

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(October 6, 2013)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm**

(Studies in the book of Job)

### **The Demands of Friendship**

(Examining Job's responses, part 1)

Study #6

#### **Introduction: Kicking 'em when they're down...**

In American athletics, it is considered unsportsmanlike to "run up the score" on an opponent after the outcome of a game is already decided.

In fact, today, there are rules in most youth sports leagues against this practice.

Still it has happened, and it continues to happen that a winning team will keep on trying to score points against a hapless rival when there is no question as to who's going to win and who's going to lose.

Back on October 7, 1916, Georgia Tech defeated the Cumberland College Bulldogs 222-0.<sup>1</sup> Georgia Tech scored 63 points in the first quarter and 63 points in the second quarter, then 54 points in the third quarter and 42 points in the fourth.

Neither team gained a first down during the game, because Georgia Tech's defense prevented Cumberland from advancing for a first down and Georgia Tech scored on every series of downs.

It's happened more recently, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Not long before this game, Cumberland had disbanded its football team. They quickly formed a scrub team when faced with fines if they refused to play.

On November 30, 1985, the University of Miami Hurricanes were playing Notre Dame. The Hurricanes, led by Coach Jimmy Johnson, called a fake punt on fourth-and-11 in the fourth quarter with a 44-7 lead and went on to win 58-7.

On November 23, 1968, the University of Houston defeated the University of Tulsa, 100-6. They had a 24-0 advantage at half - and then went on to score eleven touchdowns in the second half. Again, in 1989, U of H routed Southern Methodist University (SMU was fresh off of its "death penalty" punishment from the NCAA) 95-21.

Then, in 1968, the Ohio State Buckeyes, on the way to a national championship, defeated their bitter rival, the Michigan Wolverines, 50-14. Late in the game, Ohio State held a commanding 44-14 advantage and scored one final touchdown. Rather than taking the more common extra point kick, head coach Woody Hayes opted for a two-point conversion, which was unsuccessful.

When asked later why he went for two points, Hayes said, "*Because I couldn't go for three!*"<sup>2</sup>

All of those stories are both sad - and a little funny in their own way. Upon reflection, they draw us to the idea that you really shouldn't kick someone when they're down. You don't take unfair advantage.

I'm going to warn you here at the outset this morning that it may seem to you that I'm "running up the score" on our friend, Job. Now that he's down, I'm kicking him.

Today, we're turning from our two week focus on Job's friends to take a look at Job himself. His speeches give us a glimpse into his soul and his words allow us to look at what is happening inside him - and sadly, the view isn't all that pretty.

Last week, we paid careful attention to the cruel way in which Job's friends treated him. This morning we're going to evaluate Job with respect to how he relates to his friends.

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<sup>2</sup> Since that game, Ohio State players have commented that there was some sort of confusion on the extra point kick, and Hayes was just covering for his players.

And I believe that we're going to learn something today about following Jesus, something extremely important.

However, I'll warn you that it's going to be one of those "tough lessons." Today we find one of those life-giving lessons in extreme Christian discipleship, the kind of discipleship to which we are all called.

On a purely practical level, this morning's and next Sunday's sermons contain the most challenging messages for me, personally, out of the whole book of Job. I won't be surprised if the same is true for you, as well.

Now, in case you haven't been with us for the whole Job journey, I'll take a minute to recap his story for you.

#### *Review*

About four thousand years ago, Job was a wealthy and godly man with a large and happy family. In one day, he lost it all. Shortly after that day, he lost his health.

His trials didn't come (as his friends believed) because he had done something wrong. Rather it was because God wanted to show Satan that Job would continue to love and trust Him even if God's blessings were taken away.

Job had always been God's representative, God's man among men. He had been a bright light in dark places for God. Here was the test: Would he continue to be that kind of a man when in hardship?

THAT, by the way, has always been the call of God on His people: That we would serve and trust and love Him no matter what happens; that we would be His representatives on earth to serve His purposes; that we would be lights in a dark world.

Or, as we like to say it around here these days, that we would be "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission.

Satan said Job would fail. He would blow it. God said he would remain true. He would keep on keeping on.

And, to this point, we've seen Job respond to his losses with great integrity and faith.

After his first trials he responded with:  
***[1:21] Naked I came from my mother's womb  
 And naked I shall return there.  
 The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away,  
 Blessed be the Name of the Lord.***

To which we say, "Great, Job!"

