

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(November 3, 2013)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm

(Studies in the book of Job)

When the God of All Creation Shows Up Study #10

(God speaks, Job 38:1--40:5)

Introduction: You're soooo sarcastic...

While there are undeniable dangers associated with sarcasm, sarcasm is some people's bread and butter.

Irish Playwright Oscar Wilde sarcastically said, "*Some people cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go.*"

Groucho Marx sarcasted with this: "*I never forget a face. In your case I'll make an exception.*"

And Mark Twin once said, "*No, I didn't attend his funeral. I did, however, send a nice letter of approval.*"

Ouch!

When that thing happens that you knew would happen if your child tried it, your sarcastic comment to your child, "*Well, THAT was a shock!*" (little better than, "*I told you so!*") can do a lot more harm than good.

When someone figures out something that has taken them a while to arrive at, but that has been obvious to you for a long time and you respond with, "*Really, Einstein? No kidding?*" you can easily hurt that person's feelings.

Your words can wound if you choose to say, "*Oh, very nice. Well done*" right after someone makes a major blunder.

I am on record as recommending caution in the use of sarcasm.

It can be a fun indoor sport, but sarcasm is dangerous. An uncritical and insensitive use of sarcasm can hurt friendships and damage friends.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes,
**[26:18] Like a madman who throws
 Firebrands, arrows and death,
 [19] So is the man who deceives his neighbor
 And says, "Was I not joking?"**

There is, however, one sure exception to the rule that says sarcasm is out of line, and we come to it today in our time in the book of Job.

Today, God gets sarcastic. It's a sobering thing when God gets sarcastic, but His sarcasm comes with a purpose and to make a point.

Review (as always)

We've come a long way in our study of the life and times, the trials and tribulations, of Job.

We've seen the hardships he endured. We saw the day when he lost his wealth and his children and the day when he was afflicted with sore boils.

We've watched as his three friends sat silently with him for seven days, having come to be with him and to comfort him. And, we've watched those same friends open their mouths and attack him, accusing him of secretly committing sins which led to his sufferings.

We have watched Job himself transition from humble man of God to arrogant demander. We have even heard the long-suffering Job long for a day in court against God, a chance to plead his case against the Almighty for the hardships he had suffered.

And he actually thought he had a case - a case against God...

The speeches of Elihu

Frustrated with the arguments of Job's three older friends and with the demandingness of Job, the young man, Elihu, took them all on.

Elihu challenged Job's self-righteous pride. (33:8-13; 35:1-15) He spoke of how God could use suffering redemptively. (33:14-30; 36:1-37:22) He very skillfully spoke to the major points Job made in his own speeches.¹

Elihu even accused Job of sin. NOT of sin that brought about his losses, but of the sinful response of demandingness AFTER his great losses. And then he called Job to repentance in light of who God is.²

At the end of Elihu's speeches, Job was silent. And, yes, silence was better than the quick comebacks he made to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But silence is not the same thing as humble repentance from the ugliness of pride.³

That lack of repentance is the reason for the appearance of God.

The speeches of God⁴

The final section of poetry in the book of Job is made up of two speeches, delivered by God Himself and directed at Job. These speeches are actually set in the form of a formal reply to Job's legal challenges.⁵

¹ In Elihu's final speech (chapters 36-37) he affirms that all creation is subordinate to God's sovereign rule, the theme of much of God's own speeches.

² Critics of Elihu who say that he was just like Job's friends who accused him of sin err in chronology. Elihu did not accuse Job of a sin *prior* to his losses that explained the losses as the friends did. He accused Job of sin *after* the losses (demandingness), which has resulted in his being liable for judgment.

³ As the inspired mediator between Job and God, Elihu has thus completed his instruction on mankind's appropriate response to God to suffering. His admonition - especially the sarcastic and humiliating tirade in 37:14-20 - is ideally suited to prepare Job (and the self-sufficient reader) to face God's own impending challenge in chapters 38-41.

⁴ Our section today and next week (38-42:6) consist of two speeches by God to Job that affirm His sovereign control over all creation and over all the powers of evil AND Job's response.

