

"THE LORD SPEAKS"

Job 38:1 – 42:17

Cheri Bean

She had no idea that a seat was reserved for her for the 2002 State of the Union address, or that the President of the United States would recognize her before a worldwide television audience within the first few seconds of his address. But then, the entire world had changed since September 11, 2001, and Lisa Beamer knew her life would never be the same.

Lisa's husband Todd had been on United Flight 93, the fourth plane hijacked on the darkest day in America's history since Pearl Harbor. But upon finding that three planes had already been used as missiles against American landmarks, Beamer and his fellow passengers decided they would fight back. Although we do not have the details of the final struggle which ended with the plane crash in Pennsylvania, we do know that Todd Beamer's challenge of "Let's roll!" took on a life of its own and it spread across the country.

In his opening remarks, President George W. Bush explained the great courage of passengers on United Flight 93, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground – passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer. Then the President requested the audience to help him welcome Todd Beamer's wife, Lisa, who was in attendance.

Lisa gives us this account of the welcome in her book, Let's Roll: "The applause was thunderous, and I didn't know what to do with the standing ovation. And so, very slowly, I stood with the rest of the country. Standing there in my borrowed dress, with the eyes of the whole world on me, I somehow managed to remain standing. I glanced down at the floor of the Chamber and saw the faces of our national leaders looking back up at me, applauding. It was an extremely strange feeling. No doubt if Todd were alive, he'd be laughing and saying, 'Can you believe this?'"

There was much more, of course, for Lisa Beamer--national talk shows, another meeting with the President and his wife, and she would soon write a national best-seller about her memories of September 11.

Can you imagine how dramatically and instantly life seemed to change for Lisa Beamer? On September 10, 2001, she was the mother of two, and dealing with the first stages of pregnancy. No one could have convinced her that in less than four months, she would know the President of the United States and that there would be so many changes in her life! But God knew.

I am sure that if you asked her, Lisa would trade all the notoriety for one more day with her husband. The cost of meeting the President was far too high . . . the road that took her to Washington was paved with the worst grief of her life.

Job's road to the most important encounter he would ever have was paved with unimaginable grief. He, too, experienced how life could change in an instant. In a single

day, he had lost people he loved. Every child he had perished in a single calamity. His own painful illness that followed must have paled in comparison to those losses. The grief and pain was so severe, Job must have wondered if it would ever end. Nevertheless, the end of his journey left him more surprised than Lisa Beamer when he had a one-on-one encounter with the Almighty God.

Our lesson opens with Job, chapter 38 and it will end, as does our study of the Book of Job, with chapter 42. What Job discovered has given people insight for centuries and, I am sure that you will agree with me, the truths he learned haven't lost an ounce of their power.

Over the previous 35 chapters since chapter 2, God has been directly absent from the account. We read nothing of God's direct role in comforting, speaking to, or sustaining Job in the midst of his crisis. Over that time, Job has ached repeatedly for a word from God.

The reader is 37 chapters into the book when God finally clears His throat to speak. Chapter 38 begins with these words: "Then the Lord answered Job."

The five-man debate was halted by the dramatic appearance of God Himself. (Job 38:1). God indeed settled the dispute, but He did it His way. Job wanted God to settle it by proving *him* right and explaining the reason for all his afflictions; Job's friends wanted God to prove *them* right and for Job to recognize his error. God does not satisfy either one of these expectations. Significantly, God did not answer Job's questions. Significantly, God did not immediately or directly answer Job's friends. God answered Job by revealing Himself to Job.

Swiss psychologist Dr. Paul Tournier wrote in his book Guilt and Grace:

"For God's answer is not an idea, a proposition, like the conclusion of a theorem; it is Himself. He revealed Himself to Job; Job found personal contact with God."

The fact is that in chapter 38, Job received an up-close and personal education from God Almighty about how far God's wisdom goes beyond human knowledge. God's address to Job centered on His works in nature and consisted of over 70 questions – questions that go far beyond human comprehension. These questions brought Job to a realization that there are mysteries beyond human understanding such as, how to make a world or how to explain suffering. We will take another look at a few of those questions in this message.

