

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm

(Studies in the book of Job)

The Liberating Grace of Repentance

(God speaks, Job 40:6--42:6)

Study #11

Introduction: Plankism...

Today is a very special morning for us as we turn again to the Old Testament book of Job.

After ten long weeks of diligent study, we have finally come to a point where we will see Job “get it.” He finally arrives at the point toward which God has been driving him all along. And Lord knows it’s taken Job long enough to arrive.

It was easy for us to see the failures of Job’s three friends. They were horrible friends to Job, accusing and attacking him while he was down.

Identifying the failures of Job was a bit harder. But they were there. We looked, we searched, we explored - and we found them.

It’s been a good and a fruitful journey to have diligently searched and researched the Scriptures, looking high and low to see where Job went wrong. We’ve gotten pretty good at it, too.

We’ve seen that his failings included a demandingness that his friends treat him with kindness and a demandingness that God grant him relief. There’s nothing wrong with longing for compassion and relief. Job crossed a line, though, when he demanded it.

The ability to see others’ faults and failings is a skill set that can come in handy. Seeing problems in others is a gift.

The gift of seeing our own “issues” and the skill of seeing our own faults and failings is even more handy, but is often less well-nurtured.

Jesus understood. One time He talked about people who were really good at identifying splinters in other people’s eyes, but who didn’t seem to notice the log in their own eye. (See Matthew 7)

That’s the Lord’s colorful way of saying that there is a tendency - in all of us, I believe - to be critical toward others and not toward ourselves; to not be reflective.

I’ve certainly got my own faults - lots of them! - and I have been known to be blind to them.

A memorable moment came for me when I once remarked to Kathy that I was a pretty flexible person. The response of her guffaw led me to believe that I might need to re-assess my flexibility quotient. Maybe there is a bit of growth ahead for me when it comes to spontaneity and the ability to go with the flow, respond “in the moment”, and flex.

So it is, perhaps, with all of us.

And, as we have come to see Job’s failures, I would hope that having seen them, we would not think “mission accomplished” with respect to our time in this powerful book.

Today is a day of learning more about Job’s story, true. But it is also a day for turning reflective. It is one thing to be able to look out through the window of our own lives and see the problems out there. It is another thing - and a much more important thing - to be willing to turn the window into a mirror and to see the problems inside.

Job was a really, really good man. And we have easily seen how easily Satan was able to tempt him to come near to doing what was his goal all along, that, as Satan told God, Job would **[1:11] “...curse You to Your face.”**

If Job fell so hard so fast, what about us? What a warning to us!

The purpose of our time together is not academic. It is to so see God and to so see ourselves that we are drawn to a proper response to who He is in light of who we are.

The point of our study of Job is NOT to be able to accurately see Job's failings, but to see his failings and then ask ourselves, "*It is in me, too?*"

Review... ('cuz that's how we roll)

Trials aplenty came Job's way. He suffered and experienced loss. He turned to God in worship and then lamented.

His friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, failed him - and then he failed them. That's when Elihu showed up and challenged Job to soften. He offered correction. At one point, responding to Job's accusation against God, he said -

[33:12] "...You are not right in this, For God is greater than man.

Elihu pointed Job to the majesty and to the holiness of God. When he finished his speeches, God grabbed the torch and began the final two laps of a relay race designed to drive Job to repentance.

As we saw last Sunday, the first lap consisted of God reminding Job that he knew nothing about running a universe. God's world is an almost unbelievably complex system of systems - and it works flawlessly, from the hydrologic cycle to the food chain, to meteorological patterns, to tides and constellations.

God crafted a masterful speech, arguing that Job had no business questioning His justice. "*Job,*" God says, "*You don't have enough information to pass judgment on Me.*"

Well, after that first speech, Job still didn't "get it." He didn't argue back, but God wanted more than "no contest" from Job.