⁵ Job made these challenges at 38:1-3; 40:1-2; 6-14.

In these speeches, God uses biting, withering sarcasm to, quite frankly, put Job in his place.⁶

Job suffered from a fatal error of thought. He thought that he, a creation of God, was entitled to an explanation of his sufferings from the God who made him.

That idea is thoroughly dismantled by God as He gives His own self-defense and in what follows we listen as the Lord skewers Job with the utter absurdity of his entitlement mindset.

So now, Job is going to get what he had demanded. Like the dog that chased and finally caught the car, Job's day in court has arrived. God shows up.

So, imagine Job, sitting on the ash heap on the edge of town. He is there with Elihu, his three friends, and perhaps others who have come to witness the debates.⁷

All is calm as Elihu finishes speaking. Job sits there with arms crossed. He says nothing.

Suddenly, a storm blows up. It comes out of nowhere. The storm gets everyone's attention and Job has no idea what's going on.

When the storm blew through San Antonio on Wednesday night/Thursday morning, we had days of advance warning from weather forecasters about the beneficial rains we would receive. Job had no warning, and THIS storm makes our mid-week deluge look mild by comparison.

We should picture the scene. There is darkness and wind. The author refers to a "*whirlwind*" (What we call a tornado). So think LOUD, as in freight train loud.

⁶ Reitman "vicious sarcasm." The subtle irony and sarcasm used by Elihu pale in comparison to God's blunt and overpowering verbiage.

⁷ Todd Havekost suggested a couple of weeks ago that the witnesses at the debates might have qualified those debates to be seen as the world's first "reality show."

Above the roar of the whirlwind, we hear a voice.

**[38:1] Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,
[2] “Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?
[3] “Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!**

I have no doubt that at the moment the whirlwind showed up, Job was worried. When the Voice sounded, he knew he was waaaay out of his league.

Here is God, in His role as attorney for the defense (Himself). He has a few questions for Job, the accuser.⁸

God Orchestrates the Inanimate Creation (38:4-38)

Where was Job at Creation? (38:4-7)

**[4] “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding,
[5] Who set its measurements? Since you know,
Or who stretched the line on it?
[6] “On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone,
[7] When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”⁹**

These are rhetorical questions. They aren't meant to be answered, They are asked to show that they can't be answered.

This is not the Bible teaching that the earth is the center of the universe or that the earth rests on a giant foundation.

When we hear the meteorologist today speak of sunrise and sunset, we don't think that he believes that the sun revolves around the earth.

⁸ The content of God's speech is designed to assure Job of the universal scope of his awareness and control over the created order.

⁹ Here, Elihu's rhetorical questions (37:14-18) are echoed by God.

No, he is speaking according to appearance, *phenomenologically*. That is what God is doing. The earth is solid. “*Job, tell me, how did it become so? How did you pull that one off?*” That's sarcasm.

God's questions continue, hard and fast. He moves from the creation of the world to the world of the oceans.

King Over the Sea (38:8-11)

**[8] “Or who enclosed the sea with doors
When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;
[9] When I made a cloud its garment
And thick darkness its swaddling band,
[10] And I placed boundaries on it
And set a bolt and doors,
[11] And I said, ‘Thus far you shall come, but no further;
And here shall your proud waves stop’?**

Here, God says that the seas “*burst forth.*” This is the same idea we find in the account of Noah's flood in Genesis where we read that **[7:11] the fountains of the great deep burst open.**

God is the One who put in motion the principles of hydrology that control the seas. He governs the laws of gravity that control the tides.

Next, God wants to know if Job has much experience in making brand new days.

The Dawn of a New Day (38:12-15)

**[12] “Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
And caused the dawn to know its place,
[13] That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
[14] “It is changed like clay under the seal;
And they stand forth like a garment.
[15] “From the wicked their light is withheld,
And the uplifted arm is broken.**

We see God's faithfulness and consistency in the daily occurrence of sunrise and sunset.

Every day, without fail, a new day. The sun never doesn't come up in the morning. Job's thinking, "No, come to think of it, I don't think I've ever commanded the morning."

