

When God Shows Up

Job: View From The Ashes

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, it is a privilege to invite you to open your bibles to the book of Job 38. Now you may be a guest or visitor with us this morning or maybe haven't been with us in some time, we've been on a journey through a book of the Bible who's named after a character that is synonymous with suffering and pain and anguish, and so often it is the character of Job, it is the story of Job that we identify with so personally in our lives. In fact, here is this man who lost so much, his children, his fame, his fortune, his reputation, his health and even some would say his dignity. For 37 chapters we've been introduced to some very specific and strategic characters. Obviously we know of his children and servants that passed away in chapter 1, but specifically his wife who enters the discussion in chapter 2. Job himself, three friends by the name of Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad and then this Johnny-come-lately, a guy by the name of Elihu, and for the entirety of the book of Job up until chapter 38 there is a common theme or thread: everyone is attempting to speak either on behalf of God or to claim what God would speak if God showed up.

Well today in chapter 38 I've got good news for you and myself: God is going to show up. We no longer have to speculate. We no longer have to debate who is in the right, who is in the wrong. We no longer have to question what has been spoken in truth and what has been spoken in error. In chapter 38, we have Job on the ash heap of life. He's got sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He's surrounded by four individuals, the three friends and Elihu, who for the course of the majority of this book have been giving him the what's for regarding his life. There's evidence that the community has gathered. So there on the edge of the city, in a group that is gathered to discuss and debate what God might say if he were there in person, in chapter 38 God is going to show up and we're going to discover today that what he says may be just a little bit different than what we expected him to say.

In chapter 38 beginning at verse 1, it says,

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

Now these three verses if just taken as I read them, appear to be somewhat of a, shall we say, holy chastisement, in other words, you could have the propensity to say, "Well, if you thought it was rough the first 37 chapters, it's about to really get serious." But you and I, we have the wonderful hindsight of chapter 42. We know that in chapter 42 Job is going to be given twice what he had before. We know that there will again be 10 children under his authority and under his leadership. And one thing that's very important today is that in no place and in nowhere through the rest of the book of Job does God ever demand that Job repent of his words and/or his actions. Now he tells the three friends to and that's another story for another day. And so today I want to walk through these three verses not just in these three verses but in the context of the last five chapters of this incredible story about a man by the name of Job.

So who is it that shows up? Well, it's the Lord. We know that but I want you to pay attention to how "LORD" is spelled in your Bible. You will notice that all four letters of his name and his designation are in capitals. Now this is not rare, in fact, in your Bible it happens over 6,500 times, and when you see the word "LORD" in all capital letters, in our vernacular, in our understanding, particularly the Old Testament, that's the Bible's way of saying Yahweh showed up.

Now that's an important designation because that is not only the designation of, that is the name of God in the Old Testament. The Jewish people have such a reverence for the name of God they will not speak it. In fact, you'll notice particularly during the Passover season as you walk through a grocery store in that kosher section there'll be a statement it'll have the letter G, a dash, and then the letter D. They don't even want to write much less say the name of God out of fear per the 10 Commandments of taking his name in vain. The word Yahweh in Hebrew actually is composed of all consonants. There's no vowels. Maybe you've heard the term Jehovah. Well, the word Jehovah is simply the word Yahweh with the vowels that are added. That's a way of pulling away from the reverence of the name but not even those of the most Orthodox and sincere Jewish faith will say that name. In fact, the spoken name is the term Adonai. And songs have been written about it and poems have been published. The reverence for the name of God is so great in the Hebrew Jewish culture that they want to be so careful not to mispronounce or to misspeak on his behalf, they don't even pronounce the consonants, much less the inserted vowels of his name.

Why is that important to the story? Because this isn't a reference to God entering the picture, God has entered the picture. He is on the scene. In fact, it's very reminiscent the book of Exodus 3, I'm sure you know the story well. Moses, he's been on the backside of nowhere for about 40 years. He's been tending to his father-in-law's estate. He's going about his business and all of a sudden there is a bush that is burning that's not being consumed, and the Lord shows up and the Lord speak,s and what does the Lord do? He instructs Moses. Can I remind you of a similarity here? A man who had been subject to so much issues and struggles in his life, yes, a lot of it on his own behalf what had happened in Egypt 40 years earlier, but can you imagine the thoughts, the emotions, the anguish that had been in his life and when God shows up and says, "I'm sending you to set my people free," you have to admit there had to be a part of him that said, "Seriously?

