

**Job 38:1-11**July 9, 2006 – 5<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Questioning God?**✦ **Brace yourself.** (vv.1-7)✦ **Humbly admit your limits.** (vv.8-11)

In the name of Jesus, our living Redeemer, dear co-heirs of Christ's suffering and glory:

The tall corn fields of our suburban neighborhood suggest we are all a bit hypocritical about the wide open spaces. We build our homes right up against the farmer's fields and enjoy watching him work his acreage. Our view is great. But who stops to think what it must look like from his side of the fence where once another farmer's fields stretched to the forests on the horizon? How filled with dismay he must have been when his neighbor sold to the developers. While we enjoy the view, he's looking into the backyards and windows of urban sprawl. But we all want a quiet corner of God's green earth.

This ancient man Job had his. No one wanted to be around him. His wife thought he breath stank. His servants refused to come when he called. Nearby friends stayed away, and the three that came from afar were the kind that helped coin the expression, "With friends like these, who needs enemies?" Job's livestock and fields were decimated. His houses destroyed and his family dead – except for his wife who loathed his presence. He sat alone in the ashes and scraped the painful boils all over his body with broken pottery. It takes a lot less for us to get to Job's condition. Anyone here today **Questioning God?**

✦ **Brace yourself.** (vv.1-7)

A woman tends to find her fulfillment in relationships. "So what's with this man who promised not so long ago to love and cherish me till death parts us? Why don't my children seem to appreciate all that I do to cook and clean and keep things running smoothly in our household? Why is it that the friends I thought I had either all move away or just stop calling? Even my relatives – do they care at all to visit or get together for special occasions? Am I the only one who cares? Why me, Lord?"

Most men would be happy to skip practically every relationship except that one. "What's with this woman who talked about respecting and honoring and cherishing me for life? Why does she always find something wrong with the way I look or live, for that matter? Why don't my children seem to care how hard I work to pay the bills? Why is it never enough for my wife – what I make or the time we get to spend together? How can someone put in so many years at work and still find the boss or manager or owner of the company has no feelings at all for what their decisions do to me? What did I do, Lord?"

"Why don't my parents seem to have a clue? Are they really so old they can't remember what it was like to be a teenager? Why is that every time I think I'll have a little more freedom, I crash into more rules and restrictions on what I get to do with my friends? Why don't Mom and Dad care about my friends? And why don't my friends care more about me? Lord, what did I do to deserve this?"

It doesn't take much imagination to find Job's question lurking in the hearts of all of us. Job was a righteous man by God's own appraisal. He had it all – health, wealth, wife and kids, family, friends and fulfillment. But in a windstorm moment he lost everything, not realizing at the time that God Himself asked Satan twice about Job's faithfulness, then gave the hellish tormentor permission to tear Job's life apart. The devil was allowed to take everything except Job's life. And Job's "friends" considered it their solemn duty to convict and convince Job of some sin that made him deserve such destruction from God.

In a way they were right. The Bible tells us that we deserve eternal damnation for every breach of God's good pleasure, for every time we've rebelled against God's will or simply questioned His judgment. So on that score, Job deserved far worse than he was getting. So do we. But you find out when you finally get to the last Chapter 42, that the LORD was angry at Job's three friends for distorting

God's law and character as if He was punishing Job's sin. Job was not being punished for some specific sin. Neither are we, since Jesus paid for them all. So why do we keep **Questioning God**? Dear fellow sinner, it's time to **Brace yourself**. More like the ancient Hebrew text, "Put your pants on. Button your shirt and tie your shoes. You might want a hat and coat too because the thunder is pounding in the distance and the crash of lightning draws near. You may have thought you could call God to account, but *"then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"*

### ✦ **Humbly admit your limits. (vv.8-11)**

One Christian commentator studied all God's fifty some questions in Job 38-41, and realized that modern science still doesn't have the answers to these. Suddenly Job with all his, "Why me, Lord?" is confronted with questions about God's creation that he can't begin to understand. So how can Job hope to explain the Creator's boundless wisdom and power by which He directs the affairs of men?

*"Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"* How do you answer such questions when we're not even sure what the questions mean. The Hebrew in this oldest book of the Bible is so ancient that the Jewish translators of the Septuagint a few centuries before Christ seem to have skipped a few sections which they apparently did not know how to put into the Greek of their day. The Dead Sea Scrolls and more ancient translations have helped us a great deal even since the King James Version in 1611. At least we understand the questions better, but the answers?

The Creator asks Job who put the limits on the ocean when the clouds were first wrapped around the earth like clothes. Our NIV translates that God "fixed limits" for the sea, but it's a much more violent word-picture than that in the Hebrew. Literally, Almighty God "shattered" boundaries for the oceans, perhaps in the days of Peleg not long after the Flood when Job and Abraham were living not many miles apart from Noah's son Shem. If we read the text correctly, in Peleg's days "the earth was divided" (Genesis 10:25), which may be the time with God made the one continent into the many we see today with seven seas dividing them. Sinking the Great Rift into the Atlantic Ocean and jamming up the Rockies and Himalayas, God gave the earth a whole new look and scattered the nations according to His will.

Where were you, Job? Do you really want to keep **Questioning God**? Maybe it's time you and I took a trip to the rocky coast to watch the waves for a while. November would be a great time even on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Waves that can bury our biggest boats like the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, have been pounding incessantly since long before 1975. But the rocks are still there. God's limits still stand. Isn't this where our own proud waves of **Questioning God** ought to stop?

Distressing days can be most helpful to **Humbly admit your limits**. I could not give myself the first breath, much less guarantee a single heartbeat for another. My own heart defies me when I try to stop complaining and just be thankful to God and loving to my neighbor. But like Job in his darkest days, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 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. How my heart yearns within me!"* (Job 19:25-27 NIV) You see, all my troubles cannot argue away the cross of Jesus Christ where His blood washed clean my doubts and fears. Pounding questions cannot move the large stone the angel rolled away from Christ's empty tomb which shouts our triumph over sin, death and hell. In God alone I trust. He cannot deceive me. He will use my heartaches to lead me to repentance, like Job to admit my guilt and accept God's forgiveness. Eternal life awaits all who trust in Jesus. On the other side we will see all the answers in the smiling face of God. Amen.

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