

September 7, 2025 – “Leviathan, a Creature Without Fear” – from Job 41, Mike Eggleston

Leviathan is not a word you hear every day. Or maybe not every week, or month, or maybe we've not heard of Leviathan since we were back in high school reading Moby Dick. Leviathan is almost certainly a large mythical sea creature. If we think about large mythical sea creatures at all we likely think of them as large sea monsters who wreak havoc, like Jaws or megalodons or giant squids or godzillas. But that's giving them a bad press. Leviathan in the book of Job is not a monster but something different, a force of nature created by God. In this sermon I plan to consider but brush aside three imitation Leviathans, the monstrous ones, and then talk about Leviathan in Job 41. God tells Job you'd better have him on your radar, take him into account. For Job's Leviathan on earth has no equal, a creature without fear.

Looking at three of the not Leviathans, they tend to be human-made, very political critters. The political philosopher Thomas Hobbes in 1651 wrote a very influential book entitled Leviathan. Hobbes was a man of privilege, educated at Oxford, a tutor to royalty. He fled England for France during the English Civil War, when the rebellious Puritans overthrew and executed King Charles I. The main tenets of Hobbes teachings were three. First, in a state of nature the condition of humans is a state of war. Everyone is against everyone. All seek to survive and extend their own power. So Hobbes famously said that in our natural state our lives are solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. The second tenet of Hobbes teaching is that therefore, humans must and do enter into a social contract with other humans in which we surrender many of our rights and powers to a state, a government, to protect us from destroying each other. That state, that government to which we submit, is what Hobbes calls Leviathan. On the famous cover of his book Leviathan is seen as a king towering high over the mountains, and the body of that ruler is composed of all the tiny bodies of his subjects who yield their power to him. That's Leviathan, for Hobbes. The third tenet of Hobbes' political philosophy is that he considers which form of government works best. Aristotle had said that could be a monarchy with one ruler, or an oligarchy of several powerful rulers, or even a democracy where every land-owning male has a vote. Hobbes favored the rule of one sovereign with unlimited power. Our United States of America founded 120 years after Hobbes and after a successful revolt against kings, was built on a different political philosophy. For Hobbes, government, or leviathan, exists to maintain order and enforce the king's law. For John Locke, and Jefferson and Madison and Washington, government's role at least in theory is to preserve and extend freedom. In any case, Hobbes's Leviathan was not Job's Leviathan. For Hobbes, Leviathan was a government ruled best by a king.

Which brings me to a second very Biblical, and very political mythological monster which is also not Job's Leviathan. In Revelation chapter 13-19, a huge monster arises from the sea. In Biblical Greek it's called therion. I'll refer to it as therion rather than the common English translation the beast mostly because the word therion doesn't carry so much baggage. Anyway, therion is the second of an unholy Trinity of three monsters in the end times: first a red dragon Satan fallen from heaven; second, therion a world conquering monster out of the sea; and a third beast from the land usually called the false prophet. These three are very bad news. Therion is an intensely political thing, with seven heads and ten horns. Revelation tells us that the seven heads are seven kings of which one is now ruling, and the

ten horns are ten more kings who will rule but only for one hour. If you're getting lost in the numbers and the veiled symbolism here, well, just trust me that therion for early Christians and Jews was a symbol of the Roman Empire in the first century when it destroyed Jerusalem. And more broadly, therion the beast has been a symbol for any empire which brutally seeks to conquer and rule the world. The Third Reich under Hitler was compared to therion. Napoleon 130 years earlier who conquered most of Europe was thought by many to be the beast. The British colonial empire was thought by many it conquered to be therion. The Catholic Church has been compared to therion by Protestants. Martin Luther and the Protestants were likened to the beast by Catholics when those sides were at war. Hal Lindsay sold a lot of books in our lifetimes by saying that the European common market allied with Russia and China would be the beast. Therion the beast has always been a symbol of a conquering empire, an imperial power. The only power that finally stops therion and the devil and the false prophet according to Revelation is Jesus Christ at his second coming. One comment I would make about therion is that it's almost always somebody else; very few look in the mirror and see therion in ourselves or in our country. But my comment about therion is that this is not Leviathan. Therion is a brutal political empire that seeks to rule the world. Leviathan in Job keeps to his or her home in the seas.