Me? I've got to be disqualified." Don't you think Job began to think that at some point? "I have no health, I have no wealth, I have no friends, I have no dignity, I have no reputation, and God shows up very much in the same vernacular, very much in the same strain as he did with Moses because we're going to see in just a moment that God has a purpose, God has a plan, God has an assignment for Job that is actually eerily similar to the one that he gave Moses.

Now the next question is how did God show up? Notice it says in verse 1, "the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind." Now that's an interesting study in your Old Testament in particular of how the Lord utilizes, uses, and implements what you and I know as a whirlwind, a storm, a massive gust of wind. There's two ways that it's used in your Bible. The one that's most often used is the whirlwind of judgment. In fact, you read through the book of Isaiah, you read through the book of Jeremiah, over and over again those who rebel against God, those who resist the Lord, he says, "I will send a whirlwind. I will judge you. I will bring physical calamity upon you because of your error." But that's not what Job chapter 38 says. It doesn't say that God sends a whirlwind, what does it say? He spoke out of the whirlwind.

There's only one occasion that you have in your Bible where God speaks out or is a part of a whirlwind, it's in 2 Kings 2. There was a man, there was a prophet by the name of Elijah, this one who trusted the Lord to feed him when there was no food, this one who laid upon a young man and he was brought back to life, this one who spoke and it did not rain for three and a half years, this prophet who ran from Jezebel and Ahab and ultimately defeated all the Baal worshipers. One of the great men, in fact, so great that the last chapter of the Old Testament, chapter 4 of Malachi, mentions his coming, Revelation 11 alludes to his person in the "last days," and even today at an Orthodox Jewish seder or Passover meal, every family leaves a seat for Elijah. So what happens? God shows up in a whirlwind. Does he discipline Elijah? No. Does he punish him? No. Does he bring calamity upon him? No, much the opposite. What does he do? He catches him up. In fact, Elijah is only two men in your Old Testament who don't experience death. Enoch according to Genesis 5 walks with the Lord and then he is not, and Elijah is caught up to be with the Lord. Well, the Lord doesn't catch Job up, but much like Elijah, God speaks directly to Job out of a whirlwind. Do you notice a pattern that is forming with the parallel with Moses, with the parallel with Elijah? We get the idea that God has not come to punish Job, God has not come to chastise Job, God has come to minister to and call him to a very specific calling.

The next question we have to ask is where did God come from? Because if we're going to talk about a whirlwind, if we're going to talk about a storm, if we're going to talk about that which comes in such dramatic visible form, is it from the east, from the west, where did it come from? Well, just like a Elijah, the Lord descended there upon that area and called him up to himself. There is a specific geographical location that the Bible speaks of the Lord's descent. In fact, back in Job 26:7 it makes this incredible statement, it says that the Lord has stretched across the north the expanse. He hangs the earth upon nothing. Interesting, oftentimes people ask where is "heaven," where is the presence of the Lord, where is the throne room? All throughout your Bible the very vague yet specific

designation is that he resides in the north. Do you not find it odd that that's the one star we have that doesn't move? That's the one direction that all compasses point to? That's the one area that cannot lead you "astray."

Isaiah 14:12 through 14 records for you and I what we oftentimes refer to as the fall of Satan. Lucifer, that cherubim who was in the goodness and the grace of God, whose tabrets were beautiful, who'd been given so much authority and ability, came to the conclusion that he no longer wanted to serve, he no longer wanted to submit to the Lord. So there in three verses of Isaiah 14 it says "I will." He says, "I will set my throne above the clouds. I will ascend into the highest place." There in verse 13, listen to what it says. He says, "I will set my throne up on the sides of the north." Isn't that interesting that in Lucifer's rebellion he said the place where God resides is collectively known as the north. Now why is this important? Because this wasn't a sandstorm that came from the other side of the ash heap, this wasn't some type of typhoon that had brewed up on the Mediterranean, this whirlwind didn't come from out there, it came from up there. All of a sudden you have this whirling wind descending from above and when it touches foot there on the ash heap where Job and all the others have gathered, God himself speaks.

Now the next question is what does God say? Over the course of chapters 38 and 39, God asked 77 rhetorical questions. There is no opportunity to answer. There is no opportunity to respond. There is never this pause where God says, "Okay, what do you think about this?" Specifically today in chapter 38, God asked 35 questions of Job. Now we can classify these questions in two areas: that which can be observed out there and that which can be observed up there. Interesting, nothing that God asks him would be beyond his ability to observe. He may not know the "answer to the question," he may not know the specifics of what's being asked, but everything God asked him, he would have observed whether it's the lightning, the thunder, the hail, the seas, the mountains, the land, the stars whatever they may be.