So, God is going to run one more lap. And today, in Speech Two, God gets even more intense, more sarcastic, and more personal than He was in Speech One.¹

Beginning this second speech exactly as He did the first, God calls on Job to "man up."

[6] Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said,

[7] "Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me.

Then, God sarcastically demands that Job present proof to back up his claim that He is unjust.

Challenged by the Almighty (40:6-14)

Job's Failure (v. 8)

[8] "Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

THIS is Job's failure. It is his arrogant presumption that he - Job! - can pass judgment on God; that he, a creature is more righteous than the Creator.

Elihu's questioning of Job and his comments to Job were mild and subtle in comparison to God's words here. This is nothing but God's, "*How dare you?!*" to Job.

One of the foundational truths of our faith is found in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 11:6, the author writes, "***without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is (that is, that He EXISTS) and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (that is, that He is GOOD).***"

What was true for Job is also true for us, today.

¹ God's second speech follows the same outline as His first: challenge (40:6-14), substantiation (40:15--41:34) and response (42:1-6).

To lament that life is hard is healthy. To admit that you have suffered innocently is honest. To accuse God of treating you unjustly is way out of line.

The extreme sarcasm continues in the words that follow, as God outlines what will need to be in place if He - God! - will repent and admit that Job was right.

Conditions for God's "Repentance" (vv. 9-14)

- First, Job will have to be strong enough to run the universe at least as well as God has.

**[9] "Or do you have an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like His?"**

- Second, Job will have to exude equal majesty and eminence and dignity to that which flows from God.

**[10] "Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity,
And clothe yourself with honor and majesty."**

- Third, Job will have to show himself as righteous as God. (vv. 11-13)

**[11] "Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
And look on everyone who is proud, and make him low."²**

**[12] "Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him,
And tread down the wicked where they stand."**

**[13] "Hide them in the dust together;
Bind them in the hidden place."**

If Job can pull all of that off, then God will admit that He Himself has been mistaken, and that Job has been right all along. Then God will repent of having treated Job unjustly.

**[14] "Then I will also confess to you,
That your own right hand can save you."³**

² Note God's suggestion that Job "look down on everyone who is proud and bring him low." Of course he can't, but that is the point of the invitation.

³ The inference is that Job needs to be "saved." (40:14) Elihu had hinted at the same thing earlier (33:14-30) when he said that Job's pride would lead to self-destruction and that Job needed to be rescued by accepting God's redemption.

Don't hold your breath.

You have noticed that God uses a very sharp tone here. One author describes it as a "rhetoric of humiliation." That actually troubles some people, but there is no reason to be troubled by it. There is a reason for God's sharpness and sarcasm and biting tone.

You will note the reference to "pride" in verses 11 and 12. God brings up "pride" again at the end of this speech.

Of all the themes present in this second speech, God is most concerned to address Himself to Job's pride. Job has elevated himself to a position where he is passing judgment on God. That is pride and we must not miss it.

Pride has to be dealt a death blow, and pride doesn't die easily. That explains the harshness of God's words to Job. God is graciously laying Job low so as to destroy pride.

A return to humility before God is the only way Job will ever again enjoy a vibrant relationship with God. A return to submission will restore him to be an eager and willing servant of God who brings blessing to his world.

Now, to drive home the point that Job doesn't have a leg to stand on before God, the Lord brings forward two living creatures for Job's consideration.

Taking a Cue from Two Submissive Monsters (40:15--41:34)

Intro: Behemoth and Leviathan

These two beasts were carefully chosen by God out of all those He could have used to make His point to Job.

We'll consider *very briefly* the identification of these beasts before thinking more carefully what they have to say to Job and to anyone else who falls into the dangerous trap of pridefully standing in judgment of God.

The two creatures are referred to as "Behemoth" and "Leviathan."

“Behemoth” has been variously linked to the elephant, the hippopotamus, the dinosaur known as Apatasaurus (formerly known as Brontosaurus), and to a primordial, mythical land-monster.

