

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

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

(Studies in the book of Job)

## **When the Nightmare Continues**

(Job, Chapter 2)

Study #2

### **Introduction: Famous last words...**

You're probably familiar with the idea of "famous last words". Different from deathbed confessions, these are the things people say that reveal they don't have a clue about what's actually happening.

Here are some great examples of "famous last words":

- Oh, I'm sure he doesn't bite.
- Hey, look a light at the end of the tunnel!
- So, what does this button do?
- I know this great shortcut we can take.
- How cute! I wonder where the mother bear is.
- Trust me, these are the good kind of mushrooms.

After the losses Job just experienced, we might forgive him for thoughts of another "famous last words" thought, as in, "*Well, I'm glad THAT's all behind me.*"

Unfortunately, as dark as his recent past has been, his immediate future doesn't look any brighter.

Last week we met Job, the man the author of the book called "*the greatest man in all the east.*" (1:3)

He lived about four thousand years ago, but his story is as relevant as this morning's news. His story, in fact, contains insights into life and God that you and I can't afford to ignore. We *need* what Job's life and experiences have to say.

In the first chapter of the book of Job we saw that as a result of an agreement between God and Satan in Heaven, Job suffered loss. Devastating loss.

In one day he found out about the loss of his entire stock of flocks and herds. On the same day word came to him that his ten adult children had all died in a freak storm. In rapid succession, one messenger after another came and reported these personal earthquakes to Job.

Try to put yourself in Job's sandals and imagine how you would feel if, in one day you were told that you have lost your job, your 401(k) is worthless, your house has burned to a crisp, your car has been totaled AND you have lost the people most precious to you in all the world.

I'd be a wreck if that news was handed to me, and I imagine that Job was a wreck. Still, at the end of the day we listen as Job said,

***[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."***

That was exactly the response God was looking for, a faithful, trusting response. And today we return to Job's story and find ourselves back in Heaven. We listen as, once again, God and Satan talk about Job.

This is the second time we read about the "sons of God" (angels) presenting themselves before the Lord.

### **A Heavenly Dispute, Round Two (vv. 1-6)**

#### **God and the Sons of God and the Enemy of God (v. 1)**

***[1] Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.***

Evidently, the angels present themselves before God regularly, although we don't know how regular a thing it is. I'd like to know.

More specifically, I'd like to know how much time had elapsed between the day of Job's troubles and this day.<sup>1</sup> Did weeks pass? Did months pass? How much time did he have to process and grieve his losses?

Clearly, we don't know exactly how long. But, based on the sense I get of the story's flow, I'm going to suggest that this second "day" in Heaven is not long after (from a few days to several weeks) the first "day."

And what we have here is a virtual repeat of the first day in Heaven, the only change being that this time, Satan, along with the "sons of God" (angels) has come to present himself before the Lord. God and Satan replay their opening exchange, with exactly the same words we heard earlier.

### Satan and God Square off (vv. 2-6)

*Recapping Satan's activities (v. 2)*

**[2] The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."**

The conversation continues along the same lines as it had before, with God bragging about Job. This time, He truly has bragging rights!

*God brags about Job to Satan (v. 3)*

**[3] The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause."**

<sup>1</sup> We could get in to a philosophical discussion about the passage of time in Heaven that would be really interesting. It would seem to me that time in Heaven is different, somehow, than time as we experience it here on earth. For the purposes of the Job story, at some point later than the day of Job's trials, the angels (plus Satan) present themselves before the Lord in Heaven.

God's description of Job is exactly the same as it was in the first exchange, with one added "dig" against Satan. (See 1:2; 1:8)

This time God points out that Job has stood firm in his faith *despite* Satan's unprovoked, uncalled-for afflictions against him. Satan had claimed that if the blessings of Job's life were taken away he would curse God "**to [His] face.**"

Well, Satan certainly afflicted Job, but Job responded with worship, not bitter cursing. And Job's faithful response was God's triumph!

Earlier, when God had boasted of Job's integrity, Satan was not impressed. He's still not impressed.

