

Job 7:1-7

¹ Isn't man's time on earth like being compelled to serve in the army? Aren't his days like those of a hired man?

² Like a slave, he longs for shade, or like a day laborer, he waits for his pay.

³ In the same way, I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of agony have been assigned to me.

⁴ When I lie down, I think, "How long before I get up?" But the night drags on, and I am filled with restlessness until dawn.

⁵ My flesh is clothed with maggots and caked with dirt. My skin scabs over and then oozes again.

⁶ My days pass by more swiftly than the shuttle of a weaver's loom. They come to an end without hope.

⁷ Remember that my life is just a breath. My eyes will never again see good fortune.

Sermon for St. Paul's Lutheran Church, February 7, 2021 Epiphany 5

Text: Job 7:1-7

Theme: "Remember Me, Oh God!"

1. Provide meaning for my life
2. Change the meaning of my death

In the name of Jesus, whose love for us gives us the greatest meaning for our lives, dear fellow redeemed,

Suffering is something that every one of us has seen happen to others, it is something we hear about and are likely to hear more about in the days to come. Suffering is something that each of us has experienced personally in some way or another. As Christians sometimes we are inclined to ask "why do I, a child of God have to suffer when God loves me and I love God? I repent of my sins and worship God regularly. So why do I have to suffer"? The book of Job brings the question of suffering into sharp focus. You probably know that Job suffered the catastrophe of having all his possessions destroyed or stolen in one day. And on the same day all his children died. A short time after that, Job was stricken with severe illness—festering boils over every part of his body. What may have been even worse is that his wife seems to have abandoned him emotionally. And to top it off three of his friends came to comfort him, but ended up accusing him of being guilty of some great sin for which God was punishing him. They told him, "You need to repent and your situation will change." This only brought Job more

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distress because he knew that God was his Savior who had paid for his sins through the promised Christ. Job sincerely believed that truth. So why would God cause him to suffer?

By the time we read chapter 7 Job is in serious distress. His friends have accused him of sin above his protests. Job is in despair: life has no meaning. Death would bring him relief but that, too, seems to be meaningless. His bottom line question really seems to be, “What is the meaning and purpose of life, anyway? I have had great possessions but they have all been taken from me. I will never take those things with me to the other side of the grave. I have had good health but that is also gone. God, what do you mean by afflicting me this way?”

Finally, all Job could do was cry out, “Remember me, Oh God!” In your mercy **provide meaning for my life** and in the end, **change the meaning of my death.**

One thing had become painfully obvious to Job: He was a feeble, frail human being. And he had little prospect of regaining the good health that he had once enjoyed. He asks, **Isn't man's time on earth like being compelled to serve in the army? Aren't his days like those of a hired man?** The word he uses for *man* designates man as frail and mortal, one who eventually will die.

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Even though chapter 1 tells us he had been the greatest man among the people of the east, now Job feels his frailty. And not only because his health is gone and he is in constant pain, but also because he understands his life is hard service, it is like time spent in military service. In other words he is saying that his life is like being deprived of all comforts and you can't even control your own destiny. For Job it is very simple: my life is meaningless and I gain nothing.

And what compounded Job's troubled emotional state is that he knew that he was a sinner. **I have been allotted months of futility,** he complains. Job's allotment was something he had inherited. The unhappy part of Job's inheritance was what he and all of us have inherited from the parents of the human race. Paul describes this dreadful heritage in Romans, **Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.** The results of Adam and Eve's sin were painfully evident to Job. It should be equally evident to us also. What's more, in the middle of suffering we may feel the very same guilt Job felt. **If only I hadn't said such hurtful things to my spouse. If only I had not neglected my relationship with my child. If only I had been honest with my employer.** But we really underestimate God if we think

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that His purpose for our suffering is to make us pay for our wrongs. The fact is, we cannot.

One of God's intended results for bringing suffering to our lives is to remind us not to become attached to the things of this world. How would it serve us if we were to love the things of this world and stake our future on them? We only have possessions and family because God gives them. God can easily take them away from us. And how often haven't you seen the person who is so consumed with accumulating more and more and more, but yet he is never satisfied. And just like the rich fool in Jesus' parable, that person shuts God out of his life believing he can make his own destiny. He wants to do it as early in life as possible so he can enjoy all his wealth and possessions for as long as possible. And maybe he does get to enjoy it for a long life. Yet in the end, if he has shut God out of his life, God says to him, "You have enjoyed your possessions all your life, but THAT is all you will have; you will suffer for eternity without a single one of my blessings—in hopelessness and despair."

So how is all that so different for God's children? For one thing when we became God's children by faith that means that we fear, love and TRUST in God above all things. Our new man accepts the truth that God knows far better than we in all things and he acts on his infinite knowledge and wisdom. Yet my sinful nature always questions God's love. But when I turn to God and recognize his love for me in Jesus Christ who suffered to pay for my sins, I have a small window into God's love for me, even when he allows me to suffer. I may be very tempted to ask, "God, is my faith so weak that you need to cause me to suffer in order to strengthen it?" How arrogant! Do I think that I am that independent of God that I don't need his wisdom or his actions on my behalf? And who am I to question God when he sees the big picture and knows that my faith NEEDS to be strengthened because he knows what lies in my future. He knows what good effect he will bring from my suffering, both for me and for others whom he touches through me.

So, when the smoke clears, when I can see that there is more to the picture than merely my suffering, then God can show my new man that he has put me here to serve him. And when God shows me that I am here to serve him, then, in gratitude for Jesus' perfect payment for my sins by his suffering and death, then I ask, "How can I serve God? How can I come to learn what God wants me to learn and how can I help others learn God's truth through me?" And like Job, sometimes God has to confront me with my sins, with the reality of my need to trust HIM and HIM alone. And when I see that He and his truth have always stood firm for me even in suffering, then I am ready to ask, "How can I serve my God?"

