

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)

A Most Frivolous Lawsuit

(Examining Job's responses, part 1; Job, chapters 4-27)

Study #7

Introduction: Frivolous lawsuits we have known and loved...

Search the Internet and you will find an unending list of examples of "*frivolous lawsuits*."

The "*frivolous lawsuit*" meme probably started in 1992. That was when a customer sued MacDonald's when the hot coffee she was served - and which she spilled - scalded her. She received \$160,000 in compensatory damages and \$2.7 million in punitive damages.

That lawsuit shows up on most lists of "frivolous lawsuits." And we could list them all day long. Here is just one of my favorites.

In 1995, a prisoner in Virginia sued himself for damages of \$5 million, claiming that he had harmed himself by getting drunk and committing crimes.

Since he had no money, the suit required that the state should pay. That suit was deemed "*frivolous*" and was not successful.

Evidently, "*frivolous*" is in the eye of the beholder. What may seem to one person to be a silly misuse of court time will seem to someone else to be a perfectly legitimate lawsuit.

Today in our time in Scripture we get a ringside seat to a scene where someone serves his opponent.

I'll leave it to you to determine where this case should be placed on the frivolity scale.

Review

We've been studying the story of Job, a man who suffered terrible losses. We've been impressed to see how well Job did in dealing with those losses...at least he did well at first.¹

When it came to how he dealt with his friends' accusations that he was suffering because he had sinned, he initially did great. He expressed his disappointment that they failed to give him comfort.

However, as those accusations became more pointed, and as his own painful condition became chronic, Job crossed a line and demanded that they give him comfort.²

This is often the path that our responses take.

In the immediate aftermath of a great loss, we may manage to stay calm and cling to God as we press on with life the best we can.

Over time, though, the temptation may grow to succumb to something ugly.

Chronic pain, a loss that keeps on taking, and a wound that won't heal - these conditions provide a perfect soil in which a very dangerous weed can grow.

Today, Job's story warns us to learn to identify that weed and pull it. Quick.³

¹ Job's initial responses to his losses are impressive. When he lost his identity as a wealthy father of ten, he responded with worship. (1:21). When he suffered a painful affliction of boils from head to toe, he accepted it graciously. (2:10) In his lament, Job honestly and worshipfully poured out his heart to God. (chapter 3)

² We notice that the prose sections of the book portray Job as a godly man who accepted hardships patiently. It is in the poetic sections that we see him as a man who lashes out against God, protests his innocence, and cries out for vindication.

³ Hopefully, our increasing uneasiness over the attitudes displayed by Job and his friends will promote an awareness of our own disposition in suffering and of the

Our focus is on how Job spoke to and about God, and we'll start by noting that Job's understanding of God was, in many respects, profound and spot on.

For one thing, Job affirmed God's awesome, sovereign power.

Job Struggles with God, as HE Is

God, the All-Powerful Sovereign (9:1-10; 12:13-23; 26:1-14)

**[9:5] "It is God who removes the mountains, and they do not know how,
When He overturns them in His anger.
[10] It is He who does great things, the unfathomable,
And wondrous works without number.**

Job understood that God has all power. God's power is not a caged power, like a lion in captivity. He is a free, omnipotent God who can do anything.

That, essentially, is what *sovereign* means. God does whatever He wants to do and rules the world as He sees fit.

**[12:14] "Behold, He tears down, and it cannot be rebuilt;
He imprisons a person, and there is no release.
[23] "He makes the nations great, then destroys them;
He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.**

Today, you and I see evidence of God's "God-ness" everywhere. Certainly, we see it in His creative handiwork.

The sun, moon, and stars, the beauty of the earth, the amazing ups and downs of weather - from droughts to floods and hurricanes - all speak of His power.⁴

inescapable fact that in this life we can demand neither genuine compassion from others nor immediate relief of suffering from God. (Reitman, Unlocking Wisdom)

⁴ [7] "He stretches out the north over empty space
And hangs the earth on nothing..."

And as even Job admits, all of these evidences of God's power that we know and see are only **[26:14] "...the fringes of His ways."**

We'd have to delve deeper into deep space, the depths of the seas, the intricacies of the human body, of the mind, of the atom to move closer to the heart of His ways.

