

Is God Really In Control?

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Date: 22 December 2024

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[0 : 00] So is God really in control? Is He in control of what happens in the world? How can He be in control when everything around me feels like it's out of control?

Most of us live our lives happily, going along until one day there's just that one thing that happens that throws everything into turmoil. It could be an email from your boss having to let you go, bad news from the doctor, or that dreaded late night phone call from the police.

And your whole world is turned upside down. And we all naturally ask, but is God really in control? You can be a Christian your whole life, you can have the strongest faith, or you may have no faith at all, but we all ask that question at some point.

Why is He allowing this? Doesn't He have the power to stop these things? And these are deep and profound issues to wrestle with. So if you're asking these questions and you're here today, you're not alone.

You're surrounded by people who have asked those questions and asked those questions. But the Bible does have an answer for us. And in our story today, the story of Job, you'll see that despite going through terrible and unjust suffering, Job shows us that God is indeed in control.

[1 : 20] So I'm going to start by looking at Job's problem. Job's problem. So we're introduced to Job right at the start, Job chapter 1. And Job is a humble man.

He's helpful. He's got a great family, wealthy businessman. He's living his best life. Until it all gets taken away from him in a split second in one day.

And what's worse, it's not through anything that he did, but because of some unseen and very mysterious interaction between God and Satan up in heaven, that Job doesn't know anything about. We know about it because we're reading the story, but Job doesn't know about it. He's down on earth. Now there are many questions about just what is going on in heaven over there.

But one thing stands out for us is that God puts a limit on evil. God puts a limit on evil. So Job chapter 1 verse 12 there, as Satan is asking to do what he wants to with Job, the Lord said to Satan, very well then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.

[2 : 35] Evil wants to do stuff, but God puts a boundary on it. And so just from this first chapter, we learn that God is most definitely in control. There are some things that evil is able to accomplish, but God is the one that sets boundaries and controls what happens.

So that his purposes are ultimately carried out. So first of all, God is most definitely in control. Secondly, the pain is still real.

The pain is still real. The very fact that the book of Job portrays Job as wrestling with these issues is significant. Job's turmoil and loss is real, and God nowhere denies that it's a reality.

In fact, he works with it. So I think for us, just those two points, God is most definitely in control, but the pain is definitely real. God doesn't expect you to not have questions when you go through difficulties.

It's okay to wrestle with and be in turmoil over these things. God doesn't mind your tears. He doesn't mind your cries, or the deep inner groanings of your soul.

[3 : 44] In fact, God himself feels those things. There's a passage in Romans 8, where Paul is talking about how the world is groaning under the turmoil and brokenness of sin, and then he says this.

It should be up on the screen for us. The Spirit helps us in our weakness when we're struggling with what the heck is going on. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. So God is, as you're groaning, the Spirit is taking

those groans.

He's feeling it, and he's taking those groans and groaning up to God. It's an incredible picture of how God is with you and feels the pain that you're going through. So although these things are difficult to understand, it doesn't mean that God doesn't have any answers, just that we must learn to understand the answer that God does give us.

And the answer that we get in Job is nothing short of spectacular. So we're going to spend some time looking at God's answer to Job. Now the answer that Job gives isn't in chapter 1.

[5 : 05] It's right at the end of the book in chapter 38. But God takes Job on a whirlwind virtual tour of how God runs the world.

And it's meant to tell Job in no certain terms that God is in control and that he's totally worthy to be trusted with our pain. So we don't have time to read those chapters.

I'll just recommend, when you've got time, you may just want to go read from Job 1, read Job 2. I'm not saying skip Job 3 to 37, but the answer is in Job 38, 39, 40, 41, 42.

But I'm going to give us a quick highlight from Job 38. I'm just going to highlight a few verses that will come up on the screen. First of all, we learn that God is the one that laid the foundations of the earth.

He says this, Job is busy, Job has been going backwards and forwards between his friends, and eventually God realizes, no, but they're not getting the answers. The wisdom of the world doesn't know.

[6 : 06] Let me go and help them. And he asks Job these questions. Verse 4 here. He says, Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. Who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

A beautiful picture of how the world is created and how it's under God's control. Then it tells us that God is the one who summons the sunrise each day. He says this to Job.

Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place? What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?

Surely you know, for you were already born. You've lived so many years. So you can see God is being a bit cheeky with Job.

