

July 7, 2019

The Life of Job
The Good Life
Job 1:1-5

Opening words: Hidden in the Old Testament is the Book of Job. The entire book is a poem, written by an unknown author. Alfred Lloyd Tennyson (1809-1862) called Job, "*The greatest poem of ancient or modern times.*" However, it is not just a poem. It is an epic poem. This type of literature is not intended to simply give us an account of a real character, but rather it is a God-inspired poetic dramatization meant to teach a divine lesson. This poem teaches us about theodicy – the vindication of the justice of God in the light of human suffering. Job is a rich theological work setting out a variety of perspectives. However, this is the bottom line:

The Book of Job is universal. Everyone knows the basic storyline, and everyone can relate. The reason is obvious. Life is not easy, and everyone has problems. Some are just better at hiding their problems. What problems keep you up at night? We have all asked the question, why do bad things happen to good people? My goal in this sermon series is to help you answer that question. Our scripture reading for this morning is Job 1:1-5. Let me call this message *The Good Life*.

Job 1:1-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had many servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

⁴ His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Chuck Swindoll (born 1934) is a Christian evangelical, pastor, educator and radio preacher. He founded *Insight for Living*, which airs on 2,000 radio stations in 15 different countries around the world. He once said, "*Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.*" I cannot disagree with that quote. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

This is how the Book of Job begins. According to the first verse of the first chapter, Job lived in the land of Uz. That information is important for one reason. Uz was a large piece of land to the east of the Jordan River. That means, Job lived outside of Israel, so the story of Job was not just written for Israelites. The story of Job was written for everyone's benefit. Yet, there is more to his story than location. The same verse also

tells us he was blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil. Don't misunderstand those words. Job was a good man, but Job was a sinner, like us, at heart. Job was a good man with a good life. Verse two tells us he had seven sons, the perfect number. Plus, he had three daughters. Verse three tells us he has seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and numerous servants. What all that means is that Job was rich. Verse three tells us Job was the greatest man of all the people in the East. However, Job wasn't just rich in resources, he was rich in relationships. He maintained and valued all the relationships in his life. Job was a good man and Job had a good life. If you will agree Job was a good man who had a good life, then say, "**Amen!**" Never forget the next line. We are good people and we have good lives too.

This is a historic day in the life of this congregation. Last week, I completed my twenty-fifth year of service here at Western Reserve. That means, today I begin my twenty-sixth year. This church has changed a great deal over the years. Some have asked why I didn't move on. Some wish I had moved on. When I first came here, I came for my parents. They lived in Warren and I wanted to be close to them. When my parents died, I stayed for my children. This is a great community in which to raise your family. When my children moved out, I stayed for me. I had become part of this community. The truth be told, I had opportunities to move on to other more exciting churches, where I would have made more money, but I refused. I shunned those attempts to be moved by the United Methodist hierarchy, because this is where God wants me to be. That is fine with me, because you are good people and we have good lives. I like to think I lost nothing by not moving and gained a great deal by staying. Those of us who have lived our lives here in the Mahoning Valley are hard on ourselves. We don't say it very often, but we, like Job, have good lives. Just think about it for a moment.

You have a good life because you have your health! Did you know, according to Medicare and Medicaid sources, 52% of people turning 65 will need long term care in their lives. Long term care means five years or longer. Did you know, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 4.2% of Americans live in nursing homes at any given time. Those figures do not surprise me. I can fill my calendar with visiting the institutionalized. Those are exhausting visits.

The picture is always the same. The resident is always in bed and the television is on in the background. No one is watching. A tray with half-eaten food is on the side. The words are awkward, as I look for common ground. We visit the past for a couple of minutes, and I end with a prayer. When the prayer is over, the resident looks at me and says, "*Russ, I wish I could come back to church one more time.*" You have a good life because you are here today. You have a good life because you have your health! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

You have a good life because people are a big part of your life! Sometimes those people are family members. Sometimes those people are friends. Regardless, the

people in your life bring you happiness. A recent Harvard study tells us, having strong relationships in our lives promotes brain health. Friends help us relieve stress, make better choices, and recover from health problems. Can I ask you a question? How many friends do you have? How many friends do you have at this church? Those friendships are extremely valuable because you share the same core values. You have a good life because you have friends! If you have at least one friend in this world, say, **"Amen!"**