Even then, we would have still only scratched the surface of God's creative and sustaining power.

Job knows - and so do we - that while he knows some things about God, what he knows is only because God made these things about Himself known.

Beyond what God self-reveals, we can never know. So, what we don't know about God is far greater than what we do know about Him.

Clearly, God is not like us. He's wholly other. He's unknowable and unapproachable in His majestic holiness. A thought that prompts these thoughts.

God, the Unknowable and Unapproachable (9:12-35)

**[9:12b] "Who could say to [God], 'What are You doing?'...
[14] "How then can I answer Him,
And choose my words before Him?
[16] "If I called and He answered me,
I could not believe that He was listening to my voice.
[19] "If it is a matter of power, behold, He is the strong one!
And if it is a matter of justice, who can summon Him?"**

Well done, Job! He passed "Theology 101" with flying colors. He's got God's essential attribute of sovereign power down, cold.

But there is a "So what" behind every biblical "What."

**[11] "The pillars of heaven tremble
And are amazed at His rebuke..."**

And the “*So what*” behind the “*What*” that God rules the world is that He must be, at some level and in some way, behind Job’s sufferings. God either caused them or He allowed them. Job “gets” that.

Job is wondering what many people who have suffered greatly wonder at one time or another. He wonders, “*Why ME?*”

God, the One Who Confuses

“Why me?” (10:4-22; 13:23-28)

**[10:8] ‘Your hands fashioned and made me altogether,
Yet would You destroy me?’**

**[9] ‘Remember that You have made me as clay;
Yet would You turn me into dust again?’**

**[13:24] “Why do You hide Your face
And consider me Your enemy?”**

Have you ever felt singled out for trials and troubles? When you’ve gone through deep valleys, have you ever wondered, “*Why me?*”

If so, you are a part of a very big club of sufferers who are confused by God’s willingness to allow YOU to suffer.

Job’s life has turned ugly, and God allowed it. Job’s life has not been easy, and somehow God has had a hand in it. He asked God, **[7:20] *Why have You made me Your target?***

God didn’t respond to Job’s “*Why ME?*” question. So, he asked what seemed to him to be an even better question: “*Why not THEM?*”
Why not them?” (10:3; 21:1-34; 24:1-25)

Job could think of lots of people who were way more deserving of suffering than he was.

**[21:7] “Why do the wicked still live,
Grow old, and also become very powerful?”**

That line comes from the speech Job gave in chapter 21. There, Job described people who do wrong AND live to a ripe old age, enjoy safety, are rich, and have happy families. Job asks, “*What gives?*”

In another speech (chapter 24), Job complained of a long list of injustices committed by people who never get what’s coming to them. People who abuse orphans and widows and the poor often lead carefree lives.

He observes the obvious. Very often, people who do wicked things prosper and people who do good things suffer. That doesn’t compute to Job. He is confused by the ways of God.

Injustices in our world trouble us, too.

We hate that the innocent suffer. We’re angry that those who take advantage of the weak prosper. We can be as confused as Job was that God allows His world to work like this.

So, we are able to trace one clear thread of thought throughout Job’s speeches. He struggles to understand God, as He is. His ways are inscrutable, beyond finding out. But there is more.

Another clearly discernible thread is Job’s struggle to accept and understand his own life, as it is.⁵

In what follows Job sounds very much like a very good friend of mine. Many years ago, this man served as an Elder here. His life had, like Job’s, fallen apart at the seams.

While he and his family lived in San Antonio, he remarked to me over an IHOP breakfast, Job-like in its honesty, “*I understand that*

⁵ From Reitman (Unlocking Wisdom): By framing the debate over Job’s guilt and God’s justice with “lament” and by culminating the debate with a plea for wisdom (chapters 3-31), the author illustrates how self-righteous presumption to know God’s purposes in suffering only serves Satan’s objective of subverting mankind’s intended agency by distorting the truth about God, so that readers facing adversity might resist the temptation to ascribe all suffering to personal sin or indiscriminate punishment from God and instead seek wisdom in the fear of God.

