure. They informed us that this would be going against medical advice, but we felt like that's what we needed to do.

That night, we prayed to God for mercy. We pleaded with him to take this baby naturally. In the middle of the night, Linzy woke up, and she heard the Lord tell her that he had taken our baby home. The next morning we woke up, and Linzy told me what had happened. We went in for another test. The results came back that afternoon. Her hormone levels had dropped dramatically. The pregnancy had ended naturally. The doctors were shocked, but they assured us that that was the end and that there was nothing else we needed to do.

Thus far you shall come, and no farther. God allows chaos in this world, but that chaos does not take one step farther than he allows. Why he allowed our baby to be taken from us, I will never understand. But it was clear that he drew a line in the sand. He would only let the pain go so far, because he is the one who controls the chaos, not the other way around.

We saw this in Job's life already. God first told the challenger, Take Job's family and his possessions, but do not touch his body. Then, when the challenger came back, God said, Take his health, but do not take his life. Thus far you shall come, and no farther.

COVID-19 is sweeping the globe. It has us all working from home. It has us worshipping from home. It has disrupted our lives in every way imaginable. But it is not outside of God's control. God has set the limits on this virus. He could stop this whole thing in its track in a second. He could heal all the sick right now. He could raise the dead. He's done it before; he can do it again.

Thus far you shall come and no farther! God sets the limits on the chaos. God is in control.

This is true for whatever chaos you may be experiencing. It might feel like the waves are out of control. Like the sea is raging and there is nothing that can stop it. But God is not threatened. He is bigger. He's got this.

God cares for us in the chaos

As God continues his speech to Job, as he speaks from the whirlwind, he continues to give examples from creation that demonstrate his power and wisdom. But the picture that he paints of himself is not only of a God who is big and powerful, who brings planets into being and stops the chaos in its tracks. He wants us to know that he is tender and kind, that he cares deeply and intimately about his creation.

We see this is the way God provides food for the animals.

Job 38:39-41:

“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, 40 when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket? 41 Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food?”

On the one hand, this picture highlights the greatness of God in contrast to the weakness of Job. Can you provide food for the lion? I don't think so! But I can, and I do. But God does not use his power to just do whatever he wants. Rather, he uses his power to care for his creation, to nurture it, and to sustain it.

Another picture of God's tenderness follows immediately after this.

Job 39:1-4:

“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the does? 2 Can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth, 3 when they crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young? 4 Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open; they go out and do not return to them.”

Here, God talks about the mountain goat giving birth. There is no point in life of greater vulnerability

than birth itself, both for the mother and the newborn. For much of history, childbirth was one of the most dangerous things that a woman could experience. And the infant mortality rate was extremely high. Childbirth is dangerous, for humans and animals alike.

But childbirth is also a place of incredible intimacy. God is present in that process, even for the mountain goat. He is aware of every new baby goat that is both. He is involved, caring for mother and kid.

Not only that, but he equips the young kids with everything that they need to survive in their harsh environment—the rugged mountains and hillsides. He is with them as they grow stronger and become independent of their mothers. Because he cares for them.

So too, God cares for us. God cares for us in the chaos. He doesn't promise to stop the chaos when we ask. He doesn't promise to remove us from the chaos when it gets intense. But he does promise to care for us in the midst of the chaos.

Have you experienced this? Sometimes we get so focused on the chaos that we don't notice God's tenderness to us in the midst of it.

How is God caring for you in the midst of our current chaos? Perhaps it the extra space you have—a much needed opportunity to slow down and rest. Maybe it's been the chance to reconnect over Facebook with a friend who you haven't seen for a while. Maybe its more time at home with your children, which, I know, just means more chaos! But look for God's care for you in the midst of that.

When chaos strikes, that is an invitation to draw closer to Jesus. It might seem hard, but God will meet us in the midst of it.

Recognizing the greatness of God

At the end of God's speech, he asks Job one last question.

Job 40:2:

“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

Job, do you still want to accuse me of being unjust? Do you still want to argue your case with me?

When Job hears the voice of God from the whirlwind, his response is one of humility.

Job 40:3-5:

“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”

In his response, Job recognizes that God is great, and he is not. God indeed is the Almighty. He is the creator. He is the sustainer. He is working out his divine plan by his power and according to his wisdom. In comparison with God, Job is of small account.

And so Job says, I will rest my case. I will keep silent. I have nothing else to say.

What else is there to say? He has had an encounter with the living God. Job has not been intimidated into silence by some cosmic bully. He has come face to face with the greatness of God—the creator of the universe—and has realized that his God cares for him. Though he is small in relation to God, and though he has experienced incredible pain in his life, still God cares for him.

Conclusion

The days and weeks and months that followed our miscarriage were incredibly dark. The pain and grief still bubble to the surface occasionally. The scar will never fully heal, I'm sure.

About four months later, Linzy and I got pregnant again. Again, we were full of joy, but the joy was also tempered by fear. What if we lost this baby too? I'm not sure we could handle it. But God was gracious. The pregnancy went very smoothly. Linzy and the baby both remained healthy. Nine months later, we had our first boy, Peyton. Many of you know him. The rest won't be able to miss him once we start meeting in person again. He is the super social toe-head that runs around on Sunday mornings and looks a lot like me.

If we had been able to carry our first baby to term, we never would have had Peyton. That's weird to think about. I can't imagine life without him.

If God had asked me to write my own story, I never would have included that miscarriage. No one would ever choose that kind of pain. But now, every time I look at my son, I am reminded of the goodness and

faithfulness of God. And I hear the voice of God, spoken from the whirlwind saying, “I love you. I care for you. I am with you.”

So where are you experiencing chaos in your life? Where does it feel like things are spiraling out of control?

There is the obvious (coronavirus, shelter-in-place, social distancing, etc.), but I know you are all experiencing your own kind of chaos as well.

Let’s spend a few moments listening to God. Ask yourself, How is God speaking to you in the midst of the chaos? Listen for his voice. What is he saying to you? Let’s pause, and listen. Speak to us, Lord. Help us to hear your voice in the midst of the chaos.