“Leviathan” has been identified as a crocodile, a whale, a sea serpent, a dragon, and a primordial, mythical sea-monster.⁴

There is a word for “hippopotamus” in Hebrew. That word is not used here. And, there is a word for “crocodile” in Hebrew. That word is not used here.

The word “Behemoth” literally means, “beast.” The word “Leviathan” literally means “to twist” (thus, a creature that twists).

There are good people on all sides of the discussion as to what Behemoth and Leviathan actually are. For myself, of chief importance is what Job would have been thinking when he heard God use these names.

So, I narrowly lean toward thinking that the animals in view are the hippopotamus and the crocodile, both of which lived in the area where Job was at the time Job lived (they lived in the marshes of Egypt and in the rivers of the Ancient Near East).⁵

But, as wasting too much time arguing about the identity of the creatures would be a huge victory for Satan (!), I will simply refer to them as we move through the passages as “Behemoth” and “Leviathan.”

⁴ Reitman’s view is that seeing Behemoth and Leviathan as hippopotamus and crocodile (so Zuck; K&D; DTS) does not account sufficiently for the overtones of evil in the descriptions of them. With Donald Carson, Reitman says that both likely represent primordial cosmic powers that break out against God. The argument is that if Job is to charge God with injustice, he must do so from the secure stance of his own superior justice. If he can’t subdue them, let alone the cosmic forces they represent, he displays extraordinary arrogance in calling God’s justice into question. God’s defeat of the sea monster (Psalm 74:14) and Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1) supports the idea that the beasts embody “the chaotic forces of evil.” Excellent reasoning, and perhaps correct.

⁵ They are animals with which Job was actually familiar. And, if the descriptions don’t perfectly align with these animals, I would chalk that up to an intentional, literary hyperbole.

Now (having angered just about everybody here), we’ll listen first as God describes Behemoth. God’s first comment about him is telling.

Behemoth (40:15-24)

Behemoth and Job

[15] “Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you;

Both Job and Behemoth are creations of God. They both stand before God in a creature/Creator relationship.

But the differences between Job and Behemoth are as huge as Behemoth is huge.

Notable characteristics

**[15] “Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you;
He eats grass like an ox.**

**[16] “Behold now, his strength in his loins
And his power in the muscles of his belly.**

**[17] “He bends his tail like a cedar;
The sinews of his thighs are knit together.**

**[18] “His bones are tubes of bronze;
His limbs are like bars of iron...**

**[20] “Surely the mountains bring him food,
And all the beasts of the field play there.**

**[21] “Under the lotus plants he lies down,
In the covert of the reeds and the marsh.**

**[22] “The lotus plants cover him with shade;
The willows of the brook surround him.**

**[23] “If a river rages, he is not alarmed;
He is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth.**

**[24] “Can anyone capture him when he is on watch,
With barbs can anyone pierce his nose?**

He eats grass like an ox - but he is not an ox. He is very strong.

God says that his tail bends like a cedar. That could mean that his tail is enormous like a giant redwood.

Or it could mean that the tail is short in comparison to the beast itself, like a cedar branch is short in comparison to the height of the tree.⁶

God compares Behemoth's limbs to bronze and to iron for sturdiness. He lives in rivers and fears nothing there, not even when the river reaches flood stage.

Inserted into the middle of God's description of Behemoth is a striking remark.

Behemoth: Untamable - and tamed by God (v. 19)

**[19] "He is the first of the ways of God;
Let his maker bring near his sword."⁷**

Of all God's creatures, Behemoth is the most massive, enormous, strongest, and untamable. Nothing tames Behemoth. All creation is subservient to Behemoth. And God created and tamed Behemoth.

As Peterson renders it in The Message,
*Most magnificent of all My creatures
But I still lead him around like a lamb!*

Job raises himself up against God while Behemoth knows his place as a humble, submissive creature before his Maker.

