

Trusting the One Who Knows

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a five-part series

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Job 42:1-6 (Common English Bible)

Job answered the LORD:

- ²I know you can do anything;
no plan of yours
can be opposed successfully.
- ³You said, “Who is this darkening counsel
without knowledge?”
I have indeed spoken about
things I didn’t understand,
wonders beyond my comprehension.
- ⁴You said, “Listen and I will speak;
I will question you
and you will inform me.”
- ⁵My ears had heard about you,
but now my eyes have seen you.
- ⁶Therefore, I relent and find comfort
on dust and ashes.

Joshua 2:1-14 (NRSV)

Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. ²The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.” ⁴But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from.” ⁵And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.” ⁶She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. ⁷So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

⁸Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof⁹ and said to the men: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. ¹⁰For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹²Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith ¹³that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” ¹⁴The men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land.”

The question is quite simple: Will we trust what we don't know to the one who does?

Trust is the bond that enables the deepest and most meaningful relationships in our lives. If we have even a few people over the course of our lives that we utterly and completely trust, then we should count ourselves blessed. The first meaning of the word “trust” in Merriam-Websters is:

“assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone”

The fact that the definition incorporates an “or” illustrates that we use the word to convey different meanings. We can trust someone’s competence or we can trust their character or both. For example. I trust Robert Hasley’s character utterly and completely. I could leave a million bucks with him, fully confident that he would still have it for me when I returned. But would I trust Robert to run a nuclear power plant? Probably not. He is fully competent

in many things, but nuclear engineering is not one of them. Granted, when we think about trusting someone, we usually have in mind their character, but competence is often an important part of the trust calculation too.

There's something else about trust. Trust has to be built over a long time but it can be shattered in an instant, by one rash act, by a single instance of betrayal. That's why even

Faith and Trust

Sometimes the simplest words, like "faith," can be turned into church words that we recite all the time, but never really think about. Ask yourself – what do we mean when we say we have faith in God or faith in Jesus? If you have trouble coming up with a simple answer, try using the word "trust." When we have faith in Jesus, it means that we trust him – completely. Even when we say we believe in Jesus, it is a statement about our faith, our trust. In the New Testament, the Greek word we translate "believe" is simply the verb form of the Greek noun "faith."

There are many questions about God and life that I cannot answer. But I trust God. I trust that he will always be good and just and wise. I trust that he will always love me. I trust that I can tell him anything – that, in truth, he knows me better than I know myself.

one act of unfaithfulness in a marriage never completely goes away. It can be overcome, but the memory is still there like a distant shadow.

This week wraps up our five-week series on doubt and unbelief. But even fifty weeks isn't enough time to consider all the questions we have regarding God, Jesus, the Bible, the church, and the rest. Indeed, many of the questions that we have aren't really answerable. "Why is there suffering in God's good creation?" On one level, we could talk about sin or creative dynamism, but, in the end, the question will still linger. As will many others.

So what do we do with the questions we can't answer or the answers that discomfort us? We could just walk away from the whole thing, muttering that we won't trust God until we get satisfactory answers to all our questions. But that seems pretty foolish. Why would we think we could ever comprehend the fullness of God and his work in this world?

No, in the end, the question is really pretty simple: *Will we trust God even with all our doubts and questions?* That's the question for everyone who claims to have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. We can acknowledge our doubts, we all have some, but we can still choose to trust God with what we cannot understand or what we question.

The Bible, in its diverse writings, reveals to us that God is both competent and of unquestioned

character. The story, begun with Abraham and culminating in the death of Jesus on the cross, shows that God not only makes promises but keeps those promises. God is the able promise-keeper. The Bible's way to show us that God is trustworthy is to tell us the stories of his people. Yes, we are told of God's faithfulness in neat declarative statements, but the bulk of the telling is via story.

There are many stories in the Bible of people who chose to trust God for that is the most basic story of all. This week, we'll look at two of those stories: the well-known Job and the relatively obscure prostitute named Rahab.

"Do you have the answers?"

The basic story of Job is simple. He is a "blameless and upright" man, wealthy and devoted to God. Coming before God in the heavens, the Accuser¹ claims that Job is devoted to God only because he has been very blessed in his life and that if Job loses everything, then he will turn against God.

God allows the Accuser to take everything from Job – his family, his home, his wealth, even his health. Job has no idea why such suffering has fallen on him. Job's friends come to comfort him and for seven days, they simply sit with him. But they can't resist trying to answer the questions posed by Job's suffering. Surely, Job has done something wrong. Or perhaps his family did. Somebody must have, they say . . . for bad things don't happen to good people. But, of course, you and I know that they do. Bad things happen to good people

¹ This is *ha-satan*, whose job seems to be to roam the earth and assess wrong-doing.

all the time. Often, it is at the hands of other people, but sometimes it is the indiscriminate suffering caused by a tsunami or an illness.

In the end, after Job's friends have demonstrated their foolishness and pride through all their futile explanations, God arrives, putting human wisdom in perspective. This is God's world and Job's friends are foolish to think they can answer all the questions. They do not have the answers and they won't ever get them. In the end, Job never gets answers as to why such suffering befell him. Humility is a necessary virtue when we come to these questions ourselves. As hard as it may be to accept, there are some questions, some of the most important questions, to which we will never get satisfying answers. Job certainly did not.

