

# Followers of the Way

**Sermon: 7 November 2021**

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**Genesis 1:26**

**Job 38: 4 - 41**

According to the Bible, men and women, alone of all creation, are made in the image of God. And in Genesis 1:26, we read that God has given mankind dominion “over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So, right from the very beginning, men and women are charged with caring for the Earth – of being good stewards. But there’s a world of difference between being, on the one hand, a good steward of the estate, an agent of the owner; and, on the other, the one who built that estate, who owns it, and who is in control. And that, at the end of the day, is the crucial difference between mankind and God.

Last Sunday, in Glasgow, we saw the start of COP26, the global climate change conference, bringing together world leaders to hammer out solutions to achieve net carbon emissions by 2050, and keep global warming within manageable bounds. It’s been billed as the world’s best *last chance* to get runaway global climate change under control. And it’s founded on the idea that **we can do this**. Scientists, we know, have analysed the data and made projections, and all we have to do now is work together to put the plans in place, so that we can stop damaging emissions and live more sustainably. If we fail, Boris Johnson has told us that life on planet earth, as we know it, is pretty much over!

Commendable aims, but one thing that’s very noticeable in amongst the rhetoric, is an almost total absence of reference to God. There are a few passing nods, of course, but by and large the approach seems to be that the consultations are a bit too important to leave the outcome to some airy-fairy being in the sky, and it’s down to us. Amazingly, even Church leaders seem to take this line, with the Church of England launching a consultation on proposals to achieve net zero carbon emissions from all its buildings by 2030, and the Pope calling the world to radical decisions, and “a renewed sense of shared responsibility”. But where, on the part of those involved, has there been a crying out to God for deliverance and for healing of the land?

Now, whatever your position on climate change, there does seem over the last few years to have been an increase in what are called extreme weather events. But, with the greatest respect to our leaders, in all their plans for global co-operation, they’re missing a fundamental point, and it’s here that we perhaps need to pause and take a look at Job.

Job, written around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, tells the story of a righteous man who faced unimaginable disaster when his business collapsed, his income dried up overnight, his children were killed in a terrible accident, and then he himself was struck down with sores

that covered his entire body. Job's supposed friends all said that this was judgment and he was getting what he deserved. But throughout the ordeal Job maintains his innocence, never at any point cursing God for the apparent injustice of it all, but repeatedly asking Him, 'why?'. And in the reading we've had this morning, God finally replies. Now *we* know that Job had to endure all these calamities precisely because he was righteous, and God permitted the satan to test him because this angel, charged with tempting mankind, said his faith was all show. So the calamities were permitted in order to prove Job's righteousness. But God doesn't tell Job this. Instead, when He finally answers Job out of the whirlwind – in itself a real demonstration of His power – He says, 'who are you to question Me?' And then, by a series of questions, He reveals to Job just how great He is, and His awesome power, that founded the world and that Job cannot possibly hope to understand.

“Where were you (God says) when I laid the foundation of the earth ...? Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb ... and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther ...?’”

There is absolutely no mistake here. This is God **Almighty**, who created all things, and who, however it might appear, is totally in control ... of everything. He's awesome. And it's in this encounter that at last all Job's questions are put to rest, and his fears stilled – because he's in the presence of this Almighty and All-powerful God. And so God blesses him and, as we read, He restores Job's fortunes.

So how does that relate to us? There are so many points here, it's hard to know where to begin. First, it's the job of the satan (and as used in Job, this is a role, by the way, not a name); it's the job of this angel to tempt men and women in order to prove them, and nothing can happen without God's permission. Yet God's will is for blessing, not harm - at no point is there any suggestion He wants Job to be destroyed. Rather He wants Him to trust - as Job actually does, though with a lot of complaint. Which is interesting. But the main point I want to make here, as we've seen in our reading this morning, is that God holds everything in His hand. He alone is the creator of all things, and controls all things.

Now modern science has a different narrative. It tells us that knowledge is the key, and that as we advance in understanding, so all the wonders of the universe will be unfolded and **we'll** be in control. God is irrelevant. If nothing else, the events of the last few years should have demonstrated just how facile that approach is. Yes, by God's grace, science has yielded incredible discoveries and knowledge, and it's great. But the one thing it can't do, is answer the ultimate questions and put us in control. Nature is always one step ahead.

Job, in the problems he encountered – that literally wrecked his life – knew he didn't have the answers, so he cried out to God, and because of his faithfulness, God met with him, and restored him. If Job hadn't been faithful, then the satan would have been proved right, and Job really would have come under judgment. Today, as a world, we're facing a whole string of crises. Covid, climate change, financial collapse, growing aggression between world powers ... but instead of asking God why this is all happening, and asking Him for help – we say, we can do it! We've got this ... if we work together, we can beat it.

This is hubris, and it cannot succeed. Instead of coming up with all these plans to achieve net zero carbon emissions – which, given what's happening with the melting permafrost seems doomed to failure anyway – first off, mankind needs to turn back to God and ask Him where we've gone wrong. Then we need to say sorry, and amend our lives, acknowledging Him as

Lord. And then, we need to ask His help. Because He's the only one who *can* actually deliver us.

Job was a righteous man, who knew that in all the devastation he faced the only answer was God. The world today is caught in a spiritual battle between good and evil. Satan (the rebellious angel this time, not the role), Satan is once again trying to challenge God and seize control, and he's grown incredibly powerful, because of the 'worship' we've given him over the last century. We've exulted death, for example, by our mindless, blood sacrifice of the unborn – millions of children denied the chance of life. We've made a god of sexual licence, perversion, and promiscuity, saying we can be whatever we want, whenever we want ... Worst of all, we've rejected God, saying all religions are the same, it doesn't matter – we've grown up. We don't need the fairy stories anymore!

The truth is, the world has become blinded by evil, and God has withdrawn His protection. What we're witnessing today is a consequence of our choices, and while we persist in rebellion, we can't win. We can't solve this.

The challenges we're facing are a warning of the judgment to come, and a last chance to repent before the Lord returns and it becomes too late. What we're witnessing is a battle between good and evil. We know how it will end because the outcome was decided at the Cross, but the fate of men and women still hangs in the balance. Yes, we need to be good stewards of the Earth and not plunder its resources, but that's not enough. There *is* a storm gathering over the earth; but whatever they decide at COP 26, this is a tide we cannot turn back by ourselves.

So let's learn the lesson from Job. God is the one holding all the answers. God is in control... and only He can save us. This is the message the world needs to hear.