I will briefly speak of one more cousin to Job's Leviathan. This one is actually a prequel, a more ancient myth. Predating the Bible and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, in Sumeria and Babylon in present day Iraq there was a myth of a cosmic sea goddess, Tiamat, who was defeated by Mesopotamian gods but whose body had been so vast that the new gods used it to create the heavens and the earth. In the areas of present day Lebanon and Syria there was also an older myth of an oceanic sea monster, Lotan, who was slain by Syrian gods. Isaiah 27.1 likely makes reference to this older myth when Isaiah said God will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and God will kill the dragon that is in the sea. Psalm 104 also mentions Leviathan but in a much more positive way. That Psalm praises God for all that God has created, among them living things great and small in the sea including Leviathan that God formed to sport in it. Which now, finally, brings me to Job 41. Job's Leviathan is not a monster. Yet it's also not something you wanna mess with.

Job is a unique book in our scriptures. It's mostly a long poem which wrestles with one eternal question: why do bad things happen to good people? The main character, Job, is very unusual in the Bible in that Job is not an Israelite nor a Jew nor Christian yet is still utterly righteous. God describes Job as my servant, and says there is no one like him on earth, blameless and upright. Job thrives in prosperity and generosity. Until God allows Satan which literally means the accuser, to test Job. Satan destroys all Job's property and family. Then Satan destroys Job's health as well and leaves him in pain from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job's three friends come to comfort Job, but they're no help. They voice all the traditional answers to why good people suffer. Job shuts them down: They are a torment, not a help. Job's last speech is an impassioned speech for his innocence and a plea to God to show up and answer him. Finally God does answer Job, out of the whirlwind. God makes a fascinating answer to the problem of evil. It's an unusual, non-intuitive answer.

At first glance it seems like God just pulls rank. Me God, you not. Job, your God is too small. But at a deeper level, God calls all creation to help Job see his proper place in the world. God schools Job

with the wonders of all creation. Joseph Campbell in our time wrote of four functions of myth, and the first two are right on the mark here. The first function of myth is to inspire in humans a sense of awe and gratitude to the mysteries of the universe; the second function of myth is to link our individual experience and knowledge with the mysteries of the universe. Poor suffering Job is being brought online by God to the grandeur and wisdom of the cosmos. First God calls up as witnesses to God the physical structures of earth: the lands, the seas, the mornings, the night times, the seasons, the rains, the snow, the deserts, the lightning and thunder, the sun and moon and stars. It's a little like if all the Planet Earth videos with David Attenborough were being downloaded instantaneously into Job's mind. Then God floods Job's consciousness with earth's lifeforms, and especially God calls as witnesses the wildlife which back then was beyond human control. Job, do you know the mountain goats, the calving of the deer, the paths of the wild donkeys or the ostrich or the warhorse or the freedom and vision of the eagles? Job's mind which had been filled with his own woes is suddenly being flooded with awe and gratitude for other lifeforms. At which point Job says OK, I get it, Lord, I'm a small creature here and will hush my mouth. But Job doesn't really get it yet, so God then gives two final exhibits of the most awesome creatures on earth. God reveals something called behemoth on the land. That's another sermon, maybe, some day. Now we're getting to this sermon title. God's prime witness, God's exhibit A for the glory of God revealed through creation is Leviathan, which on earth has no equal, a creature without fear.

What does Leviathan look like according to Job? Well, something like a giant crocodile. It's back is covered with double shields like coats of mail, airtight, impenetrable by human weapons. There are terrors all around its teeth. How strong is Leviathan? Well, strong enough that no human nor any other creatures on earth can fight with it and be safe. Even the superheroes and gods that humans imagine except for the one creator God are no match for Leviathan; they're overwhelmed by the sight of it. What special powers does Leviathan have? Well, it bears some resemblance to Godzilla here, in that Leviathan breathes fire, flame comes out of its mouth and smoke from its nostrils, Leviathan makes the deep sea boil like a pot. What are the positive qualities of Leviathan? Well, it's near indestructible, no weapons known in Bible times could harm it. What are the negative qualities of Leviathan? Well, there aren't any negatives really. It's not a destructive monster. It doesn't come up on land like Godzilla and destroy cities. We're not told that it sinks ships like Moby Dick or eats whales for breakfast or pollutes its habitat. God's last words describing Leviathan are remarkably positive. Leviathan on earth has no equal, a creature without fear.

