

“Who Do You Think You Are?”

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Most of you know the story very well. Here is Job, a man who had everything going for him. He had wealth, he had family, he had land, and he had everything that the ancient world would consider to be prosperity.

One day (and we are not quite sure how this works), the story goes - and it is a story, it is a form of a parable, it is not a true historical account by any means. It is a story about how people related to a God in a world that was unfair. So in this story, God and Satan were standing together and they looked down at the wonders of Job, and God just lifts up Job as this incredibly faithful person. But, of course, Satan just looks at Job and turns to God, and says, “Well of course he is. He has every benefit - but you take all of those away and we will see what he does.”

Sure enough, you know the story. Job has his wealth taken away, his family taken away and his health – everything - his land, and he was left in total and utter despair.

That would be bad enough, but Job had friends and these friends were trying to be so helpful with all of the things, all the clichés, that people say to each other when calamity happens: “Well, what did you do that got God so mad at you?” just tearing Job down even further. If he didn’t think it could get any worse, the friends helped it happen.

Sure enough, finally, in all of this despair the one thing Job would not do was admit guilt, when there was no guilt to admit. Everyone tried to get him to cop a plea, to say there was something going on that caused this, within Job. They needed it to be fair, and if Job had committed some horrible sin that Job wasn’t sharing, then everyone else could rest easier knowing God was fair. But Job wouldn’t bite. He wouldn’t allow God off the hook because he had done nothing wrong, and so to the very point that God spoke, Job was claiming his innocence and calling out for God to perform justice.

So right then you see the tornado - the whirlwind - and, all of a sudden, out of that, the very voice of God speaks - but not what Job expected; frankly not what you or I probably expected either. Here is what He had to say because God changed the parable. Rather than defend God’s self, rather than say Job had done something wrong, God hollers out, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” And he goes on, “Who determined its measurements? Surely you know.” In other words, Job, why do you think you even have the right to talk to me that way?

Now God didn’t crush Job. God didn’t even seemingly get upset with Job, over the hollering and screaming, and the dismay and questioning. I think what would have made God the maddest is if Job would have cursed God and died - like his friends wanted him to do. You can scream at God, you can be angry. You can even question and doubt. The one thing you cannot do is give up on God. That is what is made clear in this passage.

The problem is, in our 21st century populous theology, we have made God so imminent that it is hard to imagine God as transcended. Now what I mean about imminent - imminent is when God is close to us (and I know I’m going to get in trouble on the way out again today, because I like making fun of “In the Garden” - my mother’s favorite hymn): “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own...” Well, God is so close to us walking through the garden - and that is true, God is imminent. God is close to us. But when God is *only* close to us, God is *always* our friend right by our side - then how do you deal with suffering, because if God is that close to us why doesn’t God fix it?

When you are dealing with moments of tragedy and unfairness and injustice in this world, you have to see God as both imminent, but especially transcendent – powerfully far away. Then you get a perspective of how this powerful, omnipotent creator and sustainer of the entire universe also has time for you and me. He may have a plan that is so large that it is more focused on beyond just my needs.

I have heard theologians talk about that God is not this anthropocentric (“anthropos” means “man” in Greek and “centric” means “center”). Our society has become so human-centered that we think everything, including the world and universe, revolves around us. Why did the Pope and the Church, around the time of Galileo, force him into repentance when he still knew he was right? Because the Church could not anticipate anything but the rest of the universe revolving around the earth. We need to be the center of our own universe; but a transcendent God that we can expand and understand helps us understand that we are not the center of our own universe, and God’s plan may support us, may care for us, but it is larger than just God needing to meet every one of our silly needs.

So, I want to walk with you again, about what it means to have a transcendent God - a *large* God - because in my life when I have doubted the most, when I have questioned the deepest, I haven’t focused on the God who is near to me. I have had to focus on a God who is powerful enough to transcend my little needs for a greater, larger plan to bring all things together in the future as God works through it in the present.

I need to see a big God in bad, difficult moments. So I want you to ponder with me when God screams out through that tornado, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” What does that mean? Here is what it means to me: Visualize, for just a moment, the oldest known and most distant galaxy is 13.2 billion light years from the earth. How do you even comprehend that? And we observe it as it existed 570 million years after the big bang. Space and time were created in the big bang and they imbued in the fixed amount of energy and matter. That’s how the world began and, as a person of faith, I believe that’s how God initiated evolution and the creation of humanity through that event.

Great clouds of these primordial elements coalesced through gravity to form the stars. In 1964 a couple of scientists from Bell Laboratories, their names were Arno Penzias and Robert W. Wilson, sat down together as they were developing satellites for Bell Laboratories and they kept being frustrated because they couldn’t get rid of this noise, this resident noise that seemed to come in all directions. Over a period of years they brought in scientists, physicists from every major university around the world, to try to figure out what that noise was. They came to realize that that noise was the echo of the big bang, which is still ringing billions of years later throughout the universe, still existing and making noise.

God still rings in creation. By the 1970s, physicists began to think of alternative scenarios for the universe’s evolution. Say you tinkered with the value of gravity or altered very slightly the strength of the electromagnetic force, how would that affect the path of the universe’s evolution? They played all of those scenarios - all of those little games - and realized something extraordinarily profound: you change any of the evolutionary process, in even miniscule amounts, and you destroy life itself.

For example, gravity is roughly 10 to the 39th time weaker than the electromagneticism. If gravity had been to the 10 to the 33rd time, rather than the 10 to the 39th time weaker than the electromagneticism, the stars would be a billion times less massive and would have burned out a million times faster - no life.

The nuclear weak force is 10 to the 29th time of the strength of gravity. Had that weak force been slightly weaker, all of the hydrogen in the universe would have been turned to helium, making the

opportunity to create water impossible; and without water - no life. A strong nuclear, strong force, you change that by as little as 2 percent [and that] would have prevented the formulation of protons yielding a universe without any atoms - no life. Decreasing it by 5 percent would have created a universe without stars. If the difference in mass between a proton and a neutron went on exactly as it is now, roughly twice as much as an electron, then all of the neutrons would have become protons or vice versa and there would be no life. Good-bye, life. There would be none. The list of things goes on and on, and I don't even understand what I told you, let alone what I would tell you if I kept going.

Astronomer Fred Hoyle gives a wonderful application to the depth and mystery of the big bang and creation. Here is what he said, and I just want to quote a short paragraph: *The fine tuning of seemingly heterogeneous values and ratios necessary to get from the big bang to life as we know it involve an intricate coordination over vast differences of scale, from the galactic level down to the subatomic one and across multibillion year tracts of time.*

Now Hoyle was the gentleman who used and created the name "big bang" for the beginning of creation, but even he has questioned the very legitimacy of his own metaphor of an initial explosion. He goes on to say: *An explosion in a junk yard does not lead to sundry bits of metal being assembled into a useful working machine.*

Now I thought about that. It would be like an explosion in a junk car lot. Then, when the dust settles, you find that all of the exploding metal objects fell together into a perfectly built Maserati – red, please. [laughter]

Now, Hoyle would say you can re-explode that junk yard several billion times, but I don't care how many times you do it you are never going to get the perfect red paint job – cranberry, please - that I really want on my Maserati. You can do it billions of times, and you can explode it without any kind of creative power to manipulate it, and you are never going to get that perfectly scratch-, dent-free Maserati, no matter how many times you blow up the junk yard.

That doesn't mean the junk yard didn't blow up but, in the midst of the explosion, according to Hoyle, you have to have some power, some creative power that manipulated the parts to get a mint, cranberry red paint job on my Maserati. Then, when the dust settled, it lays there beautifully.

Big bang alone? There is no possible way. You might get a Ford pinto and you will get a second explosion. (You have to be my age to know what that meant.) There is still even more for the person who named the big bang, and it has to be more than just circumstance to make what we have. Every bit of the little differences that would have changed it, he does not believe could have happened by happenstance. It had to happen by some wisdom-filled, powerful source, guiding evolution to what we have today. It is too perfect and nature doesn't quite make perfection. Only a divinely powerful creative being - who continually recreates - can make that possible.

Now, when we make God so transcendent, God so distant, that we have a deistic God, then we come back to "In the Garden," and, "He walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me that I am his own." *Now* I can stand next to God, in full awe, because the same God, who might have been 570 million light years away, still heard Job and, more than that, knew him by name, whipped up a whirlwind, and spoke directly to his need.

If you and I aren't humbled when we pray, and we feel an answer in our hearts that the same God who could be in the furthest galaxy 13.2 billion light years away, is the same God who you feel once in a while – *deeply* - when you pray and get support, now that is a God that is worth worshipping and why this place should be full every single week.

How can we ignore, for any reason, what that brilliance is willing to do - to know the hairs on our head, and to listen to our voice, and care about little me and little you? Do we not owe all honor and all glory to that most magnificent being? Does that not guide us in what we give back to other people? For if God - that all powerful majestic being - could care about us, how could we not care for one another? How does that affect our giving? How does it affect our compassion? How does it affect our trust?

A lot of unfair things have happened to me; and, as a pastor I have seen infinitely more unfair things that happen to other people. And yes, there are moments where it drives me to doubt, and in the doubt moments I don't go to the God standing beside me, because if I do that too quickly I get even madder and more doubt-filled.

In those moments, when you struggle and doubt, go to the most powerful transforming farthest parts of the universe that continues to grow, and see God on God's *grandest* scale. Then all you can do is place your trust in *that* aspect of God. Then you can deal with the unfairness and injustice of this world, knowing that that powerful being has a plan that is larger than my centered life, and I will trust in it, even when I don't understand it.

I have no clue what the 10th to the 39th anything is, but I can trust in the God who is greater than that understanding. Hold firm in your faith, trust and renew your commitment to that powerful Almighty One, who still knows what breaks your heart, and will heal it anew.

Amen.