

He > Me | Citizens | May 15, 2022

Thanks Tim for those kind words ;) Man, it's good to see y'all. *** I believe as a guest preacher, I'm contractually obligated to say something about bald Tim, so this is me doing that****

Like Tim said, I've been down this church planting road that you are all on and, to be honest, I'm a bit envious of you because these early years are truly some really special ones.

I know it might not always feel like that... I know for some it probably feels mobile and unsettled and you wonder if you're ever gonna have a permanent building to call home, and what will the future exactly hold...

... but just so you know, the things that you're doing now, the ways you serve, the relationships you build, that stuff really does go a long way in shaping the type of church you will one day become... and, and I say this from experience, God will truly do some of his most formative work in you - in how you understand who you are as a disciple, and who the church is as a people - in these early years.

And certainly God continues to do that and more in other seasons, but, all I'm trying to say is that there is something special for you in this one. So, drink it up for all it's worth.

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Today, I want to talk with you about God. Which, hopefully, surprises no one...

From what I understand, over the past several weeks, you've been learning a good bit about His character... how He's a God abounding in steadfast love and mercy... how His gospel is good news for both the person who considers themselves "good", as well as those who know they are "bad".

You've been cultivating an understanding of who He is and why that matters for you, and it's on that foundation that I would like to build.

A.W. Tozer has famously said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us..."

Because who we understand God to be affects all kinds of things - it affects how we live, things we do, things we don't do, how we think about ourselves, how we pray, the attitudes we take towards God and others and all sorts of other things... for example...

- if we believe God is cold and distant... we'll live that way - like He's not all that involved in daily life... no need to pray... because He won't answer... Plus, since he's cold, He's probably kind of disappointed in us anyways...
- If we believe he's sort of just like a cosmic therapist or butler instead of the King of Kings, we'll approach him a bit more like Santa - with our list of wants and troubles - than someone to be worshiped.

And there are lots of other examples, but point being, **knowing God for who He really is... matters.**

And today, I want to help us step into that a little bit by spending some time in **the book of Job**.

It'll be a little bit of a journey, and I'm going to kinda give us a 30,000 foot overview to start and then we'll really focus on chapters 38-42.

So, let's just jump in at the beginning... in Job 1

Job 1:1 "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job."

To give you a bit of context, the Book of Job is something of an anomaly in the Old Testament.

For example, where exactly is Uz? Scholars don't really know. What time period was this written in? Well... we don't really know that either. Well, what's the genre, then? Is this history, poetry, or something like a parable? Yes? Again, we... don't really know.

And most scholars will actually argue that this is kinda the point - that the lack of detail we're given is intentional. It's supposed to draw us to pay more attention to what the story is about - the universal themes about the human experience that it taps into - more than anything else. Themes like:

- **What do we do when God doesn't make sense to us?**

- What should we think when God does, or rather doesn't do something we expect Him to? When His actions don't seem to make sense according to what we know about Him.
- How should we approach the times in our lives when we're touched with suffering and hardship and that voice inside of us is crying out, "WHY?!"

The truth is - everyone of us, if you haven't already, will likely find **ourselves in positions** like that at some point in our lives. It's a part of being human.

I'd be willing to bet some of you are living with those sorts of questions right now. Where you can't quite make sense of things and you'd like God to give some answers.

And just for what it's worth, if you've ever felt that way or even felt like feeling that way or thinking those things made you something of a **wallflower or an outsider in God's community**, I hope you'll find the experience of Job to be a comfort and encouragement to you... that's what the whole book is about...

You're not alone. In fact, the Bible welcomes you into its story... and fwiw, I know Citizens is a great place to be if you find yourself there.

But, this is what the story of Job is all about...

The opening pages tell us that **Job is a good man with a good life**.

He has lots of wealth, lots of prosperity, lots of kids and he's described as being a "**blameless**" and "**upright**" man, someone who loves God and follows Him as best as he can.

In fact, it tells us that he even goes out and makes **sacrifices daily** for all 10 of his kids "just in case" they happen to sin unintentionally that day." [I got a 7 year old and I'll tell you right now if he sins unintentionally, I'm just like, "Yo, thats between you and Jesus" but that's not Job.](#)

But in verses 6-12, the scene shifts and we're taken into this weird sort of **heavenly staff meeting** with God and his heavenly council where the Accuser, or as we call him Satan, comes to God in verses 9-11, and says, "You know, the only reason people like Job love and worship you is because you give him a good life. If you took his good life away, he wouldn't want to love or worship you anymore."

Job 1:12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand."

God says, "Ok, then take everything from him and we'll see how that goes." Which right out the gate raises some questions, right? Like God, you said what?