Then, without pausing to switch gears, God moves from a consideration of the monster, Behemoth, to Leviathan.⁸

As you listen, you will notice that Leviathan is even less given to domestication than Behemoth.

Leviathan (41:1-34)

Strong and unassailable

**[42:1] "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?
Or press down his tongue with a cord?**

**[2] "Can you put a rope in his nose
Or pierce his jaw with a hook?..."**

**[5] "Will you play with him as with a bird,
Or will you bind him for your maidens?**

**[6] "Will the traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him among the merchants?**

**[7] "Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
Or his head with fishing spears?**

**[12] "I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
Or his mighty strength, or his orderly frame.**

**[13] "Who can strip off his outer armor?
Who can come within his double mail?**

**[14] "Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth there is terror.**

**[15] "His strong scales are his pride,
Shut up as with a tight seal.**

**[16] "One is so near to another
That no air can come between them.**

**[17] "They are joined one to another;
They clasp each other and cannot be separated.**

**[22] "In his neck lodges strength,
And dismay leaps before him.**

**[23] "The folds of his flesh are joined together,
Firm on him and immovable.**

He's really, really strong. He lives in the water, but you don't go fishing for him. He is unassailable there and everywhere else. You don't mess with Leviathan.

God has extravagantly armed him with elaborate defenses. The scales that cover him are like armor. He has, like Behemoth, enormous strength.

And then, coupled with his impressive physical power, he's got an attitude and a hair-trigger temper.

⁶ So Keil-Delitzsch, who report that "the stunted tail of an animal is a mark of its strength to a Semite."

⁷ This is the literal translation of the Hebrew and may be God, sarcastically inviting Job to bring his own sword to tame Behemoth.

⁸ More space is given to describing this creature, perhaps implying that Job has more in common with Leviathan than with Behemoth. As one author suggested, "The extended section devoted to Leviathan seems designed to address the stunning intransigence of Job's own pride."

Violent and cruel and proud

[3] *“Will he make many supplications to you,
Or will he speak to you soft words?
[4] “Will he make a covenant with you?
Will you take him for a servant forever?...
[8] “Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle; you will not do it again!
[9] “Behold, your expectation is false;
Will you be laid low even at the sight of him?...
[18] “His sneezes flash forth light,
And his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.
[19] “Out of his mouth go burning torches;
Sparks of fire leap forth.
[20] “Out of his nostrils smoke goes forth
As from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
[21] “His breath kindles coals,
And a flame goes forth from his mouth.”⁹
[24] “His heart is as hard as a stone,
Even as hard as a lower millstone.
[25] “When he raises himself up, the mighty fear;
Because of the crashing they are bewildered.
[26] “The sword that reaches him cannot avail,
Nor the spear, the dart or the javelin.
[27] “He regards iron as straw,
Bronze as rotten wood.
[28] “The arrow cannot make him flee;
Slingstones are turned into stubble for him.
[29] “Clubs are regarded as stubble;
He laughs at the rattling of the javelin.
[30] “His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
He spreads out like a threshing sledge on the mire.
[31] “He makes the depths boil like a pot;
He makes the sea like a jar of ointment.
[32] “Behind him he makes a wake to shine;
One would think the deep to be gray-haired.*

⁹ One author notes that the description of Leviathan as a dragon are too reminiscent of Satan to be coincidence. While they are probably hyperbole, they are exaggeration with a point. The dragon/Satan-parallels highlight Leviathan’s intransigent rebellion AND draw a line from Leviathan to Satan to Job!

[33] *“Nothing on earth is like him,
One made without fear.
[34] “He looks on everything that is high;
He is king over all the sons of pride.”¹⁰*

You can tame a cow or a horse so that they will serve you. A horse whisperer can tame the most unruly horse. Leviathan won’t be tamed.

You can train a dog to serve you, to walk with you, to sit at your feet. Cesar Millan, the “dog whisperer” can take any dog and rehabilitate that dog to know its place in the pack. He teaches dog owners how to let their dogs know that they - not the dog! - are the pack leaders.