What's interesting is there is one question that God asked at the very beginning that Job nor you or I can actually answer, but to the rest of the questions the answers are actually pretty simple. Notice what it says in verse 4,

4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

There's not one single human being who's ever breathed air on planet earth who can answer that question. You don't know where you were when God said, "Let there be the heaven and the earth." But beginning in verse 5, there are a series of questions that are particular, they're pointed. Notice what he says, he says,

5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest?

Job knew the answer to that question. Who laid the measures? God did. That wasn't a trick question. That wasn't something like he's saying, "Hey, do you have a fifth friend back there that maybe has the answer to this. Verse 6,

6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

God. In fact, there is a common denominator to every one of these questions because he asked Job who did it and when it was done, and the answer is God did it at the beginning. He asked him about the thunder that he hears with his ears, the lightning he sees with his eyes, and the hail that he feels upon his head in the midst of a storm. He asked about the seas and their boundaries, the mountains and their heights, the depths and how deep they are. That's fascinating because we see these questions as some type of divine test or final that Gods giving Job and it's really a pretty easy one. He could answer the first question, "Where were you?" I don't know. And every other question could be answered with, "You." That's important to today's study. He didn't ask a question that Job did not know the answer too because the answer to every question except the first one was, "God. God laid the foundations. God, you established the boundaries, you know where the lightning comes from, you know where the thunder originates." It's really not a series of difficult questions if you know the answer to who: God himself.

But then you go to verse 30 and the Lord does something very unique. He draws his attention from thunder and lightning and hail and season storms, and he has him look up. Now I want you to think about the environment Job was in. Thousands of years ago, no artificial light and he's on the edge of town in the Middle East without obstruction. Can you imagine how beautiful the night sky would have been? How bright the stars would have shown? The clarity as he sat there night after night wondering, "Will God ever answer my questions? Will he ever show up?" Verse 30 it says,

30 The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.
31 Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? 32 Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?

Do you find that interesting and/or slightly odd that the Lord calls out the constellations? He calls out the stars. He calls them out by the names by which man has given them and he basically says, "Who is it that controls where they are?" The same answer, God. Who is it that is able to loose them? God. Are you able to? Of course not, none of us can, and yet think about it, humanity has done our best, particularly with the stars, to somehow, someway believe that we know when one age is passing and the next age is coming, when one season comes and the other arrives. In fact, one of the great, one of the last standing great mysteries of the world is what you and I know as the Great Pyramids of Egypt, and those three massive items that there's a little bit of synthesis and a lot of controversy about. But can I share with you one absolute fascinating fact? In their origination those three pyramids actually line up with the three stars of Orion, and one of the shafts that comes out of it actually points to the star Pleiades. So can I give you the New Revised Jeff Version of what God is saying? You can build the biggest structure known to man that even outlines and points to these but you can't control where they go. You can't control how they move. Who can? The answer is the same, God. And so the

"what" question here that he asked whether it's observed out or up, is there's a consistent answer that God is in control, he created and he sustains.

Now I want to review real quickly before we get to the "why." God himself has shown up in a whirlwind very similar to Elijah. He has descended "from his throne above," and he has reinforced to Job that there is nothing that he will see, hear, touch or experience that not only did not come from God himself, is controlled by God himself, but is of knowledge by God himself. So the "why." The "why factor." Verse 2 and 3 of chapter 38.

2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

I want to peel the layers of this introductory statement that God gives to Job before he asked all these questions that have a very common response and answer. First thing I want to address is the person that God addresses. Do you find it interesting that he doesn't speak to Eliphaz, he doesn't address Zophar, Bildad or Elihu. He doesn't address Job's wife or anybody else that has gathered on that ash heap. When God shows up there is one person that he has a one-way conversation with and that is Job himself, and that is important. Why? Because no matter how many speeches the friends gave, no matter how long Elihu spoke, no matter what words came out of Job's wife's mouth, the only person, the only person who is at the center of everything in the story was Job.

