

# Is There Any Hope?

*Job: View From The Ashes*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Job 7. Now you may be new to us or maybe visiting for the first time in a long time, the book of Job is one of those sections in the Bible, though it's very lengthy, 42 chapters, it's somewhat neglected when it comes to times of public worship because Job is one of those characters we know a whole lot about because he suffered so much. The book of Ezekiel refers to him alongside of Noah and Daniel. James 5:11 reminds us to remember the patience of Job.

Today as we turn to Job 7, we're kind of entering a new phase of our study. For a lack of better terms, the last few weeks have been a prolonged introduction. We've been introduced to who Job is. We've been introduced to these two waves of persecution, the first one where he lost all 10 children, his fame, his fortune, his reputation, and the second one where he lost his own personal health. By the time we get to the end of chapter 2, he is seated literally in the dumpster of the community where they would burn the trash and the waste. He has sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. We've dealt with that very difficult conversation that he had with his wife, and last week we were introduced to the three "friends," Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and let me just remind you if you were not with us last week, they were really good friends until they opened their mouth.

Beginning in chapter 3, we have this prolonged period where there's a dialog, there is a debate, there is a discussion, in fact, all of the friends are going to take turns telling Job exactly why they believed that he somehow, someway is in error and that has brought upon his situation. After every one of their "messages," he is going to respond. Today in chapter 7, we're going to hear his first response and over the course of the next few weeks here's what we're going to see, that in the midst of his despair, in the midst of what is happening to him, there are these glimmers what I call mountain peaks of hope. We know that chapter 42 is coming. We know there's coming a time where the material blessings of life will be multiplied, his family will be restored, but at this current moment in chapter 7, he's on the ash heap, his wife has spoken her piece, his friends have started to speak contrary to him, the community has turned their back on him. It looks as if there is no hope. Today as we turn to chapter 7, beginning in verse 1, it's going to feel like there's no

hope until we get to verse 12, and it may not seem like a verse of hope but hang with me and we'll see it in just a moment.

Job's words to Eliphaz,

1 Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling? 2 As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: 3 So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. 4 When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome. 6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. 7 O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good. 8 The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not. 9 As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. 10 He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. 11 Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. 12 Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?

Again, for 11 verses, I mean, we are literally on the ash heap of life and then verse 12, there's this, as we're going to see in a moment, this glimmer of hope. Two things that I want to address this morning that Job not only addressed but was literally walking through, and that's the heaviness of life and the hopelessness of life. When I speak of the fact that life is heavy, the days, and as we're going to see in a moment, the nights of our life oftentimes weigh upon us, not just physical exhaustion but there's mental and emotional and even at times there is spiritual exhaustion in our lives. There's this weight called life that sits upon the shoulders and the hearts and the minds of every one of us.

Why is life so heavy? Notice what he says in verse 1, "Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth?" One of the reasons that life is so heavy is because of the futility of it and here's what I mean by that, it doesn't matter what your outward appearance is, it doesn't matter what your genetic makeup is, it doesn't matter how many resources you have access to, if you're seated or walking around today and you're listening or watching to this message, there is not one single person here who can add a single day to your life. Not one. Now don't get me wrong, you can do the right things and eat the right things. You say, "How do I know I'm eating the right things?" If it doesn't taste good, you're eating the right things, okay? You can do all that stuff but you understand that doesn't prolong your life, that just allows your life to be healthier as you get to the end.

He says, no, the days are determined. In fact, when you get to chapter 14, he makes it even more emphatic that God has numbered our days. Now don't get me wrong, the Bible speaks to the "opposite" of this. Ecclesiastes 7 as well as in Proverbs it says a fool can shorten his days. We're not going to talk about the fool this morning because there's

nothing in Job's life that would be deemed as foolish. Let's talk about the futility of life for just a moment. None of us, not one of us knows when our last day will be. Not one, and that's what he said, there's a point in time, and I don't even know when it is. You know, you look around the room today or just walking through life, there are some of you that see those young people that are, say, half your age and you look at them and say, "You know what, they've got a lot of life to live." You don't know that. They may not have half a life left. They may only have a few years, a few months. They may only have a few days. We don't know. And then sometimes we look around and see people who are much older than us, much more mature than us. By the way, just as an aside, the research has been done that we all think old is 15 years older than us. That's what "old" is. And you see somebody who you think is old, you think, "You know what, they're living on borrowed time." No, that's what the insurance companies will tell you. They're living on borrowed time. You look at them and say, "You know what, they're not just in the fourth quarter of life, they're into overtime by now." No. They still might have 10 years left. You see, we cannot determine how many days somebody else or ourselves will live. Do you see the futility of it? He says my days are determined and that's part of the heaviness of life is that each and every day that we arise we don't know if it will be our last, we don't know how many more will come our way.

So when that day arises as today has, notice what he says in verse 2, "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work." One of the reasons that life is so heavy is not only because we don't know when it will or will not end, it's because navigating it is difficult. Why? Because of the fall. You go back to the book of Genesis 3, we know that humanity rebelled against God, we know that we thumbed our nose at him and told him we thought we knew how to do this thing better, and when the Lord starts handing out the results, the consequences of our rebellion, one of the things that he communicates to us is that now the ground will produce thorns, it will be difficult to produce food, it will be difficult to manage things, things aren't just going to be together just simply because. You may never have really thought about this but did you know that almost every single activity that you participate in during the day is what I like to call fall control. You say, "Fall control?" Yeah, you work for a company or a business that in your words tries to better things in the world. Why are you trying to make it better? Because the world is fallen. You go out and you mow your yard, you maintain it meticulously, don't touch it for a month and tell me how it looks. Why does your house continually need to be remodeled and updated? Why do our cars break down? Why do our bodies get sick? Because we live in a fallen world and why are you so exhausted at the end of the day? Because you spent all day trying to reverse a curse that won't go away.

So he says, man, this is heavy. He says, "All I want is just a shadow." Do you know what he's saying? And you've said this, "Can I just catch a break? Can there just come something where maybe we can just push pause?" You know, usually that break "comes at the end of the day." Look at verse 3, he says, "So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." You know, the heaviness of life isn't just the futility of it or the struggle of the day

because of the fall, it's also what I like to call the fear of the night. You say, "What do you mean the fear of the night?" Let me ask you a very honest rhetorical question: when it comes to your personal safety, when it comes to the material blessings that the Lord has allowed you to have and to manage and be a steward over life, are you more concerned about those things at 2 in the afternoon or 2 in the morning? 2 in the morning because when night falls, we know that's when the activity picks up. We know that that's when we "lock our doors." That's when we put safeguards up. That's when we allow ourselves to kind of be on edge because you never know who might be "hiding" in the proverbial shadows.

And that's just the physical side of things. You know, probably more dramatic are the emotional, the mental side. How many of you have experienced this: wearisome day, tiresome day, all you can think about since lunch is, "I just want to put my head on my pillow and forget about this," and then you go to bed and what happens? You can't sleep because all you think about is either what went wrong today or what might go wrong tomorrow, all you think about are past decisions, future opportunities. Some of the longest "moments of my life" actually happened when I'm in bed. You say, "Why?" Because I stare at the ceiling wondering, tossing, questioning things. People ask me all the time, "Why do you answer questions on Wednesday night?" Because at night I've asked those questions to myself. I understand because the wearisomeness of the night, it's heavy so then we wake up the next day and we're exhausted, we're worn out, and Job was right, life is tough, life is heavy. We don't know the extent of our days, the days themselves are filled with the byproduct of the fall, and when we desire and want rest, rarely, if ever, does it really truly come our way.

So let's talk about the hopelessness of life. He's going to continue kind of this saga, so to speak. When we get to verse 5 he says, "My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome." Why does there seem to be kind of this hopelessness? Because of the flesh. You and I are covered with this "stuff" that if you haven't looked in the mirror lately, you may not realize it, it's eroding quickly. In fact, one of the things that we discover about aging, and we make fun of it all the time, is that no matter how much money and time you invest into somehow reversing the process, it eventually ends up all in the same place.

