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“Behind the Curtain of Creation”



*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’”*

In all the stress and craziness of this past year and more we can be forgiven if there has been an increase in Job-like feelings, as if the world...*no, as if the Universe*, is stacked against us.

Job believed that if you are good and hardworking, that you will be rewarded in this life; certainly, there will be some measure of hardship but not everything is aligned against us! If life is constantly giving us lemons there must be something wrong with how the world works or something wrong with us. Job’s friends blame him that he must have sinned. Job instead blames God, seeking remedy in a trial. He challenges God to a legal hearing, convinced if he could plead his case, he will be vindicated, “Let the almighty answer me!” (Job 31:35)

God answers Job not by explaining why the world is just, but instead in a long discourse of the

vastness and mysteries of creation – four chapters worth!

Essentially God explains that my creation is much grander, more wonderful and incomprehensible than you can ever imagine. And if you begin to grasp that you will see the answer to your question will not seem quite so important.

Perhaps, like Job, our railing at the world can also be mitigated if we come to appreciate this creation even more.

Nature discloses the character of a God who would invest reality with something more than mere existence. When our daughter, Liz, was five years old, there was a boy in her class with a bright, infectious smile. I remember her asking me, “Daddy why is there such a thing as a boy with a smile?”

Little did she know her experience of being overwhelmed had been described three thousand years before in Proverbs:

*Three things are too wonderful for me;  
four I do not understand:  
the way of an eagle in the sky,  
the way of a snake on a rock,  
the way of a ship on the high seas,  
and the way of a man with a girl.*

The author is overwhelmed by the artistry of life and the intimacy of love. Its mere existence sets one to swoon.

In Job, God reveals that stars do not just twirl in space, but the *morning stars sing together*. Composers like Gustav Holst in the 1910's sought to compose the music of the spheres in his orchestral suite, *The Planets*. Later today, we will sing a hymn tune based on the Jupiter movement. There is something in that tune that sets our spirits to soaring in the heavens.

The truths of the Job text were laid down at a time when no one knew what the stars or planets were. But in our scientific age the wonders have multiplied rather than been explained away.

The planets may not so much sing and shout but they truly do an intricate dance and each new generation of scientists revealed another complexity in this eternal waltz.

Professor Frederick Gregory of the University of Florida in his *History of Science* lectures explains that in the early years of science, it was thought the orbits were circles, since the circle was the perfect shape they reflected the perfection of God. But there were small errors which eventually showed the orbits to be ellipses, a somewhat flattened circle, and the pace of the planets sped up or slowed down to carve out the same amount of space per period of time. But the next generations of scientists found that the ellipse does not keep its orientation, but also processes which adds another layer of harmony, a little sort of jig with every completed orbit as a tip of the hat to the creator.

In those times, most scientists gawked at God for the vast secrets that our creator revealed to us. God is the ultimate puzzle master, who gives us tests of mind to expand them and create awe! And just as we think we have it figured out, a truth from left field keeps our heads scratching. Like planets that rotate, spinning like tops in the plane of the solar system, all except

for one! Rather than spinning, Neptune seems to roll through its orbit.

This section of Job is an homage to this incredible creation but even more to the God who made it.

And though scientists swooned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a trend that began to believe we had almost figured it all out. In fact, for a short time people avoided entering the field of physics because it was believed that only minor details were left to discover. Then later God was taken out of the equation altogether as the brilliant and irascible physicist Stephen Hawking so famously opined:

*Time itself began at the moment of the Big Bang, it was an event that could not have been caused or created by anyone or anything...*

His mind and his hubris were amazing! And this trend is spreading across society. Ross Douthat examines this conundrum in a New York Times piece entitled, "Can the Meritocracy Find God?" He cites a Gallup Poll that shows for the first time fewer than half of Americans claim membership in a congregation. He speaks about how faith now plays second fiddle to other personal affiliations such as sports, ethnic identity and politics. He asserts a

key piece in this decline is the extreme marginalization of religion in American intelligentsia:

*The average Ivy League professor, management consultant or Google engineer is not necessarily a strict materialist, but they have all been trained in a kind of scientism, which regards strong religious belief as fundamentally anti-rational, miracles as superstition, the idea of a personal God as so much wishful thinking.*

So certain segments of the intelligentsia have eschewed religion placing themselves on the pinnacle of existence. But perhaps believers are not much better. Like some scientists, some religious leaders believe they know it all and with equal pride, vanity and self-aggrandizement claim a corner on the truth and use it in awful ways such as the suppression of woman and LGBTQ people.

Both of these "know it all positions" of the secular intelligentsia and the self-righteous religious person are answered in Job by the simple question God asks, "Where were you?"

Job was debating God, believing he had been treated unjustly. But how

can the one who created justice and its very concept be questioned by its creation. So God explains by pointing to those pieces of creation that are more vast and complex than any human mind can ever know.

*Where were you billions of years ago when the earth was made, when the seas were brought forth, when the dawn was born...*

To think that as we know more about the Bible or more about the world that we can comprehend the vastness of all things and the one who created is like the ant who claims to know the ways of humans. Its tiny mind cannot comprehend. Our minds cannot grasp the vast time of creation nor the minute insanity of quantum mechanics. This field of science is one of the most empirically verified in all history but it leaves even the most brilliant scientists scratching their heads, unable to make heads or tails of it – much summed up by eminent physicist, Roger Penrose, “Quantum mechanics makes absolutely no sense.”

So we need wonder to keep our perspective. In fact, despite the recent trend away from God, two of the greatest minds ever, Einstein and Newton, were in part drawn to science because it took one to something

deeper and richer than the mere facts of the world. As Einstein said:

*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the **mysterious**. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead...*

Einstein’s quote applies equally to the mindless religious autocrats and secularized materialists.

In this exchange, Job is changed by the challenge. It was his engagement and wrestling with God that gave him the insight.

As one pastor explained, “God tells Job, ‘Your categories are too small, you think in terms of the courtroom. I think in terms of the cosmos. ...Your human theories cannot possibly contain the complexity of the universe, nor can they contain the chaos. For chaos is part of creation as surely as crocodiles roam the Nile.’”

Job responds to the grand description of creation saying, “I had heard of you by hearing of the ear but now my eyes see you.” He realizes that he was trying to fit God into his own moral framework and perspective, but

God's perspective is one of infinity and eternity neither of which a human is capable of comprehending.

There are times when we feel like Job and rather than shrink within we should stand up as God says, gird our loins, and confront the divine. One woman I know was afflicted with the terrible degenerative disease of Parkinson's. She loves to dance and she loves to write. Both are being stolen bit by bit, though she was not giving in easily.

She found grace in debate with God, as did Job. Like most anyone, at times she feels bitter. That is when she gets feisty.

She told me she gets angry and asks "God why me!" But in the exhaustion, like a toddler whose tantrum has played out, she is ready to listen. She thinks that if in this vast world that some people will get Parkinson's, it might as well be her. She said:

*Once I give up, everything is good.  
. . . When I give in, I am okay. . . I  
think, "Who do I want to have  
it?" . . . the sickness. . . and I think  
about all these wonderful people.  
. . . and I realize it's okay that it is  
me."*

For Job it was the wonder of creation that helped him accept his trials, for this woman it was the richness of life and the beauty of people.

Finally, as Christians, our hope goes a step further. We believe in the mystery of God and the wonder of creation, but we also believe in a God who will take all the discordant notes played in the symphony of life, the pain, the toil, the injustice, and redeem it, restore it, and lead us not back to the blessed state of Eden, but forward into an even more sublime eternity, at home with God. Amen.