God's use of extreme sarcasm continues.

The Lord of the Ocean Floor (38:16-18)

*[16] "Have you entered into the springs of the sea
Or walked in the recesses of the deep?"*

*[17] "Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?"*

*[18] "Have you understood the expanse of the earth?
Tell Me, if you know all this.*

Among the most interesting realms of scientific research in these days is what is sometimes referred to as "the last frontier" on earth - the weird plant and animal life, the amazing geology, and the rich resources at the bottom of the ocean floors.

God has walked the ocean floors. Job hasn't.

Neither is Job sovereign over the earth's weather patterns. God is.

www.weather.GOD (38:19-24, 34-38)

*[19] "Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
And darkness, where is its place,*

*[20] That you may take it to its territory
And that you may discern the paths to its home?"*

*[21] "You know, for you were born then,
And the number of your days is great!*

*[22] "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,*

*[23] Which I have reserved for the time of distress,
For the day of war and battle?"*

*[24] "Where is the way that the light is divided,
Or the east wind scattered on the earth?"*

*[25] "Who has cleft a channel for the flood,
Or a way for the thunderbolt,*

*[26] To bring rain on a land without people,
On a desert without a man in it,*

*[27] To satisfy the waste and desolate land
And to make the seeds of grass to sprout?"*

*[28] "Has the rain a father?
Or who has begotten the drops of dew?"*

*[29] "From whose womb has come the ice?
And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?"*

*[30] "Water becomes hard like stone,
And the surface of the deep is imprisoned..."*

*[34] "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
So that an abundance of water will cover you?"*

*[35] "Can you send forth lightnings that they may go
And say to you, 'Here we are'?"*

*[36] "Who has put wisdom in the innermost being
Or given understanding to the mind?"*

*[37] "Who can count the clouds by wisdom,
Or tip the water jars of the heavens,*

*[38] When the dust hardens into a mass
And the clods stick together?"*

Over in the book of 1 Kings, God created a weather disturbance when the prophet Elijah prayed for rain to end a drought.¹⁰ While crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat with His disciples, Jesus calmed a storm with this: "**Hush, be still.**"¹¹ On the day Jesus died, the sky turned unnaturally dark, even the weather mourning the death of God's Son.¹²

So God can alter weather patterns to suit His purposes whenever He wishes.

But it is also true that God is the One who created a world in which predictable weather patterns are the norm, where H₂O behaves in predictable ways below and above 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and where low and high pressure systems generate predictable climates at varying elevations and latitudes.

¹⁰ See 1 Kings 18; referenced in James 5.

¹¹ Mark 4:39

¹² Matthew 27:45-46; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44.

Job had very little to do with creating rain, snow, or hail. (There I go, getting sarcastic...)

And God keeps the pressure on Job as He speaks with increasing sarcasm, moving from the terrestrial to celestial.

Astronomy in Focus (38:31-33)

*[31] “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?”*

*[32] “Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
And guide the Bear with her satellites?”*

*[33] “Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?”*

This is God’s creative and sustaining work in deep space.

From here and elsewhere we understand that God flung the sun, moon, and stars into place. But He didn’t do it haphazardly. There was order to it. There are constellations - different ones visible in the northern and southern hemispheres - that guide travelers and that mark seasons.

All of this that we have seen is the non-living, non-organic, inanimate universe that God has put together. It is an extremely complex, ordered system that works really, really well.

And catch this. Nobody gave God the responsibility to run the world He decided to make. No. He decided to make and run the world. His authority is not derived. It is intrinsic to who He is.

Nothing that will ever be discovered by astronomers or astrophysicists, meteorologists or hydrologists, oceanographers or seismologists that will surprise God. He designed it. “*Job, you didn’t.*”¹³

And God isn’t finished.

¹³ The 2013 phrase to describe the force behind the universe is “intelligent design.” Upon reflection on just how amazing and intricate the design really is, such a term borders on sacrilege. “Designed by God” is more proper.

Having taken out the telescope and looked at the vastness of the universe and the world in general, He now takes out the microscope and zeroes in on particulars. For Exhibits A-F, he mentions the world of animals, citing the peculiarities of a small number of living creatures for Job to think about.

