

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO LEARN?

Job 38:1-4; 42:1-12

Every now and then we hear about someone whom we know who has terrible problems. It may be an illness that he or she has or it maybe a family member has a situation that requires a lot of time and money to treat. You may have known this person for several years and not even know about the burden he carries. We marvel that the person carries on a seemingly normal life when things about them are so abnormal. We meet others who had burned toast for breakfast and everyone that they come in contact with that day hears about it and how upset they are with the person who burned the toast. In the first case, we would say that the person who has the real problem has risen above the problem and not been overcome by it, while in the second case, we see a person who is being dominated by something that is insignificant. In Proverbs we find a saying to the effect that he who controls his spirit is greater than he who conquers a walled city. So why is it that one person has control and the other does not? A lot of the reason has to do with one's opinion about the basic nature of God and our relationship to Him. If we believe that God is good and that He is in control and that He loves us and wants what is best for us, then we can overcome any problem that comes our way. Oh, we may not solve the problem, but neither will the problem dominate us.

Job was a man with many problems. Job believed in the basic goodness of God and he believed in his own goodness. Because he may not have been exposed to or considered the possibility of good coming out of a seemingly bad situation, he could not understand how a good God could bring such pain and suffering to someone as himself. Job thought he knew more than he really did. With his set of boundaries and rules for life, he was seemingly ready to question one of the basis premises to which he had held and that is the basic goodness of God. Job was certainly at the point of demanding answers from God. Throughout this ordeal Job had wanted to ask God directly why this situation was happening. Now as we draw near the end of the saga, we see God providing Job with some answers.

Listen to God – 38:1-4

¹Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, ²“Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? ³“Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! ⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, Job 38:1-4 (NASB95)

Job's life was turned into a storm and he was caught in the middle of it. As when a person gets caught in the eye of a tornado, Job had no control over what was happening to him. It was out of this turbulent time that God spoke to Job.

The message that God started with was to tell Job that he really did not have all the facts. So many times we are eager to speak without really being informed or having insight. Without having insight into what is happening we do not shed any light on the subject at hand. In order to show Job how little he did know God, had a series of questions to for Job to consider.

Beginning in verse four, this series of questions is related to God as the Creator of all things. The creation is still a mystery that has baffled the most brilliant of minds. Many theories are around but there is scant evidence to fully support any of the theories. The implication was that it would be impossible for Job to have the necessary insight into what God had done and is doing. Man's experience is too brief to have sufficient data to really draw conclusions. Just when we think that we have things figured out, other problems come along for which we have no answers. We learn or discover a new set of rules to explain what we see and that also fails to explain everything. At best, our knowledge is imperfect. We may be learning all the time, but

the more that we learn, the more we realize that we don't know.

God's questioning of Job continued in this fashion covering much of the natural phenomena of the physical world that Job had observed. Job began to realize that he did not know nearly as much about things as he thought he did.

Submit to God – 42:1-6

¹Then 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 declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” ⁴‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ ⁵“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; ⁶Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:1-6 (NASB95)

Earlier in the exchange between Job and his friends, Job had pleaded for a chance to hear directly from God and to answer whatever charge God might have against him or to ask God to explain why all these bad things were happening to him. We see this in chapters 13 and 31. Now that God had answered Job in such a way that exposed how little Job really knew and understood, Job came to the same conclusion that Isaiah did when he encountered God's presence in the temple. Job had concluded that he was vile and unworthy (see Job 40:3-5). All of us have a tendency to think of ourselves as having some significance until we have an encounter with the greatness of God and the totality of His creation. We see such humility in the words of David in Psalms 8 when he asked “what is man that You (God) are mindful of him?”

In chapter 42 Job came to the realization that not only was he very limited in his ability but that God was unlimited in His power (can do all things) and sovereignty (God's purpose will be done). This was Job's confession that God is in control. How do we react to such a realization? If God is totally in control, then does it really matter what we do and the type of character we have? Some might take a fatalistic viewpoint and just “go with the flow” and think that it really doesn't matter what we think and do. In one sense, that idea has some element of truth in that the end point of “good wins and evil is defeated” will come to pass; however, “who we are” and “what we do” has significant influence on the path that we take and how others are affected in the process of getting to that end point. The most significant concern has to be which “camp” (good or evil) will we be in at the end point. Do we have a choice? Of course, we do. Joshua told the Israelite to “choose you this day whom you will serve.” Isaiah told the people of Judah to “seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” Of more immediate concern, the route on which we travel through life is certainly influenced by the choices we make in the various decision points we encounter every day. The correct response is not what so many people say now-a-days of “whatever.” Instead, we must be resolved to learn what we need to know about “what is important to God” and turn away from every other way.