He says, "My flesh has worms in it. There's clods of dirt." Now we know that Job is in a dramatic situation. We know that he is living the pandemics of pandemics. He's got open sores. He's scratching himself with pottery. I mean, he is a sight to behold. But how many times do we "make fun of this," yet deep down is the seriousness of it? You've heard guys joke all the time, "Yeah, I suffer from chest to drawer disease, my chest has dropped to my drawers." You've heard that. How about this one, "Man, if it doesn't hurt, it doesn't work"? Oh yeah, we use those statements because we realize that no matter how much bad tasting food we eat to stay healthy and how much exercise we do to try to maintain our youth, over the course of time the flesh eventually ends up just like Job's.

You know, it's interesting the research has been done that for the average American, average American, you take all the medical expenses in your life from small little things

to major procedures, that on average 85% of what you spend on medical costs will actually be spent the last six months of your life. Why? Because we know when the flesh is failing. We know when things aren't working the way they're supposed to. We understand. We can see it in the mirror. We can feel it or not feel it in our body. He says, "My flesh is open with wounds and sores."

But you know, hopelessness isn't just the fleshly aspect, it's about the future. Notice what he says in verse 6, he says, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." You know, one of the things that causes hopelessness in our life, particularly the older we get, the more mature we get, is we realize that, yes, the days are difficult, yes, the nights can be wearisome, but the longer you live, interestingly it seems the faster the clock turns day by day. In fact, how many times have you made this statement to somebody that is younger than you about cherishing a moment or an experience because the time is coming when the time will just fly. You know, an old friend of mine has a great statement, I love this, he says, "You know, life's a whole lot like toilet paper. The closer you get to the end, the faster it goes." Is that not true?

What does he say? "My days are like a weaver's beam." In other words, even though there's this futility of life, even though we're dealing with the fall, even though there's the fear of the night, even though our flesh is beginning this process of waning and eroding, as we live life we realize that it really does pick up speed, it picks up pace, and the days of our youth oftentimes seem so elongated and the days of age seem so quick and fast.

Then we get to verses 8 through 10. He says, "The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not. As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more." You know, when we talk about the "heaviness of life," I think we get that life is hard. We talk about the hopelessness of life, I think we understand from a physical perspective, an emotional perspective, but what did he just say? He said that when you and I step into the grave, that's it. This is kind of the exclamation point on the hopelessness of life because of the finality of life. For those of you who love the great game of golf, there are no Mulligans in life. There's no do-overs and yet you and I today live in a world that is technology driven and I understand that not everybody, at least in this context today, grew up with technology as we have it as such, but at least over the last 4-5 decades whether you grew up with it, your children, your grandchildren, somebody had access to some type of technology that allowed them to play a game. You know, it's interesting on these "video games" that we used to play on game consoles now we play on our phones, whatever it may be, what happens if it's not going well? You just push reset. What happens if whatever you're striving for doesn't end up the way you'd hoped? You just play again. Isn't that part of the beautiful thing? In fact, one of the things even beyond the technology of it, one of the aspects about sporting endeavors and athletics is that if we have a bad game or we lose a game or even if we lose a championship, what do we always say? There's always next year or there's always next week, or there's always the next game.

And so what happens is throughout the fall and the futility of life, we consistently tell ourselves we get another chance, we get another shot, but then there's life. What does he

say? If I step into the grave, that's it. You know, I think one of the most hopeless aspects of life is the fact that you and I both know it's all we get. That's it. Now can you imagine being Job at this moment? He's gone through the pain of burying 10 of his children, he's had that interesting conversation with his wife, his friends have turned on him, the community has turned on him, he's got sores from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet and he's going, "Seriously, God? This is the one life you give me?" You know, there's an old adage and if you've never heard this before you need to write it down: if you think your life is bad, just gather around the table with other people, have everybody put their problems on the table and most assuredly you will take yours back. Right? But we understand that whether life goes as we had planned or as we had scripted, as we had hoped, one thing we know is this, that when it ends it's over. We get one ride. We don't know how long the ride's going to last. We know it's difficult by day. We know it's tumultuous by night. We know the longer we live, the weaker and the slower we become even though time moves faster. And when it is all said and done, you get one shot and rarely, if ever, does it go as we planned, as we dreamed, or as we'd hoped.

