

Will you Worship God?

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Okay, everyone experiences suffering at some point in life, and the response to personal suffering! is often to ask the question, why? But suffering, of course, is not just a personal problem. Suffering is also a philosophical problem.

That's why we've probably heard questions like, why does God allow suffering? Or why is there so much evil in the world? And these questions essentially summarize one of the biggest objections that people have to believing in God, the problem of evil and suffering.

And many say that the reality of terrible evil and suffering in our world means they can't believe in God. And so the argument is presented along the lines of, if God is both all-powerful and if God is all-good, then he wouldn't have a world filled with evil and suffering.

But the world is filled with evil and suffering, therefore such a God can't exist. And yet the problem with the argument is it assumes that we could run this world better than God can.

And this is the stage that we've essentially reached in the book of Job. Job's been wanting God to explain the reason for his suffering, and now God's suffering, and now God speaks to Job.

[1 : 21] But interestingly, he doesn't give Job the reason for his suffering. Instead, God challenges Job with questions, and we saw that last week. And what God does is he silences Job for finding fault with how Job thinks God is doing a bad job at running his world.

And so next, what we see here is that God speaks to Job about two monster-like creatures. One is called Behemoth, which Ash read to us, and then the other is called Leviathan, which Shona read to us.

And God asks Job if he has got the power to subdue these great creatures. Now, you might think this is pretty disappointing, or this is a bit of an anticlimax after all the way that we've come in the book of Job.

And all poor Job has ever wanted is just some help and understanding from God why he's suffering. And so what is going on here? Well, God's speech does actually tackle the issue of evil and suffering in the world.

Because these two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, aren't just random creatures. They are symbols of supernatural evil. And God uses them in his speech to Job to make a vital point.

[2 : 42] A point to Job, but also a point to us. Because their monstrous evil power is far too much for a mere human being like Job to control.

And yet, what we see is that God has got them under his control. And that's the point. And so whether you call yourself a Christian or not, you need to hear God's speech to Job if you want to make any sense of the place of evil and suffering in this world.

And so God is dealing here with the subject of evil. And he's showing Job that humans have got no power over evil. But God has supreme power over it.

And so this afternoon, we're going to look at three points in this passage. First, the scarce power of man in chapter 40, 6 to 14. Second, the supernatural power of evil.

The rest of chapter 40 into 41. And then thirdly, the supreme power of God. So the scarce power of man, the supernatural power of evil, and the supreme power of God.

[3 : 49] So first, the scarce power of man. God really wants Job to realize just how limited his human power actually is. So look at verse 6 to 8 again.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

So Job's been accusing God of being unjust and of treating Job unfairly, suggesting that God was in the wrong. Condemning God in order to justify himself.

Essentially, Job put himself in the judge's seat, and he put God in the dock and wanted to question God and wanted God to answer him. So basically, what God's saying here is, Okay, Job, why don't you take the role of judge?

Judge of all the earth. You be the judge. You use your power to bring about justice in this world. On you go, Job. Go for it.

[4 : 55] And just hear how God gives this challenge in verse 9 to 13. Do you have an arm like God's? Can your voice thunder like his?

Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath. Look at all who are proud and bring them low. Look at all who are proud and humble them.

Crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them in the dust together. Shroud their faces in the grave. God's asking Job if Job can take God's place as judge.

And so there's an ironic humor here because, of course, Job can't do God's job for him. He doesn't have the strength of God. He doesn't have the thundering voice of God.

He's got no power to enforce justice in this world. And yet God challenges Job to sit in the judge's seat, to adorn himself with the judge's robes, to put the wig on, as it were, and to pronounce judgment over all the earth.

[5 : 58] But can Job pour out his anger at all evil and all injustice? Can Job round up all the proud, bring them down? Can Job find all the wicked and crush them?

Can Job pummel them into the ground and bury them in the dust? Because, you see, we know it's one thing to complain about evil and injustice, but it's another thing to be able to implement justice for all people in every place.

It's difficult to put the world to rights, even our small little world around us. It's hard to put it to rights too. And so God is saying here, Job, if you can do this successfully, then I'll acknowledge your power.

What does he say? Verse 14. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you. But Job can't do God's job.