His charge here is that, of course, Job continues to have a good attitude. He has still not been personally "*touched.*"

*Satan is unimpressed, again (vv. 4-5)*

**[4] Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. [5] However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."**

Satan still bets on Job's bitterness IF God actually brings pain and suffering to Job. "*Take away his health; He'll curse You to Your face.*"

I find it fascinating that Satan targets Job's health and physical well-being. You and I, we value our health. A lot. In every culture, health is a precious commodity and most of us do things to improve or maintain the health we have.

A few years ago I started an exercise regimen that has improved my health. A few months ago I changed some of my eating habits to improve my health.

We value being able to walk up a flight of stairs and starting off a day pain-free. We undergo surgery to improve our health, take medications to feel better, visit doctors who will prescribe the path to health. We all want to be healthy or healthier.

None of us are shocked that one of the more contentious topics when it comes to public policy in our country these days is health care, are we?

I sometimes wonder if the value we place on health (me included!) is a bit “over the top”, even bordering on idolatry. But we clearly want to be healthy!

Evidently this intense desire to protect our health is not a new thing. Concern for our physical well-being is central to who we are as people and has been for a long time. Satan knew that, and he bet that a direct attack on Job’s body would turn Job against God, once and for all.

There is something so primal about physical pain that Satan believed it was more likely to bring a negative, more visceral response against God than other kinds of suffering.

He wants Job to curse and to hate God and he is confident that physical pain will accomplish what emotional and personal and material loss did not.

So, the gauntlet is thrown down. God, for a second time, picks it up and agrees to Satan’s new terms.

### **God Empowers Satan a Second Time (v. 6)**

*[6] So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”*

Before, the line was, “Don’t touch Job, personally.” Now, the only line Satan can’t cross is, “Don’t kill Job.”

Of course, that would have been counter to Satan’s goal, anyway. He wanted a living, breathing, God-cursing Job. He wanted to show that when the chips are down, Job won’t worship. When in pain he will show that he doesn’t really love God.

But God, in allowing Satan to directly afflict Job’s body, is betting that Job will remain true.

And, with that, Satan left God’s presence to go and do his dirty work on God’s servant, Job.<sup>2</sup> He went right to work and we read immediately of the second round of Job’s trials

### **The Trials of Job, Round Two (vv. 7-10)**

#### **Job, Afflicted by Pain (vv. 7-8)**

*Complete physical misery (v. 7)*

*[7] Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.*

#### The kind of affliction

There is not much that is more personal to us than our skin. Our skin is the largest organ of our body and protects us from germs, water loss, and temperature extremes. Every inch of Job’s skin was attacked by a terrible disease.<sup>3</sup>

Back when I was in college I ran through a several years long period during which I would develop boils (or carbuncles, as the doctor would refer to them) on my hands and arms. They developed because of an underlying staph infection and were quite painful and ugly. I have always wondered if this was Job’s affliction. I hope not, but I fear so.<sup>4</sup>

The effect of this affliction for Job was complete misery and pain.

#### The effect of the affliction

<sup>2</sup> This is the last time Satan is mentioned in the book.

<sup>3</sup> Keil- Delitzsch suggests elephantiasis.

<sup>4</sup> The bacteria may not remain inside the boil or carbuncle; it may progress to inside the skin, into underlying tissues. This may occur more often where the boil is on the buttocks or back or upper arm, where the patient may squash the boil and cause the fluids inside to explode their cyst-like containment. This may lead to further boils and carbuncles (or arms, like a mountain ridge branching off existing sites); cellulitis (where the skin appears to be covering infected flesh); infected lymph nodes (which are sore to the touch) and, in fact, infection of any other body part; and the infection causes the person to feel nauseated, fevered, dizzy, weak, lethargic, breathless, unhealthy of the heart, headaches, or (in the worst case) death.

## PHYSICALLY

When it comes to the topic of physical pain, we who are not actually experiencing it can entertain all kinds of noble theories about it. For us who are not in pain, pain is an abstraction, a theological question, an unfortunate blight on an otherwise fairly tolerable world.

Pain is all of that UNTIL pain reaches out and grabs us!

Then pain becomes an enormity, a concrete reality so overwhelming that it engulfs all other realities.

Pain is powerful and it is true that God uses pain. C. S. Lewis once wrote, *"We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."*<sup>5</sup>

Yes, God uses pain. But Satan uses pain, too. It isn't surprising that the place where Satan tried to do his worst against God - the cross of Jesus - was a torture rack.

The pain Job endured was complete. His physical misery was perfect.

At various points in his speeches later in the book he says that his body is clothed with worms and scabs, his skin is broken and festering (7:5); he's lost weight and is now skin and bones (16:8); he can't stop weeping and he can't sleep (16:16); his pain constantly gnaws at him (30:17); he burns with fever (30:30).

With a skin disease such as Job has there is intense pain because of the pressure of the boils before they erupt. Afterward there is the intense itching that drives someone with boils to distraction. You itch, so you scratch. But the more you scratch the more you itch. You keep scratching until you scratch your skin off - and that only makes the infection worse.

The Bible says that Job [8]...*took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.*

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<sup>5</sup> In The Problem of Pain

So, where is the place Job was sitting? The place where there was a pile of ashes was the city dump, always located outside the city limits.

## SOCIALLY

The Old Testament Mosaic Law gives strict instructions for how to deal with people who have leprosy, or, more generally, a contagious skin disease.<sup>6</sup> The community was to remove them from contact with everybody else so that everybody else wouldn't get what they've got!

Now we believe that Job lived long before the Mosaic Law was even written. Still, it's likely that the culture in which Job lived had similar public health guidelines.

If you had a skin disease with open sores, you were banished from the city and treated as unclean. You became an outcast. That's Job's lot.

He is in agony and he's not being treated by kind nurses while he lies on clean linen sheets in the comfort of his own home (or in a hospital). He's abandoned by the community.

Further, the common perception would have been that Job, because of this disease, had been abandoned by God.<sup>7</sup>

## SPIRITUALLY

Ancient peoples viewed disease of the skin (i.e. - leprosy; a word which, in Scripture referred not only to leprosy, but a wide range of skin infections) as a disease of the soul.<sup>8</sup>

His friends have thrown him out of the city and his God has abandoned him. While he's sitting among the ashes in the city garbage dump, his wife spoke to him.

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<sup>6</sup> In the Bible, "leprosy" is a more general term than what we mean by leprosy/Hanson's Disease today.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 28:35 - curses for disobedience included being afflicted with the disease with which Job is evidently afflicted. (also verse 27)

<sup>8</sup> People who read Job who had some knowledge of the Law of Moses would have assumed that he was cursed by God.

Job's wife is sadly famous for the counsel she offered her suffering husband when the chips were down.<sup>9</sup>

### **Job Afflicted by Temptation (vv. 9-10)**

*His wife's counsel (v. 9)*

**[9] Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"**

Ouch. We wish she hadn't said that! But before we too quickly denounce her, we should at least admit that she, like Job, has suffered terrifically.

She has also lost her ten children. Her welfare was completely tied to her husband's wealth - and it is all gone. So that she is upset and has something to say isn't surprising.

But what are we to make of her words?

Is she tempting Job to sin? Is she so angry at God that she is inviting her husband to join her in cursing God?

Maybe.

She certainly wanted him to give up his "integrity". So it is possible that she is angry with God and wants her husband to go there, too.

It's just as likely (imho) that she was urging Job to curse God SO THAT God would strike Job dead and put him out of his misery. Maybe she believed that if God would punish someone as righteous as her husband, He would certainly put to death someone who cursed Him.

Giving Job's wife the benefit of the doubt, this might have seemed to her a merciful thing to urge her husband to do. Still, her suggestion was an attempt (a temptation) to get Job to do what Satan has been (unbeknownst to her) trying to get Job to do all along: curse God!

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<sup>9</sup> This is only the first of two times Job's wife is mentioned here. Second time is in 29:17 where Job says that his breath has become offensive to his wife.

Notice Satan's grand strategy to entice Job to sin.

*Satan's strategy*

First, Job's flocks and herds of oxen and donkeys and sheep and camels were stolen or destroyed. His servants were killed fire and wind and by the marauding Sabeans and Chaldeans who took his livestock. Those losses are followed by the deaths of all ten of his children.

After this, there is the subtraction of Job's health and the addition of constant physical pain. And now there is temptation to sin from his wife, his life partner.

We know about the wager in Heaven. Job doesn't. And we are desperate to see how he responds to this series of personal earthquakes. Will God's servant hold up under the strain? Will he take his wife's advice and curse God?

Listen.

*Job's response (v. 10)*

**[10] But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"<sup>10</sup> In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

He's honest, but he's not overly harsh. He tells her that she's speaking foolishness. And in his answer he takes his wife back to first principles.

Among the first principles of life is this: Always, at all times, and in every situation, we are not only, but we are primarily, dealing with God.

From the outset Job has attributed to no one else but God the responsibility for his losses.

He doesn't ever consider that the devil is behind his sufferings. He doesn't blame the weather, other people, or even himself.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:45 - God treats the good and the evil to sun and rain; also to hail?

He refused to get bogged down in trying to understand all the reasons. God knows; he doesn't. 'Nuff said.

*Apply...*

So this is Job:

His love for and trust in God, his God-honoring leadership of his family, and his integrity proves him to be a better man that I have ever hoped to be. In fact, Job's a better person than anyone I've ever known.

And Job's multiplied undeserved sufferings are greater than mine, greater than any sufferings anyone I've ever known has experienced.

If you or I think that we have suffered unjustly; if we believe that we sure didn't deserve the raw hand we were dealt; if we feel like we are the innocent who has suffered what we shouldn't have had coming to us, Job has suffered far more and far more innocently.

And at the end of the day he tells his wife that having happily accepted good from God through his whole life, he will now, in his pain and grief, accept adversity from God, too.

Friends, Job's response presents you and me with a great model of what it means to walk with God through a storm. And he also presents us with a huge challenge to follow him by responding to life's trials with an unwavering trust in God.

Job has now triumphed for a second time. He has demonstrated his integrity as the author assures us that Job has not sinned "***with his lips.***"

Those last three words offer a suspicious reader a tantalizing question about what is to come. It's almost as if the author has said, "*Job hasn't said anything sinful YET... He's doing OK so far... Watch out...*"<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Reitman, *Unlocking Wisdom*, "This passage is as significant for what it portends as it is in testifying of Job's faithfulness." Keil-Delitzsch tells us that the Jewish Targum adds: but in his thoughts he already cherished sinful words. Reminiscent of the scene in Genesis where Cain is jealous of his brother's sacrifice being accepted

Still, at this point, Job is doing great. Round Two of the wager between God and Satan is over and God, again, wins because Job has not cursed God to His face!

For the last several minutes of our time together this morning, we'll see a final scene that is really, really helpful to all of us here. Job's example presented a tremendous challenge to us to walk with God while suffering. In what follows, we see how we can walk with our friends when they are suffering.

For its lack of radio, television, and the Internet, news of Job's trials traveled quickly among the tribes of the northern Arabian Peninsula. And for their lack of planes, trains, and automobiles, some friends visited Job with remarkable speed.

That's what friends do. When our friends are hurting, we want to be with our friends. We now meet three men who have made their way to be with their friend.<sup>12</sup>

### **Job and His Friends, Round One (vv. 11-13)**

#### ***A Loving Visit from Three Good Friends (v. 11)***

*Identifying the three friends (v. 11a)*

***[11a] Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite...***

We believe that Job was a non-Jewish man. All three of his friends are too. But these men were probably all members of tribes/nations that were related to but estranged from the covenant people of Israel.

- Eliphaz was likely a descendant of Esau, the unchosen son of Isaac.<sup>13</sup>

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by God, when his own was not. God tells Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door." So here, sin is near to Job. Watch out!

<sup>12</sup> His three friends were members of tribes/nations that were related to but estranged from the covenant people of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> Eliphaz is the name of Esau's first born son. It is likely that this "Eliphaz" was either that son or his descendant.

- Bildad is probably related to Shua, the Gentile friend of Jacob's son, Judah.<sup>14</sup>
- Zophar's spiritual heritage is traceable to the line of Cain (See Genesis 4:22), Naamah being a daughter four generations out from Cain.<sup>15</sup>

I believe that these three friends got to Job as quickly as they could, probably after word reached them of his first round of trials.

It may be that they have traveled a good distance to get to Job's place. They themselves hail from different tribes, so this is about as close to a multi-cultural event as anything we see in Scripture.

They have come for one reason. They want to offer support to their friend in his time of need.

*The purpose of the visit (v. 11b)*

***[11b]...and they made an appointment together to come to SYMPATHIZE WITH HIM and COMFORT HIM.***

The old saying is, "*A friend in need is a friend, indeed.*" These are friends, indeed.

There are many blessings that come our way when we place our faith in Jesus. Among them is that, in Jesus, we are all members of God's family. Our "family tree" is Jesus' cross and in that cross we are united with each other, and our family is large and expansive and loving.

I hope that as you grow in Christ you are collecting "*indeed*" friends from among your Christian brothers and sisters who will be there when life crashes in on you.

Becoming a part of a Care Group or an Adult Bible Fellowship (Sunday School) or grabbing lunch after church - and there are dozens of other ways to do it! - are all great ways to collect friends.

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<sup>14</sup> See Genesis 38.

<sup>15</sup> While Zophar could not be a direct descendant of Naamah because of Noah's flood, it might well strike the reader as his "spiritual lineage." Much like that of the Nephilim who reappeared through the line of Canaan after the flood.

And in these ways you can develop a web of relationships that will support you in an earthquake and will provide an open door for you to be a support to others when their earthquakes hit.

As these three friends approached Job, they couldn't believe their eyes. This was not the man they used to know.

### ***A Grieving Response from Three Good Friends (v. 12)***

*That can't be Job! (v. 12a)*

***[12a] When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him...***

He has wasted away in their absence. His diseased skin has changed his appearance.

*The pain of grief for a friend (v. 12b)*

***[12b]...they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.***

Earlier, Job had torn his robes. Now they tear theirs, and throw dust over their heads.

Now, let's watch carefully to see what happens next, because what follows next is profound. It is a picture of ministry in action.

This scene doesn't take place in a corporate board room with wood-paneled walls or in a lovely church building or around a kitchen table.

No the ministry context is a heap of ashes, smoldering fires, stench, buzzing flies, scampering rats, piles of rubble, and all the other ruins and trash of a city.

This is where we find, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job's three good friends.

### ***A Silent Presence from Three Good Friends (v. 13)***

*[13] Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.*

Words couldn't have captured the magnitude of his suffering, so they offer no words. They sat in quiet dignity, wordlessly expressing their heartfelt compassion.

Their silent presence said, *"We're here. We're with you."*

Now, what they will go on to do and say *after* this scene is despicable. In much of the remainder of the book of Job they behave toward their friend as we should never behave toward our worst enemy.

Soon his closest friends will unwittingly become tools of the devil as they assault him with cold comfort and shallow theology.

But that future ugliness doesn't change the beauty of these first seven days. For seven days and nights they got it right. They gave their friend the gift of presence.

### **Conclusion:**

When your friend is reeling from a personal earthquake - be it rejection, loss, disease or whatever - the greatest gift you may be able to give is silent presence.

At some point there may come a time for words. But silent presence is powerful and therapeutic.

One of my personal heroes is the late Henri Nouwen. Nouwen was a brilliant academic, a Roman Catholic priest, and, late in life, a caretaker for the severely mentally disabled. For all kinds of reasons, Henri Nouwen knew something about personal pain and suffering.

After looking in vain through my Nouwen library for anything on silent presence, I "googled" "Henri Nouwen and the gift of presence" and came across the transcript of an interview Nouwen had done.

In the interview, Nouwen was asked what to say to people who wonder why God allows their suffering. Here's his response:

*"I don't say anything. The question really means there is deep personal suffering. Allow the question to be there...Be present...and experience in the depths the gift of life! [Our temptation is to] solve people's problems; to cure, not care. To care means being where the suffering is."*

It may be that this week a friend will show up at your door with a broken world. They've come to you because you are a friend.

Watch Job's friends. They felt no compulsion to speak. They sat with him in the ashes for seven days and seven nights. Not a word.

When your friend comes to you, try silence. Hold her hand. Give him a big embrace. And sit there. There will probably be a time for words. That time will come soon enough.

But in those first moments or hours of silent presence your friend may just experience the power of your love and the power of God's love.