How is everybody feeling this morning? It's pretty depressing, is it not? Then there's verse 12. So verse 12 may not seem like a whole lot to you but we're going to unpack it here because I believe that what we hear even from the ash heap of Job's life is that little glimmer of hope. Let me remind you before we go to verse 12 that historically speaking Job most likely was a contemporary of Jacob and Esau. You say, "Well, how do we know that?" Because Bildad, his friend, is a Shuhite who is a contemporary of them. We know that Job had 10 children, he was a little bit older in age which means, and this is important to the story, that there is a good chance that even if he never met him, which he probably did because of his wealth and such, he would have at least heard of a man who we know as Isaac. Most assuredly this man by the name of Abraham would have been one whom he had heard of. You see, Job was called the greatest in the east and he lived during what we call the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his kids most likely would have been the same age as, you guessed it, what we know as the 12 famous tribes of Israel. Why is that important to the story? Because, yes, he's lost his family, yes, he's lost his friends, yes, he's lost his reputation, yes, he's lost his fortune, but there's this one glimmer of hope because for his life he's heard and there's rumors that God has a plan for humanity.

Now notice what he says in verse 12. It may not seem like much. He says, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that you set watch over me?" Now some of your Bibles will say, "Am I a sea or a sea creature." One of the important things as we kind of unpeel these layers of verse 12 is this, that the word that is utilized there is the same word that I'm going to reference all over scripture, there's a synthesis here, there's a congruency here. When's the very first time that this word is mentioned? When's the very first time that in your Bible that word that is used for whale, that word that is used for sea creature, when's the very first time because what we call the law of first mention is important. The first time God mentions something it sets a pace, it sets a pattern. All the way back to Genesis 1, the fifth day of creation, verse 21 when he's creating what we know as the animal kingdom, he said, "And let there be whales." Isn't that interesting? Why would God singlehandedly pick out that species? More importantly, even if you want to "translate it sea creatures," God is

being very emphatic here. He's being very particular. In the midst of what we call the creation narrative, he singles out this one entity and says, "Pay attention to this group right here."

You know, whom we know as Job lived in the days of the patriarchs, would have never known, much less have heard of a guy by the name of Jonah but he's a pretty famous prophet though we call him a minor prophet. Why? Because one day when he rebelled against God and one day when he went the opposite direction where God called him to go, in Jonah 1:17, in chapter 2, verse 1, what does the Bible say? A big old fish came and ate him. I'll let you guess the wordage and the verbiage that's used. Isn't that interesting, Job on the ash heap of life says, "Am I a whale or a sea creature that you set watch over me?"

You see, by the time we get to the New Testament, Matthew 12, a bunch of people who are contrary to whom Jesus is and what he was saying began to kind of push back a little bit and they asked for a sign. They said, "All right, Jesus, show us something spectacular, something that nobody else can do." Do you remember what he said? He said, "As Jonah was in the belly of a whale so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights." Isn't that interesting that Job refers to himself in question as a creature that is uniquely mentioned in Genesis 1, that Jesus refers to regarding his resurrection. You say, "Why is that important to the story?" Because even though God had blessed him with his family and his finances and his fame and all these things, those things were all ripped out from him. His flesh is falling apart. His days are moving swift and he knows that once he goes in the grave there's no turning back.

So what's he saying in verse 12? Let me tell you what I think he's saying. Maybe, just maybe there's a glimmer of hope. You say, "Why?" Because Abraham said that God was doing a new work. Isaac, who he might have been a contemporary of, would have told the story of the day where his dad took him on the mountain and said, "Man, he was gonna sacrifice me but God provided a ram." And then there's Jacob and Esau and this saga of redemption. And don't get me wrong, I don't think Job put all the pieces together, I don't think he had it all but I'll tell you what I think he had, he had just enough hope to get up the next day because somehow, someway, surely God has a plan.

