

Sermon – 01/08/2010 pm

The Lord Answers Job – Behemoth and Leviathan

Study Text: Job 40:6-41:34

Brace yourself like a man and I will question you (40:7). The Lord had not finished with Job just yet. Out of the storm the Lord again speaks. He warns Job to get ready for some tough questions. In his suffering Job had not held back on questioning God. Why was God afflicting him and letting the wicked prosper? Why was God acting unjustly towards him? Job believed God saw everything that was happening to him – why then did he not help him? Was God omnipotent or was he impotent? Actually God was behind all that was happening to him.

‘Job wanted an interview with the Almighty. He had, as it were, sworn an affidavit demanding the Almighty appear and put his indictment in writing (31:35). But God’s defence wasn’t quite what Job had in mind’ writes Carson. The Lord’s first barrage of questions had silenced Job, but the Lord had more to say to this man who questioned God’s power and justice.

Condemn God Would You?

Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? (40:8). All through his suffering Job maintained his innocence. He examined his life and found no specific sin to repent of. The Lord had declared him blameless and upright, so it was not wrong for him to make this claim. But in justifying himself Job condemned God. He accused God of being in the wrong for the way he was treating Job. This was the pit into which Job stumbled.

Job did not understand God and his ways. He must realize not only the unreasonableness but also the sinfulness of criticizing Almighty God. Job must remind himself that ‘God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth’ (Shorter Catechism, Question 4). He failed to remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of the Lord was slowly returning to Job’s heart as the Lord spoke to him out of the storm.

Can you thunder with a voice like God’s? (40:9). In the argument between Job and his friends many bitter words were exchanged, and no doubt voices were raised at times. *Miserable comforters you all are (16:2).* Even when addressing God, Job cried out with a loud voice. *Cease! Leave me alone!* he said on one occasion (10:20).

The Israelites took on Moses as they complained about the lack of food in the wilderness, but it was a different matter when the Lord spoke out of the storm on the mountain. Trembling in their boots they came to Moses pleading *let not God speak with us lest we die (Exodus 20:19).* We only have the words of the Lord in writing but we can imagine the thunderous voice that Job heard coming out of the storm.

Have you an arm like God? (40:9) – this means ‘are you as strong as God’. The Lord was in effect asking Job if he would like to try his hand at running the universe for a while. He was being very critical of the way God was doing things. For a start Job would need to appear like the king of the universe. He would need to put on glory and splendour. He would need to be arrayed in honour and majesty. Job was dressed in sackcloth and sat on an ash heap. From this position he was contending with the Almighty. He was contending with the Lord who truly is clothed with honour and majesty, who covers himself with light as a garment and makes the clouds his chariot (Psalm 104:1, 3).

There is a lot that is not right in this world. Poverty continues to be a blot upon humanity. Rulers promise to put an end to poverty. They promise to bring in a new world order. But what do we see? We see violence and oppression all around. We see injustice, with the rich getting richer through graft, through exploitation or through dodgy business practices. We see wars all around. Some rulers want to stop wars while others promote them. In the meantime many blame God.

The Lord goes to the root of the problems in this world – pride in the human heart – and challenges Job to do something about this pride. ‘Bring down the proud and tread on the wicked’ would you? (40:12). But what can Job do? Not only would he need wisdom beyond that which the Lord gave to Solomon, but he would also need power beyond that given to King Solomon. Such wisdom and power are found in none other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

‘In an amazing display of condescension God offers to bow down in deference to Job’s godlike powers if he can demonstrate his ability to do something about the wickedness in the world. *I will confess to you that you own right hand can save you* (40:14). Job had been usurping God’s role as governor of the world. He has been lusting after godlike knowledge of good and evil (*cf.* Genesis 3:5)’ (Thomas). The Lord of course knew that Job had no power to do anything about his own situation, let alone the whole problem of evil in the world. The words here are ironic. No man can save himself or his brother (Psalm 49:7-9).

In our suffering we may well feel hard done by. Sometimes we feel the whole world is against us. Some people say life would be so much easier if they did not have to deal with other people. The problem with the world they say is the people in it! The problem with the church they say is the people in it! Do you sometimes think you could do a better job than Almighty God? If you had the power how would you fix things in the world – or in the church? Let us be thankful that the God of justice and of mercy rules this world and the church.

Job was powerless to do anything about his situation. His lack of power was due in part to his lack of knowledge about his real enemy. We know that behind his suffering was a supernatural adversary called Satan. Would Job have acted differently if God had told him about this adversary? Ask yourself if you consider your adversary when trouble comes your way. Do you put on the whole armour of God that you might stand and not fall in the evil day? What is that armour? Truth, righteousness, faith, the gospel of peace, and the Spirit of God (Ephesians 6).

