

I was walking down the street the other day and coming towards me was a young boy running. He was only about four or five and I could see a little way back was his dad. As he came towards me at a pretty good pace it seemed as if his body was going faster than his little legs and he fell splat on the floor. I moved forward to pick him up and help him but of course he didn't want a stranger and he moved as well as he could towards his dad in floods of tears. Dad picked him up and cuddled him and tried to make him feel better.

When we are suffering that is what we want. We want someone to hold us and make us feel better.

As we have been seeing Job was suffering. His possessions and family had been taken away from him and then his health. He looked for comfort and he looked for an explanation.

His friends arrived but rather than bring sympathy and comfort as they intended their inadequate views of God and their attitude towards Job only made his pain worse.

They had failed to bring comfort or an explanation as to why he was suffering. Their view that Job was suffering because he had done wrong was not right. Job knew he was blameless and so his suffering didn't seem fair.

So Job longed to come to God for comfort, to persuade God that he was acting unjustly and so perhaps to put an end to his suffering.

Over and again in his responses to his friends, Job's words are that he wants to meet God, "I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God" (Job 13:3); "I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:27), "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him" (Job 23:3&4).

However Job was not sure that he could indeed come to God and plead his case, v2 "how can a mortal be righteous before God?"

In this chapter there are a host of reasons that Job gives us as to why rather than the hurting child running to the arms of his dad he thinks that he cannot approach God and persuade God to end his suffering.

1. God is unique in his wisdom and power, vs3-10. It is summed up there in v4, "His wisdom is profound, his power is vast." Job knew God could pose a thousand questions which he wouldn't be able to answer. He has might beyond anything Job can comprehend, v5 he moves mountains, v9 he created the stars, v10 he performs wonders. In the face of such a unique and powerful God Job felt insignificant and so should we.

2. God is unseen v11. While Job may see what God has done he can't see God and so how can he debate with God?

3. God is unstoppable v12-18. Job knew that he could not stop God doing what he wanted – God is God. He couldn't make God do what God didn't want to do and if God didn't want to come and dispute with Job then God wouldn't.

4. God is unimpeachable v19-20. Job could not summon God to the dock and get what he thought was justice.

5. God is unfathomable v21-24. Here we get to the heart of Job's problem - he could not understand the mind and will of God. He knew God was sovereign and good but what was happening to him seemed unjust and he could not work out how that could be. Here he turned the attention away from himself and looking around could not understand what was going on. Why when a plague came on the world, v23, did God seem to ignore the cries of the innocent? Why did God allow corrupt government to exploit people? Job could not understand God and the seeming injustice that he experienced and that he saw all around him.

We may well have the same kind of questions. This week there have been massive floods in north east Brazil and many have died good and bad alike and the question comes when they cried out to God why did God not answer? Then we too see oppressive regimes which exploit the people. We have seen this in Zimbabwe over many years now and still the country is in the grip of those whose aim seems only to accumulate their own wealth. The questions mount up as they did for Job why doesn't God act? If God is God as Job believed and if he is in control as Job believed then why does such suffering take place? Is God not good? Is God not just?

The answers come clear from Scripture that God is in control. He is good and just, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut 32:4); "The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7-8)

It is the light of that central truth that we look at the world around us be it the floods or arrogant dictators and recognise that the world is not as God intended. There is much evil and many innocent people suffer. We cannot understand why but we know that God has done something about it. He has not sat idly by. He sent his only son Jesus who is God into this world. He, though innocent, endured such suffering at the hands of sinful humanity. He died and rose again so that in and through him we who are sinful might be justified before a holy God, and in him we might have that certainty of eternal life with God where perfect goodness, justice and peace reign. Till then we live in a world of suffering with few answers but trust in a God who is unique in wisdom and power. Also we trust in a God of justice and mercy. While we have to wait until the end of the world for his perfect justice to be revealed on the day of judgement we today know his mercy through his forgiveness.

It is this God of wisdom, power, justice and mercy, who alone rules this world. At the end of v24 we get that enigmatic question, "If it is not he, then who is it?" If it is not God who did all this then who was it? Having read the first two chapters we can in part answer it is the Satan who was acting against Job. However we also know that it was God who allowed the Satan to bring this suffering to Job. Here again we see God in control but we recognise that God is unfathomable. He works in ways we cannot comprehend and, as we have been seeing we have to allow him to be God even though we cannot understand his mind, his will and his ways.

6. God is unapproachable v25-35. In part Job was saying there's no point him coming to God to plead his case because God has already made up his mind about Job, v29. Indeed v32 the distance between God and man is too great. That led Job to the desire for a mediator between him and God, one who could bring him and God together and enable Job's voice to be heard by God. Job knew nothing of such a mediator and so he judged that because God was so great and he so insignificant there was no way he could approach God. Perhaps we have had experiences where our voices seem not to be heard from the simple sending in a request to a radio station right through to dealing with a large company which seems to ignore your request for fairness. I'm sure there are many who following the disruption of air traffic caused by the Icelandic volcano have tried to get some compensation from airlines or insurance companies and have received the standard letter which shows your voice has not been heard. Job felt that there was no way his voice would be heard no way he could approach this awesome God.

However, by the grace of God what Job didn't have we do have, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). It is through Jesus we stand righteous in the presence of God the Father and through Jesus we daily can come with the things that

concern us. We have a mediator and we can freely come into the presence of God but not to plead our case or our innocence for we are all sinful but we have a mediator through whom we come into the presence of a holy God and know we will be accepted and our voices heard.

Job was sure that he could not approach God and yet, as we have seen his desire was to come to God. His suffering, which the Satan thought would show him as a fair-weather believer only in it for what he could get and which Satan was sure would cause Job to curse God, only served to push Job towards God. To whom else could he go as he sat there on the council rubbish dump isolated and friendless. Christopher Ash in his excellent book on Job, 'Out of the Storm' writes this, "Although Job is terrified he longs to speak to God face to face. This is the mark of a true worshipper. Even when I cannot understand what God is doing, I know that it is God with whom I have to deal because he is God."

So I cannot understand the floods in Brazil but like the hurting child they cause me to pray that is in effect to run to the arms of my Father in heaven for he alone can bring comfort. I don't understand why the pain of Zimbabwe has last so long and cut so deep but I continue to bring that country to God the Father in prayer through Jesus and cry out to him to bring an end to that regime and to restore that nation even as eventually he brought an end to Job's pain and restored him.

Job had so much against him in term of his suffering and the Satan who sought to destroy his faith but what we are seeing is that instead of destroying his faith his suffering drew him inexorably towards God even though there was so much of God he didn't know and so much he feared. My prayer is for those who are suffering now or with others who are suffering that our experience would do the same for us and draw us to God whom we can know through Jesus.