

## **Where Were You? – Job 38:1-7, 34-41**

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Joel Osteen is the pastor of the big non-denominational church in Houston, Texas, called Lakewood Church. You may have seen him on TV.

Osteen preaches what's been referred to as the prosperity Gospel. And the thinking goes like this: If we are faithful to God and act in ways that demonstrate that faith, God will reward us with material prosperity.

John MacArthur is also a famous preacher. He's the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California. He's not a fan, evidently, of Joel Osteen.

Several years ago, in a video I saw posted online recently, MacArthur took aim at Osteen's theology in a blistering critique, calling him a "pagan religionist."

Here are MacArthur's comments:

*What is the source of [Osteen's theology]? Where does this come from? Answer: Satan, this is satanic. This is not just off-centered, this is satanic.*

*Why do I say that? Because health, wealth, prosperity, the fulfillment of all your dreams and your desires, that's what Satan always offers. That's called temptation, based on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That's exactly what corrupt fallen unregenerate people want. That's why it works so well, right? You can go right into Satan's system, make everybody feel religious and turn their desires, their temptations into somehow honorable desires.*

*I mean, what did Satan say to Jesus? "Grab some satisfaction. Why are You hungry? You need to eat. You need to be healthy, whole.*

*Why would You let Yourself be unpopular? Dive off the temple corner, everybody will be wowed. You'll be the winner, You'll be the champion. You'll be the Messiah. They'll hail You. And by the way, if You just look over the kingdoms of the world, I'll give those to You, too."*

*That's satanic. And why are these false teachers so successful at what they do? Because they're in cahoots with the devil. Why is Satan successful? Because his temptations, although they might appear noble on the outside, are in perfect accord with all the fallen, corrupt, selfish, proud, evil desires of sinners. This is a false kind of Christianity and a false view of God. God is the one who reserves the right to make you well.*

Again, that's John MacArthur, pastor of a large mega church in Southern California.

On one hand, I agree with him in his critique of Joel Osteen. The whole notion that God rewards our faithfulness with personal or financial success is often an affront to the reality in which we live. Some of the most faithful disciples don't see the prosperity that Osteen seems to promise.

I admire Pastor MacArther for seemingly having the courage to speak out as to what he sees as Osteen's heresy.

On the other hand, it makes me a little uncomfortable when I hear somebody in authority call somebody else a heretic. Part of me cringes at the boldness of such a stance. Because these are big matters, big claims.

I'm uncomfortable with Joel Osteen's beliefs but I'm also uncomfortable with John MacArthur's certainty regarding Joel Osteen. I don't know MacArthur's own beliefs well enough either. Maybe further investigation would find me aligning with him completely in his theology or totally opposed to it. I don't know.

I just know that in this case, I both admire his willingness to speak up but am also leery of his own certitude.

Here's a certainty of mine: I follow and put great trust in people who are wise but who also admit they don't have all the answers. There's a humility about them that recognizes there are some questions for which there are no answers. And that attitude properly puts us in our place as human beings.

It is impossible for us to come close to fully understanding many of the great mysteries of the world: Why do some people get cancer and others do not? Why do natural disasters happen where they do? Why do mountain towns in North Carolina get destroyed by a hurricane, for example? Why are we put in certain places at certain times of our lives and meet certain people—some people that are wonderful for us and some people that lead us down paths we shouldn't travel?

Many times, we lash out with questions: "Why, why, why?" We want somebody to make sense of the world. Because, in our humanity, we think we deserve to know.

Look long and hard enough, and you'll probably find somebody who purports to have the answers to all those questions. But beware: most of the time, they don't really know.

You know, in the run-up to these verses today, Job had been getting a little whiny. He had suffered greatly. While not "sinning with his lips," as we read two Sundays ago, he had been consistently offering up his lament for the tragedies that had impacted his life.

And finally, God speaks to Job, and it wasn't the words he wanted to hear: "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?"

"Where were you, Job?"

God put Job in his place, not necessarily to be snarky about it but to help put into perspective who God is and who Job was. They weren't on the same plain—didn't come close. The ways of God, who is all-powerful and all-knowing, are not our ways. We're incapable of understanding all we wish to understand, because we are who we are and God is God.

That's a humbling reality. That dichotomy leaves us often lacking in knowledge and unsatisfied. We can't make sense of all we want to make sense of, and it drives us crazy.

God says to Job what he would say to us: "You'll never understand. Just be who you are, and I'll be who I will be."

And who is this God? Who is this God that we are not like? A creator, who amazes us spectacularly despite how creation doesn't always seem to behave like we would want it to. This God is one who loves in spectacular fashion, too. A God who in Jesus Christ demonstrates care and devotion in ways we will never fully understand. And, this God is one who will always be present, no matter what. God is durable, more so than anything else we can imagine. And in a world sweeping with change and chaos, there's perhaps no bigger and better attribute.

Larry Davies is a pastor who chronicled an incident that occurred just as he was separating from his wife. "While the children slept with friends, we spent the last night of our marriage senselessly arguing over who would get the furniture, the photographs and the dishes. I even remember hiding a plastic coffee carafe under the kitchen sink. Why? I'm not sure, but we

often do dumb things when our lives are falling apart. By the time she drove off in a borrowed pickup truck, the house was an empty shell of blank walls, half-empty rooms and shattered lives

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“Like Job, my lowest point was yet to come ... At precisely 8:00 the next morning my doorbell rang. On the front porch stood, hand-in-hand, a smiling young couple ready to meet with their minister for pre-marriage counseling. Their bright smiles soon disappeared as I walked them through the wreckage of my house toward the office. I explained what happened and assured them that I would understand if they asked another minister to handle the marriage service.

“What advice could a recently separated pastor possibly give this young couple that would enable them to prepare for a holy marriage? The answer? None! I could say nothing! At that point, I no longer felt qualified or able to give advice! All I had left was God ... All I had left was God!

“At that precise moment, the lowest point of my life quietly became a momentous turning point because at that instant, I utterly and completely put my dependence upon God.”

That’s what God does that we can’t understand and can’t come close to replicating: being present through the biggest storms—unfazed and unchanged. Still present, still loving, still dependable.

We don’t understand all the other stuff. We don’t understand at times why marriages end, why hurricanes come, why other tragedies happen. And we shouldn’t try to understand completely. Because we can’t. We’re not God.

We should be humbled by that. And instead of thinking we can understand everything, our posture should shift toward one of grateful and humble service.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus rebuffs James and John, who longed to have seats on his right and on his left. They wanted the glory reserved only for him. For they were incapable of doing what he did. Instead, Jesus said, the places of honor are reserved for those who know their place: Whoever is great will be a servant. Whoever wants to be first will be the servant of all.

That's our place. That's the orbit we reside in. One of humble service and grateful that God is God, even when we don't fully understand.