But regardless, Satan does it... and get this... Job doesn't stop loving or honoring God. He doesn't accuse God of wrongdoing.

Verses 21-22 Job says... "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

In fact, throughout the whole narrative, while Job strongly contend for answers to the questions his suffering creates, and he strongly asserts that he doesn't deserve the suffering he goes through, he **never once accuses God** of being wrong or sinning against him.

Which, for what it's worth, I think is an important little nugget for when we consider our own questions, doubts and struggles.

Because it's very easy for our questions about God to **slide into accusations** against Him, isn't it?

To go from, "God, what's going on?" to, "God, you're wrong!" And, as I hope we'll soon see, that's a bit problematic.

But this starts a little back and forth where Satan progressively takes more and more away from Job - all of his kids, all of his wealth, even his health. And still Job blesses God.

But, in all this, he does have questions. Just like we would. He doesn't understand why things have gone this way... it doesn't make sense to him.

And in the next several chapters we see that he has **3 friends** who come to visit him in his grief. And they all have different takes on why this happened.

Now, sometimes these friends get a bad rap. People say they weren't good friends because of the answers they try to give Job.

But I want to say, that's not true. These were good friends. They came to be with Job in his darkest moments - taking time off work, away from family, to just come and sit with the person they cared about in his suffering - these are good friends.

They are just **good friends with poor theology** - much like some of your good friends.

So, when Job starts to speak and question what God is doing, their response is, **Job 4:7-8** "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright ever cut off... those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."

Essentially... "Job, look, you must've done something. We know how God works and He wouldn't have done this to you unless you deserved it."

They have a view of God that is **easily explainable** - God is just and deals justly. Therefore, if something goes wrong in your life, then you must've done something to deserve it. If you would just repent, it will go better for you."

And Job is like, "I'm telling you. That's not true. I haven't done anything to warrant this." And for the next 35 chapters, Job goes back and forth with his friends trying to make sense out of God and his circumstances.

Maybe you've been in a spot like that before yourself... and I'm not talking about the type of hardship brought into your life because of **your sin or your foolishness... or that of others**...we certainly all have that... where we have to live with the consequences of actions... that's a sermon for another time.

Rather, I'm talking about how **life has just not turned out** how you thought it would... you thought you'd be **married** by now... you thought your **career** would be different... you never thought **loss** would touch your life in the way that it has... and like Job, you would like God to provide some answers...

And that brings us to chapter 38... God does answer Job, but much like his circumstances, the answer isn't exactly what Job expected either...

Job 38:1-3 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind after all has been said and done and argued and pleaded, God actually steps in and speaks... He comes to Job in a whirlwind and that's just this illustrative way to communicate His majesty and might... and he says... **2** "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? God's funny way of saying, "Who do you think you are?" **3** Dress for action like a man the Hebrew is more literally translated: "Gird your loins" which I think carries just a little bit more oomph than "dress for action" **I will question you, and you make it known to me.** Essentially, "I hear the questions you have of me... but allow me to turn the tables a bit here... and give *you* some things to consider.

And then God rattles off some **60 odd questions** in a row of his own about Job's understanding of things. Ranging from all sorts of topics - from the vastness of space, to the earth's weather patterns to animals on the land and creatures in the sea.

Like in verse 4 he begins with **4** "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding..."

Job, were you there when I made this world that you live in? Tell me if you know how I did it.

12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place..."

Essentially, Job, remind me, who has brought the sun up every morning that you've been alive? Me or you?"

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? **32** Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children

These are all referring to different constellations and God is asking "Did you set these stars in their place?"

Job 41:1-5 "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? **2** Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?... **5** Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls?"

This is a reference to some giant sea creature - some scholars think he's talking about a whale or an alligator or a hippo - and I don't really know what it is, but God is basically saying, "Job, can you make that thing your pet? Can you put it on a leash?"

And there are some really random ones in there, too. Like in **39:1**, "Job, how much do you know about the reproduction habits of goats? Or 39:13-17 where God essentially asks, "Can you tell me why are ostriches so big and proud, but also so ugly and stupid? Do you know these things?"

And in all of this, God is asking, "Who's the expert here, Job... is it me or is it you?"

And that might sound a bit over-the-top like, "Is God just trying to drop the hammer on Job?" But, the answer would be no.

What God is doing is giving Job some perspective. Helping him see, "Job if you can't fully fathom the mystery of all these natural things, do you really think you are in a position to fully understand eternal things?"

Before all of this... Job thought he actually was in that position... and, you know what? We often do, too.

We live in an age that author **Tom Nichols** calls his book of the same title: "**The Death of Expertise.**" Where we have so much content in front of us, whether it's Google, or social media, or the 24-hour news cycle where instead of making us more intellectually-advanced, we now think we are the experts on any given topic.

He says, " **These are dangerous times. Never have so many people had so much access to so much knowledge and yet have been so resistant to learning anything...the public constantly searches for the loopholes in expert knowledge that will allow them to disregard all expert advice they don't like.**

All my finance pros who've ever met a crypto-bro know exactly what he's talking about. Shoot, Covid-19 was a walking case-study in this...

Fwiw, if you guys wanna know a little bit about me - this is also my speed. I'm a bit of a case study in this. I tend to be a little bit of a hypochondriac. Not a lot a bit, just a little bit. My wife says, I have a flare for the dramatic.

I'm the guy who will check his symptoms on WebMD and be convinced that this ingrown hair is carcinoma. It's a problem, I know. And I need someone to say to me, "Bailey... stay in your lane. Take this topical treatment and go get a good night's sleep."

Some of you - doctors, nurses, teachers - you went to school for years upon years to become experts in your field. I can't imagine how you feel when you have to interact with people like me or worse. Who come to you, for whatever reason, who say, "I know you went to school for a decade, but I read an article, and my friend's friend's mom had this thing happen... so I think you're wrong." How bewildering!

But, to an extent, **this is the air we breathe**... doubt, skepticism, and near constant distrust of authority... it's basically

what it means to be an American at this point.

But here's the thing - **we often turn this on God, too**. We believe we're the experts, or have enough perspective, to tell God how he should be running things, too.

We even believe we **have enough information** to even accuse God of wrongdoing when we can't make sense of Him or what's going on in our lives or in the world.

Especially, in times of uncertainty, struggle or doubt it is common occurrence to put God on trial, demanding He answer to our charges against Him.

And please don't mishear me, I'm not saying that doubt or having questions is a bad thing and you should feel bad for having them.

Not even remotely. In fact, most of the mature disciples of Jesus I know have struggled, at different points in time, deeply with doubt.

The point is not to be a person without questions, but rather to be a person who has some perspective on who it is they're questioning.

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I fear many of us have never truly wrestled with or **grasped that God** is a being of this kind of unfathomable magnitude, wisdom and goodness.

We haven't truly grasped that He is a being that has perspective that we don't have - perspective that we really *can't* have.

For many of us, we have not **rejected God per se**, but have merely reduced him - Assumed we are on the same playing field with him and that if anything he's just maybe just a little bit smarter than we are.

But what we fail to realize is that if we have a God who is big enough to question, then we also have a God who is big enough to have answers that we can't understand.

In the words of author **Evelyn Underhill** "A god small enough to be understood is not big enough to be worshipped."

Or as fellow North Carolinian pastor **JD Greear** says "a God we can predict, instruct, and control is not a God who will captivate our affections or command our devotion. He's not God enough."

He's a God we can never really trust because he is not wise or glorious enough to account for the glories and the tragedies of our existence.

And because we have never truly considered how much greater his wisdom must be than ours, how much higher his ways, or how much purer his thoughts, we think we just need a few more answers - just a little more explanation - and that's not just something he *could* do to satisfy us, but something, rather, he *must* do if he wants our worship... not to mention that those answers must also be ones we personally agree with, too.

But we're wrong. And that's what God is trying to get Job to see.

What it means to be God is that He's on a playing field all on his own. He works in ways we do not always comprehend and He is not captive to our reasoning as if He were on trial, or an employee who owes us a report...

Simply put, if God is God, then we are not. And that means he doesn't actually owe us anything.

The message of God to Job and subsequently the message of Job to us is: Answers are not the most important thing - the most important thing is knowing that **HE is GREATER than ME**

That he is a God whose greatness is so great that it would make our minds explode to try to truly comprehend him. And whose goodness is so good - that if we really and truly saw it - we wouldn't know if we actually wanted to draw closer or run away.

He invites us to have some perspective, too.

So, let me invite you to do a **little mental exercise** with me. It'll probably work better if you close your eyes, but you don't have to. As best I can, I just want to try to help get some of this perspective.

So, I want you to start by taking a few breaths... Now, think about those breaths for a moment. Those breaths that you feel rising and falling in your chest, at this very moment are being graciously given to you and sustained by this God.

Whom **Isaiah 42:5** describes **who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.**

He knows every molecule coursing through your body. He is causing them to converge in your lungs and feed your blood circulation. And He is holding together every cell within you right. Understanding the precise ways that each one works - exactly as he ordered it to. He knows what each one is doing and he is keeping them going.

And yet God is greater than that...

He knows what sounds you're hearing right now. Including but not limited to my voice. And the feelings and emotions and thoughts that arise in you at this very moment.

As the Psalmist says **You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:2**

And he knows why you're feeling them and what causes them and what causes those causes.

And furthermore, he's doing the same thing for the person sitting next to you, too. And the person next to them and next to them and next to them.

As well as all the persons in the next building over and the building after that. And in the next town over and city and state and country. In fact, he is intimately aware of everything going on in the lives of the 7.7 billion people in the world today...

And yet God is greater than that...

In these *same* moments, he is sustaining every ecosystem on every continent and every body of water everywhere. Life in all of its diverse forms on our planet. The birth of every animal. The flight of every bird. The growth of every leaf on every tree that has ever existed.

Establishing every weather pattern and season. Every harvest and every planting. From the tiniest of civilizations to the most complex. Not a seed of which has gotten lost or hidden from his view. He's intricately involved in it all.

And yet, God is greater than that...

I heard someone once remark that if you were to stretch out your arms and your entire wingspan was representative of human history, and then took a nail file and took just a bit off the edge of your fingernail, that would be the equivalent of your life span...

And yet God has been present for every single moment of not just your life span, but all of it. He knows what has happened on every single day from then until now. The rise and fall of every empire. Every invention ever made. The details of all of our art and literature. The intricacies of the craftsmanship on your designer jeans.

Every square inch of human knowledge and technology that ever has been and ever will be.

He's experienced the love of every young couple. The joy of every birth of a child. The hopes and dreams of every human that has ever existed. He's been present in every celebration... and every pain. Every tear of joy that has ever been cried, and every cry of agony and grief that has been wailed.

And yet, God is greater than that...

Saying of himself... declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' **Isaiah 46:10**

It's not just that He knows all that has happened... but all that will happen and how it will all turn out. He knows exactly how things are going to turn out...

Never once being surprised, or caught off guard, or troubled by anything that has unfolded in your life, or the lives of the billions of people before and after you...

Do you see what I mean about perspective? *This is who God is...*

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So, I know I don't know **every story** in the room - maybe some of you are like Job. You've lost kids, and health, and livelihoods... maybe that's you... but bare minimum, I'd bet there are many more of us here for whom life has just not gone how we thought it would... and that's hard...

Maybe your job and career have not exactly played out in reality the way it did in your head. You haven't risen up as fast as you expected you would. Maybe you've even started to feel like this career path you were so amped for a few years back has now turned into a dead end.

- Maybe you were let go... and you wrestle with all these questions about "**what does that mean for my future...**" and, in quiet moments, you think, "what does that mean about me?" How could God let this happen?

Or perhaps relationships, marriage, and family haven't turned out the way you thought they would. You thought you'd be married by now... or have kids... or for the few of you who have kids that you'd have *different* kids... you know what I mean?

And, you know, those aren't bad desires... but for the life of you can't understand why God would withhold such good things from you... does He even care?

Maybe it's even as simple as this church is not what you thought it would be... you loved the beautiful vision initially, but now when the rubber has met the road you've found that everything, even the beautiful, has some imperfections...

- You don't have all the friends you thought you would have... or perhaps, friendships have changed...
- It doesn't look like what you expected it to look like...
- There's been more conflict than you anticipated having to navigate.

And there's this little thing in you that wonders... "**maybe the grass is greener somewhere else?**" Maybe God doesn't want me here... maybe... and, of course, you would never say this part out loud, maybe God isn't here..."

Listen, you need to know that there is a God who is greater than you. Who sees things that you can't see. Who knows things that you don't know.

And just because you can't make sense out of what is happening, and don't know what He's doing... that doesn't mean He isn't doing anything...

So, let me just say all of this a bit differently for those of us who need to hear it: **God will not answer all of your questions before He calls you to trust and follow Him.**

He didn't do that for anybody - for Moses or the prophets or his disciples. He simply speaks — in undeniable ways, through whirlwinds and burning bushes and empty tombs — and invites you to believe.

If understanding everything is a prerequisite to belief, you'll never believe. **Faith is accepting what you can't understand on the basis of what you can understand.**

And what you can understand is that He is greater than you... and just because you don't know what He's doing...

It doesn't mean He's absent. It doesn't mean He's lost control. And, most of all, it doesn't mean He has let you go.

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Because, here's the best part of all... **the greatness of God is actually even greater still...**

If you're sleeping on it, you'll miss the profound way the book of Job reveals it... back in **Job 38:1**

Then the LORD answered After all of Job's questions and demands for an explanation we see those four simple words come breaking through: **Then the LORD answered.**

Whenever you see the LORD in all caps in the Old Testament, that's God's special name that only His people called Him: Yahweh.

