

WORSHIPING IN THE CHAOS

SERIES: SHATTERED: THE STORY
OF JOB



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Job 40:6–42:6
Sixth Message
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Job 40:6–42:6

It's been a few weeks now that most of us have been staying home during the shelter-in-place order. One of the things I've been missing is being able to explore this beautiful area where we live. I usually take Fridays as my day off and my wife and I often go somewhere for the day to relax.

One of our favorite places to go is the beach. We love to sit by the ocean and watch the waves. Earlier this year we were at Pleasure Point in Santa Cruz. There was a particular outcropping of rock that I was watching as the waves came in.

I was struck by how each wave was completely different. Some hit the rocks with a big splash. Some washed over the rocks. Some slid in from the side, and some from head on. I got to thinking about how every single wave that hit those rocks is unique. The waves were like snowflakes. No two waves are ever exactly the same.

Then, because I was trained as an engineer, I started thinking about all the different factors that created each wave. Weather. Water temperature. Ocean life. Variations in the wind. Currents and the tide. Not just local things, but all over the world. What happens here on the West Coast of California is influenced by what's happening on the other side of the ocean in China and Japan and Hawaii.

And not only that but all the oceans of the world are connected. Some splash off the coast of Florida might eventually have an impact on the wave that I'm watching. A little boy bodysurfing at a beach in France could affect what I see in Santa Cruz. The vast complexity of every single wave I saw overwhelmed me.

We're nearing the end of our series on the book of Job that we've called Shattered. This book tells the story of a man whose life completely falls apart. We started by seeing Job lose everything. Then we listened as his friends tried to explain what was happening to him. And finally last week we heard God speak into the situation Job was facing.

Last week, Dan Westman helped us to experience God speaking into the chaos. This week, we'll hear God's second speech and Job's final response. We're going to see the same theme of chaos as God interacts with Job. But we'll focus on Job's response. Eventually, we'll see him worshiping in the chaos.

Think back to those waves my wife and I were watching in Santa Cruz. Imagine them in your mind. You may not realize it, but those waves are a perfect example of chaos. This is how physicists define chaos: "Behavior so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in conditions."¹

You might be experiencing chaos having to be confined at home with people you live with. Or if you live alone, you might see this in yourself. "Behavior so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in conditions." When we live under such great pressure, our reactions to things become chaotic. We can't even predict ourselves.

This reaction is what Job has experienced. Everything he thought he knew, everything he had built as a life for himself, all of the different parts of his identity had come crashing down. Nothing was predictable anymore. His job was gone, his possessions were destroyed, his children were taken from him. But today, after a long journey, we watch him turn to God in worship.

Don't we need a picture of that today? Don't we need to see a man whose life has fallen apart fall down in worship before God? Amid the chaos of our lives, we need to figure out how to have that kind of a response to God.

This has been a difficult season for many of us. We've seen some incredible blessings come of it to be sure—new ways of ministry, online small groups and ministry gatherings and live-streams. It's been exciting. But it has also been hard.

As the situation changes daily, I have found it hard to connect with God. There is so much media—so many news stories—and so many changing circumstances that it has been hard to quiet myself down to sense God's

presence. You could follow the COVID-19 situation every minute of every day. You could get news from every country in the world. But what we really need is not to know how many new cases of the virus there were yesterday in Switzerland, but to find God today.

This morning, we'll see God begin by asking Job a challenging question. Then God paints a picture of how he relates to the chaos of the world. Finally, we'll see Job's response. My prayer is that we can learn from Job's example so that we too can worship in the chaos.

Challenging Job

As Job processes his suffering throughout the book, his language becomes increasingly aggressive. He accuses God of being unjust. He challenges God to a standoff in court. He complains of God's unwillingness to answer his questions.

God begins his second speech by reprimanding Job and asking if he really thinks he can do any better. Listen to Job.

Job 40:7-11:

“Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. 8 Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? 9 Have 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. 11 Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.

You might recognize the first phrase from last week. Both of God's speeches start with God challenging Job: “dress for action.” That's the same phrase often translated “Gird up your loins”. This is a military phrase. It's an instruction to get ready for battle.

The battle that God envisions is of Job doling out justice. He invites Job to be the judge of the world and figure out the right way to punish the wicked. It's a thought experiment. God is seeing what would happen if Job were actually in charge.