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You see, this is how God gives meaning to my life. Through the blood of Jesus that pays for my sins, the Holy Spirit shows me that my life is not a useless exercise in futility. God did not give me my life to serve me. He gave me my life to serve him, and only the sinful nature turns around and accuses God then of being on an ego trip because he uses us as pawns to serve his needs. No, because God shows us that when we serve him in all things he IS serving our needs. He served our greatest need in the person of His Son on a cross outside Jerusalem. He paid the price we could never pay. Since the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, we can serve him without fear, without guilt. Yes, we can even suffer without guilt. You see, when I focus on Jesus instead of on my suffering, God gives meaning to my life.

Job focused on suffering for most of the 42 chapters of this book. But he finally had to admit that all of his suffering, trial, illness and everything in his life was not about him—he needed to focus on God and his will, even if he did not understand it completely. He could see that his life had meaning only in God; but then, what about his death? When he died would IT have the same meaning or would it lose all its significance when he passed from this world?

In a sense Job wanted to make it easy on himself. He wanted to assign his own meaning to his death. And so when he turned his heartache inward, when he made himself the focus of his suffering, the only point to his death was that it would bring a merciful yet not fully satisfying end to his life. But at least his suffering would over. This is exactly the view that the sinful nature takes. “Let all my trouble be over. This must be the horrible purpose of my death, so bring it on.” We learn this about Job’s attitude when we read his words here: “**When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn.**”

At this point in time Job is so lost in suffering that he cannot see any use to his life. During the day he thinks only of the time when night will come and bring him sleep so he can rest. But in the night he tosses and turns, so he can hardly wait for daylight, and maybe that will bring some relief. Neither daylight nor darkness bring him any relief, so why not just die he is saying. In the end he says, “**My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope.**” Just as the knife or the scissors cuts off the threads when the weavers handiwork is complete so God brings our life to an end when it is complete and no one knows when that will be, but it comes all too suddenly and there is no time to understand what is the real meaning and purpose of my death. Finally, the conclusion the sinful nature comes to is that it must be a punishment for my sins.

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Since my sinful nature is so focused on self it cannot see any kind of hope in death, except to end earthly suffering. But then comes a much more sobering kind of suffering, eternal pain and hopelessness. You see, this is just one more reason to drown the old sinful nature by daily contrition and repentance. When I repent of my sins it is evidence that God has given me a full view of my sins and I confess that I am guilty. But at the same time, when I repent I am also stating that I believe that my merciful God has paid for and forgiven all my sins. Jesus and faith in him is what changes the meaning of my death. This is God's work, and because it is, I can be confident that he has changed the meaning of my death.

Despite Job's complaining because he was hurting so badly, he shows that he knows that God has changed the meaning of his death. In chapter 19:25-27 we read his words that inspired the great Easter hymn: "**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; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.**" He claims God as his redeemer. So can we claim God our redeemer. He claims God is a living God who lives forever and will raise our dead bodies to be reunited with our souls to live with him forever. Faith in this God-worked and God-inspired truth changes the meaning of your death and mine. My sinful nature can only see death as a punishment for my sins, that it is God's final rejection and that its only possible good purpose is to bring an end to earthly suffering. But because our Lord Jesus died and rose from the grave God says your death is not useless. It is the way that I am going to show you and the world that I have defeated death. I will raise you, I will reunite your body and soul. Yes, he will answer the prayer that you and I pray with Job, "**Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath.**"

We can be confident that Job knew the LORD as the Savior God because he addresses him as Yahweh, the God of free and faithful grace. This is God's savior name and it is important because its meaning emphasizes God's independence and his constancy. He works and acts independently of any outside source. No one can influence him. He does what he wants to do and that is to show undeserved love to us sinners. And in his constancy he never deviates from his promises. They are always the same. So when God says that Jesus has paid for our sins, every one of them, and you believe that, then tomorrow, next week and next year to the day we die, this truth is still the same. This is the way your new man, your new self looks at death. Quite a bit different from the sinful nature's view of death isn't it?

So dear friends, no matter what your trial, whether you are remembering something from the past, hurting right now or whether you experience heartache in

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the future, remember death is not the end. It may come at the end of trouble and the brokenness of old age, but in Jesus, through death we enter a new beginning. Yet while we live here in this world we serve God. It is just as Paul said to the Philippians, **“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.”** Paul wondered though if God might not want to take him out of this life to eternal life with him in heaven in the very near future. Paul believed that in God’s time he would take Paul from this life. So the apostle wrote to the Corinthians as we heard today, **“Woe to me if I do not preach Christ.”** While he lived here he would serve God who gave him new life.

Through all of Paul’s trials, through all of Job’s trials, through all of our hurts, and heartaches God uses them to focus our attention on him and to focus our service for him. Doesn’t that change the meaning of your death? As Paul wrote whether we live or die we are the Lord’s. Only when we see the purpose of life, to serve our Lord until he takes us home to heaven, do we understand that our life and our death are not exercises in futility.

Instead we see with the eyes of faith that God remembers us. He has given us Jesus who by his life, death and resurrection really does give meaning to our lives, they are not about merely enduring suffering; God gives us life to serve him. At the same time our Savior has changes the meaning of our death so that we see our Savior’s love for us as we pass through that gate and into the bliss that our Savior prepared for us from the creation of the world. Yes, God remembers that you belong to him, through the complete redemption of our Savior Jesus. Amen.