Then, after his good health vanished Job did not sin with his lips and went on to tell his wife, ***[2:10] "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"***

Another win for God and Job. Another loss for Satan.

He then retreated to the city's trash dump, where those with contagious skin diseases went to live in the ancient world. With his three good friends seated with him, he poured out a desperate lament for all the trouble that had come upon him.

His lament was a perfectly appropriate way to express grief over his many losses.

That's three wins in a row. Job is doing great.

And then, after silently sitting with him for seven days and seven nights, and after listening while he poured out his lament, his friends started talking.

*The words of a friend...*

The first of the friends to speak was Eliphaz the Temanite. And to his grief-stricken, diseased tortured friend he said,

***[4:7] "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?  
 Or where were the upright destroyed?  
 [8] "According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity  
 And those who sow trouble harvest it.***

[5:6] *“For affliction does not come from the dust,  
Nor does trouble sprout from the ground,  
[7] For man is born for trouble,  
As sparks fly upward.*

In other words, Eliphaz laid the blame for Job’s suffering on Job.  
“You brought this on yourself, buddy.”

Job’s immediate response is compelling for its honesty and transparency.

### **Round One: Pleading for Compassion (Job 4-14)**

#### **“What a Friend Should Give a Friend” (6:14)**

[6:14] *“For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend;  
So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.*

I think that Job does a very good job of expressing his longing.

I almost picture him in shock at the tongue-lashing he just got from Eliphaz. In my mind’s eye he looks like he’s just been slapped by a good friend for no reason.

His come-back is to simply and forthrightly tell Eliphaz, *“Hey, try a little tenderness, please.”*

And Job hasn’t left God out of the equation, either. The downstream, transcendent reason for a friend extending kindness is SO THAT the despairing friend will walk with God and won’t *“forsake the fear of the Almighty.”*

It is a good thing when friends come alongside suffering friends and provide kindness. And it’s not a bad thing when a suffering friend expresses a longing for that kindness.

It’s also not a bad thing for a suffering friend to express disappointment that his friend has not exactly brought the kindness he was hoping to receive.

#### **“I’m Really Disappointed” (6:15-20)**

[6:15] *“My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi,  
Like the torrents of wadis which vanish,  
[16] Which are turbid because of ice  
And into which the snow melts.  
[17] “When they become waterless, they are silent,  
When it is hot, they vanish from their place.  
[18] “The paths of their course wind along,  
They go up into nothing and perish.*

A *wadi* is an “occasional” stream. It occasionally flows and it occasionally doesn’t. We in Texas are very familiar with wadis.

I’ve told you that one of my favorite places to go camping is Big Bend Ranch State Park, out in the desert of West Texas.

It’s dry and arid - as you would expect a desert to be. But there are oases out there. And there’s nothing more delightful than to be hiking along on a dry creek bed and to come upon a spot where the water bubbles up from underground and is flowing on the surface.

Of course, thirty yards downstream the water will disappear again - but that’s a wadi. Unpredictable and - more to the point - undependable.

This is how Eliphaz’ words have impacted Job.

Just when Job’s parched soul could have really used a cool drink of water, Eliphaz speaks dry, dusty words. Job is hurt and disappointed that his hopes for kindness have been dashed.

He laments that disappointment, and it seems to me that there’s nothing wrong with that lament over the lack of comfort and compassion he’s received.

His initial disappointment doesn’t, though, keep him from continuing to express hope. Listen as Job once again voices his desire for friendly comfort from his friends.

**“Please Help Me!”(6:24-30)**

*Openness to correction (6:24-27)*

**[24] “Teach me, and I will be silent;  
And show me how I have erred.**

**[25] “How painful are honest words!  
But what does your argument prove?**

**[26] “Do you intend to reprove my words,  
When the words of one in despair belong to the wind?”**

We can hear the pain in those words! But there is an openness to receiving instruction. He’s not closed off from learning from his friends. He simply longs for their kindness.

He goes on to protest that he is innocent. He hasn’t done anything wrong. So, again, *“Please, don’t deal with me as I have committed some horrible sin. That would be deceitful.”*

*Asking for honesty and justice (6:28-30)*

**[28] “Now please look at me,  
And see if I lie to your face.**

**[29] “Desist now, let there be no injustice;  
Even desist, my righteousness is yet in it.**

**[30] “Is there injustice on my tongue?  
Cannot my palate discern calamities?**

To this point Job is simply expressing the desire of his heart for kindness. As he responds to the speech of Eliphaz and Bildad, Job is respectfully pleading.