God has a plan for my life. At the present time I just happen to think that His plan sucks."

Job remembers only too well how sweet life was before his losses. He longs for the good ol' days. Listen as he recounts "a day in the life of Job" PRE-trials.

Job Struggles with His Own Life. As It Is

Job Longs for the Good Ol' Days (29:1-10; 29:18-25)

He remembers blessings

**[29:2] "Oh that I were as in months gone by,⁶
As in the days when God watched over me;
[3] When His lamp shone over my head,
And by His light I walked through darkness;
[4] Just as I was in the days of my youth,
When the protection of God was over my tent;**

That is a sad look backward. All the past tenses give voice to his current sorrow.

Before the losses that changed everything, Job knew God's favor. Now he doesn't. God used to watch over him. Now He doesn't. He used to know the God's friendship. Now he doesn't.

Job also formerly enjoyed the admiration of the people who knew him. In the ancient world, respected city leaders would sit at the gate of the city to do the city's business.

Job remembers what used to happen when he would sit down.

He remembers respect

**[29:7] "When I went out to the gate of the city,
When I took my seat in the public square,**

⁶ This reference to "months gone by" is a hint that the time frame of Job's troubles was short.

**[8] The young men saw me and hid themselves,
And the old men arose and stood.**

[9] "The leaders stopped talking

And put their hands on their mouths;

**[10] The voices of the prominent people were hushed,
And their tongues stuck to their palates.**

He remembers thinking that his honorable, blessed life would be his life forever. (29:18) We get that.

When we are in the pits, we tend to think that we'll be there for good; when the sun is shining on us, we tend to think it will always be sunshiny. Job's life, once sweet and dreamy, has become a nightmare.

**[16:16] "My face is flushed from weeping,
And deep darkness is on my eyelids,**

Formerly, even those who were older than Job paid him respect. He is now a laughingstock to all who see him.

Job Considers His Current, Pitiful Life (16:15-17; 30:1-19)

**[30:1] "But now those who are younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I refused to put with the dogs of my flock.**

The young men mock him and "they do not refrain from spitting in [his] face." (30:10)⁷ Why? **[11] "Because He (God) has undone my bowstring and afflicted me.**

As we've already established, God was involved - in some way and to some degree, either actively or passively - in Job's sufferings. God is sovereign. He knows that and so do we.

But as we get deeper into the speeches, Job moves past observation of that fact to accusation.

⁷ [10] "They abhor me and stand aloof from me,
And they do not refrain from spitting at my face.

A major theme in these later speeches of Job is that Job accuses God of habitually causing harm to people.

Job v God

Job's Charge Against God

God harms people, generally (14:1-22)

**[14:18] "But the falling mountain crumbles away,
And the rock moves from its place;**

[19] Water wears away stones,

Its torrents wash away the dust of the earth;

So You destroy a man's hope.

[20] "You forever overpower him and he departs;

You change his appearance and send him away.

Here's Job's evolving opinion of God. *"You hurt people. That's just the kind of God You are."*

And then listen to Job's accusation about how God has particularly hurt him.

God has harmed Job, particularly (7:11-16; 16:7-14; 17:3-6)

[7:14] Then You frighten me with dreams

And terrify me by visions;

[15] So that my soul would choose suffocation,

Death rather than my pains.

Later, Job says that God has scared and exhausted him (16:7), that He has handed Job over to *"criminals"* (16:11; that is, his friends / gangsters) to abuse him.

As the speeches continue Job ramped up the intensity of his accusations. He sharpens his point to say that not only has God harmed him. God has *wronged* him. God was *wrong* to harm him.

God has wronged him (19:1-29; 30:20-31)

[19:6] Know then that God has wronged me

And has surrounded Me with His net.

[7] "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer;

I shout for help, but there is no justice.⁸

As Job sees it, God's treatment of him is just plain cruel.⁹ He sees that this terrible mistreatment has come to him despite the fact that he has done nothing wrong.

As Job argues, he is one of the good guys!¹⁰

Job's Self-Defense

A lifetime of righteousness (29:11-17; 31:1-34)

Job helped orphans. Destitute widows rejoiced when Job showed up because they knew that he would help them in their distress. Poor people had a friend in Job.