Job can't manage the universe better than God because he's a human, so he doesn't have the power. And now Job is essentially being forced to admit that God is God.

[7 : 02] And so he's got no right to question God on how God governs his world. And so the point here is that our human power is actually really so weak and limited.

And as much as we like to think that we can do great and good things in this world, stop wars, end evil, prevent suffering, save lives, the scarce power of man, humanity, means we actually struggle to do very much at all.

So, like Job, I guess we arrogantly think that we can do a better job of running this world than God can.

That if we use our human knowledge, our human understanding, our human wisdom, our human power, then we can make this world a better place. And yet things seem to get worse instead of better.

As people, we end up doing more evil than good. Just think about this past week in the UK with our parliaments discussing the sanctity of life and voting on assisted suicide and on abortion, helping to kill people who are ill and being able to kill babies up to birth.

[8 : 21] Please don't tell me that killing off the vulnerable people in our society is a good thing. And so God's speech not only rebukes Job, but all of us for ever thinking that we know better than God, for thinking that we can propose a better way to govern this world.

And yet we know we can't be perfectly just. We can't always get it right and never get it wrong. And we don't have the power to ensure that justice is done.

And even when we try to play God, what happens in our world is that we just succeed in being more evil than good. And so this passage in Job is helping us see that we need to wake up to how scarce our human power really is.

Only God has supreme power. So only God can do what is right. And only God can even use evil for good. And that's why God goes on to tell Job about the supernatural power of evil in his rule of the cosmos.

And so let's move to our second point, the supernatural power of evil. So here God introduces these two monster-like creatures to press this home.

[9 : 42] Behemoth and Leviathan. So what or who are they? Now last time, if you were here last week, we were talking, our God was talking about wild animals in chapter 39.

And if God hadn't just challenged Job at the beginning of chapter 40, then we'd be forgiven for thinking that we're still here talking about animals.

Because some commentators think that Behemoth is a hippopotamus and Leviathan is a crocodile. And as you heard these words read, you would notice that, yes, there are the characteristics of a hippopotamus and there are the characteristics of a crocodile in there.

But they actually sound more like monsters than animals. And it would be not just a bit bizarre, it would be completely bizarre if God concluded the book of Job by talking about the hippopotamus and the crocodile.

Not exactly a satisfying answer to the problem of evil and suffering. Not one that we'd want to snap up. So God's description goes beyond any natural creatures here and describes supernatural monster-like creatures.

[11 : 00] Which may seem strange and unfamiliar to us, but the language here and the creatures described here would have been familiar to people in the ancient Near East.

Because this kind of symbolic language was common in the ancient world. So biblical writers also use this to describe cosmic realities. And that's essentially what is happening here.

Behemoth and Leviathan point to supernatural evil power. Which is actually something that's not yet been resolved in the book of Job.

That's the power and the place of evil and suffering in God's creation. And that's what these two monster-like creatures help us explain.

They're showing how mere human power cannot control or subdue evil. And the evil here is personified, symbolized in these two creatures that are so powerful.

[12 : 01] It's only God's supreme power, as we'll see, that can control them. So let's just look at them each in turn. First of all, Behemoth in chapter 40, verse 15 to 24.

Let's look down at verse 15 to 24, which we had read for us. This is the Lord describing the power of Behemoth. Now, Behemoth is the plural to the Hebrew word for beast.

So this is like super beast, mega beast here. And his great strength is emphasized in verse 16 to 18. But despite his strength, the point is he's made by God.

So verse 19, he's answerable to God. Verse 23 and 24, he can't be captured or tamed by human power. But the point is he can be controlled by God.

And so the question is, well, what or who is Behemoth supposed to symbolize? Well, just think, what's so evil and powerful that human beings cannot control it, but God can control it?

[13 : 12] And the answer is death. We've got no power over death. Human beings cannot defeat death. But God controls death.

And so I think it makes sense to see this powerful monster-like creature, Behemoth, as symbolizing death. My friend, Bob File, he argues persuasively in his academic book on Job that this creature, Behemoth, does represent death.

And I think he's right. And it's maybe a bit like the way that the grim reaper today is some kind of personification of death. You know, the hooded figure with the sharp scythe that represents evil and death.