Now I know what you're thinking, "So why would he reference the whale?" I don't know the specifics but I do find it interesting that Jonah is swallowed by one and Jesus references one and whom we know as Abraham descended from those early days of Genesis, what conversations did he have in the marketplace, what did he communicate throughout his life we don't know but one thing we do know is this, that as Job is sitting on the ash heap of life, if that message that Abraham spoke of, if that message that Isaac pictured, if that message that one of the descendants of Jacob would eventually bear the punishment and the price of, if it was true – listen – then the life he lived would not be the end. The existence that he had that was so tumultuous would not remain forever. You see, throughout the entirety of chapter 7, Job is, no pun intended, he's licking his wounds. This thing is tough. The day is hard. The night is hard. I can't control how many days I

get, how many days I don't, and once it's over, it's over, but maybe, just maybe God's up to something. God's got a plan that'll fix all this.

In the midst of that, Job has this little glimmer of hope and yet you and I thousands of years later, we know about Jonah and his story, we know about Jesus and his message, and we know that no matter how our flesh deteriorates, we know no matter what the number of our days are, the scripture has testified that because Jesus Christ rose from the dead that this mortal will put on immortality, this corruptible will put on incorruption, and our days will not be numbered but they will be forever in eternal, and according to John 3:16, they will be everlasting. If Job can have a glimmer of hope on the ash heap of his life, how much more should we have? The tomb is still empty and yet our days are still long, our nights are still longer, our days are still numbered, but isn't it good to know that this doesn't have to be it?

You know, there's an old adage that I'll close with today, that for somebody who rejects the person of Jesus Christ, for someone who says, "God, I don't want to have anything to do with you," this life is all the heaven they'll ever know. This isn't my idea of heaven, folks. But for those of us who have called on the name of Jesus, for those of us who have admitted our sin problem and asked Jesus to save us, are you ready for this? This life is all the hell we'll ever know. Job had just a sliver of hope. Because the tomb is empty, you and I can have a whole lot of hope because Jesus Christ is risen from the grave, he is still risen and forever will be, and we can be with him as well. Mortal will put on immortality. Corruptible will put on incorruption.

Let us pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today as we navigate a pretty heavy portion of scripture, maybe the Spirit of God took the word of God in your life and really brought it home, that no matter how well-meaning you are, no matter how gregarious you are, there's nothing that you or anybody else can do to solve this mortality problem but today you realize that Jesus Christ is, as he said, he's the way, the truth and the life and nobody comes to the Father but by him. Let me remind you in Romans 10 it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say whoever "does this thing right or stops that wrong thing or passes this test or completes this course," it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today is the day where you no longer put your life and your flesh and your existence in your own hands but you'd be willing by faith to place it in Jesus Christ's hands.

If that's who you are today whether in person or online, according to Romans 10 just have a conversation with the Lord. Now it doesn't have to be the same words that I or somebody else might say, you don't have to necessarily do it out loud but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I realize it doesn't matter how hard I work or how smart I am, in my flesh I'm never going to beat this thing called life and/or death. God, I believe today that the only one who can is you. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when Jesus Christ allowed himself to go to the cross, his love was so great he was willing to bear the punishment and the pain of my sin. And God,

today I believe that because he rose from the grave and the tomb is still empty that, Lord, there is hope and that hope is only found in Jesus Christ and his ability to forgive me and to save me from my sins. God, today I don't have all the answers to the struggles, the issues and the problems of life, but there's one thing I know is that Jesus Christ is the only one who can forgive me, he's the only one who can save me. So the best way I know how, God, I just want to turn my life over to you through the finished work of Jesus Christ."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that one who cried out to the Lord, maybe today you've already cried out but you've never followed in believer's baptism, maybe today you cried out, you followed in baptism but the Lord has said this is your place, your family of faith, your church, your place of worship, whatever it maybe. In just a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and we're going to sing together and this is the opportunity to step out and step forward. We've got folks here who want to hear your story, who want to listen, to pray with you and pray for you. Maybe today you say, you know what, got all those things covered but maybe just maybe today will give you the ability to step out of this place in a moment and to continue one more day trusting and believing that in spite of how wearisome life is, God knows what he's doing and we can have hope in that.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, God, thank you that when life is heavy and life is hopeless, that we have the privilege of looking to an empty tomb, we have the privilege of looking to a Savior who loves us and was willing to bear the punishment and the price of our sin. God, today may we simply just respond to you as you've spoken unto us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*