

God Needs

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Date: 31 May 2020

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[0 : 0 0] My name is Anthony Parrott, and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at The Table Church, and it is my privilege and honor to conclude our series. This month we've been talking about the book of Job and the idea of God being a God of love and what that has to do with pain and suffering and where God is when it hurts. And my heart for this series has been to be able to explain and offer up to you what I think is true about God, and that the God that I believe in, that I believe Scripture teaches, is a God who is with us in the pain, a God who does not allow our suffering, but rather grants His world freedom, real, honest-to-goodness freedom, and a God who is working to heal and to redeem us. And I wish we could be together. I wish we could talk about this in person, but what I want is I want us to avoid the hurt and the heartache when we talk about God in inaccurate and harmful ways. So that's what I've been hoping for and intending, and I hope that that is coming across some way through this technology that we've got here. So we're going to conclude today's series with a pretty brief sermon. We're going to do some question and response live at the end, and then we'll go from there. So let's just do the tiniest bit of review. We have been talking about the book of Job written to be intentionally unsatisfying. I don't believe the book of Job was meant to be an answer book for the problem of pain and all of that. I think the author of the book of Job offered us this story about all the things what not to say when things are terrible. And that's kind of the assumption that we're going off of. Let me ask you a question.

Have you ever been publicly shamed? Have you ever been publicly shamed or like on social media or something like that for something you said or did or the way you look or anything like that?

When our daughter Audrey was younger, we had this little rubber chair that we could set her in, and even though she couldn't hold herself up, this chair would hold her up to sit. So I took a picture of her in this chair and I posted it on social media. And we had a chiropractor friend who didn't comment on my picture but went to my wife Emily's Facebook profile and commented about all this little meme about all the ways that that chair was harming our daughter and how it might kill her. And I thought like, well, there might have been better ways to communicate this. So I commented on that meme on my wife's profile with the Amazon link to the book called *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*.

I thought this was hilarious. Other people did not. But have you ever gone through the experience of being embarrassed publicly for something that you've said or did? You can sound off in the comments.

Um, Book of Job, you have the character of Job as well as his friends going off for chapters and chapters pontificating about whether or not God is good and trustworthy and just. And eventually, Job chapter 38, God shows up. And if you're reading this, if the person of Job yourself, you might be thrilled. Finally, we're going to get some answers. Thank God, literally.

[3 : 2 1] And then this is what happens. The Lord shows up and says, Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Surely you know. Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place? I'm sure Job is like, oh, no, no, I didn't say that I had.

Job chapter 39, this goes on, another chapter. God's talking. Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Who let the wild donkeys go free? Who untied its ropes? Which is like the ancient divine version of who let the dogs out. Did you clothe the horse's neck with a flowing mane?

No, but I'm still sick. Do you have any answers, God? Job chapter 40 and 41, Brace yourself like a man. Would you condemn me to justify yourself? So Job gets this like shakedown by God and is publicly shamed in front of his, you know, his friends and his wife. And Job chapter 42 says, Surely I spoke of things I did not understand. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. So to summarize the book of Job, God allows the Satan, the Satan figure, to afflict Job, kill his children, cause chaos on earth. Job and his friends ask a bunch of questions and doubts and fears about what God is like. God says, you stop that, no more questions. And Job says, okay, I'll shut up.

Okay, now let's contrast that with the person of Jesus, who I believe perfectly reveals what God is like. Matthew chapter 9, seeing the people, Jesus felt compassion for them because they were distressed.

Mark chapter 1, moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched this person and said to him, I am willing, be cleansed. We see that Jesus had real emotion. John chapter 11, when Jesus saw his friend weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And Jesus said, where have you laid my friend Lazarus? And they said to him, Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept.

[5 : 26] Now, the God presented in the book of Job just does not compare to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. And listen to what I'm saying. I'm not saying that like God in the book of Job is accurately portrayed like God was super angry, had a bad day, he went to therapy, and came out the other side as Jesus.

Like, no, I think the author of the book of Job is intentionally showing us like a caricature, like a comic book image of what God is not like, of maybe what people think God is like, that God is this angry, sits high upon the sky, up in the mountains, and if you start asking questions, we'll come down and berate you. People think that's what God is like. I don't think the author of the book of Job thinks that. I don't think we're supposed to come out the other side of the book of Job and think that too. The God in the book of Job, which I don't think is the real God, I don't think it's God at all, offers no answers, no relationship, no next steps, no growth, no partnership, no comfort, no nothing. Which, maybe you've been part of a church or a religion that offers a lot of the same nothingness. And if you haven't, sorry. I think the God that we shape in our mind to worship affects our theology in deep ways. And so this is why we need to talk about these things.

I think Jesus reveals a far better and truer God. Now, let's talk about that last concept, the word of partnership. God in the book of Job is absolutely high off his own dope. I mean, this God cannot get over how awesome he is. He talks about all the things he can do that humans can't, and all the ways that he created and crafted and made the world, and slayed dragons and leviathans, and all this kind of stuff. I mean, he is super, this God is super impressed with himself.

In general, that's not how the Hebrew scriptures, what we call, Christians call the New Testament, that's not how they talk about God and his relationship with humanity. Very first chapter of the book, in the Bible, God is calling us his image, his icons on earth. He's granting us co-regency and partnership and asking us to rule alongside him. We are fellow heirs. And the New Testament talks about this relationship too. First Corinthians chapter 3, Paul writes that we are co-workers in God's service. Co-workers, which I don't even think is a strong enough word.

It's the Greek word *synergoi*, where we get the word, that corporate buzzword of synergy. And it's the idea of two powers mingling together to accomplish something. And so there are powers, absolutely, that God has that we as humans do not have. God is creator and sustainer of the universe of all existence. I am not. I don't think you are either. God is almighty. He is the source of where everyone gets their might that I do not. But there are also things that are true about humans that we can do that God cannot. Before we talk about that thing, let me ask you another question.

[8 : 30] What's something that you feel like everyone else can do but you? And you wish you could. There are a couple things that come to mind for me. First one is sleeping in. I get the kids in the morning, most mornings each week. But my wife Emily gets them a couple mornings a week. And when she does, you know, baby cries or whatever, she goes downstairs, starts taking care of the kids. And most of the time, I wish I could fall back asleep, but I can't. And so I'm just awake. My brain is buzzing and I am ready to, you know, unhealthily scroll on some endless scrolling platform. I just can't sleep in anymore and I wish I could.

The other one is enjoy running. I'm physically capable of running, though if you saw me you might debate that fact. But I'm capable of running. I don't feel like I'm capable of enjoying running. Like, I hear about people who go for a run and like it. And that is just a mental state that I cannot comprehend. But I wish I did because I feel like I might be a healthier person. Something that I feel like other people can do and I can. I wish I could. There are things, we've talked about this all month, that God definitionally cannot do. It's true that God is a spirit. John chapter 4. God is a spirit. And there are things that are true about spirits that are not true about humans. Spirits are invisible. We can't see a spirit with our eyes. God as a spirit is bodiless. God does not have a physical form. We're talking about God the Father or the main part of the Godhead Trinitarian theology. Yes, Jesus has a body.

He is God incarnate. But Jesus is one particular person in one particular time and space. Jesus' body does not pervade the universe. God, in total, is a spirit. Go back to last week when we talked about God being everywhere at all times present. God as a spirit is the source of all life and being, what John Wesley called the soul of the universe. We gain our existence by the soul of the universe. God giving us that existence. So God as a spirit means that God does not have a body, Jesus withstanding. And with God not having a body that pervades the universe, there are things that God cannot do. One of the questions that ought to come up when we talk about God being all loving and therefore being non-coercive. One of the questions ought to be, well, shouldn't love be coercive sometimes? Shouldn't love, you know, jump in front of the bullet or get in the way of the bully or, you know, cut out the cancer or the tumor or the disease? Shouldn't love sometimes make a move?

And that, friends, is where you and I come in. 1 Corinthians 3 says, you, and that's you in the plural, you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in your midst.

God's temple is sacred and you together are that temple. 1 Corinthians 6, your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. That's you in singular. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God's spirit resides in you and you receive the spirit from God. You contain the potential energy of God. I mean, physics majors out there, you can correct my language if it's inaccurate. You contain the potential energy of God. And when you move in step with God's will, you are bursting with God's kinetic energy, the kinetic energy of God's spirit. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 says, you are the body of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10, the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. His life may be revealed in our mortal bodies. In Ephesians 1, the church is Christ's body. Just last week, the church universal celebrated something called the ascension. And the ascension, Jesus ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God.

[12 : 34] And so, and then God sends his spirit. And so the spirit of Christ now pervades over all creation, dwells within us, and is asking for our cooperation to bring healing and shalom and well-being to all things. God is all loving. And God does not have a body. And so God invites us, does not coerce, but invites us, and in fact needs us to use our bodies to accomplish the good purposes of God's love.

One mystic saint of old put it like this, Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which God, Christ looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands. Yours are the feet. Yours are the eyes. You are Christ's body. And so what I am willing to say when I look at this is that God needs your cooperation. He needs your cooperation to accomplish his good will, his loving will in creation. Now, don't hear me wrong. God doesn't need you in order to exist. God is self-sufficient, the ground of all being. God doesn't need you in order for God to act. God has many forms of action that are creative and persuasive but not coercive.

So God doesn't need you to exist. He doesn't need you to act. The uncontrolling love of God empowers us. And inspires us and persuades us to move and step with God's love. But it can never force us.

So that is what God needs us for. Our lives have meaning. Our lives matter. It's not that God could be doing all of this without us anyway. It's that God, when he created the world, created in such a way in which he depends on our cooperation with God.

[14 : 37] Now, this radically changes our lives. And specifically for me, it's radically changed my prayer life. I can't pray prayers like, God, we pray for world peace anymore. God, we pray for the end of racism. I can't pray like that anymore. Sure, great. I'm glad you're praying about it. But a God who needs our cooperation is going to respond with, okay, what are you going to do about it? I love this definition of prayer. This is from a psychologist and theologian, Mark Gregory Karras. He writes, we, when we pray, we create space in our busy lives to align our hearts with God's heart, where our spirit and God's spirit breathe harmoniously together. And we're we plot together to overcome evil with acts of love and goodness. And so I believe that we are called to conspiring prayer, to conspire with God, to become allies and accomplices in God's mission to redeem the world. God has a mission. God is on the move. And God makes his moves through us. His spirit, God's spirit residing within us, making action in the world. So over the course of these five weeks, we've talked about five solutions to problem of pain and suffering. Number one, God can't prevent suffering single-handedly. God's love is uncontrolling and it does not coerce. We've talked about the fact that God feels our pain, that we believe in a God who bled and died and suffered on a cross. We believe that God is not aloof or indifferent, that God suffers along with us. We believe in a God who is working to heal. God's will is always life and shalom and wholeness. We believe, I believe in a God, I believe the scripture reveals a God that is squeezing the good from the bad. God is never the author of evil, but God can squeeze good out of the evil others create. And I also believe that God needs our cooperation, that we are more than just invited to create shalom. Our contributions are essential and our lives matter in God's economy.

So let me offer you a few takeaways and then we're going to move into some Q&A.; Takeaway number one, when you pray, move your feet. When you pray, move your feet. Our prayers are not just wishes. They're not just, you know, rubbing a genie's lamp. When we pray, we better expect our bodies to get involved in the answer to those prayers. Number two, one of my favorite maxims, things that I often repeat to myself, it's that God is already up to something good. Let's join God there. And so part of the way I am training myself, and this is a process, friends, but part of the way I'm training myself to look at the world is to see the good that God is already up to. And God is up to good. And then asking, discovering, figuring out, forming my life around joining God in those good things.

