

INTRODUCTION

I heard about a wealthy Texas oil man who was getting married. He was the nervous type, so he told the preacher, "Preacher, I'm really nervous, so the shorter you make this ceremony, the more I'm going to pay you." So, the preacher thought for a moment and asked the groom, "Take her?" To the bride he asked, "Take him?" They both nodded and he said, "Took!" That was the world's shortest marriage ceremony.

In some ways, this could be the world's shortest message: Would I Be Better Off Dead? Here's the answer: YES and NO—it all depends. If you're a Christian, yes, heaven is preferable to life, but you don't get to set your departure time. If you're not a Christian, no, you wouldn't be better off dead, and you still have time to do something about it. You're dismissed. Not really. I do have a few more things to say to qualify that answer.

As we are studying the book of Job, we find a man who has experienced so much pain and trouble that he insists he would be better off dead. In the first chapter we learned about Job losing all his wealth and most of his servants. To make matters worse, on the same day, a storm blew in and killed all ten of his children. The reason Satan brought this trouble on Job was because Satan alleged if Job suffered he would curse God. But instead, Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; May the name of the Lord be praised." (Job 1:21)

After round one, the score is Job 1, Satan 0. But the devil isn't finished yet.

Job 2:1-10. "On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the Lord, 'From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.' 'Skin for skin!' Satan replied. 'A man will give all his has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.' The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.' So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!' He replied, 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said."

In the third chapter, three of Job's friends come to console him. They end up tormenting him rather than comforting him. Next week, we'll talk about them as we consider the topic, "With Friends Like These Who Needs Enemies?" But for now, I want you to notice some of Job's words of agony. He contends he would be better off dead than to deal with all the pain and suffering in his life. He says in Job 3:11-13 "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest..." He was saying, "I wish I

had never been born in the first place." Then he suggests that for him, death would be preferable to this misery:

Job 3:20-26. "Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Maybe you've never expressed it exactly in those words, but at some time, most people have wondered if they wouldn't just be better off dead. As we study Job's suffering and Job's words in these verses, we can profit from three very important lessons.

LESSON #1: SATAN IS PERSISTENT IN HIS ATTACK

Job 2:7 "Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head." You've got to give the devil his due; he is a persistent old cuss. Even though Job survived round one, the devil wasn't through. He gains God's permission for round two. He is still attacking God's servants today, so it will help us resist the devil if we can learn some of the methods of his attack.

(1) He may attack your health

Satan afflicted Job with painful sores. The English writer and artist William Blake depicted this scene in one of his engravings. He portrayed Satan as a scary angel literally stomping on Job. Satan is spreading the painful boils on Job's body while Job's wife sits at his feet weeping. Later, Job would describe his physical suffering, Job 7:5 "My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering." (Job 7:5)

Every sickness may not be a direct attack from Satan, but we can learn here that, when permitted, Satan will try to attack your health. In II Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul complained about a thorn in his flesh. Obviously, it was some kind of physical suffering, or he wouldn't have described it as a part of his flesh. We don't know what it was, but Paul said it was "a messenger of Satan to torment me." (II Corinthians 12:7) When the Apostle Peter was telling Cornelius about Jesus he said Jesus went about "healing those who were afflicted by the devil." (Acts 10:38) Just remember Satan wants to make you miserable, and sometimes he does it by attacking your health.

(2) He may attack your marriage

As I said in the last lesson, Job lost his fortune, his family, and his fitness, but to add to his suffering, his wife survived. Satan is a crafty old dog. He will attack you by attacking those you love (Job's children) and he may attack you using someone close to you. In this instance, Satan used Job's wife. Satan's allegation is that Job will curse God. That's exactly what Mrs. Job suggested. She said, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9)

Before we get too critical, we must remember Mrs. Job was suffering greatly as well. She lost ten children, and she watched as her mate suffered physically. We’re wired in such a way that we would prefer to hurt instead of watching someone we love suffer.