[7 : 04] But that's because Job, in a sense, is being cheeky with God. Now, we don't really think he's doing that. He's just asking the questions. But here's the God of the universe explaining to a mortal human being where the sun rises.

You know, we've got ESCOM and every now and then we can't even turn the lights on. And we've got a God that every morning turns this huge earth and this huge ball of fire comes up at exactly the right time.

And we've just gone through the summer solstice and slowly but surely the sun is going to get up later and later and later. All of this is under God's control.

None of it is under our control. God's wisdom is as deep as the oceans and even controls the doorway to death. God continues.

And he says to Job, Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?

[8 : 13] Can you control death? Can you control the time of your death? No. I can because I know where it is. I open and close the gates of death. It's under my control. Now of course that scares us but it also helps us trust God.

And then God orders the entire cosmos in all its glittering beauty. He says this, Can you bind the chains of Pleiades?

Can you loosen Orion's belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?

And the answer to all of these questions is no. I lose my car keys in the morning. I forgot the appointment I was going to make.

I don't have the ability to understand how the world works and to make it continuing working like that. And so we've got this dazzling display of the power and wisdom of God and His mastery, total mastery, over every aspect of creation.

[9 : 26] All right? But how does that help answer the question about God and suffering? The questions that we've got.

Well, think firstly, we're meant to marvel at the wisdom and power of God. A good thing to do would be to read those chapters just in one sitting and put yourself in Job's place and read it with passion and just picture what God is talking about.

We should marvel at the wisdom and power of God. The first thing is just to sit back in awestruck wonder of the power and the might and the majesty of God.

And to marvel at His cleverness and His insight and ability. You know, He had to work out all the maths to make all the stars and the planets move around constantly.

He had to work out the biology of how everything interrelates and doesn't overpower each other. It's all very balanced. He had to work out the cosmology. Everything.

[10 : 40] To keep the whole thing going like that. It is amazing. You know, back in high school, in my days, we had mathematics and science on high grade and standard grade.

And many of us went to standard grade fairly quickly. And at standard grade, you didn't need to learn why they did the calculations. You just had to learn the calculations.

So in chemistry, you just had to learn how the things, just the equation of how they worked. And the science teacher said, no, don't worry. I'll tell you, I'll give you how it works in matric.

And he did give us how it works in matric, and it just didn't help at all. We've got a few chemists in our church. You know, and every now and then, you put the two things together, and you think something's going to happen, the whole thing explodes.

You don't know what's just happened. Of course, they work it out later. That's not to denigrate science, but none of us has the brain capacity of a God.

[11 : 43] So that means, number two, we should humble ourselves under God's wisdom. So first marvel at the wisdom of God, then humble ourselves under his wisdom. Job instinctively understands that what God is saying is that he, Job, cannot possibly know how the world works and why these things happen.

And then Job answers this in chapter 42. It'll come up on the screen. Lord, I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted.

You asked, who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I didn't understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

And he goes on to say, I repent in dust and ashes. Now this kind of thing chafes at our modern Western sensibilities, but Job has the right response.

He is letting God be God. Every single one of us would react the same way if the God of the universe pitched up and took us on that virtual tour. In fact, we would all be going, look, so sorry about that.

[12 : 53] I didn't mean anything. Please don't kill me. He is letting God be God. This is actually helpful for us.

We're not capable of knowing the answer of how the universe works because we don't have infinite brain capacity, but God does. And so we need to let God be God and not assume that we've got it all worked out.

So marvel at God's wisdom, humble ourselves under God's wisdom, and then allow God's wisdom to widen our perspective. Allow God to widen our perspective.

God's answer is intended to broaden Job's perspective so he can see the bigger picture. Every single atom in the universe is under the control of God.

And it's meant to take our eyes off our own experience and focus on our own pain, look to the world around us, and through that, understand that there's a God out there who knows what he's doing.

[14 : 00] And so we can trust in a God that knows what he's doing, even though we're still bound, in a sense, by pain. Don't focus only on the pain.

Let God speak to you about how he is God. So friends, God is asking you to do just that. He wants you to stop worrying and trying to work it out all with your own brain power.

He's saying that you don't have to. Rather, turn to and trust in God who made it all and who's got infinite wisdom and power to make it all work for his glory and for your good.

