

“You Can’t Question God” – the urban myth series

intro: Did any of you come from a church where faith was a package? It was wrapped up, all figured out before you were born, and delivered to you as a fait accompli – not to be questioned, not to be changed. The main job of the church was to make sure that nothing was changed.

I. The Art of Questioning God

- A.** To question anything the church taught was to question God – and you can’t question God.
- B.** As I got older, I encountered the Book of Job. Perhaps the oldest book in our Bible, Job is all about Job’s struggle with God.
 - 1. He questions God repeatedly.
 - 2. And God answers – obliquely. He shows Job the creation and reminds him that the One who made all things can run Job’s life, too.
 - 3. Job doesn’t get many straight answers, and he garners a rebuke or two, but God works with him through the dance, the struggle.
- C.** Then I came upon the story of Abraham in Genesis 17ff. I liked the story of Sodom and Gomorrah because it involved angels, bad guys, and instant justice. It was the bit before the angels entered Sodom that bothered me.
 - 1. Abraham bargained with God about how many righteous people he would need to find in Sodom before calling off the destruction.
 - 2. And God went along with the bargaining. He didn’t counter offer. He asked Abraham what he thought would be reasonable.
 - 3. When Abraham kept changing the number, God went along with him. It didn’t seem that God was upset with Abraham questioning Him; bargaining with Him.
- D.** The strange case of Jacob wrestling God. Why would God allow such a thing? Why put this in the Bible?

II. The Case of Habakkuk

- A.** One very short, almost obscure, book in the Old Testament has had a great influence over my thought. To any who believe that you can't question God, this book has to be a real problem.
- B.** Hab.1:2-5. *"How long, O LORD, must I call for help? But you do not listen! "Violence!" I cry, but you do not come to save. 3 Must I forever see this sin and misery all around me? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. 4 The law has become paralyzed and useless, and there is no justice given in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, and justice is perverted with bribes and trickery."*
1. Sound familiar? We have complaints like this. We pray – but where are you? Bad things are happening to us and we want rescued but... again, you don't come. There is too much war... and you aren't doing anything about it. The law is perverted, slow, and works against justice. There are bad people everywhere.
 2. We see in the first verses of Habakkuk the complaints that we typically have toward God, but we also see that one of God's own prophets felt it was entirely proper to question God about all of this.
- C.** God immediately answers His prophet, but the answer isn't what Habakkuk wanted to hear.
1. God is creating an army that will come against Israel.
 2. Habakkuk asks if God wants to wipe them out!
1:12- 2:1
 3. God tells Habakkuk that He will make it plain by writing it big! Chapter two is God's view of things. He sees evil, greed, people plundering nations, people plundering people in business, law, via government.
 4. The day will come when all of this will catch up with you – even if, as said here, God will come slowly, slowly. When it does, you will either have to trust in the idols that have always failed you, or

you will have to turn to God and confess: “The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”

5. This is a statement of faith in the midst of questioning; not in place of it. We come to God saying “We don’t understand. Write this large for us. Help us see if we are part of the problem. But we trust you. We know it is God who rules.”
 6. [have them repeat the statement of faith, then the praise team will sing the song twice]
- D. Habakkuk asks God to not destroy them when He is angry, but he also takes time to acknowledge who God is and the righteousness of God’s cause.
 - E. Then comes this amazing statement of faith: 3:16-19.

III. Work Out Your Salvation

- A. Knowing these things helps me understand passages like Phil. 2:12. Note the word “obey”? There is an inbuilt tension in scripture: faith and works. Obedience vs. grace. Why? Because these are dance lessons from God. It is supposed to be a journey, not a “to do” list.
- B. With Kami – it is focusing on her, not on a “to do” and a “not to do” list. With us, it must be a focusing on Christ, not a prepackaged set of laws, traditions, and ways that must be defended at all costs.
- C. So we get into small groups. We form communities. We read scripture together, fellowship with each other, and help each other ask God questions and listen for the answer. We watch and pray.
- D. Rochester Church’s journey: Christ, scripture, baptism, personal ministry (the ministry survey cards).
- E. We are not ashamed to look at each of you and say: we don’t have all the answers but we worship He who does. We are walking toward Him as swiftly as we can. We want you to come with us.
- F. In a group, we can do this much better. We call you to the place where questions can be asked. We call you to the journey. We call you to the dance.