And so Behemoth is a symbol of death. And all in the book of Job, what we've discovered is that death has never been far away from Job's mind. Job has wanted to die.

But God's saying to Job, Job, you cannot control death, but I can. So that's Behemoth. Now, the focus is far greater on this second creature who's given the name Leviathan in chapter 41.

[14 : 26] So who or what is Leviathan? Well, Leviathan is understood to be a symbol of evil. Or more specifically, he is representative of the devil.

In other words, Leviathan is seen as the personification of Satan. It's just the language is graphic and vivid and pictorial. But this is Satan.

So Leviathan here in the text has this supernatural power. We see that in verse 1 to 4. Leviathan can't be controlled. He can't be caught. And there's this dark comic irony in the description.

Verse 5. Can you make a pet of it like a bird or put it on a leash for the young women in your house? God's saying to Job, it's not like a pet that, you know, your mom and dad might go and buy a puppy for you and take the puppy home.

And everybody loves the puppy and cuddles the puppy. And it sits on their knee and sleeps in their bed and all the rest of it. This is no pet, God's saying to Job. This is evil personified.

[15 : 31] He can't be tamed. He can't be domesticated by human power. Because he is a terrifying monster. And he is set upon evil and chaos. He's like the kind of animal that you might bring home.

And he just eats everybody in the house. Evil. Look at verse 9. Any hope of subduing it is false. The mere sight of it is overpowering.

So Leviathan's supernatural power is a force to be reckoned with. Verse 14. Who dares open the doors of its mouth, ringed about with its fearsome teeth?

And then look at verse 18 to 21. Its snorting throws out flashes of light. Its eyes are like the rays of dawn. Flames stream from its mouth. Sparks of fire shoot out.

Smoke pours from its nostrils. As from a boiling pot over burning reeds. Its breath sets coals ablaze. And flames dart from its mouth. See how Leviathan is described?

[16 : 35] He's like a fire-breathing dragon. With eyes so bright. They're stronger than the morning sun. Breathing out fire from his nostrils. And smoke from its mouth.

It's a spine-chilling description of the power of Satan. The evil one. So verse 25 says, When it rises up, the mighty are terrified.

They retreat before its thrashing. And weapons are just useless against such power. Look at verse 26 to 29. There's nothing that can be done to stop this beast.

And so God's telling Job in this graphic way that, Job, you can't stop evil. Only God can control this supernatural power. And if you've been reading Job with us, we saw this at the very beginning of Job in chapter 1 and chapter 2, where Satan was introduced to us in the heavenly court with God. And we might wonder, where has Satan been since then? Well, he didn't disappear. He's the evil lurking behind Job's suffering. And now, as God speaks of Leviathan, it's as if God is unmasking Satan for us to help us see that he is active in this world.

[17 : 58] But it's not just the book of Job that confirms Leviathan as a symbol of Satan. Leviathan's found elsewhere in the Old Testament as a monster-like creature with this supernatural power that only God can control.

So there's some other verses that will come up on the screen of other places where we read about Leviathan. So Isaiah chapter 27. In that day, the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great, and powerful sword.

Leviathan, the gliding serpent. Leviathan, the coiling serpent. He will slay the monster of the sea. It's describing the day, in that day, the day when Satan will finally be destroyed.

And so there's this powerful sea creature who is also a gliding serpent. And then the next slide, Psalm 74. It was you who split open the sea.

By your power, you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave it as food to the creatures of the desert. So Leviathan's got all these heads now.

[19 : 09] But again, the psalm is speaking of God's power over Satan. And then the next one, Psalm 104. How many are your works, Lord? In wisdom you made them all.

The earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro.

And Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. And the image here is of God sticking Leviathan in the sea to frolic around, keeping him contained.

Just like we used to do with our small children when we had the playpen in the lounge. Just put the child in the playpen and they couldn't go anywhere. They're stuck. And all of these pictures are saying to us, God is the one who's in charge of Satan and evil.

He can control them. But these references also point us to the New Testament and the book of Revelation and the apocalyptic literature, which is also graphic and symbolic.

