

August 25, 2019

The Life of Job
Any Questions?
Job 30:20-23

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 character or situation, 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*.

This morning's message is about questions. Let me state the obvious: We ask all kinds of questions. Just think about it for a moment. We ask questions which have answers that are soon forgotten: What are we going to eat for dinner? What time does the game start? What is the weather going to be like today? We ask questions which have answers that are grounded in fact: How many miles away is the moon? What is pi? How many feet in a mile? We ask questions which expose our greatest concerns: What did the doctor say? What is your sister going to do? Have you heard from the children? Today, Job asked the ultimate question, "Why?" Our scripture reading is Job 30:20-23. Let me call this message *Any Questions?*

Job 30:20-23 "I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;
I stand up, but you merely look at me.
²¹ You turn on me ruthlessly;
with the might of your hand you attack me.
²² You snatch me up and drive me before the wind;
you toss me about in the storm.
²³ I know you will bring me down to death,
to the place appointed for all the living.

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!**"

Years ago, The Boston Globe carried a daily column designed to answer its readers' questions. From those questions, the paper generated a list of ten unanswerable questions. Here's one:

"I am nine years of age and have a cat that eats regularly and needs to go on a diet. He also eats mice when he is out. This is my question. How many calories in a mouse?"

That is an excellent question. Can anyone here answer that question, how many calories in a mouse? Some questions are harder to answer than others. In our scripture reading for today, Job asked God a hard question. If you are ready to look at this morning's text say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the thirtieth 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 is impressed with him. That is when everything seemed to go wrong. God may have been impressed with Job, but not the Dark One. Satan is convinced 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. Job was fortunate. He had three true friends. There is nothing exceptional about them, but their friendship. They hear about Job's woes and bring nothing but their sympathy. For days they sit with Job and say nothing. It is Job who begins to speak. It is his words that give his friends the license to speak. Their words are not helpful. In one way or another, they blame Job for his hardships, saying he was being punished for his secret sins. Their bad advice is not helpful. How much bad advice have you received lately? That brings us to today's reading.

Job is not just frustrated with His friends. He is frustrated with God, too. You can hear the frustration in his words. Do not read the words in a monotone. Read the words with full emotion, especially verse twenty, *"I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me."* In others words, Job is mad at God. He doesn't understand why his good life has been taken from him. He is a victim and he has done nothing wrong. Have you ever played the role of an innocent victim? You have done nothing wrong, but your life is a disaster? You ask God why, because there is nothing else to do. Let me say this clearly: Asking questions is not a sign of a lack of faith. It is a sign of a growing faith. Voltaire (1694-1778) once said, *"Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers."* I don't know why people struggle with this simple point.

In my station in life, I have sat with many people in times of hardships. The details of the stories change, but the theme is constant. The person has been struggling for some time. They are both physically and emotionally exhausted. In the corner of some room, we cover the details one more time. In a moment of true bravery and honesty, the person will look at me and proclaim these words. "I know we are supposed to be faithful and not question God's ways, but I do not understand why this is happening." I appreciate the words of the person, but their theology is completely wrong. There is nothing wrong with questioning God. God gave us a brain, and He expects us to use it. Asking questions is not a sign of a lack of faith. It is a sign of a growing faith. You are just trying to discover God's mysterious ways. Consider this with me:

Some of the greatest characters in the Bible asked questions. The disciples asked Jesus questions. They asked, "Why couldn't we cast out the demon?" (Matt. 17:19). They asked where they were going to eat the Seder meal (Matt. 26:17). They asked what certain parables meant (Luke 8:9). John the Baptist asked Jesus why he came to be baptized by him (Matt. 3:14). Peter asked, "How many times should I forgive?" (Matt. 18:21). Martha asked Jesus, why he didn't care that she was stuck with all the work (Luke 10:40). Even Pilate asked Jesus a question, "Are you King of the Jews?" I could go on but I won't. You get the point. Many asked questions in the Bible. Feel free to ask all the questions you want. Your questions mean you are simply trying to understand God's ways. French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) once said, *"A wise man doesn't give right answers, he poses the right questions."*

I am convinced one of the reasons we come to church is to get some of life's basic questions answered. We don't come to church to be involved with another fundraiser. You can have a yard sale and benefit yourself. We don't come to church to help our community. That is why service clubs exist. We don't come to church to make new friends. You can go to your favorite coffee counter and make friends. Church is much deeper. We come to church to get the answers to life's most basic questions.

- 1. Does God exist?** It is a fair question, because our world is filled with so many complex problems. Things like climate change, conflict, inequality, poverty, government corruption, lack of education and opportunity. At times, it seems our world is out of control and we wonder why God doesn't do something! Have you ever asked the question, does God exist?
- 2. Why do I exist?** That is a question that haunts each one of us. We don't just want to live and die. We want to be more than consumers. Have you ever wondered why you are in this world? Have you ever wondered why you were born and what God wants you to do? Have you ever asked the question, why do I exist?
- 3. Where will I spend eternity?** No one gets out of this world alive. I am pretty sure each one of us was born. I am sure each one of us is going to die. Without Jesus, there is no hope of salvation, but with Jesus salvation is possible. All you have to do is accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Heaven wouldn't be the same for me without you. Have you ever asked the question, where will I spend eternity?

If you have ever asked any of those three questions, say, **"Amen!"** Church is a good place to get good answers to hard questions. Let me end with a simple story.

For the past two weeks, Kathryn and I have been in Scotland. Mark Twain once said, *"Traveling broadens a man."* Today, he would have said, "Traveling broadens a person." He was correct. Scotland was a bucket list trip for us, and it was worth every cent. We had a wonderful time and enjoyed every moment. We traveled as far north and west as the Isle of Skye. The landscape was breathtaking. We went as far south and east as Edinburgh. The history was rich. However, the best part of Scotland was the people. They may be the nicest people in the world.

On the day we were on the Isle of Skye, we explored the island by signing up for an all-day tour. Our tour leader and van driver was a man with a thick accent by the name of Bill. To say the least, Bill was a free spirit. He wore old jeans hanging on boney hips and an old faded tee shirt displaying the company's logo. His long and unkempt hair kept falling in his face. His face exposed his age. Bill was in his seventies. He had an outgoing personality and was well informed on a variety of topics. He told us about local history, geology and politics. At every stop along our journey, he encouraged people to ask questions. My wife is not afraid to ask a good question.

Somewhere along the way, Kathryn asked about the religious practices of the people in that area. Bill responded by saying, "That's good question." He wasn't wrong. It was a good question. This is the truth: In the past, religion (Protestant versus Roman Catholic), divided Scotland. That was about five hundred years ago. Religion was one of Mary Queen of Scot's problems. Today, religion has no influence on Scottish society. As a matter of fact, most of the church buildings in Europe are owned by the government. The reason is simple. The worshipping congregations are so small, they can't afford to maintain the ancient buildings. The government needs those ancient church buildings to maintain the tourist industry. Tourism is the second largest industry in Scotland. According to the Scottish government, 51% of Scots have no religious affiliation and only 3.7% attend church on a regular basis. In America, according to the Pew Research Group, 37% attend church regularly. Kathryn's question about the religious practices of the Scots was a good question. Can I ask you a good question?

If you could ask God only one question, what would it be? Would it be a question about our complex world? Would it be a question about our complex country? Would it be a question about your complex life? Would it be a question about your eternity? Never forget it: Questions are a sign of a growing faith. What would you ask God? 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. If you find some truth in that quote, say, **"Amen!"**