

## **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)

### **The Enlightening Sarcasm of God**

(God speaks, part 1, Job 38:1--40:5)

Study #10

#### **Introduction: You're soooo sarcastic...**

Sometimes, sarcasm says it best.

*"Oh, I just love waiting in line."*

*"I enjoy nothing more than a hot, dry October."*

*"Super excited to go to the dentist next week."*

But sarcasms should come with a warning label.

Like, when that bad thing happens that you suspected would happen if your child tried it, your, *"Well, THAT was a shock!"* can do more harm than good.

Or, when someone figures out something that has taken them a while to arrive at, but that has been obvious to you for a long time and you say, *"Really, Einstein?"* there will be some hurt feelings.

While I have often been guilty of sarcasm, I try to limit it.

Sarcasm used with the wrong person at the wrong time can ruin a friendship and do damage to a friend.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes,

***[26:18] Like a maniac who shoots  
Flaming arrows and death,***

***[19] So is the person who deceives his neighbor  
And says, "Was I not joking?"***

But there was one time when sarcasm fit the need of the hour, and we find it in the book of Job.

Today, God gets sarcastic. It's a sobering thing when the Almighty uses sarcasm. But when He does, we sit up and take notice.

*Review (as always)*

We've come a long way in our study of the troubles and trials and tribulations of Job. We've seen the hardships he endured, the losses he suffered, the failures of his friends.

We have watched Job morph from a Godly innocent sufferer into an arrogant demander. We have heard him plead for a chance to argue his accusation of injustice against God in a court of law.

*The speeches of Elihu*

Elihu, a younger man, got frustrated with the arguments of Job's three friends *and* with Job's demandingness. So Elihu took them all on.

He challenged Job's self-righteousness. (33:8-13; 35:1-15) and told Job that God used suffering redemptively. (33:14-30; 36:1-37:22)<sup>1</sup>

Elihu even accused Job of sin. But NOT like the friends did who said that his sin brought about his suffering. Elihu accused Job of the sin of demandingness AFTER his great losses. Then he called Job to repentance before God.

When Elihu's speeches ended, Job was silent. And his silence was better than the comebacks he made to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

His silence, though, was not the silence of humble repentance of the ugliness of a demanding pride.<sup>2</sup> And it was absence of repentance that explains God's appearance.

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<sup>1</sup> In Elihu's final speech (chapters 36-37) he affirms that all creation is subordinate to God's sovereign rule, the theme of much of God's own speeches.

### *The speeches of God<sup>3</sup>*

The final section of poetry in the book of Job is made up of two speeches, delivered by God and directed at Job.<sup>4</sup> In these speeches, God uses withering sarcasm to, frankly, put Job in his place.<sup>5</sup>

Job suffered from a fatal thought error. He thought that he, a creation of God, was entitled to an explanation of his sufferings from God, the Creator.

God will thoroughly dismantle that idea. God is going to give His own self-defense. And we get to listen as the LORD skewers Job with the utter absurdity of his entitlement mindset.

So now, like the dog that chased and finally caught the car, Job's got God just where he thought he wanted Him. Job had demanded his day in court...and God showed up.

Imagine Job, now, sitting on an ash heap at the edge of town. He is there with Elihu, his three friends, and perhaps others who have come to witness the debates.

All was calm as Elihu finished speaking. Job sat there with arms crossed. He had nothing to say. Suddenly, a storm blew up. This storm got everyone's attention.

When storms blow through San Antonio, we usually have advance warnings from Accuweather or The Weather Channel. We get a chance to prepare. This storm came out of nowhere. No warnings.

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<sup>2</sup> As the inspired mediator between Job and God, Elihu finished his instruction on mankind's appropriate response to God when he suffers. His reproof (especially the sarcastic, humiliating tirade in 37:14-20) is ideally suited to prepare Job to face God's own impending challenge in chapters 38-41.

<sup>3</sup> Job 38:1-42:6 consists of two speeches by God to Job that affirm His sovereign control over all creation and over all the powers of evil AND Job's responses.

<sup>4</sup> Job made these challenges at 38:1-3; 40:1-2; 6-14.

