

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(November 17, 2013)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: GOD...in the Storm

(Studies in the book of Job)

God: 1; Satan: (still) 0

(Job 42:7-17)

Study #12

Introduction: Your life - an epic quest...

I love the “epic quest,” the larger-than-life story of someone fighting against all odds to accomplish an impossible task.

Among my favorite fictional “epic quests” are, of course, The Lord of the Rings series, in which Frodo Baggins seeks to destroy the ring of power in the fires of Mount Doom to defeat the wicked Sauron.

A number of years ago I also really enjoyed reading the Harry Potter books, Harry’s fate being to kill or be killed by his nemesis, Voldemort. An epic quest, for sure.

On a kids’ level (although very suitable for adults, as well) The Chronicles of Narnia trace the journeys of the Pevensy siblings as they travel back and forth from England to the mythical land of Narnia.

In the non-fiction world, we could all think of people who lead “epic quest” lives. In technology and business, we think of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. In sports, there is Bo Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Michael Jordan. In entertainment, you’ve got the Beatles and the Stones.

And the Bible gives us lots of true-life characters whose life assignments are epic and daunting. Abraham and Sarah and Moses and Deborah and David and Paul all led larger-than-life lives.

Near the top of any list of epic quest heroes would be the man we’ve spent the last three months considering, the patriarch, Job. And today we conclude our study of the epic life and times of Job.

Review the conflict...

It all started with the author telling us what a great guy Job was. He was **“blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.”** (1:1, 8; 2:3)

Then, right after we meet Job, there is a scene in Heaven where Satan bet God that Job would curse God to His face IF God’s blessings were taken away. God said Job would stand strong.

So, Job was put to the test and Satan was given freedom to afflict Job to see if he would continue to worship and trust and obey God as life became difficult.

Well, the afflictions came and they were terrible. They are all recorded for us in the first two chapters of the book. Then we notice something peculiar about the way Job is written.

The descriptions of Job, the cosmic wager, and Job’s epic losses are all written in the form of narrative prose, like you would find in any novel today.

That narrative is followed by thirty nine chapters of poetry. Job’s lament and the debates with his three friends, and Elihu’s speeches are all cast in verse. The speeches of God and the repentance of Job¹ are framed in the form of a poem, as well.

Today’s passage reverts to narrative prose. The only sections in the book that are prose are the Prologue (chapters 1 and 2) and the Epilogue. (42:7-17)²

¹ In those speeches, the Lord told Job, *“You don’t have enough information to stand in judgment of Me.”* He then assured Job that if enormous Behemoth and cruel Leviathan assume the posture of submission before God, Job should, as well.

² The only exceptions are the introduction of new speakers Elihu (32:1-6) and God (38:1).

This literary curiosity tells us something about what happens today. It informs us that the conflict that began with prose at the start of the book resolves today, in the final prose section.

The intervening poetic chapters are the first twenty five and a half miles of a marathon. Today, the race concludes. Today, we reach the finish line.

Last week, we watched as Job came to the point of repentance.

He now knows that none of God's ways can be thwarted. Oh, God's ways are still a mystery to him. But now he's OK with that. God is God, and God's ways are inscrutable. He understands that he'll never understand the ways of God.

God is the Sovereign and Job is no longer demanding that God explain everything to him. Now he commits to worship, trust, and obey despite the unrevealed mysteries of life and death and suffering.³

And, God, having taken a brief pause to allow Job to speak his repentance, now speaks again. Surprisingly, God doesn't speak to Job. He speaks to Job's three former friends.

Let's listen carefully, because today, a winner of the cosmic wager emerges.

Job, Back "On Mission" for God (42:7-9)

God's Command to Job's Three (former) Friends (vv. 7-8)

God's anger (v. 7)

[7a] It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite...

Remember Eliphaz? He was the leader of the gang of three friends who came to comfort Job when he was first afflicted.

³ And remember, even at this point, Job knows nothing of the first two chapters of this book. He doesn't know that his sufferings had been God's test to prove to Satan that he wouldn't "***curse God to His face.***"

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sat silently with Job for seven days and nights, which was great. Then, they stayed and debated and attacked their destitute, suffering friend, which was awful.

These three guys were there on the scene from start to finish. They were there to listen to Elihu's speech and they were there to hear what God had to say. They have heard Job's repentance - and now they listen as God addresses them.

[7b] "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has."