I have categorized God's addresses and Job's responses in the following four areas:

1. The Lord Reveals His Omnipotence to Job (Chapters 38-40:2)
2. Job's Response to God (Chapter 40:3-5)
3. God's Challenge to Job (Chapter 40:6 – 41:34)
4. Job's Repentance and Restoration (Chapter 42)

Think back to Job 13:22 when a desperate Job said to God, "Then summon me, and I will answer, or let me speak, and You reply." God now responds to Job's plea. The storm that Elihu had been describing in chapter 37 broke and God spoke out of the storm.

The Lord Reveals His Omnipotence to Job (Chapters 38-40:2)

God was ready to address His power and wisdom in bringing the universe into being. Job was sure that his own speeches had been filled with wisdom and knowledge, but God's first question put an end to that delusion: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2) Let us be clear about what God is saying in His query. He is actually asking, "Who is this who doesn't have a clue of what he's talking about?" How would you like to be greeted by the Lord in that way?

In verse 3, God tells Job to "Brace yourself like a man. I will ask you questions, and you must answer me. Where were you when I made the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off how big it should be? Surely you know! Who stretched a ruler across it? What were the earth's foundations set on, or who put its cornerstone in place while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted with joy?" (38:3-7)

God floods the sky with queries, and Job cannot help but get the point: Only God defines God. For the first time, Job is quiet and silenced by a torrent of questions. God has now appeared to Job. Job's greatest agony was that he felt God had abandoned him, and now He knew he was not abandoned. Job must have felt a massive comfort in simply being consciously in the presence of God once again. Job thought he knew about God, but he didn't realize how much he didn't know about Him; but then, the interrogation continued . . .

"Have you ever gone to where the sea begins or walked the valleys under the sea? Have you ever gone to the storehouse for snow or seen the storehouses for hail? Are you the one who gives the horse his strength or puts the flowing mane on its neck? Do you make the horse jump like a locust? Is it through your wisdom that the hawk flies and spread its wings toward the south?" (38:16, 22; 39:19-20, 26)

Job barely had time to shake his head at one question before he was asked another. The Father's implication is clear: "As soon as you are able to handle these simple matters of storing stars and stretching the neck of the ostrich, then we'll have a talk about pain and suffering. But until then, we can do without your commentary."

The next aspect of Creation that God focused on was the nature of the earth. God asked, "Have you commanded the morning since your days began? Is this in your power to do? Where is the road to the home of light? Do you know where darkness lives?"

God pursued the concept of controlling the weather when He inquired if Job understood the nature of rain and its effects. God asked, "What is the way to the place where the lightning is disperse? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm?"

In verses 31-33, God inquires of Job if he understood the nature of the constellations when He asks, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion's belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?"

In chapter 39, God questions Job about His animals--mountain goats, deer, wild donkeys and oxen. For example, He asks, "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth or when the doe bears her fawn?"

God spoke of the proudly waving wings of the flightless ostrich. Perhaps Job could explain why a flightless bird has wings, or why a winged creature is flightless. God continued the discussion of His creatures - horses, hawks, and eagles.

While the list of questions is long, the purpose of the questions is obvious. God's queries lead Job to realize his own inadequacy and inability to meet God as an equal and defend his cause.

Job and the reader understand that the world is full of God's mysteries. Since humans cannot comprehend them, mankind's response must be to trust in the power, and in the wisdom, and in the good of Him, the Almighty One, who rules it.

Job's Response to God (Chapter 40:3-5)

In Chapter 40 God asks Job, "Will you now challenge Me?" When Job finally gets a chance to speak, he speaks as a changed, humbled man. No longer does he demand an answer from God. No longer does he insist that his righteousness wasn't deserving of suffering.

In verses 4 and 5, Job answered the Lord:

"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.
I spoke once, but I have no answer –
Twice, but I will say no more."

Notice the change. Before he heard God, Job couldn't speak enough. After he heard God, he couldn't speak at all. Job is amazed not by the answers God gives, for God simply asks questions. He's amazed by the majesty he sees. In the presence of God, he's silenced completely. I wonder how much less talking there would be if we lived in a continual awareness of the presence of God. Job was so prolific with words earlier, but now his hand is to his mouth.