Can You Catch Behemoth?

The lesson continues. If Job could not ascend to heaven and judge the wicked let him try something a bit easier. Let him show his power over some dumb animals. The Lord urges Job to demonstrate his wisdom and power in catching behemoth and leviathan.

Some men feel a sense of power when they subdue wild animals. Hunting wild animals has a fascination for them. Others feel a sense of power in domesticating and controlling a dog or a bird. In his previous discourse the Lord directed Job’s attention to the wild animals which God created and cared for. He made Job realize how little he knew about the world in which he lived – and Job reckoned he could do a better job than God in running the world! In this second discourse the Lord told Job to look at behemoth and catch leviathan, if he could.

Firstly the behemoth. This word which occurs nine times in the Old Testament means ‘beast’ or ‘cattle’. Here in the book of Job it refers to a specific beast or great beast. The description fits a large land animal, most likely a hippopotamus or possibly an elephant. Some think the description

does not fit any known animal but rather an extinct dinosaur. The behemoth was a real creature which God made along with human beings like Job (40: 15).

The hippopotamus is the third largest animal after the whale and the elephant. It can weigh up to 3 tonnes. It has powerful hips and can run at great speed over a short distance. Do not try to outrun a hippo! The hippo has an enormous mouth, being surpassed only by the whale in this feature. It is as if he can swallow up the river (40:23). This animal lies in the reeds by the edge of the river with only his eyes protruding above the water. The behemoth is a herbivore (40:15) as the hippo is, but it is also one of the most aggressive and dangerous animals in the world. No one can put a ring in its nose and lead it away (40:24).

The hippo is native to Africa, and in ancient times was found in the Nile. Here the Lord speaks of it as being in the Jordan (40:23). A certain mythology surrounded this amazing beast – or ‘horse of the river’ as the Greek name means. But it is a real animal that is portrayed to Job. Many men working together with clubs and spears might overpower a hippo, but even today it is a beast that is feared by the hunter. Job knew there was no way he could catch or control such a beast. Only God who made it had such power (40:19).

Can You Catch Leviathan?

The Lord brought another creature to Job’s attention: a creature called leviathan. This is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that occurs five times in the Old Testament. It refers to a monster of the sea. The name was used figuratively to describe the monstrous ruler of Egypt (Psalm 74:14), and other rulers (Isaiah 27:1). In another Psalm (104:26) the word seems to refer to whales. Here in Job we have a detailed description of this monster of the sea, a description that best fits a crocodile – although reference to smoke going out of his nostrils and a flame out of his mouth (40:20, 21) leads some to conclude it is a fire-breathing dragon now extinct.

If the hippo holds a fascination for men then the crocodile does so even more. It is a fascinating relic from the dinosaur era. For some this fascination becomes a challenge, a challenge to overpower this powerful reptile. Paul Hogan portrayed himself as a macho crocodile hunter in a movie. Steve Irwin took on the crocodile in the real world. One or two people are killed each year by crocodiles in Australia.

Can you make friends with a crocodile? Will you play with one as with a bird (41:5)? We have seen video clips of crocodiles latching onto their prey with huge powerful jaws and dragging them under the water. The scales on this reptile resists the spear, dart and javelin (41:26). No other creature is as fearless as leviathan. Of all the creatures it is the most proud. It is king over all the beasts (41:33, 34). Indeed a lion coming to the river must be alert to the crocodile lurking in the murky waters.

What was the Lord trying to tell Job in this portrayal of behemoth and leviathan? He invited Job to catch such large and dangerous beasts if he could. Job wanted to tell God how to run the world but he could not even subdue the animals God had made. As Job contemplated standing before leviathan the Lord asked him *who then is able to stand against me. Who has given me anything that I should pay back? Everything under heaven is mine* (41:10, 11).

God made the behemoth along with Job. He made leviathan also. If these creatures appear powerful, as they are, then consider the One who made them. ‘If we tremble at the sight of a beast should we play the bold fellows against God’ said Calvin. We can see Job shrinking as the Lord makes him realize his impotence. This is the same Job who would condemn Almighty God while justifying himself!

God is all powerful. We must stop and consider the mighty works of God. We are not to fear the creation as many do as they worship created things. It is tragic to see men, educated men, bowing down before idols of elephants, monkeys or cows. It is tragic to see educated men and women becoming so fascinated with animals while ignoring the Almighty God who created them.

God made these great and powerful creatures. God reminded Job that he made him also. God is all powerful and he is all wise. God is just. His is the sovereign Lord of all creation, and the lesson Job is being asked to learn is that submission is the better way of discipleship. Submission not rebellion is the way of true discipleship.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon