

THE OVERWHELMING WEIGHT OF GOD, PART 1: HUMILITY

Job 38:1-11, 40:4, 42:1-6; Psalm 46:10 (NASB)

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21 November 2010

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Some years ago filmmaker Alejandro Amenábar wrote and directed a film entitled *The Others*. It tells the story of a religious woman from World War Two England whose husband is off at war. She is waiting for him to return with her two small children in an old, isolated manor house. Although there are three servants, there is no one else in this gigantic house.

Or is there? The young girl picks up on something strange. She claims to see a boy named Victor and draws crayon pictures of an old woman she says she often sees. Mother gets very upset about these reports from her daughter, harshly scolding her with the words: "There are no such things as ghosts!" Yet the daughter persists. And in a move no Christian parent should copy, mother assigns Scripture readings to her daughter to punish her.

One day when mother is in her bedroom she hears the grand piano playing down in the drawing room on the first floor. This is impossible, since there is no one in the house who plays. Mother creeps down the stair, retrieves the fowling piece from the chest in the front hall, and approaches the door of the drawing room. She tries the doorknob and as the knob turns the playing stops. She had left it locked and now it is unlocked. Mother pushes the door open and moves into the room, shotgun in hand.

She sees the lid of the piano open and the keyboard unlocked and open for play. The door shuts behind her, seemingly on its own. Mother shuts and locks the piano, and turns to examine the door. As she swings it away from her, it seems like it has a return spring—which it does not. But no! It only pushes back sometimes, as if someone is on the other side, toying with her. But there is no one on the other side.

After all her denials, mother seems to be confronting the reality of ghosts for the first time in her life. And then it becomes undeniable. The door suddenly slams itself in her face and she falls to the floor. The door locks on its own. Mother screams for Mrs. Mills, the housekeeper, to bring her key. They burst into the room, and to mother's shock, the piano keyboard is open once again! She cries out: "Oh, my God!"--something no one should ever say unless it is genuinely a prayer to God.

And now I must spoil the film. It will still be worth watching for those who do not mind spooky films with jump scenes because it is a well-made film.

Toward the end of the film the viewer learns that mother, her two children, and the three servants are the ones who are dead. Mother had everything exactly backward. She was the one haunting a real person whom she could not see who was just trying to play the piano. She was the ghost opening the door, shutting and locking the piano, and pushing back on the door that the living person was trying to close. Without having any idea what she was doing, mother did everything ghosts are expected to do when haunting a house. She was dead and she did not know it.

GOD SITS ON JOB

Is it possible that we could be in the same condition—that there is something fundamentally false in our view of reality, and that we consistently make bad decisions based on this faulty view triggering consequences we cannot even imagine? What if, from God's perspective, all mankind has the idea of reality exactly backward? That people miss him completely, even when they think they are looking for him? That would explain Bible verses like Psalm, 53:1-2: **"God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men /To see if there is anyone who understands, /Who seeks after God. /Every one of them has turned aside; /together they have become corrupt; /There is no one who does good, not even one"** (Psalm 53:2-3).

Does not that set of verse make you mad? *That can't be right!* we think. *How can God say that about us? We can't really be that bad!* But what would the consequences be if it is right? We might all be like ghosts who do not know that they are dead, banging ignorantly around God's world without acknowledging him, getting everything exactly backwards and creating havoc as a result.

And if this is true, what might God be willing to do to change it? The opening to the book of Job gives us an idea of just how far God would go to pierce our fatal confusion: **"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.' The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.' Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.' Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD"** (Job 1:6-12).

What happens next is that enemies carry off some of Job's cattle and slay his servants. Fire falls from heaven and burns up Job's sheep and other servants. Other enemies raid Job's camels and kill yet other servants. Then a great wind collapses a house onto Job's children and kills them all. Job does not sin or blame God at this, and so Satan goes back to God to bargain for yet increased suffering for him. God agrees, and Job is then afflicted with boils as a result. In the end, Job is bereft of everything and everyone except his wife, who then tells him to **"Curse God and die!"** Somehow, instead of acting as Job's partner, she becomes the mouthpiece for Satan's attack.

Do not think for a moment that God and Satan bargained back and forth like equals, or that God was somehow backed into something he did not want to do. It is not Satan who is in charge of this scenario. We will not yet offer any thoughts as to why God did this. But in an unequivocal way, God sits on Job—that is, he permits the weight of his overwhelming power to be seen, felt, tasted, and touched. Perhaps our sin blunts the revelatory force of lightning bolts, orchids, babies, and good health, but we lose our sense of what great creative works of God's power they are. Here God chooses to undo his creation and smash everything. And Job knows that God has done it: **"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD"** (Job 1:21).

JOB AND HIS BUDDIES TRY TO PUZZLE IT OUT

At that point Job's first three friends show up to try to comfort Job and help him puzzle it out. If I were him I would want to know why—they all did. Job curses the day he was born, they try out every possible theory as to why God would do this, including blaming Job for doing something wrong. They talk and talk and talk and talk and talk. Job seems to bottom out emotionally and yet asserts his own integrity. At that point, another friend, Elihu, gets really angry and rebukes them all. Yet even he, for all of his desire to vindicate God, ends up bloviating about things which are beyond him.

Is it possible that all of these good, God-fearing men were missing something? Is it possible that, in spite of being aware of the nature and reality of God they were still left banging around on God's earth like a bunch of ghosts who do not know that they are dead?

GOD ANSWERS THEM ALL, AND US, TOO

At the beginning of chapter 38 we start to see some of God's reason for permitting this sequence of events in the first place: **"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 'Who is this that darkens counsel /By words without knowledge? /Now gird up your loins like a man, /And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! /Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? /Tell Me, if you have understanding, /Who set its measurements? Since you know. /Or who stretched the line on it? /On what were its bases sunk? /Or who laid its cornerstone, /When the morning stars sang together /And all the sons of God shouted for joy? /Or who enclosed the sea with doors /When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb; /When I made a cloud its garment /And thick darkness its swaddling band, /And I placed boundaries on it /And set a bolt and doors, /And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; /And here shall your proud waves stop!'"** (Job 38:1-11).

This is but a small sample of the thorough drubbing Job and his friends receive from God. But for what? What exactly had his friends done wrong that they did not do wrong every day? Surely the errors in their thinking were present before this, and Job's sufferings were merely the opportunity for them to be revealed. And for exactly what will we blame Job that we would not have done ourselves?

There are many analyses one might make of this entire sequence, but I offer you this most expansive one: The men and women God made, from his point of view, even including those who believe in him, spend most of their time banging around his earth like ghosts and getting most things wrong because they do not perceive the overwhelming weight of God. This response of God, which goes on with breath-stealing force for four chapters, is God's way of shouting: **WHY DO YOU NOT NOTICE THAT I AM SITTING ON YOU?**

What does that failure look like in specific terms? How about a long list of bogus, ignorant, and foolish theories about the meaning of life? How many have you heard? The bookstores and internet blogs are full of them. How about a long list of false and half-hearted Christianities? And all of them are doomed for the same reason, that they fail to acknowledge the overwhelming weight of God. Maybe C. S. Lewis was right: Pain is God's megaphone.

And what exactly is God shouting through his megaphone? Psalm 46:10 says: "**Be still, and know that I am God. /I will be exalted among the nations, /I will be exalted in the earth!**" (Psalm 46:10, ESV). Because we are spiritually dead, lost, and condemned, God will literally do anything to get us to be quiet, recognize his overwhelming weight pressing down on us, and acknowledge that his purpose for all creation, including us, is to exalt himself above everyone and everything. He cannot do anything else because he really is highest and best and the people he made don't really notice! Like ghosts who do not know they are dead, we live our lives oblivious to his sublime, all-encompassing reality. We should not be surprised that God will do anything to change that.

JOB FINDS HUMILITY

In one of the great personal revelations of all time, Job finds and embraces true humility. It is amazing that all of Job's good theology and faithful living up until this point could not take the place of this crucial confrontation in shaping his spiritual life.

There are many false ideas about humility, but Job is a wonderful example. Humility is not the crushing of our souls into hopelessness; it is not the fruit of self-imposed external suffering, such as the wearing of hair shirts or doing all the work other people are supposed to be doing; it is not the artificial humility of talking ourselves down; and, it is not the same as the sorrow of soul which comes from others running us down or using us badly.

What is it? Humility is appraising ourselves exactly as we really are by looking into the face of God. That's one reason why Job's buddies had so much trouble. They were staring mostly at one another. Humility cannot be achieved by staring at ourselves. Because those who do not believe in God do not know him at all, true humility is impossible for them, and it is still extremely difficult for those who do know him. We need to be squashed by the overwhelming weight of God before we will ever see ourselves the way we really are.

Job's example teaches us that an awareness of the overwhelming weight of God gains us many things. First, we learn our true size—small! Job said, while gazing into the revelation of God: "**Behold, I am insignificant...**" (Job 40:4a). That awareness disengages the sinful engine that makes us think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Again, this does not approve low self-esteem, but self-awareness in the face of God's immensity.

Secondly, we learn that our words are insignificant next to the truth, majesty, and power of God's words, as Job said: "**...What can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth**" (Job 40:4b). So we stop talking in order to hear God's words.

Thirdly, we embrace the almighty power of God as the unique controlling factor of the universe and integrate this fact into our thinking and decisions. As Job said: "**I know that You can do all things...**" (Job 42:2). Our false impression is that we are empowered to determine our own reality, yet we are weak as babies before the Almighty. Thus we crack our heads repeatedly into doors which he shuts, and we yank to no avail on doors he has closed.

Fourthly, we learn to live our lives in the awareness of God's sovereign oversight of all things, as Job said yet again to the Lord: "**...No purpose of Yours can be thwarted**" (Job 42:2). Omnipotence is

a measure of power, and sovereignty is a combination of omnipotence and purpose. If God is all-powerful, and can do whatever he wants, what exactly does he want to do? We find this out by reading the Bible, and to a lesser extent by observing our experience. If we ask for something right and good, and do not get it, we must not conclude that we have not been heard. The most likely answer is that God is pursuing a mammoth purpose with complex, interlocking objectives far beyond our ability to understand. So Job came to conclude with respect to his many losses. Had he not prayed for protection from his enemies, for the health and long life of his family, for protection from storms, and a wife who would encourage him? He did not get those things—because God will do anything to shatter our false view of reality that we are in charge of our own lives! He needs to save us from ourselves, and he desires above all else to glorify his name. Denying this makes us into ghosts who haunt the earth ignorant of the fundamental facts of reality.

This is why church cannot be everything you and I want it to be. We cry: Why do there have to be difficult things to deal with, seemingly all the time? Why cannot the music and preaching be exactly what you and I want? The answer is simple. Church is really not about you and me, but the God who deserves our faith, worship, and obedience. A church which is about you and me is bereft of the overwhelming weight of God, and his majesty is not seen. We might as well just join a club.

Fifthly, when we gaze into the face of God we gain a painfully sharp recognition of our sin condition. So it was with Job: **"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, /Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know"** (Job 42:3b). Job easily and freely admits, after a fresh encounter with the weight of God, that he had sinned by obscuring the truth of God with his words. A. W. Tozer wrote: "...Unless the weight of the burden is felt the gospel can mean nothing to a man; and until he sees a vision of God high and lifted up. there will be no woe and no burden. Low views of God destroy the gospel for all who hold them" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1961, p. 11).

Sixthly, and finally, the overwhelming weight of God releases the energy of true repentance in our lives. Job, after being sat on by God, was not only willing but eager to change his behavior: **"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; /But now my eye sees You; /Therefore I retract, /And I repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42:5-6). If anyone claims to have had an encounter with God and is not at that moment ashamed of their sin and eager to change, then they have not seen God. They may have looked right at him, but the false belief that they are not dead will keep them from seeing him as he really is. The evidence of failure to see is a lack of repentance.

In one sense God is sitting on everyone all the time. The creation declares his glory. He has given general revelation directly in the human heart. Everyone knows that God exists, even those who deny it. But in another sense, we need interventions on a regular basis to cause us to sense his overwhelming weight in a fresh way. And let us not be surprised at the lengths to which he will go to make sure that we feel the weight.

So I urge you to invite the overwhelming weight of God to squash you into spiritual health! Let us seek the revelation of the majesty of God in his word, in creation, in all of our worship services, and in our devotional lives. Without a confrontation with that majesty we will find our eyesight clouding over, our attentions will be drawn increasingly to ourselves, and reality itself will begin to fade away. We'll be like ghosts who do not know that they are dead.

[clip from *The Others* DVD, 0:47:00-0:50:02]