Can you imagine the scene? I'm assuming that Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad and Elihu were pretty puffed up. I'm assuming they were pretty proud of themselves. They had gained some street cred with the crowd. All of a sudden the whirlwind shows, God speaks, and I get kind of this mentality of, "Excuse me, guys, I've got an important conversation to have and it's not with you. Job, I need to talk to you." Now remember the Bible doesn't say he was alone, the Bible doesn't say that everybody fled, the Bible doesn't say. You know why? Because those who claim to speak on behalf of God always think it's God that's going to come and justify them. I can almost see Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad saying, "Come on, God, come tell him I was right." And God says, "Enough with you too," and by the way he doesn't even address Elihu, it's like he doesn't even count. He says, "Job, we need to talk."

Let me give you some perspective. Look at verse 2, this is a verse that I want to address specifically, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" Who's he talking to? Job. Now on the surface it does appear as a very caustic statement. It could be seen as, "How dare you speak on behalf of myself." But that's not what he's saying. When he asked him, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel without knowledge," can I give you a perspective that I believe God is giving Job? Did Job have any idea of what had happened behind the scenes? Did Job have any idea that God himself referred to him as perfect, upright, one that feared him and removed himself from evil? Did he have any idea that God twice had bragged on him? Not a bit. Did he have any idea that Satan came and said, "Job only worships you because his kids are healthy and his bank account is fat,

that's it"? Did Job have any idea what had happened? Did Job have any perspective of what was happening behind the scenes? No and neither do you, and neither do I.

You see, all of us walk through some of those Job moments in life, some of us walk through Job-years and Job-decades, and we question and we wonder but let me give you some perspective: you have no idea what God has spoken of you in the heavenlies and you have no idea what Satan has accused you as well. Satan and the audacity to say, "If you remove the life of luxury from his life, he will curse you to your face." Did he ever do it? Never. In fact, even his own wife chimed in and said, "Do so," and he says, "You speak as one of the foolish women." Job had no idea about the conversation, about the accolades and about the accusations. He had no idea that even though there were sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, that he'd lost everything, that God had restrained the enemy from going even further.

Speaking of perspective, chapter 42 is important. In chapter 42, Job repents but you know God never asked him to. God never came to him and said, "Job, in light of what I've spoken to you, in light of the 77 questions I've asked you, you need to fall down on your knees and repent in sackcloth and ashes." He never says it. He said it to the friends. Isn't that interesting? In fact, the Bible says that God's wrath was kindled against the friends but Job just willingly repents. It kind of reminds you of Isaiah 6, doesn't it? When Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, he just repents. He says, "I'm a man of unclean lips. I'm a man among unclean people." Do you remember what happened next in Isaiah's life? The Lord said, "Who will go for us?"

Go back to verse 3 of chapter 38 and I want to talk about the proclamation that God gives. This is the part that gets me. You've got a man who's endured untold pain, agony, loss, the emotions that most of us cannot fathom. Verse 3 what does God say? "Gird up thy loins like a man." Now in our Southern culture we have this phrase called "man up," it basically means you're not acting like one so you need to. That's not what that phrase means. "Gird up thy loins like a man," it's hard to picture in our culture but in the Middle East they dress a little bit differently than we do. Why? Because you think it's hot here, you ought to go there. What they wear, a tunic for a lack of better terms, is very purposeful. It keeps you cool in the day, it keeps you warm at night, but it's hard to run in. You don't believe me, guys? Ask your wives, ask your sisters if they've ever tried to run a 100 meter dash in a long skirt. It doesn't work well. You're restricted. You're confined. You can't generate speed and you're probably going to trip and fall on your face. In fact, in Ephesians 6 it talks about the armor of God and one of the things that you see there is that the legs are exposed. You see, in the Middle East culture when you told a man to take his garment and to hoist it or to gird it up, you know what you're telling him to do? Get ready to fight. He's not telling Job to sit down and shut up, how dare you challenge me. Do you know what he's telling Job? He says, "Hey, you have no idea what has been happening behind the scenes and I've got something for you right around the corner that you better gird up if you're going to run the race I'm about to give you." What happens in chapter 42? The number of animals he had in chapter 1 is about to double. He's about to bear twice the responsibility. He's about to have twice the authority. And guess what? He's about to have 10 more kids. We'll discuss that in chapter 42 is that his

kids coming back to life or is he going to be changing diapers for the first time in 40 years? We don't know but I've got news for you, if you were Job's age and been through what he's been through, if all of a sudden you've got to change 10 diapers, you'd better gird up thy loins because you've got a fight on your hands.