<sup>5</sup> Reitman "vicious sarcasm."

We should picture the scene. There is darkness and wind. The author refers to a "**whirlwind**" (What we call a tornado). So, think LOUD, as in freight train loud.

Above the roar of the whirlwind, we hear a Voice.

***[38:1] Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,***

***[2] "Who is this who darkens the divine plan  
By words without knowledge?***

***[3] "Now tighten the belt on your waist like a man,  
And I shall ask you, and you inform Me!***

I have no doubt that at the moment the whirlwind showed up, Job wondered if he had bit off a bit more than he could chew. When he heard the Voice, he instantly knew that he was way out of his league.

In His role as Counsel for the defense (Himself), God had questions for His accuser.<sup>6</sup>

### **God Orchestrates the Inanimate Creation (38:4-38)**

#### **Where was Job at Creation? (38:4-7)**

***[4] "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?***

***Tell Me, if you have understanding,***

***[5] Who set its measurements? Since you know,***

***Or who stretched the measuring line over it?***

***[6] "On what were its bases sunk?***

***Or who laid its cornerstone,***

***[7] When the morning stars sang together***

***And all the sons of God shouted for joy?***

These are rhetorical questions. They're the kind of questions that aren't meant to be answered, They are asked to show that they can't be answered.

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<sup>6</sup> The content of God's speech is designed to assure Job of the universal scope of His awareness and control over the created order.

In what I just read, the Bible is not teaching that the earth is the center of the universe or that the earth rests on a solid foundation.

When we hear a meteorologist today speak of sunrise and sunset, we don't think that he or she believes that the sun revolves around the earth.

No, the meteorologist is speaking according to appearance, *phenomenologically*.

That is what God is doing. The earth is solid. *"Job, tell me, how did it become so? How did you pull that one off?"* That's divine sarcasm.

God's questions continue, hard and fast. He moves from the creation of the world to the world of the oceans.

#### **King Of the Sea (38:8-11)**

**[8] "Or who enclosed the sea with doors  
When it went out from the womb, bursting forth;  
[9] When I made a cloud its garment  
And thick darkness its swaddling bands,  
[10] And I placed boundaries on it  
And set a bolt and doors,  
[11] And I said, 'As far as this point you shall come, but no farther;  
And here your proud waves shall stop'?"**

God says that the seas "**burst forth.**" We hear similar words in the account of Noah's flood in Genesis: **[7:11] the fountains of the great deep "burst open."**

God, not Job, put in motion the principles of hydrology that control the seas. God, not Job, governs the laws of gravity that control the tides.

God next asks how much experience Job has in making brand new days.

#### **The Dawn of a New Day (38:12-15)**

**[12] "Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,  
And made the dawn know its place,  
[13] So that it would take hold of the ends of the earth,  
And the wicked would be shaken off from it?  
[14] "It is changed like clay under the seal;  
And they stand out like a garment.  
[15] "Their light is withheld from the wicked,  
And the uplifted arm is broken.**

We see God's faithfulness and consistency in the daily occurrence of sunrise and sunset.

Every day, without fail, a new day. The sun never doesn't come up in the morning. God asked Job about his involvement in the dawning of each new day. And the sarcasm continues.

#### **The Lord of the Ocean Depths (38:16-18)**

**[16] "Have you entered the springs of the sea  
And walked in the depth of the ocean?  
[17] "Have the gates of death been revealed to you,  
And have you seen the gates of deep darkness?  
[18] "Have you understood the expanse of the earth?  
Tell Me, if you know all this.**

Among the most interesting realms of scientific research in our own day is what is sometimes referred to as "the last frontier" - the weird plant and animal life, the amazing geology, and the rich resources at the bottom of the ocean floors.

God has walked the ocean floors. Job hasn't. Nor is Job sovereign over the earth's weather patterns. But God is.

#### **www.weather.GOD (38:19-24, 34-38)**

**[19] "Where is the way to the dwelling of light?  
And darkness, where is its place,  
[20] That you would take it to its territory**

*And discern the paths to its home?*

*[21] "You know, for you were born then,*

*And the number of your days is great!*

*[22] "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,*

*And have you seen the storehouses of the hail,*

*[23] Which I have reserved for a time of distress,*

*For a day of war and battle?*

*[24] "Where is the way that the light is divided,*

*And the east wind scattered on the earth?*

*[25] "Who has split open a channel for the flood,*

*And a way for the thunderbolt,*

*[26] To bring rain on a land without people,*

*On a desert without a person in it,*

*[27] To satisfy the waste and desolate land*

*And to make the seeds of grass to sprout?*

*[28] "Does the rain have a father?*

*Or who has fathered the drops of dew?*

*[29] "From whose womb has come the ice?*

*And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?*

*[30] "Water becomes hard like stone,*

*And the surface of the deep is imprisoned...*

*[34] "Can you raise your voice to the clouds,*

*So that an abundance of water will cover you?*

*[35] "Can you send flashes of lightning, so that they may go*

*And say to you, 'Here we are'?*

*[36] "Who has put wisdom in the innermost being*

*Or given understanding to the mind?*

*[37] "Who can count the clouds by wisdom,*

*And pour out the water jars of the heavens,*

*[38] When the dust hardens into a mass*

*And the clods stick together?*

Here and in other places in the Bible, God is demonstrably sovereign over weather. He is in control of the climate.

- God created a weather disturbance in answer to the prayers of the prophet Elijah for a drought-ending rain.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Kings 18; referenced in James 5.

- Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee with a simple, "**Hush, be still**"<sup>8</sup>
- On the day Jesus died, the sky turned unnaturally dark as even the weather mourning the death of God's Son.<sup>9</sup>

So, while seasons follow their general patterns, God can change weather patterns to suit His purposes whenever He wishes.

But it is also true that God is the One who created a world in which predictable weather patterns are the norm, where H<sub>2</sub>O behaves in predictable ways below and above 32 degrees Fahrenheit, where low and high pressure systems generate predictable climates at varying elevations and latitudes.

So, no. Job had very little to do with creating rain, snow, or hail. (Sorry for the sarcasm...)

God keeps the pressure on Job as He speaks with increasing sarcasm, moving from the terrestrial to the celestial.

### **Astronomy in Focus (38:31-33)**

*[31] "Can you tie up the chains of the Pleiades,*

*Or untie the cords of Orion?*

*[32] "Can you bring out a constellation in its season,*

*And guide the Bear with her satellites?*

*[33] "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,*

*Or do you establish their rule over the earth?*

This is God's creative and sustaining work in deep space.

Genesis tells us that God flung the sun, moon, and stars into place. But He didn't do it haphazardly. There was order to it.

There are constellations - different ones visible in the northern and southern hemispheres. Different constellations are observable at

<sup>8</sup> Mark 4:39

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 27:45-46; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44.

different seasons. Over millennia, these constellations have guided travelers and marked seasons.

All of this that we have seen is the non-living, non-organic, inanimate universe that God has put together. It is an extremely complex, ordered system that works really, really well.

And catch this. Nobody gave God the responsibility to run the world He decided to make.

No. He decided to make and run the world. His authority is not derived. It is intrinsic to who He is. He is, as we saw last Sunday, autonomous.

Nothing that will ever be discovered by astronomers or astrophysicists, meteorologists or climatologists, oceanographers or seismologists that will surprise God. He designed it. Not Job.”<sup>10</sup>

And God still isn't finished.

Having taken out the telescope and looked at the vastness of the universe and the world in general, He now takes out the microscope and zeroes in on particulars.

In what follows God mentions the world of animals. He wanted Job to think about this, mull it over, meditate on it.

Here is the second part of God's first speech. Let's pay close attention. God is speaking. I'm simply going to read God's speech, making few, if any, comments.

### **God Orchestrates the Living Creation (38:39--39:30)**

#### **Beasts of Prey (38:39-41)**

***[39] "Can you hunt the prey for the lioness,***

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<sup>10</sup> The current phrase to describe the force behind the universe is "intelligent design." Upon reflection on how amazing and intricate the "design" is, I would suggest, "Designed by God."

***Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,  
[40] When they crouch in their hiding places  
And lie in wait in their lair?***

***[41] "Who prepares feed for the raven  
When its young cry to God  
And wander about without food?***

#### **Wild Animals (39:1-4)**

***[39:1] "Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?  
Do you observe the calving of the deer?***

***[2] "Can you count the months they fulfill,  
Or do you know the time they give birth?***

***[3] "They kneel down, they deliver their young,  
They get rid of their labor pains.***

***[4] "Their offspring become strong, they grow up in the open field;  
They leave and do not return to them.***

#### **Domesticable Animals (39:5-12)**

***[5] "Who sent the wild donkey out free?***

***And who opened the bonds of the swift donkey,***

***[6] To whom I gave the wilderness as his home  
And the salt land as his dwelling place?***

***[7] "He laughs at the turmoil of the city,  
He does not hear the shouting of the taskmaster.***

***[8] "He explores the mountains of his pasture  
And searches after every green thing.***

***[9] "Will the wild bull be willing to serve you,  
Or will he spend the night at your feeding trough?***

***[10] "Can you tie down the wild bull in a furrow with ropes,  
Or will he plow the valleys after you?***

***[11] "Will you trust him because his strength is great  
And leave your labor to him?***

***[12] "Will you have faith in him that he will return your grain  
And gather it from your threshing floor?***

#### **The Foolish Ostrich (39:13-18)**

[13] *"The wings of the ostrich flap joyously  
With the pinion and feathers of love,  
[14] For she abandons her eggs to the earth  
And warms them in the dust,  
[15] And she forgets that a foot may crush them,  
Or that a wild animal may trample them.  
[16] "She treats her young cruelly, as if they were not hers;  
Though her labor is for nothing, she is unconcerned;  
[17] Because God has made her forget wisdom,  
And has not given her a share of understanding.  
[18] "When she rushes away on high,  
She laughs at the horse and his rider.*

#### The Majestic Horse (39:19-25)

[19] *"Do you give the horse his might?  
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?  
[20] "Do you make him leap like locusts?  
His majestic snorting is frightening.  
[21] "He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength;  
He goes out to meet the battle.  
[22] "He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;  
And he does not turn back from the sword.  
[23] "The quiver rattles against him,  
The flashing spear and javelin.  
[24] "He races over the ground with a roar and fury,  
And he does not stand still when he hears the sound of the trumpet.  
  
[25] "As often as the trumpet sounds he says, 'Aha!'  
And he senses the battle from afar,  
And the thunder of the captains and the war cry.*

#### The Hawk (39:26-30)

[26] *"Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,  
Stretching his wings toward the south?<sup>11</sup>  
[27] "Is it at your command that the eagle flies high*

*And makes his nest on high?  
[28] "He dwells and spends his nights on the cliff,  
On the rocky cliff, an inaccessible place.  
[29] "From there he tracks food;  
His eyes look at it from afar.  
[30] "His young ones also lick up blood greedily;  
And where the slain are, there he is."*

What an amazing listing of the features of the worlds God has made. And He could have gone on and on and on.

He could have spoken of astronomical wonders like black holes, biological marvels like reproduction, amazing chemicals like the exquisite and elegant H<sub>2</sub>O, and animals that seem to defy classification, like my favorite, the duck-billed platypus.

And THAT is God's speech. A description of God's sovereign creation of the animate and inanimate worlds is His response to Job's accusations.

Job says, *"I've been dealt a lousy hand. God is unjust."* - So...God gave Job a lesson in the birds and the seas.

People unfamiliar with the book of Job were NOT expecting this kind of a speech from God.

Job has accused God of running a lousy universe and what we expected was an explanation from God about how RIGHTEOUS and JUST His earthly reign really is. We expect a discourse on *theodicy*.

*A word about theodicy...*

The concept of God's justice is a major theme of philosophy and theology. And *theodicy* is the word philosophers and theologians use to talk about God's justice. (from two Greek words: "God" + "justice").

Now, theodicy is an important subject. It's actually good to think about it.

Theodicy deals with questions like,

<sup>11</sup> God repeats *"Tell Me..."* Each time, the response is a very conspicuous silence from Job.

*"How does God rule?"*

*"Why do bad things happen to good people?"*

(and the equally troubling) *"Why do good things happen to bad people?"*

*"Given that there are injustices in the world, how do we square that with the idea that God is just?"*

I've thought about those questions a lot. I'll bet you have, too.

There are those who believe that the book of Job was written to deal with and answer the questions raised by theodicy.

Not me.

In fact, the more time I've spent in Job's story, the more convinced I've become that the book does not give us the answer to the "Why?" of our suffering. It is not about how God's justice is worked out in the world. Job was not written to be a philosophical brain-teaser.

The book of Job urges us to gladly accept life as it is, to enthusiastically worship God for who He is, and to zealously serve God where we are.

When God took the witness stand, He didn't explain Himself to Job. He didn't take this golden opportunity to let Job look behind the curtain and see the cosmic wager between Himself and Satan that was the cause of Job's suffering.

Not even close.

He described His masterful orchestration of the universe and told Job, *"You don't know enough to call Me and My ways into question. You are out of your league. This is way above your pay grade."*

That was God's answer. And He wrapped up His self-defense with one final question for "the prosecution."

**[40:1] Then the LORD said to Job,**

**[2] "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who rebukes God give an answer."**

Here is Job's response.

### **Job's Response (40:3-5)**

**[4] "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I say in response to You? I put my hand on my mouth.**

**[5] "I have spoken once, and I will not reply; Or twice, and I will add nothing more."**

To which we say, "Hmmm..."

On the plus side, we commend Job for backing down. He's no longer getting in God's face. There are no demands. Job admits that his own knowledge is dwarfed by God's wisdom.

However, there is a minus side to what he says that I think outweighs the plusses.

He says, **"I am insignificant."** - But that is not true. And for Job to say, **"I am insignificant"** is a massive problem.

The truth is that Job is God's ambassador. He is God's agent to the world. Job's mission is and has always been to bring blessing to people by being God's representative.

The whole point of Job's sufferings was to prove that he would keep on being **"significant"** for God, worshipping and serving, come what may.

In fact, God's purpose in allowing Satan freedom to afflict Job was to prove that Job's witness would be even more profound, more powerful, more impactful when he carried it out while suffering.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Job's self-evaluation as being insignificant is completely at odds with the whole thrust of God's first speech. The point has been to highlight His intentional care for all creatures AND the key role that man is to play in superintending that Creation. The key issue in the initial drama with Satan was whether Job - God's agent - would or would NOT serve God if he suffered great loss.

The very fact that God agreed to show up at all and to speak to Job gives Job the status of a valued servant. Despite the sarcasm and the scathing words, God honors Job by His appearance.

So, no, Job is not *“insignificant.”* What God was NOT looking for was a hang-dog, self-flagellating, Eyore-like, *“I’m just a nobody. I don’t matter.”*<sup>13</sup>

No. God was after repentance. God wanted Job’s full-blown acceptance of sin and ownership of the mission God had given him.

But by his claim of insignificance, we know that Job is still angry. He still has his arms folded across his chest.

He knows that he can’t say anything. But he hasn’t yet repented of his self-righteous pride, which is now being manifested by false humility.

So, God isn’t yet finished. So, we will listen next week to God’s second speech.

That’s where God will guide Job to the point of repentance and to a renewed commitment to bless his world.<sup>14</sup>

We end today with a “note to self.”

### **Conclusion:**

We will all suffer, sometimes innocently, maybe even unjustly. Here’s the vision of what we’ll do what that happens.

We won’t rail against the Almighty. We don’t know enough to stand in judgment of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Job capitulates. He gives up. Not so much because he has given up his defiance, but because he has no hope of contending with God - which is EXACTLY what he had feared would happen if God came at him in His power! (9:14-15)

<sup>14</sup> Reitman: If we were to understand that Job has appropriately responded to God after the first speech, God’s second speech would be superfluous.

And we won’t claim that we are *“insignificant.”* Far from it. In Christ, we are God’s agents on earth with the assignment to take our place as His representatives.

And we will accept the assignment to be “on mission” for Jesus, even when, especially when we are suffering.