However, toward the end of the first round of the debates - especially after Zophar’s speech - we get the first hint of a subtle change in Job’s demeanor. Among Zophar’s less than gracious words were these:

**[11:2] “Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,  
And a talkative man be acquitted?**

**[4] “For you have said, ‘My teaching is pure,  
And I am innocent in your eyes.’**

**[12] “An idiot will become intelligent  
When the foal of a wild donkey is born a man.**

In response to Zophar’s insults, Job sarcastically, says, *“Hey, there’s nothing new here.”*

**“You Have Failed Me” (12:1--13:13)**

*Nothing new here (12:1-3)*

**[12:1] Then Job responded,**

**[2] “Truly then you are the people,  
And with you wisdom will die!**

**[3] “But I have intelligence as well as you;  
I am not inferior to you.**

**And who does not know such things as these?...**

**[13:2] “What you know I also know;  
I am not inferior to you.**

Job makes clear that Zophar’s insights aren’t all that insightful. He already knew everything that Zophar had to say. In fact, Job goes on to say that birds, beasts, and fish know as much as Zophar! (12:7-8)

And not only is there nothing new here, there’s nothing helpful in anything any of the three have said.

Listen carefully to Job’s words here and see if you don’t hear a sharp edge to his words. There is a growing bitterness of spirit.

*Nothing helpful here (13:4ff)*

**[4] “But you smear with lies;  
You are all worthless physicians.**

**[5] “O that you would be completely silent,  
And that it (i.e. - their silence) would become your wisdom!...**

**[12] “Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,  
Your defenses are defenses of clay.**

**[13] “Be silent before me so that I may speak;  
Then let come on me what may.**

And so, the first round of the speeches ends with Job both astonished and hurt that his friends insist that he must in some way be guilty of sin; that he is responsible for his own sufferings.

He has pleaded with them for compassion - but they have given him only accusation and explanation. Job ends up disappointed with his friends for their intransigent refusal to comfort him in his grief and pain.

I hope that you never find yourself surrounded, at a time of grief and loss, with a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

I've spoken to enough suffering people to know that Job's friends are still out there, lurking around, looking for people to "help."

If they have you in their sights, run away. It would be a miserable experience to have your thirst for compassion ignored. We feel for Job.

His friends' failure to help at his time of need has made Job's suffering, if possible, even worse than it was before. Life would have been somewhat easier if his friends had offered him compassion and comfort. But they haven't, and now he has to deal with their insensitivity on top of his loss of wealth, children, and health.

But now he is more than disappointed. He is angry. Their unwillingness to give him what he wants disgusts him.

"I want..." has morphed into, "You should..."

An expression of longing has turned into a toxic demand. He now **requires** that his friends come through for him.

And from this point forward, getting his friends to respond to his pain the way he wants them to becomes his bitter obsession.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Not only is there a notable downward spiral toward bitterness and demandingness from chapter 5-27, but as we will see, each round of the debate internally displays progressive disillusionment over his three friends' obstinacy as they demonstrate a seeming inability to show comfort or compassion or of even hearing him in his inconsolable distress.

## Round Two: Obsessed with Finding Compassion (Job 15-21)

### **"You Haven't Come Through for Me" (16:1ff)**

The second speech of Eliphaz is an amazing piece of work. Some time I hope you take time to read it through, as it is a masterpiece of insensitivity.

And so, after Eliphaz has accused Job of being a windbag<sup>4</sup> who speaks nonsense<sup>5</sup> and irreverence;<sup>6</sup> after having accused Job of self-incrimination<sup>7</sup> and of arrogantly supposing that he, Job, is the only one around with wisdom;<sup>8</sup> and after accusing Job of foolishness for not accepting his own wise words,<sup>9</sup> Job speaks again.

