

Sermon Draft (August 13, 2023) for Samuel

Text: Job 38:4–18

Sermon: “God is in Control”

The readings for this morning are keyed by two themes, both of which are evident in our sermon text, the Old Testament Reading from Job: the omnipotence of God and trusting in him. Our Psalm proclaims especially the omnipotence of God, who grants his people deliverance from their distress. Then the Romans 10 Epistle connects the sermon text with the theme of trust; Paul emphasizes trust in the Lord for salvation. The Gospel actually brings together the two themes, God’s omnipotence and trust in him. Regarding omnipotence, Jesus, the Son of God, walks on the sea, and because of him, the storm wind ceases. Regarding trust, Peter learns to have full reliance on Jesus, who saves him from sinking in the sea.

Our text occurs in that section of the Book of Job in which God speaks to Job, after Job has gone through much suffering, has done some complaining, and has questioned whether God rules in a completely just manner.

The passage from Job, which is our text, is in that portion of the book in which God is speaking to Job. Job, as you recall, had been struck with horrendous calamity and had been experiencing terrible suffering.

As a result, Job has done some complaining and has questioned whether God is always just. In response, God emphasizes his role as Creator and Sustainer of the world, and that his ways are far above man's ways and his power far surpasses man's power.

Our text, then, makes us think of how God rules over the world, and specifically over the human race. We are led to consider that God's rule in this world is total and good and affects both unbelievers and believers.

God has total rule and control of all aspects of his creation. God reminds Job of this reality. This means that what God plans does indeed take place. Nothing can stop his will from being accomplished. This is because God is almighty. His power exceeds any other power. Our text emphasizes God's omnipotence.

God's rule is good, because he has infinite, perfect wisdom. God's wisdom is far above our wisdom and understanding, a truth which God highlights for Job. Thus, God does not make mistakes. He rules in a holy, just, righteous manner. Thus, God does not reign in a capricious manner. He has a wonderful master plan. God is ruling everything for the welfare of his Church, as Scripture reveals.

How does the total and good rule of God affect the unbeliever? God wants unbelievers (“the wicked” in our text) to repent and be saved. Because God is merciful and patient, at times a wicked man continues on in his sinful living, and could even prosper. But the wicked will get away with nothing before the holy, all-seeing, all-knowing God.

According to his timetable, God will send his righteous judgments against the unbeliever who persists in his rebellion against the Almighty. Yet even in these judgments there is a distinction, which highlights the mercy of God. With some unbelievers, God’s judicial action will affect them negatively in this life and will result in their destruction in the life to come. With others, however, the judgments will work to shatter their stubbornness and self-righteousness and make them ready to hear the Gospel, through which they will be brought to faith and salvation.

In all of his dealing with unbelievers, God is acting ultimately for the good of his Church. The Book of Job says, “[God] *makes nations great, and he destroys them*” (Job 12:23). After the Israelites conquered Canaan and settled in the land, many began to practice the idolatry of their pagan neighbors.

God let various Gentile nations and peoples conquer and rule over portions of Israel. These rulers treated the Israelites in a harsh manner. This made the Israelites cry out to the Lord for rescue, in sincere, proper repentance. God in his grace would then deliver his covenant people and end the rule of the pagan nation oppressing the Israelites.

Later, in the time of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, God raised up the Babylonians and made them powerful so that they could conquer unfaithful Judah. Many from the Southern Kingdom were taken into exile, but as a result of this subjugation, there emerged a purified remnant of true believers, zealous for the Lord. Then, when God ended the power of the Babylonians by means of the Medes and Persians, this remnant was able to come to the homeland, to Palestine, and from that group the Messiah would one day be born.

Though God's handling of history will often elude our understanding, as it did Job's (Job 38:4–18)—especially when we suffer—we can be certain that he is always guiding it for our ultimate, eternal good.

How does the total and good rule of God affect the believer? God blesses his people richly, with both physical and spiritual blessings. And God also allows trials, calamities, and sadnesses to come into the lives of believers. These afflictions are disguised blessings. If in all things God is working for the good of his Church, and the Church is made up of individual believers, he is so working in the lives of those individuals, including you and me. How can suffering and sadness be for our good?

The Lord can use tribulation to give his children chastening, or corrective discipline, when they need it. This will have the effect of driving them to the Word and Sacrament, through which they will be led to confess their wayward behavior, comforted with the Gospel assurance of forgiveness and strengthened to straighten out and do what is God-pleasing.

One example of this is seen in the life of David (2 Samuel 11–12). He committed grievous sins and was brought to repentance and spiritual restoration through the Word of God spoken by the prophet Nathan. Still, he had to endure chastening from the Lord, and this corrective discipline benefited David so that he grew spiritually (see Psalm 51). David became the golden standard by which later kings in Israel were measured.

Another example: Some of the Corinthian Christians were going to the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor 11:17–34). They were disciplined by God so that they would repent and not be lost spiritually and condemned to hell. It can always be said that trials in a believer's life will work for the refining of his faith, again through the Means of Grace. All believers on earth are constantly in need of refining.

Think of the life of Job. The Book of Job emphasizes, at the beginning, that he was a righteous, godly man. But as the book unfolds, we see some rough edges to his faith. He protests a bit too much his being innocent of any wrongdoing and gives evidence of being tainted somewhat by a theology of glory, the belief that a godly life means earthly prosperity. By the end of the book, however, after God has spoken to him, Job has been properly humbled. He is a wiser man, and he is stronger in the faith.

A key message of the Book of Job, though, is that we might not know, at least at first, the full reason, or all the reasons, why we or other believers suffer.

Job was unaware of the dialogue between God and Satan at the start of the book, of the contest between the two, and of how God's purpose prevailed, with Job standing forth as a trophy of God's grace.

Job's life continues to present powerful theology to believers today. Perhaps Job learned the full story of his situation at a later point in his life. Often, however, a child of God will not have the complete answer to the question "Why?" until he or she enters heaven.

Therefore, when you ask "Why?" you can tell yourself, "Somehow this suffering has its place in God's good master plan for this world's history, in his wise governing of all things. Keep on trusting in the Lord." But if in response to that, the further question should arise in your heart, "Why should I trust the Lord?" then may you always firmly answer, "Because of the cross of Christ!" That is God's clearest revelation of his nature—and the undeniable, everlasting proof of his tremendous love for me. Because of the cross and the empty tomb, I can be absolutely certain of my salvation, that God is for me, and that I can trust his rule.

The rule of the almighty, wise God in this world is total and good. It is good and wise in itself, good for the Church, and good for each of us individually, as children of God.

Amen