



## Cosmos or Chaos? - Job 9

Melvin Tinker

*This is the fourth in a series of sermons by Rev Melvin Tinker based on the book of Job. It would be helpful to read Job chapter 9 before listening to, or reading, the sermon.*

*To go to the next part of the series, [click here](#).*

The film has already grossed over \$400 million world wide - £40 million in the UK alone. Quiet an amazing feat really for what many would consider to be a children's film made by Walt Disney no less. Of course the critics had been out sharpening their knives even before the film was released. Cries of 'indoctrination' and religious 'propaganda' have been heard echoing from the citadels of the liberal intelligentsia. But still the film and the books are drawing in new audiences and new readerships on a daily basis. I am referring, of course, to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. The great Lion Aslan is the Christ figure and in the book there is one significant point where the youngest of the children who have set out on their adventure into Narnia, Susan, meets Mr and Mrs Beaver. And this is what we read: 'As Susan heard the strange name, Aslan, she began to tremble, "Oh", said Susan, "is he quite safe?" "Safe?" said Mr Beaver. "Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you."

In many ways that telling phrase takes us right to the heart of Job chapter 9. The 'safe' God of the opening paragraphs of the book and the 'safe' God of some of Job's counsellors who is so tame and predictable, and no bigger than their puny ideas about him, has receded into the distance. There is no question in Job's mind that he is 'King' as we shall see, the one who is able to unleash the most awesome power and perform the most

astounding miracles - but is he 'good'? That is the question found lingering on Job's lips. The avalanche of events which have fallen on this innocent man would seem to place a great question mark against such an assertion. To pronounce, 'I believe in the greatness of God' is much easier than to declare 'I believe in the goodness of God.' From Job's perspective it is the LORD who in his sovereignty has given and who has taken away. But why? What possible reason could there be to lose the security of an income, the love of a family and the blessings of a good health? What could possibly justify the denigration of a man like Job as he moves from the status of an Arabian prince to a penniless pauper, sitting amongst the scavenging rats on the local ash heap (2:8)?

It has been suggested that the question which lies at the heart of the whole book; the problem which demands a resolution - is found right there in verse 24 of chapter 9 and the rather ambiguous question: 'If it is not he (God), then who is it?' As Job surveys not only the desolation in his own life, but some of the chaos which erupts in the natural order as well as the social upheavals in society as a whole - Job asks this penetrating question which reveals the inner tension he is feeling, whilst at the same time is reaching out towards a possible answer. You see, Job has two pillars of belief which uphold the edifice of his faith. First, that God is sovereign over every twist and turn of existence - nothing can thwart him or surprise him, and so he rightly asks, "*If it is not **he***" who is in some way behind such things then who else can it be? But then this brings into question the other pillar of his belief that God is good, for how can a good God have a hand in such things? This is the bulwark that is starting to crumble as he contemplates so much ruin in the world.

He wants to affirm the sovereignty of God without attributing to God evil, for it is unthinkable that the God who is the source and definition of all goodness should be the originator of evil. So we have the other aspect of the ambiguous cry, "*If it is not he, then **who** is it?*" Perhaps now Job is entertaining the possibility that there *is* some other force or personality at work in the world another 'who', one who is malevolent and wicked. Not a second God, for there is only one God. So could it be that somehow God maintains both his sovereignty and goodness by allowing such a

being to act whilst still achieving his righteous purposes, using this being as an instrument? In some cases punishing a wayward world - as if God were to say, *"If you refuse to have me as your loving ruler then here is the alternative ruler."* But perhaps sometimes he becomes an instrument not to punish the wicked but to test the faithful, becoming more like a fire to refine faith. Well, we as the readers know from the first two chapters that such a creature does exist, he is called Satan - but although Job may be groping towards this idea, he never fully grasps it, and so he continues to feel the inner anguish of wanting to hold on to the goodness of God.

In some ways here we see a different Job to the one we saw in chapter 3. There he was drowning in the depths of despair; he was in a pit he couldn't climb out of. But now, to change the metaphor, Job is off the canvas and is ready to fight back. He may be knocked down but he isn't knocked out. Now he is ready to hit back at his friends and indeed wrestle with God, like Jacob did in Genesis 32. This is an important point.