Earlier God had asked Job a rhetorical question of “who was he that he should confuse or misinterpret what God had said since he did not have adequate knowledge to speak for God.” Job had now realized and confessed that he really did not understand what was happening in his life. He did not understand what God was doing and he had spoken without benefit of insight into the mysteries of life. Another statement God had made to Job on two other occasions was essentially a challenge to Job to answer questions about the creation. After hearing all the questions to which Job had no answer, Job was now ready to take back what he had previously said about how God was dealing with him.

Job had an incomplete picture of God. He had heard about God and was trusting in Him as best he knew. After this encounter with God, Job realized how little he really knew. Job concluded that he did not like what he saw of himself and he was ready to change. I wonder if

we could argue that most people are not ready to repent and turn to God for salvation until they come to such a point in their life.

Well, how did it all work out? Job learned a significant lesson about the nature of God and man's relationship to God. Even though he was an upright person, yet he had room to grow and improvements could be made, especially in the area of humility. After all, if you are as great as Job was, it is difficult to be humble. The problems Job encountered had shown him that such pride had no basis and Job repented of that but did not and had no reason to repent of the sins his friends had supposed that he had committed.

Intercede Before God – 42:7-9

⁷It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.” ⁸“Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you *according to your* folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.” ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job. Job 42:7-9 (NASB95)

Starting in verse seven, the account switches from poetry to prose and these last verses of the Book of Job were the final comments of the narrator of the story. Some commentators think that this account of God confronting Eliphaz happened after he and his two friends returned home. God was displeased with these three because they had foolishly spoken and had essentially accused God of punishing Job for some secret or hidden sin or sins that they had presumed Job had committed. In effect, they were limited God to acting only in response to what man had done or was doing. They thought that God provided blessing in response to good behavior and sent trouble in response to evil behavior. They left no room for God to act sovereignly for some other reason. Not only had they misjudged God, they had (by implication) misjudged Job.

At first glance, it is difficult to see why what Job's friends did was so much worse than what Job had done in accusing God of injustice and ignoring Job's pleas for an answer to his questions. The difference was that eventually Job listened to God and realized his error and then repented of his thoughts and words. There was no evidence in the story that Job's friends learn any new insight from their experience and had, therefore, not repented.

In sending the three friends to make a sacrifice for their sins and have Job pray for them, God was, in effect, putting Job in the role of a priest in that God would accept Job's intercession on behalf of these who had incurred God's anger for attributing wrong behavior to God. This was an interesting reversal of roles from the situation represented by the poem itself. The friends had essentially accused Job of sinning, while God had declared Job to be perfect and upright. Now God was accusing the three friends of sinning. All the while when they were visiting Job not once did they intercede to God on Job's behalf. Now, Job was to intercede before God for them.

Rely on God – 42:10-12

¹⁰The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold. ¹¹ Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold. ¹²The LORD blessed the latter *days* of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. Job 42:10-12 (NASB95)

The timing of the events in this account are instructive. It was after Job had prayed for

his friends that God began the restoration process. We might could assume that his healing also started after this evidence of forgiveness on Job's part took place. Apparently, Job forgave and prayed for these who had accused him even while he was still suffering. It would seem to be a lot easier to forgive someone when you are well and happy rather than when you are still hurting. Job's true character of being perfect and upright, fearing God and shunning evil was able to rise to the occasion in spite of the pain and loss.

There is a telling commentary on human nature in the observation that Job's relatives were absent during the suffering and the loss, but they showed up to offer comfort and consolation after the ordeal was over. Sometimes we just don't know how to mourn with those who are hurting as evidenced by the attempts of Job's three friends, so we just avoid the challenge by staying away. Apparently, they got over their reluctance when it came time to celebrate. We might conclude that it is better late than never.

Many of us have or will undergo trials and testings in life. We need to trust that God is in control and that He loves us even though the outward evidence appears to the contrary. Faith is holding on to the truth of the matter in spite of all evidence to the contrary.