The main thing to learn here is that Satan wants to drive a wedge between every husband and wife. Satan wants to drive a wedge between every parent and child.

Job told his wife, “You are talking like a foolish woman.” He didn’t call his wife a fool. He said she was talking *like* a foolish woman. In the Bible, a fool is someone who “says in their heart, ‘there is no God.’” (Ps. 53:1) Job’s wife believed in God—but she spoke foolishly about God, as if God should be blamed for his suffering. But we see Job’s wife stayed with him, and in the end she enjoyed the blessings of God. So, don’t let Satan attack you through those who love you.

LESSON #2: EVEN GOD’S FAITHFUL SERVANTS MAY SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE QUITTING

Job 3:20 -21 (*The Message* paraphrase): “Why does God bother keeping the bitter people alive? Those who want in the worst way to die, and can’t? Who can’t imagine anything better than death? Who count the day of their death and burial the happiest day of their life?”

In the next thirty chapters you can read questions and statements from Job and his friends that wander just to edge of blasphemy. When you read these words, you might wonder if Job was suicidal. No. He was just expressing the depth of his pain. He is bemoaning the fact that sometimes in this world, life can become so painful that you long for the next world.

Elijah felt that way when he sat under a Juniper tree and said, “I have had enough, Lord. Take my life.” (I Kings 19:4) Lord, I’ve had enough, please just let me die.” Jeremiah felt the same way when he said, “Cursed be the day I was born! Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow?” (Jeremiah 20:14,18) Even God’s most faithful servants have expressed the same kind of emotion Job experienced. Have I ever felt that way? No, not more than four or five times a day. Of course I have. It’s okay to look at life and contemplate heaven and say, “I’d be better off dead.” That may be true, but that doesn’t mean that we should contemplate ending our lives or quitting on God. Elijah didn’t quit, Jeremiah didn’t quit, Job didn’t quit, I’m not quitting, and you don’t you give up, either!

Unless you’ve been hiding in a cave somewhere, chances are you’ve seen the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. When Frank Capra released the movie in 1946 it was a box office flop. Since then, however, it has become a Christmas classic.

As you know, the movie centers around the character George Bailey. Life has become so painful for George, he runs away from his family on a snowy Christmas Eve. He sits in a bar over a drink and prays, “Dear Father, I’m not a praying man, but if you’re up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way, oh God.” After his prayer, the guy next to him, who is the husband of his daughter’s schoolteacher punches George out for insulting his wife on the phone. Outside George rubs his bloodied lip and says, “That’s what I

get for praying.” Have you ever felt that way? You’re at the bottom of the barrel and you think things can’t get any worse, and then the bottom of the barrel falls out?

Then clutching his life insurance policy George decides it would better for everyone if he were dead. We see him standing in the middle of the bridge, gazing down into the icy waters. He’s on the verge of giving up and committing suicide.

At that moment, God’s answer to his prayer arrives. Clarence, the goofy guardian angel, falls into the river and George rescues him. Most of time when God answers our prayers, we don’t recognize His answer. Clarence arranged for George to see what life would be like if he had never been born.

In one memorable scene, George visits a cemetery and sees a tombstone of his brother that says, “Harry Bailey 1911-1919.” Earlier in the movie George had rescued Harry from an icy sledding accident. George looked at the tombstone and said, “That can’t be true! Harry’s a hero, he flew in the war; he saved all those people on the transport!” Clarence says, “Every man on that transport died. Harry wasn’t there to save them because *you* weren’t there to save Harry.” Then Clarence gives the most powerful line in the entire movie: “Strange isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?” Not long after that we see George on his knees saying, “Help me, Clarence. Get me back. I don’t care what happens to me. I want to live again. I want to live again. Dear God, let me live again.” I would tell you how the movie ends, but you already know, and besides, I’d start crying.

You may be thinking, “My life isn’t very wonderful. Nobody cares about me. Nobody would even miss me if I died.” There are people who care for you, and God cares. Jesus said God notices and cares when a little sparrow falls to earth, and if His eye is on the sparrow, you can know He watches over you.

