

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: The Story of Our Lives...and God

(Growing through Job's story)

#### **When the Nightmare Continues**

(Job, chapter 2)

Study #1

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

We've all heard the phrase, "*famous last words.*"

And here I'm not referring to the meaningful thing someone says on their deathbed. I'm talking about the thing someone says that shows that they don't know what they're talking about.

Like...

- Oh, I'm sure that dog won't bite.
- Look! We're OK. A light at the end of the tunnel!
- So, I wonder what this button does?
- Oh, what a cute cub! I wonder where the mother bear is...
- Trust me, this is a good kind of mushroom.

Famous last words, indeed.

After some time of recovering from his terrible losses, we would forgive Job if he thought to himself, "*Well, I'm glad THAT's all behind me.*" Or "*Well, now everything will take a turn for the better.*"

Those would be "*famous last words,*" because as dark as his recent past was, his future is darker.

*Review...*

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

Job lived about four thousand years ago, so his story is very old.

That is not a problem. A character in one of C.S. Lewis' novels made the point that being old doesn't make an idea or a person or a story old-fashioned. Job's story is old, but it is still state of the art.

In Job's story we gain insight into life and God that we can't afford to ignore.

We saw in the first chapter of the book that as a result of a test agreed upon by God and Satan, Job suffered devastating losses.

On one day he lost all of his livestock, lost many of his personal servants, and suffered the deaths of all ten of his grown children.

In rapid succession, one messenger after another came and reported these personal earthquakes to Job.

We can and we should try and put ourselves in Job's sandals. That would be hard to do. We'd have to imagine the loss of everything we hold dear. Complete personal wreckage.

I suspect that I'd be a wreck if I got the news that Job got. And he was a wreck. But at the end of that day, he 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.

Today we return to Job's story and find ourselves back in the heavenlies. We listen as, once again, God and Satan talk about Job.

## 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.**

We don't know how regularly the angels (here **"the sons of God"**) came together to present themselves before God. Nor do we need to know.

I would really like to know how much time had passed between the day of Job's troubles and this day.

For how long had he processed his losses, had he adjusted to his new normal, had he grieved?

I'm going to guess, based on a general sense of the flow of the story, that this second **"day"** in Heaven was not long after (a few weeks or months; I don't think it was years) the first **"day"** of calamity.

The conversation between God<sup>1</sup> and Satan followed the same path it did in the first go around.

### 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."**

God, again, bragged on Job. His words about Job were exactly the same as in the first exchange, with one added **"dig"** aimed at Satan. (1:2; 1:8)

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to here, as in chapter 1's heavenly scene, as LORD = Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God.

*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 to his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause."**

Job stood firm in his faith *despite* Satan's forced and uncalled-for afflictions.

Satan had claimed that if God's blessings were taken away, Job would curse God **"to [His] face."** But Job didn't at all do that. And his faithful response was God's triumph.

On that first day, when God had boasted of Job's integrity (1:9-11), Satan was not impressed - and he's still not impressed.

His charge here is that, of course, Job continues to have a good attitude. That's because 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, reach out with Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."**

Satan 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."**

It's crucial for us to note that Satan targeted Job's health and physical well-being.

Health is a precious commodity in most cultures. In our own culture, we certainly value health. A lot. Most of us do things to improve or to maintain the health we have.

I do. I exercise regularly, work on flexibility, mobility and conditioning, and I am now trying to eat like a grown-up.

We value being able to walk up or down a flight of stairs. We may get surgery to improve our health, take medications to feel better, visit doctors who will prescribe the path to health.

This intense longing for 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 and visceral about physical pain that Satan believed it was more likely to bring a negative response against God than emotional and material and personal loss.

Satan threw down the gauntlet a second time. And God, a second time, picked it up and agreed 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."***

As before, Satan invited God to act against Job. As before, God permitted Satan to be the one to afflict Job. As before, God put in place a boundary. Before, the boundary was, "*Don't touch Job, personally.*" Now, the only line Satan can't cross is, "*Don't kill Job.*"

Of course, killing Job would have been counter to Satan's goal. Satan wanted a living, breathing Job to curse God.

He was out to prove that when the chips were down, Job won't worship. Pain will prove that he doesn't really love God.

But God, in giving Satan permission to afflict Job's body, is betting that Job will remain true. With that, we read of the second round of Job's trials as Satan went right to work.<sup>2</sup>

### **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 struck Job with severe 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 our body's largest organ. It protects us from a scratch becoming a fatality. It protects us from germs and cold and heat.

All of Job's flesh was under attack from a terrible affliction.

Back when I was in college, I had some years of suffering from boils (the doctor called them *carbuncles*). They would show up on my hands and arms and knees. They developed because of an underlying staph infection and were painful and ugly.

I have always wondered if this was Job's affliction. I have hoped not.

The effect of this affliction for Job was unremitting pain.

#### **The effect of the affliction**

##### PHYSICALLY

When it comes to the topic of physical pain, we who are not experiencing it may entertain all kinds of noble theories about it.

For us who are not in pain, pain is an abstraction, a theological question, a topic of interest.

Physical pain is all of that UNTIL pain reaches out and grabs us.

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

Then pain becomes a monstrosity, a concrete reality so overwhelming that it engulfs everything else.

Pain is powerful. And it is true that God uses pain. C. S. Lewis once wrote, *"...pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."*<sup>3</sup>

So, 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 place of torture.

The pain Job endured was complete. At various points in his speeches later in the book he says that...  
 ...he's clothed with worms; 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 like Job had there was intense pain because of the pressure of the boils before they erupted.

Afterward there was itching that would drive him to distraction. He itched, so he scratched. But the more he scratched, the more he itched. He would keep scratching until he scratched his skin off - and that only made the infection worse.

The Bible says that Job ***[8]...took a piece of pottery to scrape himself while he was sitting in the ashes.***

So, he was sitting among ashes. And the place in the ancient world where you would find the ashes was the city dump.

SOCIALLY

The Old Testament Mosaic Law gave strict instructions for how to deal with people who had diseases of the skin. (referred to as a whole by the term *leprosy*).

Now, we believe that Job lived long before the Mosaic Law was written. But 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 because it was understood that what you had, others could get. That's Job's lot.

He was in agony, and he was not being treated by kind home health nurses, or at a hospital. He was abandoned by his community.

Further, the public perception would have been that Job, because of this disease, had been abandoned by God.<sup>4</sup>

SPIRITUALLY

Ancient peoples viewed disease, generally, but especially diseases of the skin as a disease of the soul.<sup>5</sup>

His family and 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.<sup>6</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 firm your integrity? Curse God and die!"***

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 28:35 - curses for disobedience included being afflicted with the disease with which Job is evidently afflicted. (also verse 27)

<sup>5</sup> People who in centuries to come read Job and who had some knowledge of the Law of Moses would have assumed that he was cursed by God.

<sup>6</sup> This is only the first of two times Job's wife is mentioned here. The second time is in 29:17 where Job says that his breath has become offensive to his wife.

<sup>3</sup> In [The Problem of Pain](#)

Ouch. We wish she hadn't said that. And sadly, she is famous for this counsel. But before we too quickly denounce her, we should at least admit that she, like Job, has suffered.

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

But what are we to make of her words?

She is inviting Job to sin. If he takes her counsel and curses God, won't the suffering get worse? Does she want his suffering to get worse?

It may be that she is angry at God and wants her husband to join her in rebellion. Maybe.

But it might be that she was urging Job to curse God SO THAT God would strike Job dead and put him out of his misery, that her counsel sprang from mercy.<sup>7</sup>

Still, her suggestion was an attempt to get Job to do what Satan had been trying to get Job to do all along: curse God!

#### *Satan's strategy*

Job's flocks and herds of oxen and donkeys and sheep and camels were stolen or destroyed. Then, his servants were killed by fire and by the marauding Sabeans and Chaldeans who took his livestock.

After those losses, all ten of his grown children were killed by a great wind.

Then, Job lost his health and suffered unrelenting pain. Add to all of that his wife's invitation to sin and it looks like God may have bet on the wrong horse. He's about to lose His wager with Satan.

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<sup>7</sup> Maybe she believed that if God would punish someone as righteous as her husband, He would certainly put to death someone who cursed Him.

So, how will Job respond to these personal earthquakes. Will he trust and follow God, or will he take his wife's advice and curse God?

Listen.

*Job's response (v. 10)*

***[10] But he said to her, "You are speaking as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we actually accept good from God but not accept adversity?"<sup>8</sup> Despite all this, Job did not sin with his lips.***

Now, Job really was not overly harsh toward his wife. But he was honest. He told her that she was speaking foolishness. In his answer he takes his wife back to first principles.

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

After the first day of calamity, Job attributed to no one else but God the responsibility for his losses. He did the same thing on this second day.

He had no reason to consider the possibility that the devil was behind his sufferings. He didn't blame the weather, the Sabeans or Chaldeans, or even himself.

He refused to waste time trying to understand all the reasons for his suffering. He held fast to his integrity, kept on being the Job he had always been, and entrusted himself to his God.

#### **Reflecting on Job's Faith-fullness:**

This is Job. His multiplied, undeserved sufferings are magnitudes greater than mine. They rank up there with the greatest sufferings of anyone, ever.

Turning reflective, if any of us here...

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:45 - God treats the good and the evil to sun and rain, also to hail?

...think that we have suffered unjustly.  
 ...believe that we don't deserve the raw hand we have been dealt.  
 ...feel like we are the innocent one who has suffered what we shouldn't have, well...  
 ...Job has suffered far more and far more innocently.

At the end of the day, he told his wife that having accepted good from God, he will now, in his pain, accept adversity from God.

Job's response presents us with a great model of what it means to walk with God through a personal nightmare that keeps on coming.

He also invites to follow him, and to respond to our life's trials with an unwavering trust in God.

Job has now triumphed for a second time. He has lived up to his reputation and shown his integrity. The author assures us that Job has not sinned **"with his lips."**<sup>9</sup> Way to go, Job!

As we conclude the book's second chapter, we're going to see a very helpful final scene. A scene of Job with his friends.

Even without modern communication, news of Job's trials traveled quickly among the tribes in this region of the ancient near east. And without modern means of travel, three friends who heard about Job's losses left their homes to visit.

That's what friends do. When our friends are hurting, we go to be with our friends.

We now meet three men who have made their way to be with their friend.

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

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<sup>9</sup> Those last three words offer suspicious readers (like us?) a hint at what is to come. Reitman, in *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 this: 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 by God, when his own was not. God tells Cain, **"Sin is lurking at the door."** (Genesis 4:7) So here, sin is near to Job. Watch out!

### **\*\*\*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're going to get to know all three of these men much better in the weeks to come. Today, we see them at their very best.

It seems that these three friends got to Job as quickly as they could, probably after word reached them of his first round of trials.<sup>10</sup> They have come for one reason.

*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. 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.

As these three friends approached Job, they couldn't believe their eyes. This was no longer the man they knew.

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<sup>10</sup> It may be that they have traveled a good distance to get to Job's place.

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

***[12a] When they looked from a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe, and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.***

Job had wasted away in their absence. His diseased skin had changed his appearance.

Earlier, Job had torn his robes from grief. Now these three follow suit and do the same.

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

This scene didn't take place in a lovely church building or around a kitchen table.

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.

**\*\*\*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, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar offered no words. They sat in quiet dignity, wordlessly expressing their heartfelt compassion.

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

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. It helps. Silence can heal.

One of my personal heroes was 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.

Some years ago, I came across a transcript of an interview with Nouwen. The interviewer asked for Nouwen's wisdom about what to say to people who had suffered greatly.

Here's his response:

*"I don't say anything... The most important, first gift is the gift of presence. Be there. Our temptation is to try 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 their 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.