Yes, you don't have the answer, but leave that with God. Now, that doesn't mean that our pain goes away. Our biggest thing is we want the pain to go away.

You may say, well, that's great. That does help a bit, maybe. But what about all the pain that Job is going through? What about the pain that I'm going through?

[15:05] What can I do when it doesn't make sense? And so there's some things in the book of Job that helps us what to know to do when we're going through the pain. So we're just going to look at Job's pain for a few minutes.

Job's pain. What does Job do with his pain and what lessons can we learn from it? Well, the main thing is that Job takes his pain to the Lord. Job takes his pain to the Lord.

He's wrestling. He's in turmoil, but he's wrestling with God. And he's asking God deep questions. But Job is doing exactly the right thing.

He's going through it with the Lord. And he's frank and forthright. In Job chapter 1 verse 21, He breaks down in sackcloth and ashes.

But it says he breaks down and falls on his knees in worship. And he says these amazing words, The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away.

[16:05] May the name of the Lord be praised. Now, I don't think that Job at that point is feeling the same way we feel when we sing our songs on a Sunday.

He's not praising God out of his heart because he's happy. He's saying it because it's the right thing to do and he knows it. And he knows that there's a God who gives and takes away.

That's the nature of reality. But what that allows us to do, what Job is doing, is it allows us to be brutally honest with God.

There's no area off bounds for him. You can search for answers, but what you need to do is take your thoughts and your fears and your hurts and your confusion to God.

Pour out your heart to the Lord. Don't let it sit and fester inside of you. You're just not going to find any answers there. Job had God speak to him and Job still went through turmoil.

[17:12] But that's the help. Help. And that's one of the things that we've got to do. There was a singer on America's Got Talent called Nightbird. He sang a beautiful song called It's Okay.

But when she sang it, she was dying of cancer. Like Job, she wrestled with God and her cancer and wrote a blog titled God is on the Bathroom Floor.

Just going to quote from it. She says this, On the nights that I couldn't sleep, vomiting my lungs out, I laid in the tub like an insect.

The bathroom became my place to hide where I could scream and be ugly, where I could sob and spit and eventually doze off, just happy to be asleep, even if my head was on the toilet.

I've heard that it's said that some people can't see God because they won't look low enough. And it's true. If you can't see Him, look lower, God is with you on the bathroom floor.

[18:22] And this is exactly what we remember God doing for us at Christmastime. Because Christmastime is all about God stepping out of eternity into our world and essentially joining us in our grief and our pain and confusion.

And so I'm just going to spend the last bit looking at how Christmas helps us. What I mean by that is how Jesus helps us. So in many ways, Jesus is a Job-like figure. Jesus' birth into the world was fraught with uncertainty and anxiety.

Born out of wedlock, hunted by a king, fled as refugees to a foreign country. His whole life was one of rejection, pain and humiliation, culminating in His death on the cross.

Exactly what Nick was talking about earlier and what we celebrated in the communion. and He was innocent. He was far more innocent than Job.

Jesus experienced evil and pain and loss and so He's able to understand ours. He's not aloof. He's not unfeeling. He's not unsympathetic. In fact, the Bible says precisely because He is human, He can sympathize with us.

[19:47] Jesus is the answer to the goodness of God and the problem of evil in the world.

Hebrews 4 says this, We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses.

Talking about Jesus. But we have one who has been tested in every way, just as we are.

yet, He did not sin. The conclusion for that is, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

And so won't you do that this Christmas time? Come to God's throne of grace. Bring your pain, bring your anger, bring your confusion, lay it at the foot of the one who understands at a more profound level than we can ever understand what evil is all about but who has overcome it for us.

Well, there's one last question. How can one man's life and death do all of this for the whole of creation? Well, the truth is he can't do that if he's only a man.

[21 : 08] So I want to invite you to come back and join us for Christmas Day to hear about how in Jesus God really was here and how that makes all the difference to the big questions of life.

Let me pray for us. Lord Jesus, we are so lost and lonely and easily broken by the problems of this world.

Lord, many of us are struggling with deep problems that we cannot resolve by ourself. Yet you came into the world precisely to remind us that these things do not last.

They don't have the last word but you do, Lord. Your death and your resurrection changes everything. Lord, the pain is still real. Help us to do what Job does which is take our pain and our struggles to you.

And Lord, will you meet us there and remind us that you've got everything under control and that we can trust you. Amen.