What's God proclaiming? He's saying, "Job, I knew everything that happened and I knew why it happened. I was preparing you for twice what you had before. I was preparing you to handle twice as much as you had in days past. Gird up thy loins. Get ready because you think it was responsibility in chapter 1, wait until you get to chapter 42." And by the way, I don't want to get the proverbial cart before the horse but you know one of the things he's going to ask Job to do, and you'd better have your loins girded. He says, "Those three guys that made your life a living hell, I want you to pray for them." You talk about girding up because that's a fight with your own soul and your own spirit.

You see, in chapter 38 God shows up and oftentimes we think, "Oh, here we go. It's a 10 round fight and here comes round 11. Job's about to get beat on again." I don't think that's the case. I think God shows up. He says, "You know the answer. I'm the answer. You have no idea what's happening behind the scenes. I do. I entrusted you with little, I'm about to trust you with a lot. Ignore what all these other guys said and did. This is about you and I. I had you then, I've got you now, and I've definitely got you in the days ahead." Do you know what that would cause me to do? The same thing Job did, the same thing Isaiah did, he just fell down what did Isaiah say in chapter 6? "I am not worthy." The exact opposite of the "three friends."

Today we enter a new phase of Job. We're finally shown what's behind the curtain. We're finally able to see what was really happening and we're finally seeing that God didn't show up to punish Job, God didn't show up to chastise Job, God said, "Job, you have no idea why you've been going through what you've been going through but now you do. There's something better coming and I had to prepare you for it. Gird up thy loins. Here we go because more is around the corner."

Maybe that's God's story for you, maybe that's his story for us. God's been faithful in the past, he's been faithful in the present, but can I ask you some rhetorical questions? What if he gave you twice the responsibilities you have now? What if he gave us as a church twice the responsibility that we have now, twice the impact we have, twice the availability, twice the possibility? It's possible but are we like Job staying faithful no matter what the environment?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're that individual that the Spirit of God took the word of God and just did a surgical procedure on your heart. Maybe today you realize that the Lord does see all, he does know all, he has a plan and he has a purpose for your life. Can I tell you the single greatest plan and purpose for your life is that he loved you so much in spite of your rebellion, in spite of your sin, he sent his only Son to shed his blood on the cross to save you from that and all of eternity. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We've been given 35 valid reasons in chapter 38 why we should call on the Lord. He knows everything that's

happening both visible and invisible. He has a plan and a purpose whether we can see it or know it or not. Maybe today is the day that you just simply call on the name of the Lord. It doesn't have to be out loud, it doesn't have to be the same statement or phrase that somebody else or myself might say, but maybe this might help serve as a guide this morning as you call out and say, "God, today I recognize that you are God and I'm not. I recognize that you are perfect and I am not. God, I confess I have sinned and your Bible says that the wages of my sin is death and, God, I admit I deserve it, but the rest of that verse says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, and God, that's what I'm placing my faith in, my trust in, my today, my tomorrow and my forever in. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come on my behalf, he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf, he was willing to die a sacrificial death on my behalf, and, yes, he was able to rise from the grave and to conquer death on my behalf. God, today I believe that Jesus Christ alone is the one who can forgive and save my soul. God, I don't have all the answers to the issues, the struggles, the problems and the conflicts of this world, but there's one thing that I know and I declare today, that Jesus Christ is the answer to my sin problem. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in a moment I'm going to pray for us, afterwards we're going to stand and sing together our hymn of invitation, and maybe you're that one who had that conversation with the Lord, or maybe you've got questions, maybe today's the day you just step out and step forward. We've got a whole team, we've got a room set aside to give you the time you need to be able to hear your story, your struggles, your concerns, whatever it may be. Maybe today you say, "You know what? I confessed the Lord Jesus Christ years ago, decades ago," maybe today more than any day you really do feel like Job, you feel like you've been on the ash heap and you don't know why. You've questioned if God even knew what he was doing. Maybe today it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is about stepping out of here in just a moment and even though you still may be on the ash heap, you're trusting that one day the whirlwind's going to come and God's going to do and say as only God can.

Lord Jesus, today as we come to this time of response, thank you, thank you that in spite of our doubt, in spite of our lack of faith, in spite of our rebellion, God, in spite of our oftentimes thumbing our nose at you, that you are a God of mercy and of love and of grace and of compassion. God, today may we not listen to the voices of the past, may we not listen to the anxiety of the future, may we just hear your voice and respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.