

David Alan Hjelle
1 Corinthians 2:2
English 200C
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Evil in Power

“Living under evil in power.” As Christians, we realize that the ultimate power, God Himself, is not evil, but is perfect and good. However, we also see evil all around us every day—from the terrifying stories of death on nightly television to the gloomy realities of our everyday life. More often than not, it is the dark, dank, and dirty areas of humanity that we see, and not the majesty of God’s Glory. What are we to do in the face of a very present evil, the evil of not only our sin, but sometimes of Satan himself?

There are many Biblical examples of those who specifically were forced to live under an evil in power. Moses and the Israelites under the Egyptian pharaoh; Joseph under his jealous brothers and later under Potiphar; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego under King Nebuchadnezzar; and our Lord’s apostles under the Jewish and Roman authorities. Yet, all of these seem rather paltry as compared to the one man who is remembered solely because of his suffering: Job. Job was rich, Job was powerful, and God even proclaimed Job as “blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” in Job 1:8. Yet, Job became the all-time icon of living under evil in power. He lost his sons, his daughters, his servants, and his cattle. He was hanging on to his life with only the weakest grip. He was ugly, covered with sores and scratches from head to toe. He had no reason left to live. God had apparently left him. He tried to praise his Lord, but the question “Why?” kept weaving its way into his speeches. (Over fifteen times!) He knew that God couldn’t be punishing him. Finally, after thirty-four straight chapters of Job disputing with his friends, God answers Job face to face.

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God's answer isn't what we want it to be, however. We want a concise and detailed explanation of why all of this could happen to such a good man. A itemized legal brief would do nicely, or perhaps a sincere apology. It seems like nearly anything would be better than the answer God gives. Job 38:1-7 records the first words out of God's mouth:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

God starts right in, and He minces no words. He is God, and He wants to make it clear. Even though Job only doubted God's fairness and justice, God is out to prove His strength and might.

He lists example after example of his power, filling four chapters. Halfway through His speech I think we find the climax—God's main point. Here are His words from Job 40:8-14:

"Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will

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admit to you that your own right hand can save you.”

God is trying to tell Job one thing: “I am God, and you are not. I am in control, and you are not. Face it, Job. You can try being in control, you can attempt to run your life (and the lives and destinies of others), but you won’t make it. Remember, no matter what happens, I know what I am doing. I’ve done it before, and I will do it again.”

At first glance, this response seems to answer nothing. Job did not question God’s power—his speech in chapters twelve through fourteen showcases God’s awesome creative ability. Job questioned God’s fairness. So where does God’s answer fit in? I think that it was simply the best answer that we, as humans, are capable of understanding. Our vision of God is still dim and blurry (See 1 Corinthians 13:12.), and we cannot fathom His wisdom. As a result, there is only one thing that will help us get through our times of trouble and misery on this earth: our realization and trust that God is truly in control. This is precisely what Job realized; the first words out of his mouth were, as Job 42:2 records, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.”

I believe, too, that this is the lesson that we are given in many, many other passages of Scripture. Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Paul, the Apostles, and even Jesus Himself endured suffering—and God brought them through. As tough as our life may be, we can always count on God to bring us through. He has done it time and time again,

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and He will do it again. Yes, sometimes “bringing us through” means letting us enter Heaven a little sooner than we had planned, but somehow, somewhere, His plan is best.

The book of Hebrews points this out as well. In chapter eleven, the author lists the greats of our faith, commonly referred to as the “Faith Hall of Fame.” Yet, at the very end of the chapter, the writer turns from discussing those whose faith was evident in what God did *for* them, to those whose faith was evident in their trust of God *despite* what was happening to them. Consider Hebrews 11:35b-40, the end of the faith chapter:

“Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Throughout all of this, we can see our only appropriate response during times of frustration and struggle, times when evil surely seems to be in power. Yes, we can ask questions. Yes, we can be frustrated. God never condemns any of these actions in His servants. But, more than anything else, we need to realize that God is in control. He knows (and always has known) what He is doing, and that we can trust Him. He has promised us that we will never be tested beyond what we can bear, and He will keep that commitment forever.