Many of you know that we have two adopted children. During that process, we had to go to family court on many occasions. Every time I went, I was

struck by the immensity of the task and responsibility given to these judges. Each day these judges would make decisions about children and families with far-reaching implications.

Imagine yourself as a judge in that kind of a position. You have a busy caseload. You don't have all the information you need. You're tired and stressed. But you have to make decisions about other people which change the course of their lives---children and parents and families.

How do you decide when to give someone a second chance? When do you decide that one more chance won't make a difference? How do you know if someone needs compassion or tough love? How do you keep wrestling with all those issues for every single case which comes before you?

The family court system certainly isn't perfect, but most of those people are doing the best they can. I felt so grateful for their willingness to step into those situations. I didn't always agree with the decisions they made, but I appreciated the complexity of those decisions. I was glad that I didn't have that kind of responsibility. What an overwhelming weight!

God challenges Job: Do you really think that you could do a better job bringing justice to the world? God says full of irony, “Let's give you the gavel for a day and if you can do a better job, I'll admit you're right.”

We often succumb to the same temptation that Job did. When things don't go our way, we look at whoever is in charge and think that we can do better. We ask God why he couldn't have protected us or changed our circumstances. We sometimes charge him with being unjust or unfair or forgetting us.

What if God asked us the same question he asks Job? Do we actually think we could do his job better than him? Do you think you could do better?

Think again about that wave crashing against the rocks. With all of the technology and computing power available to us, is it even remotely possible for us to understand all the different variables which go into each wave? Could we model those waves? Much less predict? And even less so: control?

We have so little sense of how interconnected the world is. We see one little part of the cosmos—our world,

our lives, our circumstances. We think that things would be much better if I could just turn this one dial. If only I didn't get sick. Or I wasn't so lonely. Or this didn't happen to me. Or I never had to go through that.

So we accuse God of neglecting us or failing us or even intentionally hurting us. But we don't see the whole system. We don't understand the massive number of interconnected events and factors and circumstances of the entire cosmos.

If you listen to the way we talk, it becomes clear that we often do think we could do a better job. How ridiculous is that! We have no idea of the ways that every part of the world affects every other part. Do you think that if God put you in charge, you would know what to do?

Even in the small amount of responsibility I have in the world, sometimes decisions are overwhelming, such as making decisions about how to function as a church during this season, what to do as a family, how to prepare, and how to help others. I can't imagine making decisions for a county, or the state, or the nation, much less being in charge of the entire cosmos!

God's purpose in this speech is to get Job to realize the complexity of the job that he so easily criticizes. He wants Job to realize how complex it is to be in charge. The cosmos that God created has elements of chaos which are completely unpredictable to Job. But in the next part of his speech, he changes his tone.

Comforting Job

After explaining why Job can't understand or manage the chaos, God wants to make it clear that he can. He does this with long discussions of two mythical creatures: the Behemoth and the Leviathan.

Now, there is a lot of discussion about what these animals refer to. Some people think they are actual animals—usually the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Some people think they are animals that used to exist but don't anymore. And some people think they are metaphorical references to forces of chaos.

I'd probably lean toward the idea that they are metaphorical, but it doesn't have a huge effect on the interpretation. The point that God is trying to make is the same. Listen first to what he says about the Behemoth.

Job 40:15-19:

“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. 16 Behold, 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!

God speaks about the power and strength of this creature—his loins, his tail, his bones, and his limbs are beyond powerful. Nothing on earth can control the Behemoth.

But God created him. He gave him life, and he can manage him. “Let him who made him bring near his sword.” No one else can handle the Behemoth. But God can.

The Behemoth is the most powerful land creature. God continues by saying the same kinds of things about the most powerful sea creature: the Leviathan.

Job 41:1-5 and 8-11:

“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?

Lay your hands on him; remember the battle-- you will not do it again! Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him. No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

God makes the same general points about this creature. I love the sarcasm here: “Will you put him on a leash for your girls?” We've had a lot of pets as a family. I think our highest count was 18 animals in our household, but we never considered getting our daughters a Leviathan.

Through a series of rhetorical questions, God makes it clear that people can't begin to control a beast like this. But he can. He affirms "Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine."