Not Leviathan. He’s the leader of the pack and everybody knows it. He’ll never submit to you.

You can’t play with him. You can’t buy and sell him. You can’t go to war against him. It’s best to stay out of his way!

There’s nothing gentle about him. In fact, there is about him a malevolent and evil pride. That’s behind the description of his red eyes and fiery breath. He’s cruel and hostile.

And then listen to these lines, embedded in the middle of the Leviathan passage.

Leviathan: Rebellious - and subdued by God

[10] *“No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him;
Who then is he that can stand before Me?
[11] “Who has given to Me that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.*

Just as it was with Behemoth, Leviathan submits to God’s rule. He submits to no one else, but even cruel and arrogant Leviathan knows his place before God.

Exhibit A is Behemoth, showing Job the necessity to allow himself to be tamed by God.

¹⁰ Leviathan pictures Satan’s dominion over other proud creatures (41:34).

Leviathan, God's Exhibit B, teaches Job that the only proper posture to take before God is that of submissive humility. There is no place for pride.

So, these descriptions of creatures were given to make a point to Job (and to us, of course).

And the point is...

And the point is that if such mighty monsters as Behemoth and Leviathan submit to God, so should Job submit to God.¹¹

After his terrible losses, Job made the common, but tragic, error of believing that he could pass judgment on God. For all their rebellion and wildness, Behemoth and Leviathan have one up on Job in that they know their place before God.

So, what will Job do now that he has been confronted with this embarrassing, humiliating comparison where he comes in third behind these two mighty beasts?

Listen. The effect of all of this on Job is immediate and profound.

Job's Liberating Repentance (42:1-6)

Repentance and Words

[1] Then Job answered the LORD and said...

The first thing I want us to notice here is the presence of words. Job had something to say. Wherever there is genuine repentance, there are words.

At the end of God's first speech, you'll remember that Job said,

¹¹ We want to shout, "Job, imitate the massive Behemoth who is tamed by God! Copy the Leviathan who is subject to God! You couldn't begin to stand before Behemoth or Leviathan, yet they submit to God. Allow your Creator to tame you. Submit to him."

*[40:4] 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."*

He had nothing to bring to the table. No words. That was a signal to God that His work was not finished. When Job was thoroughly broken, there would be words.

We see this in other places in the Bible. People who are truly repentant have words.

When King David was thoroughly convicted of his sins - adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah - he came before God with words, the words of Psalm 51.

When Hosea called the people of Israel to repentance, he told them, *[14:1 "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
[2] Take words with you and return to the Lord...*

Job's words express the genuineness of his repentance.

So here's a thought for anyone who can relate to Job. You may have taken some blows recently that have left you reeling. In response, you may have accused God of mismanaging your life. You may have called into question His justice.

As of this morning (maybe this moment!) you're aware that something is wrong with that response. As never before, you're convinced that condemning God is not right. You now own the idea that bitterness against God, railing against God, accusing God of injustice is not proper. It's ugly.

And it's a good thing to recognize this. But don't stop with simple recognition. Follow Hosea's counsel and "**take words with you.**" Follow the lead of King David and Job. Speak.

And what words will you say? Let's observe the words of Job. We can use his words as a template.

I think that it is significant that Job begins with an affirmation of God's worth and by reciting God's words.

A Whole Life "About Face"

Remembering God's words

**[2] "I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
[3a] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'**

Job's first words here are familiar to us. They are our memory verse for the month of November. They are a good reminder of God's power and sovereignty. They make for a great place to start.

And Job's next words quote God's words. Back when God first started speaking to Job out of the tornado, He asked,
[3a] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'

Job repeats those words here, letting God know he had been listening. God's words now fill his mouth and his heart. It's good to reflect on God's words. It's good to say them back to God. It lets Him know that we are placing ourselves under His word, under His authority.