But Job was not quite broken and at the place of sincere repentance. He was silent but not yet submissive; so, God continued His address.

God's Challenge to Job (Job 40:6-41:34)

The main topic of discussion changed from the power of God to the justice of God. Job had said that God was unjust in the way He treated him and in the way He failed to judge the wicked. In Job 40:9-14, God asked, "Job, do you have the strength and holy wrath it takes to judge sinners?" If so, then start judging them! Humble the proud sinners and crush the wicked! Bury them! You claim that you can do a better job than I can of bringing justice to the world, so I'll let you do it!"

Before this happened, though, God selected two creatures and asked Job if he could subdue them. It's as though God was saying, "My whole universe is too much for you to handle. However, here are two of My best products. What can you do with them?"

God first asks Job if he could handle the "Behemoth." The word "behemoth" is the transliteration of a Hebrew word that means "super-beast, a huge and monstrous creature." I do not recall ever running across the word behemoth before. Interestingly, I just read about the remains of a "behemoth" reported in the *Sacramento Bee*. Apparently, the remains of super-size whales are being washed up on shore in the Santa Cruz area.

While God might be referring to now extinct creatures that once roamed the earth, many students of this book agree that the animal being described in chapter 40 is the hippopotamus; although, there are those who argue that the tail of a hippopotamus does not "sway like a cedar" as described in verse 17. Today's big-game hunter with his modern weapons would probably not be deterred by the hippo's size or strength. This beast was a formidable enemy in the days of arrows and spears.

God reminded Job that He was the Creator of both the hippo and man; and yet, He made them very different. Man is small and weak in comparison to the hippo which has a powerful body, with strong muscles and bones like iron rods. "Now Job," asks the Lord, "Can you capture and subdue this great creature? If so, then I'll believe that you have the power and wisdom to judge the world justly."

The second of God's most challenging creatures is alluded to in chapter 41 when God inquires of Job if he could catch the "Leviathan." This word is the transliteration of a Hebrew word, the root of which means "to twist, to writhe." People used the word to describe the "sea monsters" that supposedly inhabited the Mediterranean Sea. Scholars are divided on the type of animal to which God is referring. Some believe it to be a crocodile; some believe that this could refer to whales or dolphins. In mythology, the Leviathan was a many-headed monster that ruled the waters and feared no man.

"Can you capture the Leviathan?" asked the Lord. "And if you can, what will you do with him?" God drew a practical conclusion: "If you can't come to grips with the Leviathan how will you ever be able to stand before Me?" (vs 10-11)

Job's Repentance and Restoration (Job 42)

Job knew he was beaten. There was no way he could argue his case with God. Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and You shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

Quoting God's very words in Job 42:2-4, Job humbled himself before the Lord and acknowledged God's power and justice in executing His plans. Then Job admitted that his words had been wrong and that he had spoken about things he didn't understand. Job withdrew his accusations that God was unjust and not treating him fairly. He realized that whatever God does is right and man must accept it by faith.

Job was saying to God, "I can't answer Your questions! All I can do is confess my pride, humble myself, and repent." Until now, Job's knowledge of God had been indirect and impersonal; but that had changed. Job had met God personally and was now quiet before the Lord. The word for such a moment is reverence. Job recognized and revered God as his Holy Sovereign and honored Him as he remained quiet in His presence.

In verse 42:7, the Lord made another personal encounter as He addressed Job's friends. He said to Eliphaz, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has."

Not only did God rebuke Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but in a beautiful way He vindicated Job. It is true that in his frustration, stubbornness, and misery, Job said things that he had to repent of; and yet, God referred to him as "My servant Job."

God made Job a mediator to his friends when God directed him to pray for his friends. Not only did the act of praying for them restore his relationship with them, this act of intercession was an act of love. Job prayed for his friends – friends who had criticized him, and found fault with him – and Job was set free from the bondage of bitterness.

Charles Spurgeon tells us, "The door of repentance opens into the hall of joy," and this was true for Job. In the climax of the book, Job the sinner became Job the servant of God. Four times in these verses God called Job by the special title "My servant." How did Job serve God? By enduring suffering and not cursing God, and thereby silencing the devil!

But Job the servant became Job the intercessor. God was angry with Job's three friends because they hadn't told the truth about Him, and they had to be reconciled to Job so he could pray for them. By forgiving his friends and praying for them, Job brought back the blessing to his own life. We only hurt ourselves when we refuse to forgive others.

Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Job did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer. I find it interesting that the Lord did not address Elihu. Some commentators believe that at this point we should do as God did and ignore Elihu. Others believe that there is enough evidence to recognize this young man as heaven sent. He was not out to terrorize Job or overwhelm him with guilt. He assured Job that he, too, was only a "vessel of clay." (Job 33:6-7) He does not use the same words Job's three friends did when they accused Job of secret sins, nor did he assume that Job's suffering proved his guilt.

Elihu's approach is identical to God's in that they both asserted that, at times, Job had spoken without wisdom and knowledge. Both affirmed that Job had justified himself rather than God. Nevertheless, Job himself seems impressed with the compassionate approach of this young man, for he does not argue with him. The empathy and sincerity of Elihu and his words of correction mingled with love, were perhaps a balm to Job compared to the accusations of the others.

"After Job prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and doubled his previous possessions." (Job 42:10) And so it was that Job ended up with twice as much as he had before. He had twenty children, ten with God and ten in his home. He ended up with twice as much livestock as before. He was once again a wealthy man.

I think it is noteworthy to think of Job's three daughters who received an inheritance of land along with their brothers, which was not typical in those days. I chuckled as I thought about the possibility that Job might have been a forerunner of the movement for women's liberation.

Verse 42:16-17 tells us that Job lived 140 years and saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so, Job died "old and full of years."

Summary and Application

As we complete our study of the Book of Job, I believe it is wise for us to review some of the lessons in this book that are critically important, especially if you happen to be in a season of crushing grief or painful suffering.

1) We need to follow God's will rather than our own. In chapter 40:2, the Lord asks Job, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? Are you trying to instruct me?" God asks. That sounds crazy. But that's what we do. So often, as we come to Him in prayer, we say, "Lord, here's what needs to happen . . ." We pray directive prayers and we give the Lord instructions. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. He knows what's best for each of us. Let's pray not my

will but Your will be done. All through the Book of Job, we have learned that we need to let God be God. We need to follow His lead.

2) It is important for us to love and pray for our friends and our enemies. In chapter 42, God instructs Job to pray for his friends. By being an intercessor for his friends, Job was freed from the bondage of bitterness and he was able to forgive. It is important for us to pray for the people who disappoint us and seem to be a thorn in our side.

Matthew 5:44 reminds us that "Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who cause harm to us." I believe He means we should pray for them in the same way we want to be prayed for. If you want to be blessed, prosper, and do well, I encourage you to follow Job's example, to pray God's richest blessings for those who mistreat or misunderstand you.

3) We need to set our sights on our Sovereign Lord and remember that His ways are perfect even when we experience the storms of life. When we do this, we focus on the Holy One and not on what the storms of life may bring. Like Job, you find peace in the pain. Like Job, you cover your mouth and sit still. Psalm 46:10 tells us, "Be still and know that I am God."

The next time you face trials and dilemmas, see them as opportunities to turn to God for strength. You will find a God who only desires to show His love and compassion to you. If you can trust Him in pain, confusion, and loneliness, you will win the victory and eliminate doubt, one of Satan's greatest footholds in your life. Make God your foundation. Let Him bathe you in His glory and remember you can never be separated from His love.

Closing Prayer:

My dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Book of Job and the many lessons it contains. My prayer is that it will equip us and inspire us to say, "Lord, whatever You choose to do, I trust You implicitly and completely." You are the Almighty God and your ways are perfect. Strengthen me and let me remember that You always write the last chapter and that makes all of the storms of life worthwhile. Job passed the test of his life. Let his story be our encouragement to do the same.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen!