

August 4, 2019

The Life of Job

Just Stop!

Job 13:1-12

Opening words: Hidden in the Wisdom Literature section of 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 it is meant to teach divine truth. Job teaches us about theodicy – 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, because life is hard. I have called this entire body of work *The Life of Job*.

Today, I want to talk about giving advice. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received? Many believe this is the best piece of advice: *Treat people the way you want to be treated. Talk to people the way you want to be talked to. Respect is earned, not given.* That is one of the first principles in Dale Carnegie's book, *How To Win Friends And Influence People*. That is good advice. I try to apply that principle to my life. I have told the people in my life a million times, everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received? What is the worst piece of advice you have ever received? There is an old proverb that says, "*Never give advice unless asked.*" That question goes to the heart of our scripture lesson for today. Our scripture reading for today is Job 13:1-12. I have called this message *Just Stop!*

Job 13:1-12

"My eyes have seen all this,
my ears have heard and understood it.
²What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.
³But I desire to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God.
⁴You, however, smear me with lies;
you are worthless physicians, all of you!
⁵If only you would be altogether silent!
For you, that would be wisdom.
⁶Hear now my argument;
listen to the pleas of my lips.
⁷Will you speak wickedly on God's behalf?
Will you speak deceitfully for him?

- ⁸ Will you show him partiality?
Will you argue the case for God?
- ⁹ Would it turn out well if he examined you?
Could you deceive him as you might deceive a mortal?
- ¹⁰ He would surely call you to account
if you secretly showed partiality.
- ¹¹ Would not his splendor terrify you?
Would not the dread of him fall on you?
- ¹² Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defenses are defenses of clay.
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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. It has become the quote for the entire series. If you find some truth in that quote, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the thirteenth chapter of Job. Much has already happened. When our story began, Job had a good life. He was rich in resources and relationships. He feared God and shunned evil. He was the greatest man in the East. Even God was impressed with him. That was when everything seemed to go wrong. God may have been impressed with Job, but not the Dark One. Satan is convinced that Job's pious ways would pass once hardship entered his life. Sad but true, God grants Satan permission to test Job. The tests are not easy; they are hard. Over a short period of time, he loses everything. Job's money is gone. His oxen, donkeys and lambs are taken by foreign raiders, who killed most of the servants. His relationships are gone. All ten of his children, seven sons and three daughters, are gone in an instant by a mighty wind from the wilderness, while partying at the eldest son's home. Even his good looks are gone. He is covered with painful boils from head to toe. He loses everything, except for his charming wife. She adds nothing to his life. Too bad the raiders didn't take her too 😊. Thank goodness for his friends.

When we last left Job and his friends, they were sitting on the ground, and not a single word was uttered. It is Job who breaks the silence. They are not words of hope and praise. They are dark words. Chapter three begins by Job cursing the day he was born. His words are as close as he will get to cursing God, but Job never curses God. However, Job's words give his friends a license to speak themselves, and speak they do. It takes nine chapters to contain all the words that Job's friends spoke. In one form or another, Job's friends deliver a single message. They believed Job's suffering in this world is his own fault. It was a common belief in their time. Many believed, human suffering was a product of personal sin. The more you sin, the more suffering you must endure. That line of thought did not die with that generation. It was even found in Jesus' time. Do you remember the story of the man born blind? The disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned? Was it the blind man or his parents?" Personal sin is one answer to

suffering. You can make a case for it in our time. There is a surplus of human suffering, because there is a surplus of sin. But there is a problem with this line of thinking: It is wrong. In other words, Job's friends give him some bad advice and Job recognizes it. In our scripture reading for today, Job tells them to stop. It is not a matter of what Job's friends knew. It was a matter of what Job's friends didn't know. They didn't know God and they didn't know God's ways. Can I ask you a question? Have you ever been given some bad advice?

One of the best people in the world is my sister, Susan. In a few days, she is scheduled for knee surgery. I was talking to her the other night. The topic of her knee came up. She started by saying, "If you have any horror stories about knee surgeries, I don't want to hear it." I didn't. This is an amazing time to be alive. I am confident everything will go well, and she will be able to resume her tennis career. She warned me not to start the bad news stories, because she has been overwhelmed with people's bad advice. People have told her the doctor is a quack. People have told her the hospital is filled with germs. People have told her about every possible mishap that can happen. She has decided not to tell anyone anymore about her knee surgery, because she has had enough unhelpful advice. She is not the only one. That happens to everyone who has a problem or a crisis. It is one of the things which make a personal problem or crisis harder.