LESSON #3: YOU CAN MAINTAIN YOUR SPIRITUAL INTEGRITY DURING SUFFERING

Job 2:9 “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” Even though the devil is persistent in his attack against you, and even though you may go through periods of deep despondency, you need to know you *can* maintain you integrity.

The word “integrity” has almost lost its meaning in today’s dog-eat-dog and what-have-you-done-for-me-lately world. What is integrity? According to dictionary.com integrity is the quality or condition of being whole or undivided. (from Latin *integritas* from *integer*). Let’s start with the word “integer.” In math, an integer is a whole number. It is a number that isn’t fractional, or divided. Five is an integer, Five and three quarters is not an integer. To maintain your integrity means your mind and heart are not divided—they are whole. In this text and context integrity means that you fully trust God without a divided heart or a fractured mind. When you are suffering there are two things you must do if you are going to maintain your integrity:

(1) Trust God’s plan when you can’t see His hand

At the very time Job felt God had forsaken him, God was actually giving Job personal, almost microscopic attention. When you think about it, in one sense God was putting His entire divine reputation on how Job would respond to this kind of suffering. Satan had declared before thousands and perhaps millions of heavenly creatures that Job would break and curse God when he suffered enough. God, who is omniscient, knew without a doubt Job would trust Him.

Like us, when Job was suffering, he couldn't understand the details of God's plan, he just had to trust that God HAD a plan. He didn't understand it at first, but that's what suffering does—it helps us understand that God has a plan. In the last chapter of the book Job says, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.” (Job 42:2)

Sometimes you just simply have to believe God even when you don't have any evidence that things are as God's says. I think one of the best television shows ever produced was “The Andy Griffith Show.” There was one episode that can teach us something about trusting God. In this particular episode Opie claims he has met a friend in the forest named Mr. McBeavy. He describes Mr. McBeavy as if he's an alien. Opie claims Mr. McBeavy came down out of a tree wearing a big shiny hat, and he jingled when he walked and he could make smoke come out of his ears. They go out in the woods, but they don't see any sign of Mr. McBeavy. Andy and Barney are certain that Opie is making all this up. One day Opie brought in a hatchet he says Mr. McBeavy gave him and Andy makes Opie take it back. Another day Opie brought home a quarter he claims Mr. McBeavy gave him. By now Andy is concerned Opie is making all this up and is stealing from someone.

Finally Andy gets so frustrated he sits Opie down and tells him he must admit he made up the whole story about Mr. McBeavy or he will be punished. Opie wouldn't admit it, instead he looked at Andy and said, “But, he's real, paw, don't you believe me?” Andy thought for a minute and looked his son in the eye, and against all evidence said, “Yes, son I believe you.” When Barney learns Andy didn't punish Opie he says, “Oh come on, Andy, you don't believe in Mr. McBeavy, do you?” And in the best line of the show, Andy said, “No, Barn, I don't believe in Mr. McBeavy, but I do believe in Opie.”

Later Andy walks out in the woods and in his frustration, just cries out sarcastically, “Mr. McBeavy, Mr. McBeavy.” Then a voice from above says, “Yeah, I'll be right down.” Mr. McBeavy climbs down. He's a forester with a belt full of tools wearing a silver hat. Andy grabs his hand and says, “Mr. McBeavy I can't tell you how happy I am to meet you!”

You have to do the same thing. You may be in the midst of suffering and you can't see any evidence of God's hand—that's when you just have to trust his plan.

(2) Trust God's grace when you can't see His face

When we are hurting, we often put our eyes on our desperate circumstances and we beg God to change our circumstances. If you're looking at your bad circumstances, your eyes are focused on the wrong thing. You should be looking for God—you should be looking to see what God is doing. And even though, you may not see His face, you can trust His grace.

There's a great hymn written by William Cowper that says, "God moves in a mysterious way; His wonders to perform; He plants his footsteps in the sea; And rides upon the storm." My favorite verse is the third (and you if grew up in a Baptist church, you usually only sang the first, second, and last stanza!) The third verse says: "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense; (When we try to figure out God, all we do is realize how mentally feeble we really are!) But trust him for his grace; Behind a frowning providence, (In other words, storms, and disasters might lead us to believe that God is mean and always wearing a frown.) He hides a smiling face."

Even though Job suffered terribly and experienced deep despondency, he never gave up on God. Even though he asked some questions that would make us think he wanted to die, he never gave up. He never sinned against God by blaming God. He did not curse God and die. He did not try to end his life. He hung in there. He maintained his integrity to the end.

Job's eyes stayed filled with tears. But Job didn't use his tears as microscopes to focus on the extent of his suffering. Instead he used his tears as telescopes. By faith he looked 2,000 years into the future and he saw a Redeemer who would stand as the ultimate King over all of God's creation. He knew one day He would see God. This is the key passage to the entire book. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God;" (Job 19:25-26)

CONCLUSION

In Jerusalem there is a Holocaust Museum dedicated to the memory of the millions of Jews who were exterminated by the Nazis in World War II. I've been there several times, and it's a depressing experience to see the horrible pictures and to hear the accounts of the ghettos and the concentration camps. But in the midst of all the dark tales of suffering, there is one amazing story of how God can transform horror into hope. This story is like finding a diamond in a garbage heap.

In one of the German concentration camps there was a young lady named Rachel. She endured great hardship from being made to work in the snow with inadequate clothing. She watched in horror as many of her friends and family members were killed. Then one day, the guards left unexpectedly. She didn't know the war was over. Later that day some American soldiers arrived to set the prisoners free. One young American soldier told Rachel he had come to rescue her and for her to gather her few possessions. Then he held the door for her and said, "After you, ma'am." Rachel started to cry. He asked, "What's wrong, ma'am?" She said, "I can't remember the last time someone held a door open for me. It's the nicest thing anyone has done for me in a long time." The soldier stayed in touch with Rachel after she was relocated, and they became friends. Later they fell in love and were married.

That's what God can do. He can take the most terrible situation imaginable and make something beautiful out of it. Our God is an awesome God and I'm glad He is in control. Whenever you go through tough times, you can either look for the junk or you can look for the joy

And in the end, God rewarded Job's persistence and patience. It says in Job 42:12 that "the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first."

Herb Warren was a friend of many of us here at Green Acres. He relocated to heaven a little over a year ago. He loved poetry and he knew I enjoyed poems. Before he died he gave me a book of his favorite poems, and this is one of my favorites.

How Did You Die?

*Did you tackle that trouble that came your way
With a resolute heart and cheerful?
Or hide your face from the light of day
With a craven soul and fearful?
Oh, trouble's a ton, or trouble's an ounce
Or trouble is what you make it.*

*And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts,
But only how did you take it?*

*You are beaten to earth? Well, well, what's that?
Come up with a smiling face.
It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
But to lie there—that's disgrace.
The harder you're thrown, why the higher you bounce;
Be proud of your blackened eye!
It isn't the fact that you're licked that counts;
It's how did you fight and why?*

*And though you be done to death, what then?
If you battled the best you could;
If you played your part in the world of men,
Why, the Lord will call it good.
Death comes by a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
And whether he's slow or spry,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
But only, how did you die?*

Edmund Vance Cooke

If the Lord carries in His return, we are all going to face death. For some of us, we will be better off dead—it will mean heaven and paradise for us. If you don't know Jesus as your personal savior my advice to you is to take all the vitamins you can buy, workout 7 days a week, don't smoke, don't drink, don't eat fatty foods. In other words, you should do everything you can to try to delay that day, because this life is as good as it will ever get for you. Isn't that scary?

But my friend, you can turn from your sins and place your faith in Jesus today, and you can be ready to die.

OUTLINE

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- (2) He may attack your marriage

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"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God;" *Job 19:25-26*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes