

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Elemental: Behold | Job 38**

My name is Debbie Manning and I'm a pastor here at Christ Presbyterian Church. A moment ago you might have looked over and seen Carrie Gleeson rubbing off some lipstick that I had on my tooth. We are not a classy group, but we are for one another! I'm so happy to be here with you guys! We are in our Elemental series "God All Around Us" and we're taking a look at God's unique presence in the elements. So far this summer we've talked about experiencing and hearing from God through water, through fire, and last weekend John Mitchell talked about through the wind. Today we're going to hear about how God speaks to Job in a storm. I can't think about storms without thinking about the first storm experience that I had with my husband when we were first married. We got married at twenty-one, and about a year into our marriage we pooled our money, came up with a thousand dollars, and bought our first car. It was 1982 and this was a 1970 Toyota Corolla. We loved that car! And despite the fact that every night we had to take the battery out, haul it upstairs to our apartment, and plug it in, and despite the fact that it didn't have a handle for the stick shift—we stuck a hockey puck on there—we thought we were so cool driving around in our Toyota Corolla. But a couple of months into this car, we took it on a trip from Minneapolis to Columbus, Ohio. That's where my family was living at the time. We hit storms through Wisconsin, and Illinois, and Indiana. And our little Corolla was making it and we were like, *Yes! This is awesome. It's so great!* We hit Ohio and the weather started to clear and we were just a few miles away from my parents home. Unbeknownst to us, they had had some flooding. We hit this little valley in the road and there was about a foot of water there. My husband was driving and I'm looking at him and chatting, and simultaneously, I hear *whoosh*, and at the same time it was like someone took a fire hose under his feet and it just drenched him. He was soaking with water. Of course, I was bent over laughing so hard as he was gasping. What we found in our beloved car was that the floorboards had rusted away, and we could see the ground underneath once that water came. For us that is such a funny and fond memory, but the reality of storms, whether we're speaking physically or metaphorically, is that they can bring destruction, and tragedy, but they can also bring new life. I think that's what we see in this part in the Book of Job.

The Book of Job is first in poetic literature in the Hebrew Bible. It speaks to true faith and God's sovereignty, and it asks the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Job is a faithful man and a lot of us know this story; it's a bit familiar, but he has it all, right? He's a prosperous farmer, he's got family, he's got servants, he's got prestige. Satan, the accuser, comes before God and says, *Well yeah, of course he's faithful, he's got the good life, he's got a great life, why wouldn't he be?* So God allows Satan to take it all

and Satan does. He takes his business, he takes his money, he takes his children and his servants, and then when you think it can't get any worse, it does. Satan puts these painful sores all over Job's body. So the question becomes: how will he who has served God so faithfully, how will he who has looked to God for help and protection, react to all this suffering that doesn't make sense, that seems unjust? Will Job remain faithful? And for 35 chapters, Job's friends surround him and they try to answer the question of why the righteous suffer. Ultimately their answer is: *Job, you must have committed some terrible sin for God to be punishing you. You've got too much pride.* Throughout it all, Job desperately tries to solve the mystery of why he's suffering. He prays, he cries out, he pleads, he even challenges God. What's clear in it all is that Job's terrible despair and discouragement, even his lashing out at God, is not disbelief, because he remains faithful. God's existence is never in question. He knows that God must be alive. And Job cries out in despairing belief:

Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him. [Job 13:15]

And still trusting in God as his Advocate, he insists:

I know that my Redeemer lives. [Job 19:25]

After what feels like a really long period of silence from God, He finally speaks and that's where we pick up the story. God answers Job out of a whirlwind, out of a storm, but instead of answering questions of suffering, God has a few questions of His own for Job.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ²“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁴“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. ⁵ Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ⁶ On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—⁷ while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? ⁸“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, ⁹ when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, ¹¹ when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’? [Job 38:1-11]

God continues on for over two chapters, but let's be honest . . . what's your kneejerk reaction? Because for me at first glance, God's response seems sort of unsatisfying. It reminds me a little bit about my family discussions at home. We get into these conversations. Sometimes they are intellectually stimulating and they're a little theological and philosophical. Sometimes they're just silly conversations, but we have this running joke in our family that whenever one of us makes a statement, my son Sam kind of cocks his head and looks at us and says, “Really?” I sort of feel a little bit like this to God's response. But for Job, I imagine God's response blew back his hair. And I'm talking literally through the storm, and figuratively too, because here's what God

does. He gives Job a creation appreciation tour. He recounts the majesties of nature. He goes from hail to horse. What is demonstrated is God's incomprehensible, awesome, mighty power. God has all the forces of nature at hand, and He's the master of the storm.

Philip Yancey wrote this in his book *Disappointment with God*, about what God's point to Job was:

“Until you know a little more about running the physical universe, Job, don't tell me how to run the moral universe.”

Feel a little bit like you want to go “bam!” That's crazy! So in this passage, God addresses Job and calls him to prepare himself, and then He asks, “Job, do you know how creation was established?” And He goes on to say, “And do you have the knowledge, do you have the ability to govern it all?” I imagine that might make us step back just a little bit, but what I think holds the most important message in the entire passage is the first verse: “Then the Lord spoke to Job out of a storm.” I think the first verse is so important because it signifies the context of the book as a whole. Job's friends had all assumed that Job's circumstances and his responses to it revealed a sort of rejection of God whom Job had claimed to serve faithfully. They had warned him if he didn't repent, further judgment would fall on him. Wrong! God's not only speaking to Job in this passage, He's speaking to Job's friends and He's speaking to all of us. God reveals Himself in verse 38:1 in a display of both majestic power and relational presence.

I wanted to point out, too, that the writer used the words “the Lord” because whenever we see that, it signifies God's covenant character and His promises. As you look at the book of Job, it is used just in those first two chapters when God is describing His relationship with Job. It's a covenantal gesture where God reveals His power and His presence as he speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. And that means everything! The mighty voice of God, thundering out of the storm, puts everything into perspective for Job and what it says is this: I am alive; I am here; I care; I am capable; and I make good on my promises, and if that's not enough there's far more to this story.

So all summer during The Table that meets here on Sunday nights, we've been going over Brian McClaren's book, *Naked Spirituality*. And the goal of spirituality, McClaren says, is to lead the naked person to stand trustfully in front of the naked God. And I think that's what's been happening to Job. Now, we've been walking through the four seasons and the twelve practices of spirituality, and they build off one another. These practices come out of seasons of our lives, and we know that we all have either gone through, or are in, or will continue to go through those different seasons. Some seasons hold grief, and loss, and uncertainty, and adversity, and much like Job, we often end up in a season that McClaren explains as exasperation, desperation, refusal, rage, and even abandonment. Does that sound familiar? But what comes next? We get to see

that in the passage with Job. It's what McClaren calls behold. The experience of wonder and deepening by seeing.

For Job, God speaking to him out of the storm came a "behold" moment, an invitation from God to open our eyes and to see in a new way. And for Job, behold came through his suffering. I think sometimes that's a message that we don't really want to hear. Couldn't we just get to that "behold" without going through the suffering? But the truth is that grief, loss, and adversity are a reality of our world and of our lives, and when pain and suffering come upon us, we finally see that not only are we are not in control, we never were. The truth that adversity moves us toward God, or it can in difficult times, wakes us out of our sleep of spiritual self-efficiency and into a serious search for God if we lean into God in difficult times. So maybe that's a question for all of us . . . when things come our way that are hard, are we leaning in or are we leaning away?