The stuff of legend

It is amazing to see what one act of trust and courage can do for a woman's reputation. When we meet Rahab, she is a common prostitute living in the city walls of Jericho. Yet, in Jewish legend, she came to be remembered as one of the four most beautiful women in all of human history. The story was told that she went on to become a righteous convert to the worship of YHWH, that she eventually married Joshua, and even became the ancestor of eight great prophets, including Jeremiah. Matthew lists her in his genealogy of Jesus. In his New Testament letter, James lifts her up as an example of faith in action. The writer of Hebrews includes her in the long lists of God's faithful. What was it about Rahab and her story that gave birth to such prominence and reverence among God's people? The basics of her story are pretty simple.

One day, two men arrive at her door. Rahab realizes that they are spies for the Israelites who are preparing to attack Jericho in their conquest of Canaan. She, like the rest of the city, has heard of these people and their god. She quickly decides to help the two men, in defiance of her own king. She hides the two men and then helps them escape from the city, but only after extracting a promise that she and her family will be spared by the Israelites when they take the city. The men tell her to hang a red cord in her window as a signal of the household to be spared. When Joshua enters the city, he keeps the promise made to Rahab (6:22-25).

There are two important questions surrounding this story. First, why does Rahab take the risk of helping Joshua's spies? Second, why was this story preserved and then told in such detail in the book of Joshua?

A confession of faith/trust

Why does she help? Rahab tells the spies that she has heard what the LORD has done for the Israelites. She knows that God has given them the land. She knows about the flight from Egypt across the dried-up Red Sea. In short, she has heard about the mighty saving acts of YHWH² and believes. She confesses her faith to the two men, "The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below." She knows little about God, but she knows enough to choose him and to trust him. Rahab, this common prostitute, utters the words that God hopes all humanity would utter. She places her faith in a God she has hardly met.

Acting on it

It is one thing to profess faith in God, the "God in heaven above and on earth below," as Rahab puts it. It is another to act on it and yet another to risk one's life, and that is surely what Rahab does in defying her king.

Perhaps this is why the story was preserved in such detail, why Rahab became the stuff of legend. We see in her a willingness to act on her faith, to risk it all. What she knows of the LORD God is only what she has heard. She knows nothing of the law given to Moses,

²YHWH is the English translation of God's name as revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). The Israelites came to embrace the name as so holy that they would not say it. Thus, when they came upon the name, YHWH, in their Scriptures, they would say, *Adonai*, the Hebrew word for "Lord." English translations respect that tradition by rendering YHWH as LORD (always in the small caps to differentiate it from the word "Lord.").

nothing of the tabernacle and God's presence. Yet, she has been given faith sufficient to take extraordinary risks, even to betray her own people.

Can God be trusted?

If we are not going to get all the answers we seek, then where are we left? In his book, *Can God Be Trusted?: Faith and the Challenge of Evil*, John Stackhouse traces both the theological problems posed by evil and suffering, as well as possible solutions that have been proposed. He rightly concludes that the key question posed to us is whether we will trust God even in the face of our own unanswerable questions. Will we trust God's promises that, in the end, we will enjoy a renewed and transformed world free from tragedy, illness, suffering, and even death? Will we trust that God is all-powerful and all-loving even though, at times, it doesn't seem possible to us?

In *Creation Untamed*, Terence Fretheim offers us these reflections on the questions for God in the Job story:³

[The] world that God describes in these speeches represents God's willed design, and Job should trust that God knows what God is doing in creating such a world. At the same time, God does not ignore Job's questions about such a world. God could have dismissed Job's queries outright and shut down conversation in a hurry. Yet God chooses to respond at some length to the issues Job raises and gives Job room to respond, thereby demonstrating that the "why?" questions are worthy of consideration and, at least to some extent, can help human beings understand some reasons for suffering, reasons not necessarily related to sin. God may be said to have created a good world, but that world is not harmless. Job and we ourselves might wish God had created a different kind of world, but we will never know whether such a world would have been less dangerous.

The divine relationship to this kind of world is such that God no longer acts with complete freedom but from within a committed relationship to the structures of creation to which God will be faithful. . . . The speeches reveal that God's well-ordered world does not have a tight causal weave (it is more like burlap than silk); there is room for ambiguity and randomness that may occasion suffering. To be told that God is responsible for creating the kind of world in which suffering can take place may provide a remarkable comfort. There is a price, sometimes a horrendous price, the people may pay for living in such a world. But this is a price that God also pays, for God too will experience the suffering that the creatures undergo. God does not remain aloof, ensconced in some distant abode. God is not like a mechanic fixing a car. God enters deeply into our suffering; rather than controlling things from without, God works from within.

This is not complicated. We are asked to trust God with all our doubts and hurts, our questions and our pain. Will you let God help your unbelief?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by talking about Job. He has suffered terribly, losing everything – all for no apparent reason. Assume that you are one of Job's friends. You've come to comfort him and the conversation inevitably turns to the explanation for Job's sufferings. What possible explanations might you suggest? What explanations might you hear from others? What is your reaction to God's pronouncements that the answers are unknowable and that it is foolish for us even to ask?
2. How would you describe Rahab's faith? Why do you think she is willing to take such risks? How would you explain her faith? What does this story say to you about our discipleship?
3. What holds you back from fully trusting God? What doubts and questions are you unwilling to hand over to God? Have you come to see why Jesus' resurrection is the event on which all this rests?

³Terence Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 2010. P. 88-89.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, Job 1 and 2 – the wager is made	Tuesday, Job 4 – Eliphaz believes the innocent do not suffer
Wednesday, Job 27 – Job affirms his innocence	Thursday, Job 38, 40:1-14, & 42 – God speaks, Job repents and is restored
Friday, Joshua 2 All of Rahab's story	Prayer List