Hmm. I kind of wish I was a creature without fear, how about you? I secretly fear many things. I fear death, I fear pain, how about you? I fear embarrassment or rejection by other people. I fear ICE for many of my friends and children are naturalized citizens. I fear politicians and philosophers of politics like Thomas Hobbes who tell us that that our basic state of nature is to be afraid because the human condition is to be at war. Darn. I won't want to be in Hobbes's Leviathan. I would like to be like Job's Leviathan, swimming in the sea of life, a creature without fear. Jesus was a man without fear. Jesus and God the Father so often say to us, fear not, be not afraid.

Leviathan is a mythical creature but sure symbolizes something. I think Job's Leviathan stands for the resilience of life, the hope and faith and grandeur which God breathes into life from the beginning.

I'll briefly close with a recent account about fear and the resilience of life. I heard this from a man named Dan Wickstrom ten days ago at a Mended Hearts meeting. Wickstrom is about 40 years old, a fit, energetic man covered with tattoos head to toe. He'll tell his story again at the Red Barn in Los Osos on September 14 at 2 PM. A story of pain and loss, like Job's, but also of resilience and now a degree of fearlessness. Dan is a heart transplant survivor. Here is his story.

He knew something was wrong at age 16 when sometimes even when driving his vision would just narrow down until he almost lost sight and consciousness. The doctors said, well, try this or that, it may go away or get better. And it did go away sometimes and get worse sometimes. He married and had children in his 20s, strong reasons for living, even while at the same time having black outs and weakness and times of great pain. By then doctors had diagnosed cardiomyopathy, heart failure where the heart muscle often just can't pump enough. Before he was 30, his good doctors here said you'd be a good candidate for a heart transplant, because sudden death is also one of the symptoms of cardiomyopathy. The heart team at UCLA also said, yes, you'd be wise to get on the waiting list for a donor heart transplant. At some point, Wickstrom's heart stopped, but they attached to his chest an LVAD, left ventricular assist device, to restart and hopefully keep his heart beating until a transplant became available. Then after a year of waiting, the fast sudden trip to UCLA, the surgery to remove his heart and put in a donor heart. For whatever reason, that did not all go well for Dan. At least two weeks of being in a coma with multiple life support devices and terrible bad dreams followed. But Daniel Wickstrom woke up and lived and I guess to this day is on the medications that allow your body to co-exist with a new heart from someone else who didn't survive a traffic accident.

That someone else was the eldest in a family of several siblings. Within the first year, the donor's family asked to meet Dan who was now alive because of their loved one's heart. So they met. Within another year, the next oldest sister asked Dan if he would come to her wedding, OK, And then she asked if Dan might dance with her at that wedding, OK. And then an even more touching request. Would he be willing to officiate at her wedding? OK. That wasn't easy. A number of family members and friends felt out of sorts to think that their loved one has passed but now his heart is allowing that stranger up front to live and conduct our family wedding. But I guess there are a lot of strange and painful and glorious things in life. Daniel Wickstrom is now about 40, he's seen his own children mostly grow up. He gives talks about the pain and the overcoming. When he goes to UCLA he makes the rounds to encourage other people awaiting or recovering from heart transplants. What does this have to do with Job's Leviathan? Well, it just seems to me that Job's Leviathan is a mythical sea creature, who stands for something very real. Leviathan stands for the resilience of life, which after all probably first arose in the oceans of this planet. And Leviathan stands for transcending fear in life. He or she is a creature without fear. Since I've already referred to iconic movies like Godzilla and Moby Dick, I'll close with another iconic quote from a monster movie, although they're not really monsters, just great creations of God. From the first Jurassic Park movie, hold on to this. "Life will find a way." Leviathan, a creature without fear, stands for the resilience and the transcendence of life, which by the grace of God will find a way. Thank you, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.