If there was a miscarriage of justice, Job could be counted on to right it. He saw to it that the weak were supported AND that those who abused the weak paid dearly! (19:17)

He asserts his integrity. He didn't exploit his servants, didn't take advantage of people, financially, or of women, sexually.

Yes, Job was wealthy, but he placed his trust in God, not his gold. Yes, he had enemies, but he didn't rejoice when they suffered. Yes, he had a blessed life, but he shared his bounty with those in need.

⁸ Job 19:23-27 - The phrase *"from my flesh I shall see God"* is probably better rendered *"apart from my flesh I shall see God"* - an unusual, but clear Old Testament expression of faith in life after death.

⁹ See also Job 30:20-22.

¹⁰ See Job 6:10 - In his very first speech (chapter 6) Job asserts his unimpeachable integrity - and he becomes more and more adamant about it as the speeches continue.

And that's Job. Quality through and through. The kind of person we aspire to be.

The further we get into the book, the more we see that Job was out to convince anyone who would listen - Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, you, me, God! - of his righteousness.

Based on his own righteousness, he has full confidence that, in the end, he will be vindicated.

Confident of vindication (23:10-12; 27:1-6)

**[23:10] "But He knows the way I take;
When He has put me to the test, I will come out as gold."¹¹**

Now THAT is confidence - and it shows a movement in Job's spirit from what we had seen earlier.

Last week we saw movement in Job's dealings with his friends, tragic movement from "I long for compassion from you..." to "I better get compassion from you!"

Today we see movement, too, as Job wrestles to square the tragedy of his life with what he knows about God.

He's rock solid on the basics of God's power and sovereignty. And he's honest throughout as he questions God about suffering, "Why me?" and "Why not the wicked?"

But then there is that movement, that shift in attitude.

- When he talked about his life, he started off *complaining* to God and then he turned to *accusing* God.
- He began with a correct assumption of God's *involvement* in his sufferings, moved to accuse God of *harming* him, and ended up charging that God had *wronged* him.

That's movement. But not what we'd call progress. And there is one final way in which we see movement.

Early on in the debates, Job's good friend, Eliphaz, planted a seed in Job's mind. Eliphaz said that if he were in Job's place he would take his concerns directly to God.

**[5:8] *But as for me, I would seek God
And I would make my plea before God***

Of course, it is always a good thing to go to God when we are in pain and anguish.

But in the heart of this man who had suffered so much, that suggestion by Eliphaz woke up something that was already present, but sleeping.

It's in our hearts, too. Maybe sleeping, maybe alive and kicking. I'll name it in a moment. But we'll first watch it develop in Job.

At the beginning of the debates, Job didn't seriously consider the possibility of actually presenting his case before God. He saw Eliphaz' counsel as nothing more than a passing comment.

**[9:3] "If one wished to dispute with Him,
He could not answer Him once in a thousand times.**

Nobody could bring a case before God. He's GOD.

However, as the speeches continue, as I said, there is, again, movement. By the second round of speeches, Job thinks it would be a good thing to find a judge to try his case against God.

Job's Demand for a Hearing

Job calls God to court! (13:3; 15-16; 17-22)

**[13:3] "But I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to argue with God.**

¹¹ See Job 27:1-6.

**[15] “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.”¹²**

And by the third round of speeches, Job is chomping at the bit to take God to court.

**[23:3] “Oh that I knew how to find Him,
That I might come to His home!**

**[4] “I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.**

**[5] “I would learn the words which He would answer,
And perceive what He would tell me.**

**[6] “Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.**

**[7] “There the upright would argue with Him;
And I would be free of my Judge forever.**

So here is the movement.

- Job initially thinks it would be *frivolous* to try and convince God that he is right, and God is wrong.
- That transitions to an *openness* to “take God on” and argue with God.
- That turns into an *eagerness* to go for it.¹³

Job crossed the final line into sin with the final words of his final speech.

The defense rests (31:35-40)

**[31:35] “Oh that I had one to hear me!
Here is my signature;**

Let the Almighty answer me!

And the indictment which my adversary has written,

**[36] I would certainly carry it on my shoulder,
I would tie it to myself like a garland.**

¹² See Job 13:17-22.

¹³ In the speech recorded in chapter 23, Job admits that God cannot be summoned - but he adamantly refuses to be silenced. (23:13-17).

**[37] “I would declare to Him the number of my steps;
Like a prince, I would approach Him.”**

Job is serving God as a plaintiff serves the accused in a lawsuit. THAT is one frivolous lawsuit! And THAT is the ugliness of demandingness.

Conclusion:

So, what do we learn from Job today?

On the one hand, we applaud Job for engaging with God. To rail at God is to at least take God seriously. And it is far better to passionately engage as Job did than to live as if God is not.

We don’t make progress in our walk with God by refusing to engage with Him. Skirting life’s big questions about justice and God’s role in suffering doesn’t resolve anything.

But on the other hand, Job crossed a line when He challenged God (God!) to a day in court. Job demanded that God admit that he (Job) was right. He demanded that God see where He (God!) had been wrong.¹⁴

Job’s life had come apart at the seams. He was sure that if he was in the driver’s seat, he could do a better job of running his life than God was doing.

One of my favorite Christian authors has long been the always thoughtful Philip Yancey. Years ago, Yancey wrote Disappointment with God. In that book there are these thoughts about Job:

“I once regarded Job’s book as an expression of human disappointment. I have learned that Job doesn’t represent the human viewpoint at all.

¹⁴ And how do we know that Job was wrong? We know because we have cheated and looked ahead to the speeches of God (Job 38-41) where God directly indicts Job for the sin of questioning His wisdom and justice in ruling the world.

“When people experience pain, questions spill out, like the ones that tormented Job. ‘Why me?’ ‘What’s going on?’ ‘Does God care?’

“This one time we, the readers - but not Job - are granted a view behind the curtain. Only here in the Bible, are we shown God’s point of view, including the supernatural activity normally hidden from us.

“Job has put God on trial, accusing Him of unfair acts against an innocent party. Job is angry, satirical, betrayed. He wanders dangerously close to blasphemy.

“And what he has to say sounds startlingly familiar. They sound so very modern. Job gives voice to our most deeply felt complaints against God.

“But chapters 1 and 2 prove that, regardless of what Job thinks, God is not on trial. Job is on trial.

“The point of the book is not suffering: Where is God when it hurts? The prologue deals with that. The point is faith: Where is Job[’s faith] when [life] hurts?”¹⁵

I mentioned a friend earlier. He accepted that God had a plan for his life, but who didn’t particularly enjoy that plan. That man was actually one of the most spiritually mature men I have ever known.

(He would argue against that, his disagreement with my assessment arguing for my opinion.)

And here’s the thing. When that man spoke about the goodness of God, it rang exceptionally true.

At the time that he made his comment about God’s plan for his life, he and his wife and his daughter were suffering life-threatening health crises. His very active and distinguished military career was greatly limited by his own fight with cancer.

With all of that going on, when he would lean across the table at IHOP and tell me something he had learned from Scripture, or when he would tell me - with tears! - about someone he knew and loved who was far from God, or when he exhorted me to walk with God - there was POWER.

My friend didn’t go where Job went. He didn’t become demanding, and he didn’t rail at God. He continued to embrace his life mission as being a light sent to shine in dark places.

You and I are called to the same thing.

So, let’s refuse to allow a demanding spirit to take root in our hearts. And let’s be especially vigilant against it when life’s losses mount and multiply. Of all the frivolous lawsuits, none are bigger wastes of time and energy than bringing suit against “*the Almighty.*”

And when faced with pain and loss, as we grieve and honestly lament, let’s continue to be His bright lights in a dark world.

For we are at our most powerful for Jesus when we embrace our mission for Him while we are in in pain.

That’s faith. And that - FAITH - brings a smile to your Savior’s face, great joy to you, and great blessing to your world.

¹⁵ This quote is from Disappointment from God. I quote it from a footnote in Unlocking Wisdom (Reitman), p. 49.