Please simply listen for a couple of minutes as I read the second part of this, God’s first speech.

God Orchestrates the Living Creation (38:39--39:30)

Beasts of Prey (38:39-41)

*[39] “Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,*

*[40] When they crouch in their dens
And lie in wait in their lair?”*

*[41] “Who prepares for the raven its nourishment
When its young cry to God
And wander about without food?”*

Wild Animals (39:1-4)

*[39:1] “Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the deer?”*

*[2] “Can you count the months they fulfill,
Or do you know the time they give birth?”*

*[3] “They kneel down, they bring forth their young,
They get rid of their labor pains.*

*[4] “Their offspring become strong, they grow up in the open field;
They leave and do not return to them.*

Domesticable Animals (39:5-12)

*[5] “Who sent out the wild donkey free?
And who loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,
[6] To whom I gave the wilderness for a home
And the salt land for his dwelling place?”*

*[7] “He scorns the tumult of the city,
The shoutings of the driver he does not hear.*

*[8] “He explores the mountains for his pasture
And searches after every green thing.*

*[9] “Will the wild ox consent to serve you,
Or will he spend the night at your manger?”*

[10] *“Can you bind the wild ox in a furrow with ropes,
Or will he harrow the valleys after you?
[11] “Will you trust him because his strength is great
And leave your labor to him?
[12] “Will you have faith in him that he will return your grain
And gather it from your threshing floor?”*

The Foolish Ostrich (39:13-18)

[13] *“The ostriches’ wings flap joyously
With the pinion and plumage of love,
[14] For she abandons her eggs to the earth
And warms them in the dust,
[15] And she forgets that a foot may crush them,
Or that a wild beast may trample them.
[16] “She treats her young cruelly, as if they were not hers;
Though her labor be in vain, she is unconcerned;
[17] Because God has made her forget wisdom,
And has not given her a share of understanding.
[18] “When she lifts herself on high,
She laughs at the horse and his rider.”¹⁴*

The Majestic Horse (39:19-25)

[19] *“Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?
[20] “Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrible.
[21] “He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength;
He goes out to meet the weapons.
[22] “He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
And he does not turn back from the sword.
[23] “The quiver rattles against him,
The flashing spear and javelin.
[24] “With shaking and rage he races over the ground,
And he does not stand still at the voice of the trumpet.
[25] “As often as the trumpet sounds he says, ‘Aha!’
And he scents the battle from afar,
And the thunder of the captains and the war cry.*

¹⁴ Perhaps God references the ostrich to reflect Job’s vain flailing of his presumptuous charges against God.

The Hawk (39:26-30)

[26] *“Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,
Stretching his wings toward the south?¹⁵
[27] “Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
And makes his nest on high?
[28] “On the cliff he dwells and lodges,
Upon the rocky crag, an inaccessible place.
[29] “From there he spies out food;
His eyes see it from afar.
[30] “His young ones also suck up blood;
And where the slain are, there is he.”*

All that we have heard thus far is quite a listing of amazing features of the worlds God has made. And He could have gone on and on and on.

He could have spoken of astronomical wonders like black holes, biological marvels like reproduction, amazing chemicals like H₂O (what an amazing molecule!), and zoological surprises like environmental adaptations within species.

And THAT is God’s speech. A description of God’s sovereign creation of the animate and inanimate worlds is His response to Job’s accusations. Job says, *“I’ve been dealt a lousy hand. God is unjust.”* - and God gives Job a lesson in the birds and the seas.

People unfamiliar with the book of Job were NOT expecting this kind of a speech from God.

Job has accused God of running a lousy universe and what we expect is an explanation from God about how JUST His earthly reign really is. We expect a discourse on *theodicy*.

Theodicy

The concept of God’s justice is a major theme of philosophy and theology. And *theodicy* is the word philosophers and theologians use to talk about God’s justice. (from two Greek words: “God” + “justice”).

¹⁵ God repeats “Tell Me...” Each time, the response is a very conspicuous silence.