You have a good life because you live in a true community! Community has nothing to do with economic opportunity or growth. Community has nothing to do with weather. Community has everything to do with a sense of belonging. Webster defines a community as a group of people who live in the same place or have a certain thing in common. We live in a great community because we care about one another. How many fundraisers have you attended for someone who was injured in an accident, or struck with a disease? How many silent auctions have you entered? It would be nice to win the basket, but it really doesn't matter. The only thing that really matters is that you helped someone in this community. You have a good life because you live in a true community! If you consider this community home, then say, **"Amen!"**

You have a good life because you live in the United States of America! Did you know, according to the United Nations, there are 196 countries in the world today. 194 of those countries are members of the United Nations. (The two countries who are not members of the UN are the Vatican City and Palestine.) The UN exists to tackle global issues. According to US News and World Report, the world considers Germany the greatest country in the world to live in, followed by Canada and Great Britain. The United States is number four. Did you know, according to the Pew Research Group, 85% of Americans believe America is the greatest country in the world? It is hard to disagree with that fact. I love visiting other countries, but I am always ready to come home. You have a good life because you live in the United States of America! If you are proud to be called an American, say, **"Amen!"**

You have a good life because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ! This is the sad truth: On the day you die, your American citizenship is revoked. You have a good life because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you die, your American citizenship ends, but your citizenship in the Kingdom of God continues. Your time in heaven is eternal. Never forget it: You are not saved by your good works. You are saved by grace, and by grace alone! And, all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

If only we could end the story of Job after the fifth verse of the first chapter, it would be a good thing. The problem is, the story of Job continues. Next week, we discover the source of all human suffering. Let me give you a teaser, it isn't God. The problem is, the story of Job does continue and all the good things in his life are taken from him. Yet, Job prevails in the faith and he continues to worship God. If it is true of Job, then it is true of us. When hardship comes to your life, how will you respond? Will you prevail in the faith, or will you walk away and curse God? It is a question you must answer for

yourself. Do you remember the Chuck Swindoll quote? He once said, *"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** Let me end with this daily scene from my home.

Every day, I wake between 6:00 and 7:00. The house is quiet because my children are gone, and Kathryn is still down. I start the coffee, check the weather, and log into my bank account to make sure everything is accountable. Then, I walk my dog and call a good friend. Then, I sit down and work on my sermon in the quiet. It is during those quiet times that I begin to worry about some minor details in my life. There seems to be an endless supply. My dog Macy, the world's best dog, is getting older and that bothers me. My granddaughter is getting older and I worry I haven't spent enough time with her. My daughters are transitioning and that worries me. There is only so much I can do for them. I worry about my Aunt Phyllis. She is eighty-six and the family matriarch. She is completely healthy, but I worry she won't make it to the big family wedding next summer. I begin to worry about my refrigerator, because it is sixteen years old and is making a funny noise. I worry about my wife, and I worry about the strain she will be under when she leads the next mission trip to the former Soviet Union. I worry about myself. Maybe my allergies aren't allergies. Maybe they are masking a more serious problem? Life is moving fast and there are so many things I still want to do. I am not saying my worries paralyze me, but I will admit they weigh me down. Then, I take a shower and go to work.

In my job, every day is different, yet every day is the same. Every day, I connect with all kinds of people. Some communication is by text. Some communication is done face to face. Some is done by phone or email. I have asked the question a million times: what is happening in your life? Usually, what is happening in your life is not good. People tell me they spend too much time going to funeral homes. People tell me they spend too much money at the doctor's. People tell me about some major problem in their home. People tell me about the broken relationships in their lives, or in their children's lives. I can field your problems easily, because they are your problems. However, it is my problems that stagger me. However, in all those discussions a transition takes place. Hearing everyone else's problems minimalizes my problems. At the end of the day, I walk into my home, look at my wife, and say, *"We have good lives."* That is what I want to tell you. We have good lives. We are American Christians who worship together; how much more can you expect? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**