[20 : 13] So Revelation chapter 12, the great dragon was hurled down, that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

Those words, that ancient snake, come from the Garden of Eden. And Genesis chapter 3, where they refer to the devil, Satan. And then Revelation 20, he sees the dragon, that ancient snake, who is the devil or Satan, and bound him.

And so can you see how Satan comes throughout the pages of Scripture in many different guises? Leviathan, the great sea monster, the ancient snake, the great dragon, all symbolic of supernatural power and of cosmic evil.

It's as if God is drawing back the curtain, pulling it back for Job to get a glimpse into Satan's evil power at work in this world.

And to show that there's no way this evil can be subdued by a mere human like Job. God's showing how humans have no chance of defeating the power of death or evil.

[21 : 32] And so how does this apply to us? Well, we should never underestimate the supernatural power of evil in this world. It is a powerful force.

And behind evil, we're being told, is Satan, the devil himself. And that's why it's such a strong power. And it's a power that mere human beings cannot overcome.

But the good news is, the supreme power of God can overcome it. And so that takes us on to our third and final point. The scarce power of man, the supernatural power of evil, and the supreme power of God.

So whilst Behemoth and Leviathan do have superpower, the Lord's power is supreme. Now this is not like the force in Star Wars.

If you enjoy the Star Wars movies where there's a light side and there's a dark side, and they're both equal, and the conflict just goes back and forth, back and forth, and it just seems as if one is never more powerful than the other.

[22 : 38] No, here the Lord has supreme power over Satan and his evil power. So look back at chapter 40, verse 10 and 11.

Sorry, chapter 41, 10 and 11. No one is fierce enough to rouse it. Who then is able to stand against me? This is God speaking. Who has a claim against me that I must pay?

Everything under heaven belongs to me. Everything belongs to God, so we're being told Satan belongs to God too. He may be powerful, but he is one of God's creatures.

Look down at verse 33 and 34, chapter 41. Nothing on earth is its equal. A creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty.

It is king over all that are proud. God's saying there's nothing on earth equal to Satan. He is king over all who are proud.

[23 : 41] In the New Testament, Jesus calls him the ruler of this world. Paul calls him the ruler of the kingdom of the air, so he's powerful. He controls people.

But we're being told, he can never operate outside of God's control. And we saw this happening in the early chapters of Job.

God granted Satan permission to allow Job to suffer. But God wouldn't allow Satan to take Job's life. Because it was as if God has Satan on a leash.

He's allowed to go so far, but no further. And God wants Job to get that while he does allow evil to a limited extent, which is surely a reassurance to Job in his suffering, he will not let it go further than he wants.

And this should be a reassurance to us in our suffering too. Because when we suffer, or when we sit with loved ones who suffer, we should do so with the knowledge that the all-powerful and all-loving God will never let evil or suffering go one bit further than he intends.

[25 : 05] I wonder if you've ever seen an electric dog fence. In action. I'm not sure if they're actually legal in the UK. It's certainly legal in the USA.

And they're really effective, as I discovered by default when we were over in the United States visiting my brother-in-law and his family. So there was a really fierce dog, like just some kind of crossbreed between some monster and some chihuahua or something.

really like a dog I'd never seen before. And it was in Port Chester, and along the street that my brother-in-law and his family lived on, for some reason in that street, no garden, no yard, had a fence around it at all, just grass.

And one day as we walked past the house to get to the train station, this dog barked like mad and just came charging towards us. And we got a shock, but not as big a shock as the dog got.

Because as the dog came to the edge of the yard and reached the grass and the pavement, or sorry, the sidewalk, as it came there, it just stopped.

[26 : 17] It went quiet, and it walked away with its tail between its legs. And I realized that there was this invisible fence all the way around the garden that was connected to the collar around the

dog's neck.

And the dog just got enough of a shock to stop it getting near us. It could only get to the edge or the boundary of the garden. And this happened every time we passed the house on holiday, which was great entertainment for the kids.

They just loved taunting this weird-looking animal because they knew it couldn't touch us. It could get close, but it couldn't do us any harm.

And you know, this is what happens here to Job. God's got Satan under control, only allowing him to go so far, but no further.

And so we're being taught in graphic detail here that God has power over Satan. And of course, it raises questions, doesn't it, about the relationship between God and evil.