In his book *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller says this: "Adversity does not merely lead people into believing God's existence, it pulls those who already believe into a deeper experience of God's reality, love, and grace. And one of the main ways we move from abstract knowledge about God to a personal encounter with Him as a living reality is through the furnace of affliction." Isn't that true? Over many years of just living life, and over some years of doing ministry, that has indeed been my experience. It makes me think of a dear friend of mine. We went to college together and hung out as young couples together, and she had four boys from the ages of 12-weeks to 8-years-old. Her husband came home one night and said, "I don't want to do this anymore" and he walked away. Over the years, she went through her season of "Why, God?" "How long, God?" And there's been a lot of pain and suffering, but what she would tell you and what I hear from so many of you when I get to hear about your stories is this: *I would never wish this to happen to anyone, and I would never want to relive this pain again, but I would never change the relationship I have with God because I am different.* So often as Christians I think we understand who God is and how He works in the world in our heads, but those truths rarely make it to our hearts except through disappointment, and failure, and loss.

Tim Keller tells a great story in his book about a friend of his who was about to lose his family, his career, everything he had, and his friend said this, "I always knew, in principle, that 'Jesus is all you need' to get through. But you don't really know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have." Recognizing God's presence in the worst of times. We acknowledge to God that what He's been trying to show us is finally coming into focus. We move from: when, how long, why, to amazing, beautiful, wonderful, because somewhere in that storm, when we lean in, we hear God's voice shouting "Behold. I am your God." And beholding is a slow, reverent, seeing with God; a slow, reverent, and knowing with God; a slow, reverent, and holding everyone, everything in the light of God. It's in that moment where we breathe in with awe and we breathe the behold. I think the seeing with God is especially precious because we've been in a season of pain and suffering and the exasperation, the anger, the doubt, and even the

abandonment, can give way to wonder, and peace, and joy. And here's the truth: we will never truly understand God.

Brian McClaren says this from his book *Naked Spirituality*:

“We can rest in God in the eye of the storm, seeing our difficulties neither as punishment for some past offense nor as evidence that God's protection has gone offline, but as an opportunity for God to speak expanding good into an expanding void.”

I think what Job teaches us is how big and how great God is. After hearing God's argument, Job finally gets it and he says, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” And throughout Scripture we see that God brings fullness of joy, not despite suffering, but through suffering, just as Jesus saved us not in spite of, but because of what He endured on the cross. There is a poignant joy that seems to come to us only through suffering.

Maybe this ability to behold is what God is trying to move us to. We all have our behold stories, don't we? I think about last summer—it was a year ago last June—a young woman from this church was diagnosed with cancer and I was asked to walk alongside her, and so I would visit her at her home. I thought she had two or three years to live. About six weeks into it, it became apparent that she only had weeks, maybe just a month to live. I'll never forget, almost a year ago right now, sitting around her kitchen table with her husband and her nine-year-old, her eleven-year-old, and her sixteen-year-old, telling the children that mommy was really sick and that she was getting ready to leave this world and to enter her heavenly home with Jesus. Just a few weeks after that I was at a fabric store, of all places, with my daughter who was about to get married and we were buying all this tulle to decorate all the pews. That's that white kind of chiffony stuff, and while I'm there, I get a call from the husband of this woman who was dying and he says, “Debbie, Cynthia just passed away. Could you please get over to the house?” So I hopped in my car, left my daughter at the fabric store, and as I'm driving down the highway getting closer to their home, I shift lanes and as I look back, I see all that tulle in my backseat and I'm grabbed by how hard life is, how we constantly hold the joy of celebration, the excitement of getting ready for my daughter's wedding, and the sorrow of someone losing their mom, their wife. As tears were running down my face I'm saying, “God, I don't get this. This is hard. This doesn't make sense.” I turned back around, and the skies that had been grey and cloudy, parted and the sun started shining. In that moment I had a “behold” moment. God was saying, “I got this. I have this family. You may not understand, but I've got this.” So, is there a message in the Book of Job for us about remaining faithful? About trusting God no matter what our circumstances are? Absolutely! But I think the real story in Job is not about us and how faithful we're to be, it's about God and how faithful He is. “Then the Lord spoke to Job out of a storm” and in that moment God revealed His presence, His power, His promise. God was saying, “I got this, Job. I got you.”

Together let's watch this and we can hear more of what God said to Job in this beautiful poetic book in chapter 38.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLf_Nlakra0

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