The greatest of the land creatures is the Behemoth. The greatest of the sea creatures is the Leviathan. They are symbolic of the incomprehensible forces of chaos at loose in our world. We can't contend with those chaos creatures. But God can.

God is trying to reframe Job's perspective. Instead of Job thinking that he can do better, God wants Job to realize that God is capable of handling the chaos. And because of that, God can be trusted. There is chaos in the world, but what looks like chaos to us is not chaos to God. Nothing is unpredictable or random or too complex or too powerful for him.

Because of that, we can trust him. Even when things seem chaotic around us, we can trust that God is on top of it. Can you? Can you trust God in the chaos?

It's important for us to realize that there is still chaos in this world. God allows it. Our world is not completely predictable. In Genesis, God brings order out of chaos. But he has not brought complete order to the world. The Behemoth and the Leviathan are out there. Chaos exists.

Listen to how one commentator puts it:

*The world does not run like a machine, with a tight causal weave; it has elements of randomness and chaos, of strangeness and wildness. Amid the order there is room for chance... Given the communal character of the cosmos—its basic interrelatedness—every creature will be touched by the movement of every other. While this has negative potential, it also has a positive side, for only then is there the genuine possibility for growth, creativity, novelty, surprise, and serendipity.*²

We tend to simplify the world in our effort to understand it. We often mistakenly think there are only two forces to contend with: God is sovereign, and I have free will. If something doesn't go the way I want it to, something needs to happen: I should make a different choice, or God should fix the situation.

But the cosmos is so much more complex than that. There are angelic forces, there are demonic forces, there are forces of chaos, and probably more that we don't know about.

At one point in the book of Daniel, he says a prayer. Sometime later, an angel appears to help him. That angel explains that his coming was delayed due to some kind of cosmic battle. We aren't sure exactly what that refers to, but the point is that there is more going on in heaven and on earth than we see or are aware of. There are more forces than we can understand.

God is above all those forces. But in these passages about the great land and sea beasts, we also see something else. There is a kind of appreciation for the chaos. As God describes the muscles of the Behemoth and the raw power of the Leviathan, there is a note of affection. Chaos can be dangerous, but there is also something majestic about chaos, even when it can't be controlled.

Isn't that why we love to watch the ocean? I wouldn't be interested in watching those waves if I knew exactly why everything was happening. I'm drawn to the ocean because it is so vast and unfathomable.

We appreciate the chaos, even though it's dangerous. This is why we play in the ocean and why people surf on the waves. I've never gone surfing, though I'm hoping to rectify that soon. I've been told that when you go surfing, you have to expect to wipeout and be overwhelmed by a wave at some point.

When that happens, the key is not to panic. If you desperately try to swim to the surface, it won't work. Instead, you relax and hold your breath. Rely on your body to right itself and calmly head to the surface. One site I read instructed, "No matter what happens, stay calm."³

This is good advice, but it's hard to do when you're in chaos unless you know that someone is looking out for you who can control the chaos. What looks like chaos to us is perfectly manageable in God's sovereignty. Because of that, we can trust God, even in the chaos. No matter what happens, we can stay calm.

Job repents in worship

Finally, Job gets it. In his final response to God, he arrives. Everything clicks.

Job 42:1-6:

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.’ 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job’s big moment has him moving through a progression of four stages.

First, he grasps God’s sovereignty in a way that he hadn’t before. “I know that you can do all things.” Job probably knew this before, but now he truly understands it. He understands the extent of the chaos and the magnitude of God’s sovereignty over it. God can do all things.

Second, Job realizes his limitations. He quotes back the charges that God has made against him, and he retracts. “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me.” Job sees how limited his perspective is and how impossible it would be for him to understand the complexity of the world. Job takes back his boast that he could do better.

I think he realizes that even if God explained why his suffering happened, he wouldn’t understand it. He’s been so focused on “why”, but now he sees that the answer to that question wouldn’t even make sense to him. It would be like explaining the fluid dynamics of a wave to a kindergartner. We can’t begin to understand the complex interactions of the events which happen to us.

That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t ask “why” when terrible things happen. But eventually, we have to come to some kind of peace that we will never have a sufficient answer.

Third, Job describes his encounter with God. He says “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” Job has met with God through the processing of his suffering. In an authentic way, Job has seen God.