Eliphaz and friends have been dealing with a suffering friend. Now they have an angry God to deal with. God is angry because the words they had to say to Job misrepresented Him. God doesn't like to be presented as other than He is.

Yes, they certainly proved to be horrible friends to Job, offering him zero compassion and comfort. They didn't say or do the things that you would want to do when your friend is in pain.

God doesn't take them to task for that. He calls them on the carpet for what they had to say about Him, which was:
Suffering is always the result of sin. God's moral universe is a zero sum game. One sin, one suffering. If you are suffering a lot, you must have sinned a lot. Behave well and your life will go well. Obey God and you'll be materially blessed.

According to these guys, there is no such thing as innocent suffering. We call their belief system "retribution theology." It is cold and calculating. It doesn't take into account the randomness of life. It doesn't know what to do with the victims of a Philippine hurricane or a Sandy Hook shooting. It is a false theology, a heresy of the first order.

But Job's "friends" have not only been factually off. They have been tools of Satan. Attacking Job at his most vulnerable moments, Eliphaz and company succeeded in tempting this good man to "***curse God to His face,***" which had been Satan's goal from the start.

Job, though, HAS spoken what was right about God. Not in the debates, but here at the end. Confessing that God is God; admitting that His ways are inscrutable; committing to listen; repenting of a demanding spirit; taking his rightful place as a submissive man before his Maker.

Job's words honored and pleased God. The words of the three made Him mad. So, God gives them a two-part assignment. First, they are to offer a sacrifice, a very expensive sacrifice.⁴

A sacrificial offering (v. 8a)

[8a] "Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams..."

God is directing these men toward a path that will lead to their redemption. He is leading them to salvation. Offering a sacrifice forces them to admit that they have sinned. They are going to have to come clean with God and confess.

Now, you'll notice that God doesn't engage with Eliphaz as He did with Job. There is no long speech as there was to Job - but then God is free to deal with each person uniquely, as He sees fit.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have sinned and a sacrifice is required to atone for it. They proved to be unworthy friends and they misrepresented God. They sinned flagrantly - and God is dealing with them in justice and grace.

Their sacrifice is important. But they need something else. They need an advocate. God knows just the man.

Job's part (v. 8b)

[8b] "...and go to My servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

⁴ The double seven amplifies the solemnity and worth of the sacrifice.

They needed an advocate / intercessor

People who have sinned need help. They need an advocate, an intercessor, a mediator.

Quick. Fast-forward four thousand years to 2013. We, who have sinned, need an advocate! And we have an Advocate.

When we first come to faith in Jesus, He acts as our Mediator, bringing us to God. And throughout our lives, as we sin, He advocates for us, He intercedes for us. He serves as our great High Priest.

Jesus lovingly provides exactly what we need. Now God calls on Job to provide for these three men who have hurt him so badly exactly what they need.

No doubt this would have been tough for the three to take.

How this might have come across to the three?

One commentator refers to Job's "embarrassing" advocacy on behalf of the friends.

Think of the three horrible stepsisters' mistreatment of Cinderella in that fairy tale. Then, remember Cinderella's elevation when she married the king. Now, imagine the king telling the sisters that they needed to beg his forgiveness - but that they would have to go through Cinderella to get to him.

I think it would have been tough for Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar to approach Job and ask for his advocacy, given that they had so flagrantly failed to provide him advocacy, when he needed it and even begged for it.

Coming to Job would have been a humbling thing. And what would have been going through Job's mind when he heard God's words to Eliphaz?

What this required from Job?

Well, clearly, Job was being vindicated. Here at the end, God calls Job His "servant" four times (in verses 7 and 8).

God honored Job by calling him “servant.” He also honored Job by pressing him into service. So, on the one hand, Job would have understood that God was pleased with him. Elevating Job to the role of mediator/priest/intercessor/advocate placed him in a lofty role, indeed.

But, if you’re tracking with me on what Job had suffered at the hands of these three, you’re probably also tracking with me about the challenge he faced when God called him to serve them.

Showing kindness to a close friend takes time and energy - time and energy we’re usually willing to spend. Showing kindness to a stranger in need is harder, but we will sometimes stop and help someone change a tire on the side of the road or give our seat to a tired stranger at an airport.

Showing kindness to a friend who has just stabbed us in the back is a tough assignment.

So...what will Job do?

THIS is the crisis moment of the book! This - when Job is commissioned by God to pray for Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar - is the acid test of Job’s character.

God has placed all of His chips to the center of the table and He’s betting on Job to come through. The outcome of the cosmic wager with Satan hangs in the balance.

Job had been God’s man prior to his losses. Satan said that if Job suffered loss, he would cease to be God’s man, would no longer trust and worship God, would not be God’s witness, would not serve God.

Watch.

God Restores...Job! (v. 9)

[9] So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job.⁵

⁵ The “servant of the Lord” is not only favored himself, he also becomes the instrument of God’s grace to fellow sinners.

The three approached Job

We watch as the three men select and prepare their sacrifices. Then, they approach Job. They have been humbled.

For the first time in a while, they speak to Job. Now they speak to him with respect, as children coming to a parent - “*Job, would you pray for us?*”⁶

Job prayed for them

Earlier, Job had regularly prayed for his children. He served as the High Priest and advocate for his family. Earlier, Elihu had provided advocacy for Job.

Never once did we ever read of the friends praying for Job. They attacked Job!

While He was hanging from a Roman cross, Jesus looked at those who had nailed Him there and said, ***[Luke 23:34] “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”***

And Job, obeying God’s commission, carrying out his assignment from God, prays. He advocates for these three men who had treated him so badly. He intercedes for them.⁷ He prayed for them.

And, then, at the end of the day, with sacrifices offered and prayers prayed, God looks with favor on faithful Job.⁸

Final score? God: 1; Satan: 0.

⁶ Notice that here the three are identified with their lineages. They are estranged from God by their genealogies and are approaching the one who has found favor with God to seek reconciliation with God and to find forgiveness. What a picture of our role (and ancient Israel’s) in the world today.

⁷ Back in 22:26-30, Eliphaz, in seeking to encourage Job, said that if he repented, God would use him to bring blessing through his advocacy toward sinners. Ironically, after Job repented (not from sins committed prior to his losses, as Eliphaz supposed, but to his demandingness afterwards), he did indeed serve the sinner, Eliphaz (!), by praying for him.

⁸ Only when Job obeys God’s commission and intercedes for his friends while he is still suffering does God finally accept him. (v. 9)

SATAN LOSES; GOD WINS!

By Job's faithful service to God, Satan has been defeated. It is a great victory. But it was touch and go. There was uncertainty right up to the end. Job might have said, "No." He might not have prayed.

It has happened that one of God's chosen servants has NOT fulfilled his stewardship to bring blessing to the world.

Remember Jonah? Jonah was called by God to be a blessing to his sworn enemies, the Ninevites. To avoid having to bring God's message to the city of Nineveh, the prophet Jonah boarded a ship heading to Spain - the exact opposite direction!

Well, God lassoed Jonah on the high seas, using a whale for transport. Once in Nineveh, Jonah did, reluctantly, preach. But his heart wasn't in it. All the way to the end of the book, Jonah is hoping against hope that God will destroy Nineveh and all the people in it.⁹

The book of Jonah actually concludes with an unrepentant, unhappy prophet refusing to be an advocate for people who are far from God.

The story of Jonah (a very true story, by the way) is a picture of what the people of God are NOT to do. And from the very beginning, God has been concerned that His people share the blessing of knowing Him with people who don't know Him.

Abraham was the first to be blessed by God and then told to be a blessing to his world. Every child of God since has been blessed to be a blessing. (See Genesis 12:1-3)

⁹ The natural human aversion to such intercession is graphically depicted in Jonah. Job's displayed the same contempt toward his former friends, a contempt that needed reversed (via repentance) before Job would even consider praying to God on their behalf.

There are pictures, images, scattered throughout Scripture of God's people being God's blessings to those who don't yet know Him.¹⁰ Among the most impressive is Job, offering loving, intercessory prayer for the unlovely, unworthy Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

His willingness to pray for the three men is an indication of how deeply transformed he has been by his encounter with God.

Go back and read the debates and listen to how contemptuous he is toward these guys! He was as vindictive toward them as they were accusing toward him. He gave as good as he got!

At the height of their conflict can any of us imagine Job pausing to pray for Eliphaz, to be Bildad's advocate, to offer compassion to Zophar?

No way! But his prayer for them gives clear witness to an inner transformation.¹¹

And here is the message for each of us, today. Seeking to bring the blessing of God to those around us - friends, family, strangers, and enemies - is every bit as much our calling as it was Job's.

God wins by Job's faithfulness to be God's witness to a needy world. And today, God wins every time we pray. Satan loses every time we say "Yes!" to spreading the love of Jesus.

This is our "epic quest."