Yahweh, the covenant-keeping, Messiah-bringing, kingdom-conquering God of the Universe is here to enter into a conversation with Job and all of his questions.

Tim Keller ...we are told that Yahweh answered Job out of the storm. This phrase, as generic as it looks to us in English, is significant... in Hebrew idiom, to "speak to" someone indicates a one-way communication of an authority to an inferior, while to "answer" or "reply to" expresses a dialogue between two parties. It is striking, then, that when God shows up, he enters into a dialogue—he does not come to simply denounce. In other words, God is inviting Job into a relationship.

Yes, God comes to Job displaying all of his power and might... but also like a loving parent to a child, he kneels down to respond.

Do you see? *This* God... This all-powerful, all-knowing God out of the overflow of this same cosmic power he used created everything that has ever existed... who stands before and after all of time... who holds every life, every person, every breath in the palm of his hand... **doesn't just invite Job into perspective... but into relationship.**

You see, we do need perspective, it's important... but we're given something even better... relationship.

No, we don't always know why what has come into our life has come to us... but **we can always know who has come to us**; who is with us... through every up and every down... every moment of clarity and every moment of pain and doubt. This God.

Because *this God* who stands sovereign over all creation **is the same God who came to His people in Jesus** - lost in sin - to pay what they owe that we might be held by his hands forever.

Who through the cross and resurrection covenanted Himself to His people and said, "no matter what, I'm in this with you... I will not leave you or forsake you. Behold, I will be with you until the end of the age.

Who according to **Romans 8:28** is even now, right in these moments... even in the moments of your biggest doubt, your biggest pain, your biggest questions... is **"working all things together for the good of those who love him."**

This God out of the overflow of His grace and mercy gives us himself...

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And when life doesn't go how you expected... that's exactly what you need...

When life caves in on you -- whether that's caused by a global pandemic, an unexpected cancer diagnosis, the crashing of the stock market or fill in the blank - you need **more than a sentimental Jesus** sitting beside you stroking your hand, explaining that there is a silver lining or giving silly platitudes about how things that don't kill you only making you stronger.

No, you **need a God of infinite glory** who sits upon the throne of the universe, who has promised to marshal every molecule of creation in pursuit of his plan and your good -

Who regardless of if you ever understand why what is happening is happening stands behind your salvation and will let nothing stand in His way.

When life - in whatever way, shape or form - doesn't go like you thought it would... you need more than the trivial comfort of "oh, God has plan. You just need to trust it." No matter how true that might be.

You need a **God who has been where you've been**... who has felt the pain of loss, suffered the weight of injustice... who has cried, himself in agony... a God who can weep with you as you weep, a God who cares about your pain... A God who cared enough to do something about it and walked out of the tomb so that one day you will walk out of yours...

You need a God like that... who has made himself personally available to you...

And that's exactly who God is.

Let me be clear: I **don't understand everything God** is doing in my life, and I probably won't until I meet Jesus face-to-face. What I do know is that God has revealed his intentions for me clearly in the cross of Jesus.

For whatever happens to you or me, it cannot mean that God is absent, out of control or that He doesn't love you.

On the cross, we see what is arguably the most astounding and confusing action God would ever take. We see Him willingly enter into our suffering. On the cross, he did more than promise to fix our pain; he immersed himself in it.

If there was ever a time that felt like God was not there or that God did not care or that **God wasn't in control** it was when Jesus was crucified. Now, however, we know that there was **never a time when God was more in control.**

He took the worst, most inexplicable event in human history - the murder of his Son - and turned for his glory and our good... and he did it in love. This we can know without question.

What we *can* understand is that Jesus really is who He says He is and really can do and has done all that he said he would do.

And so, we may never understand why God does everything He *does*, but we can know who he *is*. And *that* will always be enough.

Pray

Heavenly Father,

You are far greater than we even know. Who can utter your mighty deeds or declare all the praise you are truly worth?

And who are we that you would be mindful of us? That you would care for us and draw near to us.

God, we thank you that this is who you are. We thank you for Jesus, who has made knowing you and being found in you possible for us all.

God, help us with what we can't understand. By your Spirit strengthen our faith... help us to rest on your unchanging grace.

In the words of that famous hymn - in every high and stormy gale, be our anchor that holds us in the veil.

I pray that over my Citizens brothers and sisters this morning. I ask that would work it in us.

Strengthen us for the journey. For your glory and our good.

*In Jesus name,
Amen.*