*[1] Then Job answered,*

*[2] "I have heard many such things;  
Sorry comforters are you all.*

*[3] "Is there no limit to windy words?  
Or what plagues you that you answer?"*

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<sup>4</sup> [2] *"Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge  
And fill himself with the east wind?"*

<sup>5</sup> [3] *"Should he argue with useless talk,  
Or with words which are not profitable?"*

<sup>6</sup> [4] *"Indeed, you do away with reverence  
And hinder meditation before God.*

<sup>7</sup> [5] *"For your guilt teaches your mouth,  
And you choose the language of the crafty.*

<sup>8</sup> [6] *"Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;  
And your own lips testify against you.*

<sup>8</sup> [7] *"Were you the first man to be born,  
Or were you brought forth before the hills?"*

[8] *"Do you hear the secret counsel of God,  
And limit wisdom to yourself?"*

[9] *"What do you know that we do not know?  
What do you understand that we do not?"*

[10] *"Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,  
Older than your father.*

<sup>9</sup> [11] *"Are the consolations of God too small for you,  
Even the word spoken gently with you?"*

[4] *“I too could speak like you,  
If I were in your place.  
I could compose words against you  
And shake my head at you.  
[5] “I could strengthen you with my mouth,  
And the solace of my lips could lessen your pain.*

The message is crystal clear. *“You have let me down. You haven’t come through for me.”*

And it’s more than that. Job says that if their positions were switched HE certainly would have come through for them. It’s just common decency. *“I would definitely do for you what you have refused to do for me!”*

His friends haven’t been helpful AND they are fools.

#### **“You’re All Fools!” (17:10)**

Again, responding to Eliphaz, Job declares,  
[10] *“But come again all of you now,  
For I do not find a wise man among you.*

He has already exposed their failure to offer compassion. Now he faults them for not coming up with plausible explanations for his suffering.

As he continues, he has all but given up on trying to convince his friends of his innocence. We can hear a crescendo of bravado and cynicism in his words.

Moving from a sincere disappointment over compassion withheld, Job now indicts his friends for harming him.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From Reitman: Job, now deeply wounded by his friends’ relentless insistence that he is guilty of sin, replies with escalating vindictiveness and closes with a decisive rebuttal of their theory of retribution, counter-indicting them for their own intransigent ill will toward him (chapter 21)

#### **“You Have Done Me Dirty!” (19:1ff)**

[1] *Then Job responded,  
[2] “How long will you torment me  
And crush me with words?  
[3] “These ten times you have insulted me;  
You are not ashamed to wrong me.”<sup>11</sup>*

And among the last words of Job to his friends in this second round of speeches is one simple message: Be quiet!

#### **“If You Can’t Help - Be Quiet!”**

[21:1] *Then Job answered,  
[2] “Listen carefully to my speech,  
And let this be your way of consolation.  
[3] “Bear with me that I may speak;  
Then after I have spoken, you may mock.  
[4] “As for me, is my complaint to man?  
And why should I not be impatient?  
[5] “Look at me, and be astonished,  
And put your hand over your mouth.”<sup>12</sup>*

These *“sorry comforters”* (16:2) haven’t done him any good - and he’s sick and tired of listening to them.

And we somehow feel in our gut that he’s got good reason to use the very pointed language he does. Many times as I’ve read through these speeches, I’ve found myself cheering Job on as he takes his false friends to task.

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<sup>11</sup> Or consider this:

[19:21] *“Pity me, pity me, O you my friends,  
For the hand of God has struck me.  
[22] “Why do you persecute me as God does,  
And are not satisfied with my flesh?”*

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 21 is a long address that ends with an accusation of empty comfort and false accusations from his friends.

[21:34] *“How then will you vainly comfort me,  
For your answers remain full of falsehood?”*

And far from calming down, the intensity of the battles increases as we turn to Round Three of the debates.

### **Round Three: Threatening Retribution (Job 22-27)**

In his third and last third speech, Eliphaz crosses a line. He accused Job of terrible sins.

According to Eliphaz Job never lifted a finger to help a widow or an orphan, never supplied food to the hungry, abused the helpless, and denied justice to the weak - the exact opposite of the kind of life Job had actually lived!<sup>13</sup>

Now he and Bildad and Zophar have become Job's enemies. They are no longer friends.

After Bildad's short, final speech, Job addressed all three with this:

**[26:2] "What a help you are to the weak!  
How you have saved the arm without strength!  
[3] "What counsel you have given to one without wisdom!  
What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!  
[4] "To whom have you uttered words?  
And whose spirit was expressed through you?"**

You can hear his scorn. And in what follows (chapter 27), his bitter attitude bleeds through every word. He descends further and further into angry invective.

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<sup>13</sup> [22:5] "Is not your wickedness great,  
And your iniquities without end?  
[6] "For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause,  
And stripped men naked.  
[7] "To the weary you have given no water to drink,  
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.  
[8] "But the earth belongs to the mighty man,  
And the honorable man dwells in it.  
[9] "You have sent widows away empty,  
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.