You see, Job and all Christians are not fatalists. They do not sit back, fold their arms and whatever comes their way simply mutter *"Ah, it is the will of Allah."* Neither do they buy in to the theology of Doris Day, (for those here who are old enough to remember) - 'Que Sera, Sera' - 'Whatever will be, will be.' No, Job has a razor sharp mind, he is a moral man with a deep sense of right and wrong, made in God's image who can and will ask pertinent questions; thinking through the issues so that he can come to some understanding of what is going on. He will push the question: *"If God is so good, why are things so bad?"* And that is what God expects us to do, to use our minds within the limits of his revelation.

And so here in chapter 9 Job responds to his mate, Bildad. In chapter 8, Bildad has been arguing the toss that God is always good and fair 8:3: *"Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?"* Expecting the rhetorical answer "No." Then, 8:20: *"Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers."* Job doesn't deny that - take a look at 9:2a: *"Indeed, I know that this is true."* That is not the issue for Job. Given all the false accusations of his friends that Job somehow must have grossly sinned along the way for God to act like

this, Job wants God to acquit him. He wants some access to the great Judge who is just, so that he can be declared to be in the right. What is at issue is his integrity which is more precious to Job than anything else. In fact *had* Job given in to the brow beating of his friends and lied in order to stop the suffering, saying *"Yes I do deserve this"*, then Satan would have won his wager, for then Job would have showed that his own personal peace and prosperity mattered far more than the truth. No, he wasn't to be cleared before the heavenly court - 9:2-3: *"Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand."* Then again in verses 14-15: *"How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy."*

In other words, he wants an audience with God, but how? And even if he did he is scared stiff of the reception he might get. And maybe you feel like that too. There are all sorts of questions you want to voice to God, to ask of the Bible - but you think that somehow God will disapprove of you if you do and come down on you like some insecure headteacher for being so impertinent? If so, then let me encourage you to take a leaf out of Job's book and ask the questions.

There are three areas of life which Job looks upon and asks: What is a good God doing? *"If it is not he, who is it?"*

First, there is the area of nature. Here we are given a glimpse into the largeness of Job's view of God reflected in his overawed response to the glory of the universe. The point is: if a cosmos such as this is so great, then how much more the one who made it? And so Job employs the language of worship: look at verses 5-10: *"He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted."*

This is no puny God Job worships. His litany of praise is not the soundbite of some of our choruses; it is the majestic language of the angels looking on in breathless wonder as God the great Artist sweeps his brush across the heavens to produce the galaxies, whose voice thunders and the mountains tremble. And so it stands to reason that such a God would not be trivial in his dealings with the things he has made, he is a God who takes his creation and his creatures seriously, so there must be some *reason* for all that is happening, but what?

Here we see through the eyes of Job that we live in a universe which has all the hallmarks of a cosmos - the well designed, intricate purposeful motions of planets, not the haphazard meanderings of rocks thrown up by Chance. And when you think about it, it is the fact that we *know* we live in a world predominantly of order which causes us to believe that there is a God we *can* question when we do come across the disorder. You see, if the universe is ultimately random and at rock bottom, meaningless with no rhyme or reason, people would not be asking the question: Why suffering? It would be no more meaningful than asking 'Why dry rot?' It just 'is' that's all.

Think of it like this. Suppose you want to lay a square patio of crazy paving in your garden; and so you order a load of broken flagstones. Then you start the tricky business of piecing them together. You will not be surprised in the least to find that when you have finished you are left with a few pieces that can't be placed anywhere. You are not surprised because you never thought that random, broken pieces were *designed* to fill up your square. You are not going to ring up your supplier and complain that he didn't send the right type of flagstones for your garden are you?

But suppose you buy a jigsaw puzzle from a shop. You fit it all together carefully and thoughtfully, but at the end you are left with a hole and some pieces which don't fit. *Now* you do have a right to be offended and ring up to complain. Why? Because underlying your complaint is the belief (rightly so) that there is an intention, purpose and design behind the jigsaw puzzle, that is what makes a jigsaw different from crazy paving.

And so it is with suffering. Suffering, we feel,

doesn't quite fit in to the scheme of things. And there would be no cause for complaint if underneath it all we didn't believe that the world *was* consciously designed by a good God. So, strange though it may seem, the fact that we feel we have a right to complain is *evidence* that we really do believe there is a God to complain against, that our world is more like a well designed jigsaw puzzle with some pieces missing rather than a pile of crazy paving we are expected to put together somehow. Do you see?

So, like us, Job recognises that natural disasters occur, such as earthquakes (9:6) - but God is still the one in control. So just maybe something has happened which has caused some of the pieces of the jigsaw to become dislocated. And the Bible tells us there has - human sin. When the first man rebelled the whole of creation was thrown out of joint. Sin has a dislocating effect and we *all* get caught up in it. We shall be coming back to this in a few weeks time, but the presence of evil in the world, which is responsible for so much heartache, is represented here by the use of a symbol for personal evil - like the serpent in Genesis 3 and the Red Dragon in Revelation 13 - the sea monster Rahab (9:13). But note God is still the one who triumphs: '*even* the cohorts of Rahab covered at his feet.' So evil will not have the last say after all, God will.

The second area of concern for Job is society. This comes out especially in verses 22-24. "*It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent. When the land falls into the hands of the wicked he blindfolds its judges.*" At least that is what it seems like.

Now notice what an amazing man Job is. Even in the midst of all his problems he never becomes self-centred, as if it is all "*Why me, me, me?*" He still has what we would call today a social conscience. He cares about others in society who seem to be denied justice. One of the reasons why God gave his law to his people Israel was so that order should reign in society as much as the solar system. This sense of wholeness, harmony and well being is described by the Bible writers as *shalom*. To receive God's *shalom* was to receive the highest blessing of all. So if in some way there are forces of evil at work in the cosmos, then we

should expect such forces to be at work in society. Indeed, going back again to Genesis 3, the shalom of the garden - that state of harmony between man and God, man and woman and man and nature became disrupted when the lies of the serpent were listened to and it was suggested back then that God was *not* good. And we have been following suit ever since and suffering the consequences.

But justice is not always seen to be done in this world which is the beef of verse 22. And if justice is not done now, then how can God be said to be just? Does it mean that evil men suffer the same fate as good men - both ending up in the grave - full stop? But *if* God is good, which Job still wants to believe *and* God is all powerful, which he cannot deny, then might the fact that justice is denied in *this* life suggest the possibility that justice will be carried out in a *future* life, maybe after some sort of resurrection? Then God's justice and goodness would remain intact. The Christian sociologist, Peter Berger observes how in the debate over the architect of Hitler's Jewish extermination programme, Adolf Eichman, there was a general feeling that, 'hanging was not enough.' He points out that in the case of some human deeds no human punishment will ever be enough. In other words, there are deeds that demand not only human *condemnation* but divine *damnation*. It was Winston Churchill who once said that the evidence that "*God existed was the existence of Lenin and Trotsky, for whom hell was needed.*" That is pretty well Job's sentiment too and I wouldn't be surprised if it weren't yours either. In fact later on in chapter 19 Job, however dimly, glimpses the possibility that this will be so; justice will be done and be seen to be done and he will be there when it happens - 19:25-27 "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth (literally dust). And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another.*"

Of course Job has no fully developed idea of such a resurrection day, that comes in the New Testament, but the instinct is right. As you look at society with all its abuses, with all its corruption and appalling evil, do you not long for one day when it will not only be removed but deservingly punished? This is not a thirst for vengeance but for justice. Because I tell you this: without it God

will cease to be God for he will have ceased to be just and that cannot be.

But then there is the chaos in Job's personal life. This comes out especially in the last three verses (33-35). "*If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.*" Like Susan in Narnia who is terrified at the prospect of meeting Aslan and yet desperate to see him, so it is with Job and God.

Knowing that in the divine courts he doesn't stand a chance, he longs for someone who could arbitrate for him, some kind of go-between, a mediator who will act on his behalf - verse 33: "*If only there were someone to arbitrate between us.*" But here is the problem: who can approach God but God? Who can understand a man but a man? Is there anyone in the heavenly court who will speak for him? In short, is there an advocate?

And maybe you are here tonight and that is the longing of your heart. There is someone in your family who is causing your heart to ache. There are pressures on your mind which you long to unload. If only you could somehow reach out to God and speak to him knowing he will hear you and, perhaps more importantly, understand you - because no one else does. But the gap seems too great and God seems too remote. If only there was someone who could reach down and put the hand of God into your hand and yours into his, someone who knows from the inside the anguish of a man like Job, who has been to the ash heap and triumphed and whose heart is tender towards us. The Gospel which Job anticipated and glimpsed from afar has come right into our midst - for that someone is Jesus. How does the apostle John put it in his first letter? 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is an atoning sacrifice for our sin.' The go-between is there, one mediator, one Lord, the God-man Jesus.

*To go to the next part of the series, [click here](#).*

*Copyright information: The sermon texts are copyright and are available for personal use only. If you wish to use them in other ways, please*

*contact us for permission.*