Now, theodicy is an important subject. It's actually a good thing to think about it.

Theodicy deals with questions like,
"How does God rule?"
"Why do bad things happen to good people?"
 (the equally troubling) *"Why do good things happen to bad people?"*
"Given that there are injustices in the world, how do we square that with the idea that God is just?"

I've thought about those questions a lot and I've led small group discussions about them and I've even preached sermons about theodicy.

There are those who believe that the book of Job was written to deal with and answer the questions raised by theodicy. Some think that the whole book is nothing more than an explanation of how God rules.

Not me.

In fact, the more time I've spent in Job's story, the more convinced I've become that the book does not give us the answer to the "why" of our suffering. It is not about how God's justice is worked out in the world.

Job was not written to be a philosophical brain-teaser. It was given to urge us to accept life as it is and to worship God for who He is and to serve God where we are.

When God takes the witness stand He doesn't explain Himself to Job. He doesn't take this golden opportunity to let Job look behind the curtain and see the cosmic wager between Himself and Satan that was the cause of Job's suffering. Not even close.

He describes His amazing orchestration of the universe and says to Job, *"Bub, you don't have enough information to stand in judgment of Me. You don't know enough to call Me and My ways into question."*

That's God's answer, and He wraps up His self-defense with one final question for "the prosecution."

***[40:1] Then the LORD said to Job,
 [2] "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
 Let him who reproves God answer it."***

So, having listened to God speak about His creative work, does Job "get it"?

III. Job's Response (40:3-5)

***[3] Then Job answered the LORD and said,
 [4] "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
 I lay my hand on my mouth.
 [5] "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
 Even twice, and I will add nothing more."***

Now, how does that sound to you?

On the "plus" side, it is certainly commendable that Job didn't get in God's face. He didn't argue like he did with his three friends. His words don't have a ring of demandingness to them. He admits that his own knowledge is dwarfed by God's creative wisdom.

On these points, Job did well. However, there is a "minus" side to what he has to say and I think that the minus outweighs the plusses.

Listen again. He says, ***"I am insignificant."*** That is not true.

Job is God's commissioned witness in the world. His mission is to bring blessing to people by living for God. The whole point of the sufferings of Job is that he would continue to serve and worship and bring blessing to people in God's name, no matter what happened to him.

More specifically, the point was that Job's stewardship as God's witness would be even more profound, more powerful, more impactful if he carried it out while suffering.¹⁶

¹⁶ Job's self-evaluation as being insignificant is completely at odds with the whole thrust of God's first speech. The point has been to highlight His intentional care for all creatures AND the key role that man is to play in superintending that Creation.

The very fact that God agreed to show up at all and to speak to Job gives Job the respect of a valued servant. Despite the sarcasm and the scathing words, God honors Job by His appearance.

So, no, Job is not insignificant. And God was not after a hang-dog, self-flagellating, falsely humble, Eyore-like, *“I’m just a nobody.”*¹⁷

God is after repentance and the author wants us to recognize Job’s sulking obstinacy.

Figuratively speaking, he’s still got his arms folded across his chest, lower lip curled down, brow furrowed. Job concedes that he can’t say anything, but to this point he hasn’t repented of his self-righteous pride.

Therefore, God’s not finished. Therefore, we will listen next week to God’s second speech. And there, we will listen as God skillfully guides Job to the point of repentance and to a renewed commitment to bless his world.¹⁸

Conclusion:

So, for all of us, a note to self...

We will suffer, sometimes innocently. We may very well suffer injustice.

When it happens -

We will not condemn God as unjust (We don’t know enough to stand in judgment of the Almighty).

We will be more concerned to walk with God than to demand an answer from God.

We will trust and obey. We will worship.

We will remain “on mission” for Jesus’ Great Commission.

¹⁷ Job capitulates. He gives up. Not so much because he has given up his defiance, but because he has no hope of contending with God - which is EXACTLY what he had feared would happen if God came at him in His power! (9:14-15)

¹⁸ Reitman: If we were to understand that Job has appropriately responded to God after the first speech, God’s second speech would be superfluous.