Job - upright and blameless, fearing God and turning away from evil at the beginning - adopts their own tactic of counting the terrible judgments that God has waiting for them because they have so abused him.<sup>14</sup>

And we, who know the back-story from chapters one and two, we who are "in the loop" about the heavenly wager are increasingly uneasy with Job's behavior. We are aware that his words are contrary to the character of the man we met at the beginning. And we wonder if Satan is rubbing his hands in glee at the prospect of a soon-to-come victory.

The reality is that while it is true that Eliphaz crossed a line, so did Job. In his pain, he lost sight of his calling to worship ("*fear the Lord*") and to love.

### **Conclusion:**

There. Now what have we seen?

We have seen a suffering man who has lost everything. He longs for the comfort of friends. He is denied that comfort and compassion and responds to that denial by begging for it.

When he continues to be denied the compassion he longs for and believes he deserves, his longing morphs into something ugly. Job becomes something he never was before: a "friend" who required - not just desired - that his friends come through for him. No longer is Job the God-centered, others-focused and loving man we met at the beginning of his story. He has become an ugly demander.

So now I have piled on. I have run up the score on Job. I am the Ohio State coach, Woody Hayes, going for a two point conversion against a hopelessly defeated Job, just because I can't go for three.

Or am I...

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<sup>14</sup> Job sarcastically condemns his friends for their unhelpfulness (26:1ff)  
**[26:7] "May my enemy be as the wicked  
And my opponent as the unjust.**

Let's imagine that some Sunday morning here at church, as I am in the middle of delivering a message, someone stands up, screams, knocks over chairs and runs out of the Worship Center, even bumping into people as he crashes through the double doors and noisily makes his way to the foyer.

He's made a shambles of a worship service. He has made a wreck out of the edifying stuff that was going on.

If that happened, we'd think poorly of this man. We'd think that he was rude and insensitive.

But what if we were told that this man had just suffered an acute attack of appendicitis? What if we later learned that he was in the process of passing a kidney stone when he stood up, screamed, and ran out to the bathroom?

Our thoughts would immediately change because, after all, he was in pain. All sorts of behavior are excused when someone is in pain.

So, is Job excused from serving God's purposes, loving others, and trusting God because he is in pain? Am I? Are you?

When we are disappointed with someone because they have not given to us what we want, are we excused from worship, exempt from serving and loving?

When our husband or wife does not come through for us the way we would have longed for him or her to come through for us, are we free to become angry and to demand, to pout or to rage?

If Job is our model, the answer is, "Yes." He slammed his fist down on the table and demanded that his friends give him the compassion for which his soul thirsted.

But Job is not the end-all example for us.

The fact is that Job lost sight of his calling. But there is one Man who never did. Here, at the end, we look to Jesus. He is our example and He is the gold standard for God-centered, others-focused living.

At the moments of His greatest need, He was abandoned by friends. Still, He did not require them to come through for Him. He loved them as an expression of His relationship to His Father.

- While walking on the road to Jerusalem, with the cross looming ever larger, Jesus could have surely used the encouragement of His twelve friends. Instead, He got James and John approaching Him to ask if they could sit on His left and right side in the coming Kingdom. Jesus looked past His own desire for comfort from His friends and re-told His disciples about the importance of servanthood.
- When He was arrested by Roman soldiers and Jewish priests in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus would have loved to have had His disciples stick around, willingly enduring hardship with Him. Instead, He asked that they be protected and watched as they all fled into the night.<sup>15</sup>
- While He was dying on the cross, Jesus looked beyond His own pain - physical, emotional, spiritual - and spoke words of forgiveness to a penitent thief, words of love and care for His mother, and salvation to the world.

THAT is our calling. To hope for comfort, to long for compassion - but to never require it.

Longing is good. Desiring is human. Hoping is healthy. It is bad when we abandon our primary stewardship to worship and to pray, to love and to serve.

To live without demanding that our friends come through for us will demand that we will be willing to live with a certain, chronic degree of sadness.

Living with disappointment is better than living as an angry, bitter, spouse or friend, roommate or neighbor.

Turning to God at the moment of our sadness, we will find His strength to love. Looking to Jesus, we can be His representative to a dark world and "on mission" for His Great Commission - even in pain.

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<sup>15</sup> And this, after Peter, James, and John had failed to even remain awake when He asked them to "Watch and pray" as He prayed.