I can help you understand the first two ideas: God is big, and we are small. I can give you illustrations and explanations. But in the third part, I can only encourage you. Encountering God is not something that can be given by someone else. This is a journey that you must make. Only you can put yourself in a place to encounter God.

And when you do, something incredible can happen.

Maybe you feel like you’ve heard of God, but you can see him. You can have an encounter with God that transforms you. Often, this is how God uses suffering in our lives.

When that happens for Job, the final step is he worships God. For him, that involves “repenting in dust and ashes.” That is part of worship—coming to God in repentance; it’s a turning toward God because of our need. Here is where everything arrives. Job worships God.

This is where Job’s example becomes an invitation to us. We’ve seen Job put in his place. We’ve seen him invited to trust God in the chaos. Now we see him worshiping even as chaos reigns. Can we do the same? Can you worship God in the chaos?

Worship flows from the first three ideas. It starts with God’s greatness. But there is no need to worship unless we also recognize our own limitations. We don’t know who to worship until we have encountered God. When these things come together, we are able to fall down in worship of the God who created the cosmos, rules over the chaos, and redeems this world.

Remember that coming to a place of worship has been a process for Job. It hasn’t happened overnight. In fact, it took a very long time. Job had to move through blaming God, challenging God, listening to his unhelpful friends, being reprimanded by God, confronting his own pride, and finally coming to a place where he could worship.

One commentator was giving an interview on the book of Job and was asked “Why is the book of Job so long? And why is most of it poetry?” He answered,

“Deeply to grapple with God in a messed-up world takes time. We cannot tidily sum up the message of Job on a postcard or in an SMS or Tweet. We need to let these truths soak into our souls and engage with us in our real human experience; there is no shortcut for that.”⁴

We will have spent seven weeks looking at this incredible book. However, seven sermons, even excellent sermons, are not sufficient. This is a process that you have to go on with the Lord. This is a journey that you walk together with him. Give yourself time. You may have to move through some of the same stages through

which Job progressed. This is not something you can force or control.

But you can put yourself in place to encounter God when you feel surrounded by chaos. You can create the space and opportunity for God to speak to you. Now is an excellent time to do this. It is such a unique time — our rhythms are disrupted, and we have lots of space and time in our lives. Make some time in your life to encounter God in new ways. Be faithful to whatever journey God has you on. Let him lead you eventually to a place of worship.

Conclusion

Imagine yourself once again watching the waves at the ocean—the beauty of water and spray and rock and sky. We love the ocean because we can't understand it, we can't predict it, we can't control it.

We are living through an unprecedented time of chaos. One microscopic virus which began in a remote part of the world has changed the world as a whole in a few short months. Talk about “great sensitivity to small changes in conditions.”

If we ever thought ourselves invincible; if we ever thought our way of life was stable and predictable; if we ever thought we could contend with the chaos of the world, we have learned a valuable lesson. We are so fragile. Our most impressive achievements can't compare to the power in the world that God has created. There are more forces around us than we could possibly understand.

Job has experienced more suffering than most of us could imagine. For most of the book, he's been desperately focused on figuring out why. Finally, at the end of the book, he realizes that he can't fully understand God. After all these chapters, there still isn't an answer to the question of why he suffered.

Job realizes that he can know God, but he can't fully understand God. That's okay because you don't need to understand God to worship him. You don't need answers to your questions to follow Jesus. It's because we can't completely understand that we have to worship. If we understood it all, what would be left to worship? Because

we can know the God who created the chaos and rules over it, we can worship without complete understanding.

You need God. You think you need answers and explanations and control, but in reality, you need God. He is the one who can be trusted, even in the chaos. It's not chaos to him. Especially during times like this, worship God.

Endnotes

1. Lexico, “Definition of Chaos in English,” Lexico.com, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/chaos>
2. Tim Reddish, “God's Good Chaos,” Biologos.com, November 18, 2015, <https://biologos.org/articles/gods-good-chaos>
3. Surfer Today “8 ways to pull through a surfing wipeout,” SurferToday.com, <https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/8-ways-to-pull-through-a-surfing-wipeout>
4. Jonathan Petersen, “Job is a Book About Jesus: An Interview with Christopher Ash,” *Bible Gateway.com*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2014/07/job-is-a-book-about-jesus-an-interview-with-christopher-ash/>