

Feeling Insignificant?

Where were you when I...? Job 38.4

I suspect that most of you remember the story of Chanticleer, the vain rooster who became convinced that his crowing in the predawn mornings was the cause for the sun to rise.

That story has been told for centuries and we all realize that it is a cautionary tale for children to have them think no higher of themselves than is true and accurate. Even a child knows that rooster is not the reason the sun rises. How silly that the rooster would think such a thing!

I have been thinking about that story as we come to the last few chapters of Job. It would seem that as God begins his speech directed to Job, there is a similar outcome for both characters: Job and the rooster get what my grandmother would say is their “come-uppence”. If you haven’t ever heard that expression, it means simply that a proud or arrogant person gets what is coming to them: reality. They find out that they aren’t as great as they thought they were.

In the case of Chanticleer, he learns his lesson from Renard the fox. Job is getting it from God, as he finally gets his wish.

Job Gets His Wish (38.1-3)

Job has been expressing his desire for an audience with the Almighty to get an explanation for his suffering. Both he and his friends have been working with the assumption that good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people—and then reverse the statements so that they claim that if good things happen, then you must be good, and if bad things happen, then you must be bad.

In Job’s case, since he has experienced a series of such great tragedies, he must have done something incredibly wicked. Which Job claims he has not. And thus his desire for meeting with God—he will ask the “why” questions, and God will answer him. That’s his plan. His three friends haven’t provided any real help. Elihu speaks well, but he is but a young man—who can believe him?

And then God shows up.

Perhaps as you read through these 4 chapters you might get the impression that God is dealing harshly with a man who is in very poor health. God’s sarcasm is so cutting that Job doesn’t stand a chance.

But that is the difference, after all, between a child’s “T-ball” game, and a world series game with the Yankees. It’s the difference between a grade school soccer game, and the World Cup games.

Job wants to play in the big leagues, and so he gets his wish.

God shows up in a whirlwind—the same word is used of the storm that takes Elijah to heaven in 2 Kings 1. You may remember when Elijah hit a low point—clinical depression we would call it now—God came to him with a still small voice.

God can meet a person in any number of ways. In Job's case, it is in a powerful wind storm, setting the scene for the challenge: *Who is it that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?* Who talks about things as if he really knows what is going on, and yet he doesn't? Who muddies the waters of life without a clue to what is really involved in life?

Dress for action like a man—gird up your loins like a soldier getting ready for battle. Prepare yourself for my questions before you get to ask yours. Put on your big boy pants Job. If you want to play in the big leagues, this is your chance.

God's Macrocosmic Operation (38.4-38)

In the first part of the speech, God challenges Job to answer the question of the macrocosm—the greatness of the universe at the beginning, and from the greater perspective beyond human reach.

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who determined its measurements? How was it put together? Who bound up the seas and set the limits?

Did you command the morning—here is where I think of Chanticleer—*did you cause the dawn to know its place?*

Have you entered into the springs of the sea, walked in the recesses of the deep? How much of this world have you really seen, Job? Do you know the expanse of the earth?

Where does light dwell? How about darkness? Where are the storage houses of the snow? Where does the east wind start? Where does rain come from? Can you capture the constellations, and change their orientation in the sky? Can you cause lightning?

Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given wisdom to the mind? (v. 36)

It is at this point that God challenges not only Job's brevity on the face of the earth, not only his extremely limited abilities in the universe, but even his wisdom. We often of wisdom as a human trait, a commodity that can be increased by increasing knowledge and reflection. And that is true, to a point.

But God used wisdom in the structuring and ordering of creation—that is the point of Proverbs 8:

The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. (Proverbs 8.22, 27-30)

Job may have wisdom, even great wisdom for a man, but he lacks God's wisdom which is not merely greater in volume, but greater in kind. For Job to understand how the universe is formed and run, it will take more wisdom and knowledge than what he has, or is capable of having.

God's Microcosmic Operation (38.39 – 39.30)

In the second portion of God's speech, he questions Job's knowledge of animals—most of the ones listed are undomesticated.

Whether acquiring the diet for lions and ravens; mountain goat reproduction, the range of the wild donkey, the resistance of the untamed wild ox, the strange habits of the ostrich, the strength of the horse, or the flight patterns of the birds of prey, Job is at best an observer, not a creator or provider.

Not only is the creation of the universe beyond Job, but so also are these animals, his contemporaries on the earth.

And of course, we are not surprised that Job is unable to answer these questions. We can't either. That is the limitation of being creatures, not the Creator.

And so we wonder, what is the point? What is God getting at?

At the heart of Job's questioning is the intimation that God, in the governing of his universe, has not been just. Since Job himself is suffering unjustly—so he thinks—and God is behind all that goes on, it must be that justice is not how God governs his world.

But here is the problem. One cannot simply ascribe to the universe the attributes of God, nor ascribe the attributes of the universe to God. We would not expect something that we create to have our attributes, so why would we demand the same thing about God? God's justice—perfect justice—does not transfer over to his universe as we know it. We might have said it did before Genesis 3, but certainly we cannot now.

But beyond that is the question of knowability. Job wants an answer to a complex question—why is he suffering the way that he is? Knowing what we know of the first 2 chapters of the book, where the events in the heavenly counsel are given to us, can we even now come up with a satisfactory explanation for Job? I think we would struggle greatly, both to explain, and to have him understand apart from a divine perspective.

Our quest is often to get a simple explanation for complex problems—something that we wrap our minds around. And in trying for that simple explanation, we find that there is one simple, clear and *wrong* answer, as H L Mencken observed.

God's questions to Job highlight that as there are many things in creation that we do not understand due to our creaturely limitations, it is folly to seek to devise a simplistic system such as the retributive principle as Job and his 3 friends have latched onto for *the* ultimate explanation of events in the universe. Quite frankly, if you can't figure out the visible things of life, how can you figure out the invisible?

By raising these questions, God is confronting Job, and us, with the foolishness of demanding that God conform to human system of explanation, when it is the creatures, not the Creator who needs to conform.

In these questions God demonstrates his knowledge and control of the macrocosm and the microcosm. His knowledge, wisdom and power are unlimited.

Application for Us

So what is in this for us today?

There are times when it is not pleasant to get what you ask for—mostly because when you ask, you don't realize all the implications of your desire. And God in his mercy denies our requests when they are harmful to us. But his is one time when God answered a prayer, a desire for a greater purpose than what the petitioner wanted. To demand answers for our “why” questions is to expect answers that are beyond our comprehension. And quite frankly, none of us want to admit that we not only do not understand, but cannot understand, and will not be able to understand.

But the reality of our lack of understanding is not to be transferred to the Creator, the Sustainer of the universe. The problem is not with his ability to explain something. The problem is with our inability to understand. Hence the questions that God posed to Job.

What Job seems to be experiencing at this point is humiliation—something that comes from not being humble in the first place. He is in the midst of his being humbled, as we will see in the beginning of the next chapter. But God is not finished yet. There is more to come.

Thus for us at least one application today is that either we humble ourselves in the sight of the LORD for him to lift us up (James 4.10) or he will humble us himself, as he did to Pharaoh. It's tough to be a Chanticleer, and to be humbled.

In Deuteronomy 8:2 Moses reminded the people of the last 40 years since their liberation from slavery. He led them on a journey which they did not understand, no more than Job understood in his journey, or that we understand in our journey. *And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*

Did you catch that? Testing you to know what is in your heart.

How is it with your heart this day? Do you trust the Creator and Sustainer of the universe to do what is right and just for you?