Next, Job confesses to something that is impossible to understand. Literally. He confesses God's inscrutability.

Confessing God's inscrutability

**[3b] "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."**

God's ways are inscrutable. That means that they are beyond figuring out. Have you ever said to yourself, "I just don't get what God's doing?" Yep. He's God. He intended it to be that way.

The thought of God's inscrutability surfaces in lots of places in the Bible, often in Ecclesiastes.

For instance, in Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon writes, **[5] Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.**¹²

Job thought that he could figure out God and His ways. And finally, here at the end, he realizes that God is un-figure-out-able.

Or, as Larry Crabb writes: *Sometimes it's hard to know what God is doing. He informs us that he withholds nothing good from His children. I take that to mean that there is nothing that perfect goodness coupled with absolute power should be doing that isn't being done - right now... We rage at God, demanding that He do more than He is doing. He remains quietly unthreatened, saddened beyond words that we think Him cruel or indifferent, but unswervingly committed to the course He has set. He refuses to redesign the plot of the book, having already written the last chapter and knowing that the end is very, very good, and that every thread in our story is necessary to that conclusion.* (Finding God, p. 187).

These are good words to bring with you when you come to God. Express to Him that you don't understand what He's doing - and tell Him that you are perfectly OK with that.¹³

The end of Job's response to God gives us one more set of words to bring to God. Job commits to an "about face".

Retracting demandingness

¹² **[Ecclesiastes 8:16] When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), [17] and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.**

¹³ If God had told Job the reason (from chapters 1 and 2) for his sufferings, He would have nullified Elihu's key point that the ways of God are inscrutable (Job 34) and subverted his hopes for Job and the author's hopes for us, the readers: that we would fear the Lord and be "on mission" for God's mission in the world even when His ways are not known (in the midst of inscrutability).

[4] *'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.'*

[5] *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;*

[6] *Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes."*¹⁴

Job has been confronted with God's amazing creative power and His sovereignty over nature. He's seen God's orchestration of all the systems that work so harmoniously to make the world "tick." He's been reminded that even the enormous Behemoth and the rebellious Leviathan willingly and happily live under God's sovereignty.

So now, he's ready to take his rightful place, again, as a created person living in submission, tamed by Almighty God.

He repents. He turns, makes an "about face."

In the New Testament, the word that we translate "repent" literally means "change your mind."

For the person coming to faith in Jesus, that means to change your mind about whatever it is you have been trusting for eternal life and trust Jesus, instead.

For the child of God, for the one who has already believed in Jesus, "repent" involves a radical re-orientation of life, a change of mind about where L-I-F-E is to be found. Specifically, it is to be found in Jesus!

When Job says that he repents, he means that he has withdrawn his demand that God meet him in court. He has changed his mind about requiring that God grant him relief. He no longer will accuse God of injustice.

This is not Job, hoping that his repentance will somehow convince God to re-bless him with material wealth. His repentance comes before any hint of restoration.

¹⁴ *"I abhor myself"* ("*despise*" "*hate*" as in King James, NIV, New King James, ESV) is misleading. Better is "*withdraw/retract/repent.*" (NASB; The Message)

Job has simply come to see something of the worthiness of God and realizes the ugliness of stiffening his neck and hardening his heart against the immortal, invisible, God only wise.

When you come to God, words to that effect would be just right. Affirm that God is God. Affirm that you know that you are not. Tell God that you intend to stop demanding that He come through for you in this or that way. Tell Him that you will worship and trust and obey, regardless.

Conclusion:

The relationship between the Creator and the created is the most important relationship the created will ever know. And that relationship doesn't thrive where there is pride marked by independence and rebellion.

We are created people who really LIVE when we are "tamed" by and in submission to our gracious and all-powerful God.

The word that describes the shift toward that LIFE is *repentance* - a life "about face" - that spells F-R-E-E-D-O-M to be "on mission" for God.