

**Augusta First Baptist Church**  
***Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?***  
**Job 38:1-7**  
**January 21, 2007**  
***When God Asks the Questions Series***

NRS Job 38:1 “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: 2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements-- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?”

One of the most difficult jobs I remember as a kid was clearing a 20 acre field of rocks. Now this may not seem like much, but for a 12 year old in the summer, this was a daunting task. My brothers and I had to walk every square inch of the property, every Saturday, and pick up every rock we saw. This included the rocks embedded in the ground. We extracted these rocks with a crowbar and hammer. We could not risk leaving one rock, because the field was going to be used to grow hay. Rocks and hay bailers do not get along. It was tempting every weekend to find some excuse to not work, but I was being paid \$3 an hour, and who can turn down that kind of money! One would just as soon avoid difficult work – mental, physical and especially spiritual.

Let’s begin this message with an up front disclaimer: to read the book of Job is difficult work. But I want to encourage you to not avoid it. It is difficult, because there are many questions asked throughout the text, but very few answers provided. Even the reader cannot help asking questions. Why did Job have to prove his fidelity to God? Why did God allow Satan to take nearly everything away from Job except his life? Why did such bad things have to happen to such a nice guy? In fact, God describes Job as righteous.

As we come to chapter 38 of Job we find ourselves, the reader, at a moment we have been waiting for. Job has survived the testing. He has not, as Satan said he would, and as Job’s wife asked him, cursed God. And now, God shows up, so we, along with Job expect answers from God. This is all perfectly understandable. I want explanations when injustice is witnessed. But God does not bring an answer. Instead, he brings to Job a question.

Here, God is not simply asking one question, but a litany of some 38 *questions* in this chapter alone. And to be honest, they are all kind of intimidating. We are done with the rather paternal questions we have explored in the last two weeks: “Where are you?” and “Where is your brother?” These questions are intense and sound more like an interrogation and they come at an unrelenting pace: Who? Where? How? What? Can you? Have you? Do you know...?

A few observations:

**1) It takes courage to have faith:** to ask the questions and to be questioned. Surely, we have all had the experience of having our faith questioned by God and others.

Job is not condemned for asking questions regarding his suffering. But God reminds him that one must be courageous if they truly want to deepen their relationship. 3 “Gird up your loins” like a *hero*. And this becomes the “getting off” point for most of us. Generally speaking, many just want a polite and distant God, a God that can be contained in books and Chicken Soup for the Soul stories. We don’t ask the hard and tough questions.

We are blessed as a church to have several members who are chaplains in hospitals and the military. One day I was speaking with one of our chaplains and I shared with him that it must be frustrating that most of your calls are always related to people in crisis. Rarely does a chaplain get called up to the Labor and Delivery section of the hospital to celebrate the birth of a healthy child. It is more often related to death or serious illness. But the chaplain said that he found great satisfaction in helping families deal with the difficult questions they have with God during times of crisis. He doesn't give them the answers (there usually are none), **but he gives them the courage to ask**. It takes courage to have faith.

It is popular to interpret the book of Job as a writing concerned with what it means to suffer. I don't think so. I agree with those who see the book as concerned with what it means to be human in relationship with God.

Job has come to a place where God will no longer tolerate the image of Job's own making. *Where were you...* is not simply rhetorical. The answer is obvious: *I was not and therefore I cannot create answers for all my longings and searchings*.

Job had to have the courage to allow his faith to be *challenged* and *changed*. Job's world was a world of answers and order. But all that changed...

**2) Religious clichés are empty in the face of pathos.** Job had three friends and I think it should be pointed out they were friends, in spite of their later condemnation by God. They responded to Job when crisis struck and they initially sat in silence with him. We must give them that much credit.

I am disturbed whenever I hear someone speak that they have a friend at the hospital or nursing home, but they will not go to visit because "I don't like those kinds of places." Well, too bad. It is not about you anyway.

Yes, they were friends of Job. But their friendship motivated them to give some very predictable and insufficient spiritual advice. They hid behind the conventional wisdom of the day, that believed if you are suffering, it must be because of something you have done.

There are those that hide behind religious clichés, thinking it will provide comfort. It happens all the time. We hear phrases like: "It must have been their time," "This is the Lord's will," "The Lord helps those that help themselves," or "God will not put anything on you that you cannot handle." It is not that some of these phrases are necessarily wrong, in fact, some can even be scriptural. They are just empty because they spoke more out of their own insecurities of faith than a real desire to struggle.

**3) There are some questions we bring that cannot or will not be answered.** That doesn't mean we do not ask them. It just means there are many things we will experience in this life that will not have resolution.

I am one of those Bible readers that like the book of Job precisely because it lacks resolution. We cannot easily explain away Job's sufferings, the perception of God's apathy, and then, when God does show up, there is a lack of a clear explanation or defense. In all of God's speeches, God still does not deal with the basic fundamental problem of Job: Job is righteous, and yet lost it all and suffers greatly.

There are some questions that cannot be answered, but there are things we can learn:

**God can be trusted.** In God's response we are reminded that in the face of our unanswered (and oftentimes unanswerable) questions, God can be trusted. It was God who laid the foundation of the world and God who holds it all together. Everything had to go exactly right for us to have life on this earth and to live thus far. What we tend to focus on, however, is how much has gone wrong.

Remember the song: *he's got the whole world in his hands...* Well we don't, but God does. And you know what? I am pretty relieved. As good as I am, I cannot run the world according to the morality or ethics of Greg.

Also, we find in God's question that the task of making sense and meaning is not solely God's responsibility, it is ours.

In essence, all the questions God asks Job come down to this: are you willing to take God seriously enough that when we enter into life's deepest mysteries, God can be trusted?

An irritation I have is when people in rather empty headed fashion go to the Bible, snatch out a verse and use it to explain away a problem, dilemma, or crisis. I do not know why Christians seem to be so opposed to think and reflect. Romans 8:28 is often quoted: "*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*"

God's questions are not simply rhetorical. I think everyday, God is asking us basic theological and moral questions that have to do with where do we place our trust? Whose creation is this anyway? What will we do when the world seems to go against us?

God is asking the question, and this time we have to answer. What we have to do is remain vigilant and alert that we not give the wrong answer or worse, ignore God.

These questions of God all want to know two basic things about human existence: **who are you and what are you going to do?** Well, get ready to stand up and act like a human being.