[27 : 23] And some might think, well, this just creates a big problem for us because if God is the creator with supreme power and Satan is a creature with supernatural power, then does that mean God created evil or that God is the source of evil?

No. No. God's creation, you remember, the beginning was perfect. And so where did evil come from? It came from the devil in the Garden of Eden.

He wasn't created an evil being. And we're not sure, we can't be sure how and why the devil fell, but there are references suggesting some kind of angelic rebellion.

But he's the snake in the garden, remember, who tempted Eve. And the consequence of Eve disobeying God and eating the fruit along with Adam was the entrance of sin and of evil and of suffering and of death into our world.

And so the book of Job is telling us that while Satan and evil exist, they're under the control of God, which is hard for us to get our heads around, especially when we're suffering.

[28 : 42] But have you ever thought about the alternative? Is there a better explanation for evil and suffering than what the book of Job, as it fits within the Bible, tells us?

Well, Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist and atheist, thinks there is a better explanation. Listen to what he says in one of his books in *River Out of Eden*.

He says, in a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice.

The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, and no other good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.

DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music. So see what happens with this problem of evil and suffering when you remove God from the picture.

[29 : 50] If you take God out of the equation, then there's no ultimate justice, there's no design, there's no purpose, there's no value to life, there's no reason or purpose or hope in suffering.

And I don't think we can live in such a bleak and hopeless world where the best response to evil and suffering is that, well, we're all just dancing to the music of our DNA.

Try telling that to the Ukrainian victims of war. Oh, Vladimir Putin. Yeah, he was just dancing to the music of his own DNA.

That's why so many people are dead. Or explain to the victims who've been sexually abused by Jeffrey Epstein. Yeah, he was just dancing to the music of his DNA.

It won't do, will it? We won't accept it. And of course, the issue of evil and suffering is complicated, but the perspective here in Job, which informs the Christian worldview, does actually help.

[30 : 57] It acknowledges the cause and the effect of evil and suffering. And it says to us, this is not how the world was meant to be.

And God has evil on a leash. And so God can even use evil and suffering for his greater purposes, even if we just don't understand why.

And we're also assured in this Christian worldview that, well, God is loving and he's just. And so ultimate justice will be done in the end.

And one day, all wrong will be put right. And that's why Christianity makes best sense of life in this world and life full of suffering.

Listen to how C.S. Lewis put it in his book, *The Great Divorce*. He said, they say of some temporal suffering, no future bliss can make up for it, not knowing that heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.

[32 : 05] He's describing how the supreme power of God is so infinitely greater than all other powers that God's not only going to defeat evil and suffering for good, he will, but whatever has happened will somehow serve his perfect plan and make the future even more glorious for having gone through it.

And that's why the Bible story, including Job, helps us make best sense of our suffering. Of course, we see far more than Job by living this side of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so what God's speech to Job is here is a preview, a trailer, of Satan's defeat. And we know, because Jesus has died and rose to life again, we know that Satan has already been defeated. Jesus has won the victory through his death and resurrection. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus became fully human, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

So death and the one who holds the power of death, Satan, are too strong for mere human beings. We are held in slavery, unable to defeat death, Satan, even unable to subdue death.

[33 : 46] It's coming our way. And yet we're told Jesus destroys the devil and delivers us from death. And that's why we must all turn from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ if we are to share in his victory over Satan and sin and death.

Because through God's speech in Job and then through the suffering of Jesus on the cross, we've got the assurance that death, behemoth, and the devil, Satan, Leviathan, are under the supreme power and control of God.

Even to the extent that God would permit such evil and suffering and the death of his son to play a part in his greatest work.

because when Jesus died on the cross, what looked like death for him and what looked like victory for Satan when he did his very worst and looked as if he'd won, it was the very moment of his defeat.

Because Jesus rose triumphant from death, opening up the door of eternal life into God's perfected new creation.

[35 : 13] And so, as we finish off, if the supreme power of God used the supernatural power of evil to accomplish his purposes for ultimate good for this world and for you and me, then surely we must bow down before this God in worship and adoration.

And as we do so, there's no guarantee that evil and suffering won't come our way. And yet we can trust, even then, that it will be used in our lives as God accomplishes his purposes for our good and for our salvation.

Let's pray.