¹⁰ Job's intercession for his friends reflected the intended connection between one's reconciliation to God and his transformed agency for God. See Psalm 51:13-15, where David, repentant over his sin, asks God for the favor of turning others who have sinned back to Him.

¹¹ Edith Schaeffer: There is an amazing forgiveness shown in Job's willingness to pray for his friends, rather than to gloat over them. It would do us good...to recognize the opportunities that we have time after time to pray for people who have hurt us. We should pray with a desire that others may come to an understanding of the truth...rather than with a desire that they be proven wrong. Or, to quote Larry Crabb, "*Recovery from terrible mistreatment is never meaningful until the victim hungers for the restoration of the abuser and is even willing to be an instrument of that restoration.*" ([Finding God](#))

Who are you? A teacher, an IT guy, a student, a homemaker, a breadwinner, athlete, professional. Sure.

You are all of that. But more fundamentally, you are an ambassador for a King, sent into enemy territory to bring that King's love. You face enormous odds. There is a whole world system arrayed against you. Your flesh may be weak. The enemy hurls temptations against you.

But you press on, because, like Job, you've gotten a glimpse of the wonder of God's love and grace and holiness and justice and power and sovereign majesty.

And sometimes, when you love after you've been harmed, you feel something like you know it must feel when *[Romans 16:20] the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*

That's what it means to be "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission. And that is the message of Job.

Now, we're almost finished. One more scene to observe before we're done. And we'll start with one more reminder.

Remember that the key question in the whole drama is this: Will Job remain faithful as God's chosen servant (1:8; 2:3) in spite of suffering?

It turns out that the answer is "Yes!" - because through everything we've seen so far this morning, Job is still suffering.

JOB'S CONDITION WHEN HE PRAYED

In case you hadn't noticed, there has been nothing mentioned about blessings coming Job's way. As he has served his former friends, he is still covered with sore boils, still destitute, still sitting on ashes in the city dump.

Chronology is critical to theology!

If God had restored Job right after his repentance, but before he prayed for his friends, Eliphaz' "retribution theology" would have been validated.

We would all be walking away thinking, "*Yep. All Job had to do was repent to be restored.*"

But that's not the way it happened.¹²

Job was brought to the point of repentance and then re-committed himself to submissive obedience for God. He was re-commissioned by God to be a witness and to bring blessing to the people in his world and carried out that commission while suffering.

Then AND ONLY THEN did God restore Job's fortunes. As we close this morning, let's think together about what message God is sending by giving Job great rewards.

Job, Rewarded for His Faithful Witness (42:10-17)

*[10] The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold.*¹³

In other words, and to be crystal clear, God forgave Job's three friends - and that on the basis of Job's prayers for them! - BEFORE He restored Job's fortunes.

In other words, God took care of Job's friends greatest need (their reconciliation to Himself) before He took care of restoring Job's great, but secondary losses.

Still, after the friends confessed, sacrificed, were prayed for and were saved, God again turned His attention to Job.

¹² Carson writes, "*If some critics are displeased with God's answer to Job out of the storm, even more are incensed by this "happy ending." They think that the story should have ended with Job's repentance. Whether he is restored is irrelevant. And in any case it is untrue to the experience of many, who suffer at length without reprieve. To end the story this way makes the doctrine of retribution basically right after all. The conclusion is therefore anticlimactic at best, contradictory at worst.*" As Reitman explains, though, "*The main flaw in this reasoning is that the dramatic climax is not Job's repentance but rather his intercession.*"

¹³ Note "*restored*" and "*increased.*" The words are sandwiched around the phrase "*when he prayed for his friends*" indicating a logical (and chronological) conferring of these two gifts in two stages.

It is likely that Job was cured of his painful disease at this point. And in addition to that medical cure, Job was blessed with reconciled relationships.

- **Reconciled Relationships (v. 11)**

[11] Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money,¹⁴ and each a ring of gold.

Evidently, the months of suffering had driven a wedge of some sort between Job and his family of origin and the community in which he lived. Suffering can do that.

That divide is healed with Job's recovery and they come to him, bringing gifts. All of a sudden, he is, again, a very wealthy man.

Then, having lost all of his livestock (see chapter 1), Job's flocks and herds were restored. In fact, they were doubled!

- **Doubled Riches (v. 12)**

[12] The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys.

Now, the greatest loss he experienced was the loss of his ten children. Post loss, God blessed him with ten more children.

- **One BIG Family (vv. 13-15)**

[13] He had seven sons and three daughters. [14] He named the first Jemimah, and the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.¹⁵ [15] In all the land no women were found so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers.

¹⁴ Qesitah - a unit of money more valuable than a shekel, but of indefinite worth.

¹⁵ "Jemimah" means *dove*; "Keziah" means *perfume* (cinnamon); "Keren-happuch" refers to eye make-up.

Just as his flocks and herds doubled, Job has exactly twice as many sons and daughters as he had previously. Ten of his children preceded him in death and are in heaven; these new ten are with him still, children of his old age.

The author singles out his daughters for special mention as the most beautiful in all the land. And, contrary to Ancient Near Eastern customs, Job gave these three daughters an inheritance, an indication of his super-abundant wealth.¹⁶

And then, Job lived "happily ever after," the book closing with a recounting of the end of his long "epic quest" life.

- **Length of Days (v. 16-17)**

[16] After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. [17] And Job died, an old man and full of days.¹⁷

So, is the message of the last verses in Job to assure us that things will always turn out well for us if we acknowledge God?

Well, if you mean "here and now" - No! But if you take a longer view - absolutely!

Conclusion:

There is a Bible scholar I really respect who says this about the blessings on Job's life at the end.

"They are not cast as reward that he has earned by his faithfulness under suffering, but as the Lord's free gift."¹⁸

¹⁶ In normal Jewish practice, daughters only inherited when there were no sons to inherit. (Numbers 27:8)

¹⁷ According to Jewish thought, Job was 70 when his trials hit. Thus, he lived twice as long after as he had lived prior to his great losses, for a total of 210 years.

¹⁸ Dr. Donald Carson, How Long, O Lord?, p. 176

I understand not wanting to ever imply that we earn God's favor by our works. This man understands that we are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone.

But the Bible doesn't teach in Job 42 that Job was eternally saved by his works. It says that Job's material and relational and family losses were restored by God when he prayed for his friends.

And we are to understand that Job was rewarded by God for obeying the call to bless his unworthy friends.

The final tally of Job's wealth and family tells us that God knows how to reward His people for their faithfulness.¹⁹

Job's restoration came after he prayed for his friends. God smiled when Job prayed for his friends. So, in Job's story, God reset Job's wealth and standing in this life to show how happy He was with Job.

Does this mean that God will always reward our faithfulness in this life? No. It doesn't. There are countless examples throughout history, in our own lives, and in the Bible of believers who were "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission and were not rewarded materially.

But, they are going to be rewarded!²⁰

¹⁹ From Reitman: Job's blessing signifies much more than the simple restitution of all the losses he was obliged to endure as a consequence of God's wager with Satan. The nature and circumstances of Job's final blessing convey the object lesson that knowing God and fellowship with Him are of infinitely greater value than to avoid suffering at all cost.

²⁰ Philip Yancey writes, "*The best way to view the ending in Job is to see it as a sign of what is to come, the happiness of Job's old age was a sampler of what he would enjoy after death. The good news at the end of Job and the good news of Easter at the end of the Gospels are previews of the good news described at the end of Revelation.*" (Disappointment with God)

One of the more prominent themes in the New Testament is the idea that there are rewards we can look forward to receiving from Jesus for faithfulness here and now.²¹ And it's not unspiritual to long for those rewards. Jesus even told us,

[Matthew 6:19] Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.

He wants us to have reward in Heaven. He wants us to want reward in Heaven. And the way to receive the rewards He wants to give us is to invest time, energy, and money, blood, sweat, and tears, prayers, fastings, and service in the advance of His kingdom.

God may choose to reward you, as He did Job, in this life. He sometimes does that with quite material blessings that He knows you, a faithful steward, will use to advance His kingdom even more.

But we shouldn't be surprised if He withholds reward until later. That's His prerogative.

The end of Job's story, though, assures us of this one thing: It is worth it to serve God.

You will never, for all eternity, look back at a prayer prayed, a service rendered in love, a gift given in Jesus' Name, a time of sharing the Gospel that Jesus saves with someone who is far from God and think, "*Man, I wish I hadn't done that. What a waste.*"

There may be lots of other things you and I will look back on with regret. But we will never regret serving God.

We will never regret being "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission because in addition to being an amazingly gracious God, He is also an incredibly generous rewarder! (Hebrews 11:6)

²¹ This notion of reward is all over the New Testament. A fruitful study of the concept of eternal rewards would include a study of Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 5, Galatians 6.