And number three, always be prepared. This is 1 Peter. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. I believe that believing in God, believing in Jesus, believing in the Holy Spirit, gives Jesus' followers a sense of hope and expectation that the world has a trajectory, that history has a direction, and that God is bringing us into a world that is whole, where there is no more racism or sexism, where there is no more homophobia, where there is no more sickness or pain or disease, where there are no more pandemics or stay-at-home orders.

I believe that God is moving us in the direction where the world is made right again. And I better be prepared to give an answer to folks who say, why on earth do you believe something so stupid? Because that kind of hope can look really stupid sometimes. When we read the news, when we look out the window from our stay-at-home order homes, sometimes that hope can seem idiotic.

And so part of my own study is dedicating myself to being prepared to give an answer, to being a person of hope, believing that God is up to something good, and I better have a good way of answering why I believe that when people are in the middle of real, true pain and suffering.

[19 : 19] And so what I hope, what my heart has always been when you walk away from these sermons or from this sermon series, is that you can affirm your belief in a good and loving God. You can affirm your belief in a God of grace. You can affirm your belief in Jesus, who shows us what God is really like, and that Jesus is working to make this world whole again, and he needs you to get your body in the game.

Let's pray. Gracious and almighty, loving God, we are so glad that you call us co-rulers, co-heirs, co-regents with you. And God, we feel the weight of that responsibility, and when we look outside our windows and we look at the news and we scroll on our feeds, we recognize how badly we've messed that all up. And so God, I ask that we would have a renewed sense of your spirit dwelling within us as individuals and as a collective church, that with your spirit dwelling within us, we can draw this world to shalom, to wholeness, to peace. That the good news of the gospel is that Jesus did something, that Jesus is declaring that your kingdom is breaking into this world, that your kingdom is opening up graves, is opening up hearts and minds and lives, and that you are giving us no excuse to sit on the sidelines.

God, may we join you in your work of renewal in all parts of our lives. May we submit to your loving ways and show this world what it means and what it's like when people really love God and love people.

We pray all these things in the unity of the Holy Spirit in the name of the everlasting Christ. Amen. Let's move into some Q&A.; Hi, Table Church. This is me. Yeah, in light of, you know, everything that's been going on this week, a Q&A; time just seems not particularly important, though, I mean, I've got your questions and I've got some answers typed up and I'm looking at the live chat right now. So if you have some questions, please put them in there. But I feel like as I was thinking about this series and what we've been trying to talk about and learn and all of the events happening across our country and our world, I feel like the message today is appropriate. Thoughts and prayers are not enough.

Being not racist in a society built upon white supremacy and racist assumptions is not good enough. We need to be people of action. And so for every Bible verse we read, for every church service we attend, for every prayer we pray, worship song we sing, has to lead to the question, what then do we do?

[22 : 29] And I believe that's what God is calling us to. When we read scripture, scriptures are not merely the stories of a bunch of people thinking pretty thoughts. Scripture is not merely the story of God shaping and forming and moving within people so that they think really nice things.

And that's why we have to be people of action. That's why we have to be people who are going to do something. And so as we prayed in our lament and confession earlier on, indifference is sin.

Lack of action is sin. The book of James says that if you know the good you ought to do and you don't do it, that is sin. So that, I mean, I think that is the question and response for all question and responses. We can get into the technicalities of all sorts of things, but there's still a worship song. There's still communion. And I feel like that's far more important.

As the table church and as staff and leaders, we've been having continual conversation about what are ways that we can up our game into being an anti-racist organization and church, and how can we equip folks who need to be equipped to make anti-racist moves. And so you can be on the lookout for more conversations and more equipping and more tools that we will put into your hands.

We are sending some people to an anti-racism course. We want to put our money where our mouth is. We want our actions to line up with our prayer lives. So that's probably the number one thing I would say right now is that if you are praying about this, if you are thinking about this, then also be ready to, you know, when you pray, move your feet. I've got a whole set of like questions and stuff that you all had sent to me and some typed up responses. I think I'm just going to type that up or maybe make a podcast or something because I feel like that might be a better use of all of our time.

[24 : 33] Thank you.