I am not just talking about medical issues. I am talking about life. Any kind of change in your life welcomes unsolicited advice givers. You know it is true. On the day you announce you are getting married, someone will say, "Why are you marrying that person?" On the day you announce you are going to have a baby, someone will say, "I wouldn't want to be raising a child in this world." On the day you buy a new home, someone will say, "Why did you buy in that neighborhood?" On the day you announce you have purchased a new car, someone will say, "I bought one of those once. It was a lemon." I could go on, but I won't. You get the point. Our ears are filled with unsolicited advice. Bernard Williams (1929-2003) once said, *"Unsolicited advice is the junk mail of life."* Have you ever wished they would just stop? This is the question I have asked a million times.

Why do people feel like they have the license to give advice? It is an excellent question. Psychology Today posted an article on the topic on December 31, 2017. They say, there is no single answer. There are a variety of answers. Consider this list with me. Maybe you know someone who fits into one of these categories? Maybe you fit into one of these categories?

1. **Unsolicited advice givers are rigid.** They believe there is only one way to solve a problem. For them, there is no Plan B. For them, it is all or nothing, black or white. How many rigid advice givers do you know? How rigid are you?

2. **Unsolicited advice givers are arrogant.** They believe they are more intelligent, sensible, or special than others. They believe the world would run smoother

if everyone would listen to them. How many arrogant advice givers do you know? How arrogant are you?

3. **Unsolicited advice givers are compulsive.** They lack any self-awareness or self-discipline. They simply can't help giving advice. They are unaware of how their actions or words affect others. How many compulsive advice givers do you know? How compulsive are you?

4. **Unsolicited advice givers are controlling.** Some give advice and don't even care about the person. They just want to control the situation. How many controlling advice givers do you know? How controlling are you?

5. **Unsolicited advice givers are lazy or selfish.** They are tired of hearing your problems, so they give advice to change the topic. It is their way of saying, you have talked about you long enough - I want the attention focused on me. How many lazy or selfish advice givers do you know? How lazy or selfish are you?

I do not know how to categorize Job's friends, but I do know their advice was wrong. The source of human suffering is not sin. That is not just my opinion, it was Job's opinion. In the end, he dismisses the foolish words of his friends, and he returns to God's. I hope you can do the same. Let me end with my own tale of wayward advice.

It was the end of a long day. I had been suffering with my viral infection for several weeks. I didn't know it then, but I know it now, because my doctor told me. I was at the church at 4:30 AM to pray and say, "Good-bye" to the youth going to Knoxville for this year's mission trip. That meant I stood outside in the excessive heat and pollen for about an hour. When I returned home, I had another cup of coffee and began to review my material for the morning. I preached at 8:30, 9:15 and 11:00. It was the 8:30 service that did the damage. Trying to speak in the open air in Louisiana-like weather was more than my lungs could handle. I was next to worthless at 9:15 and 11:00. I was frustrated because I love to preach, and I physically just couldn't do it. Throughout the morning, people saw that I was struggling, and they wanted to help. I received what seemed like a million pieces of advice. I was told what to eat. I was told what to drink. I was told what to breathe. I heard about everyone's sinus, viral, and allergy history. Someone told me my end was near. (At that moment it sounded good. I wanted to go home early.) It was a long morning, but I survived. That afternoon, Kathryn and I drove to the Akron area. To be more exact, she drove, and I slept. My great nephew, Luke, was getting his Eagle award in the Boy Scouts and I refused to miss it. I was proud of him and I was proud to give the invocation and the benediction in the service. There was a wonderful dinner afterwards. As I ate, complete strangers gave me more free bad medical advice. When I returned home in the early evening, I was done for the day. Kathryn turned on the television to watch her Sunday night shows, the ones where everyone speaks with a British accent while solving murders. I decided to go to a good friend's house to escape my world. As usual, I walked in the back door without knocking. I was greeted by his two dogs, Cooper and Bailey, and in my broken voice yelled out, "So, what is happening?" My friend responded, as usual,

"You are." I sat in my usual spot and my friend's wife looked at me and said, "You are sick! What are they doing for you?" It was painful to speak, and I was tired of talking about my health. I gave her the quick version, and she began to give me her medical advice. I said to her what I wanted to say to everyone else with their medical advice on that long day, "Just stop!" She was shocked that I didn't want to hear her wisdom. I know I offended her, but at that moment, I didn't care. I simply had had enough of people's advice. Can I ask you a question? Is there anyone in your life to whom you would like to say, "Just stop"?

For seven days his friends sat with Job in silence. It was Job who started talking. That gave his friends permission to talk. However, their words were not helpful. How helpful are your words when a friend is in need? Do you remember the quote from Chuck Swindoll? He once said, "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it." I cannot disagree with that quote. It has become the quote for the entire series. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"