

READING

Job 42: 1-6

SERMON

Job's humble reply (Job 42:1-6)

Have you ever thought, what would happen if God was not sovereign. How would this change your life? Well if God was not sovereign then the following things might or would happen.

This world would be controlled by the Prince of this world

We know that Satan thinks he controls the world because we read

“...the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:8-9 NIV)

But they were not his kingdoms to give away. We have already seen in the story of Job, when God and Satan have their wager, the first time Satan says

“"Does Job fear God for nothing?"..."Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” (Job 1:9-11 NIV)

God replies to Satan is

“..."Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” (Job 1:12 NIV)

Do what you will to Job, Satan, but there is a limit because I am sovereign.

The second time when Satan says

“"Skin for skin!"..."A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” (Job 2:4-5 NIV)

God replies

“..."Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.” (Job 2:6 NIV)

Do what you like to Job, but again there is a line that you cannot cross, because I, God am in control.

The problem is that some people do not live as if God is sovereign. They would think that in many situations, although they are Christians, that they are in mortal danger because Satan is so strong. Yes, Satan is strong and he does go around like a roaring lion, but in that place in Peter where Satan is described as the roaring lion we read

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:8-11 NIV)

We are to be alert, but always remember that God is sovereign. Do you fear Satan so much that you see Satan around every corner?

God might lose

Do you think that God might lose the battle? No, of course not, but you might want to help God, just in case. When Gideon got his army together to defeat the Midianites, the Amalekites and other eastern peoples who had joined forces against Israel, he had a force of thirty-two thousand men. But God said that he didn't need that many and whittled it down to just three hundred.

What do we do to help God? Maybe we call others to pray harder, to pray longer? This is not that I am against prayer, I am not saying that we should not be persistent in prayer, but we need to be careful why we are praying. It is not to help God win. This was one of the problems that some had with a series of Christian books that came out in the nineties which were novels but had four forces in the stories: Christians and non-Christians, demons and angels. So you had this fight going on between good and evil, both physical and spiritual. One of messages that came across in the books was that if more the Christians prayed, the lesser the demons became and the more the angels won in their fight with the demons.

If God had to rely on our prayers to win, then he would have lost ages ago. Our prayers do not work like that. God does not need our help to win. Yes, we are to pray and God chooses us to carry out the good deeds he has planned for us and to take the message of the gospel out into the world, where we begin with our neighbours, those around us.

But God is not going to lose, so we do not have to live as if he will. We need to live knowing that God has won.

Who's In Control

Another consequence that comes out is we live as if God is not in control. This is we may say that God is in total control in our heads, but our lives do not reflect that is when people live as if they can control God. They make deals with God. Job did this when he asked to speak to God directly – he wanted to call the shots.

We don't do that, or do we? Do we talk to God as if we are in charge? God, if you do this for me, then I will do this for you. Like the young lady who a year after her father had recovered from a large heart attack, said that he had prayed for her father and because God had healed him that she felt it was time to get baptised. Someone said to the young lady, “Would you be getting baptised now if your father had not pulled through?” You could tell that she had never thought about that scenario.

Let us beware not to bargain with God in this way. Job realised this which is why in chapter 42, verse 2 Job says

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” (Job 42:2-3 NIV)

Job had not sinned, but he realises that he has been presumptuous. He realises that he was demanding things of God that he had no right to ask.

God Gives Me My Answers

Another thing that we can do to God, is to demand the answers to **my** questions. But it may be that we are asking the wrong questions.

In the book *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* a huge computer is built to answer one question. Let us look at the question and the answer.

[VIDEO CLIP]

Alright that is a novel, turned into a radio series, turned into a TV series, but with God we want our questions answered – but they might be the wrong questions. Job wanted answers as to why he was suffering. The easiest answer would have been, “Well, Job, you see Satan and I were having a conversation one day when I said to him

“...”Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

And Satan replied

“Does Job fear God for nothing?”...”Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

So I said to him

...”Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” ... (Job 1:8-12 NIV)

So that is the start of all the things that happened to you. You losing your family, your property, and even your health.

What would the next question had been from Job, “Why me!” A question so often asked by us when something we deem as bad happens to us. “Why me!”

However God never answers Job in that way, but as one person put it

Job has not learnt the cause of his sufferings, or explanation of apparent injustices in the world, but he has found God again (H H Rowley)

As Job says in verse 4 of chapter 42

“”You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”” (Job 42:4-6 NIV)

His ears had heard, but now he has seen. We can hear, but not really know until we have seen and in the times of Job, there was no TV, no DVD, no video, so you had to see people face to face.

We do not really get to know someone, even with all our aids, until we meet them face to face. Sue and I know a couple who met through a Christian dating agency. They have been happily married for some years now, but they did not really get to know one another until they met and met several times.

Job had met with God as we saw in chapters 38-41, so he now knew God personally, rather than as someone he had heard about and followed. God had been someone he had second hand, theoretical knowledge about, but now he had first hand, personal knowledge about.

Keith Ward, a professor of divinity at Oxford, had all the theoretical knowledge about God, but he needed to meet God personally to know the full picture. Knowledge is never enough – we need that personal touch as well.

Job has come to realise in his final conversation that he has overstepped the mark, that he had begun to doubt God. Listen again to what he says

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

“You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:2-6 NIV)

The suffering that Job was going through was not because God had cast him aside. God was not upset with Job, in fact Job is rejoicing in the fact that he has come to know God personally in his suffering. This chapter is the climax for Job. Previously he has said

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”
(Job 19:25 NIV)

But now he says

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” (Job 42:5 NIV)

May it be that we all come to the position of Job – that we really know God personally. God is always there – that should be the climax for us. All else pales into insignificance by this. Also God is in control, so whatever is thrown at us – he is sovereign

- This can be redundancy – this may happen to some due to the credit crunch
- This can be suffering – it may be due to many reasons, but it is never God casting us aside, but he is there with us
- It may be other things you can think of, but God is still sovereign in all situations

So let us never live as if theoretically we know that God is sovereign, but practically live as if he is not. At work know that he is sovereign so that whatever befalls is in his hands. One of the sadder visits I use to make was to an old lady who was slipping into dementia. She had been a farmer’s wife and had a vibrant mind with a great sense of humour. One afternoon I get a phone call from her, one of many and she tells me that she has had burglars in. The place was a mess because they had been in. She never went out you have to know and it is around 4.00 pm. I told I would be round in a little while.

So I finished off the task I was doing and went round. I walked in and the place was tidy, like it always was and so I said, “I thought the place was a mess from the burglars!”

“I’ve tidied up,” she says. So we settled down for a cuppa and a chat and during the chat she said that she must be ever so wicked – she had been a Christian for years and her and her husband were baptised at the same time even before they were courting each other! I asked her why she thought she was so wicked. “Because I am so old and I want to die, but God won’t let me. So I must be so wicked as he won’t let me die yet. He doesn’t want me in heaven”

I tried to reassure her that God does not work like that. It was not true in Job’s case – it was not true for that lady - it is not true for us. God is with us in all situations. As Job 42:2 says

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.”
(Job 42:2 NIV)

We have to live in the reality of that.

PRAYER