

Job 7:1-21
Bitter Life. Unfair God.
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10.19.14

Do you feel hopeless? Do you feel lost? Do you feel like the darkness won't lift? In the 1500s a priest named John wrote about the darkness. John wrote the famous poem, "Dark Night of the Soul." John was a man so devoted to God he renamed himself "John of the Cross." John named himself after the cross because he wanted to crucify his sinful desires. He did this through practicing community, poverty, fasting, silence, enclosure, and prayer. He was what we might call today Pius, ascetic, or intentionally holy. He was also pretty mystical or what some might now call charismatic. So if John were alive today, he probably wouldn't attend our church. But there's still a lot we can learn from the way John suffered.

John suffered from a life of hardship and a life of depression. At one point in his life John was imprisoned in a tight windowless cell, beaten, and tortured. Yet while he was in prison he began to write poetry about God's beauty and love. He knew that when we feel caught in the darkness we feel like God has abandoned us. But he believed that God is more present with us than ever before. God works through our darkness and suffering to prepare us for eternity. When we can't see how to move forward, it means we have to walk by faith. So "The Dark Night of the Soul" is something God has us experience for our good. Maybe you too feel as if you're going through the "Dark Night of the Soul." You feel hopeless, lost, and like the darkness just won't lift. Life feels bitter and God seems unfair. Does life seem bitter? Does God seem unfair?

Today we're going to talk about how dark life can feel through our study of the book of Job. In chapters 1-2 of Job, he loses his family, wealth, and is struck with sores all over his body. In chapter 7 today we're reading how Job feels about everything that has happened.

Life is bitter (7:1-16)

Life is bitter because it's full of hard labor, pain, and waste. (Read 7:1-6)

First, life is bitter because it's full of hard labor. (v. 1-3) Job feels like a hired hand or slave. He worked his whole life for his wealth and family which was taken away in an instant. A hired hand in that culture didn't have much to show for their day's labor. They might work all day in the field and their employer could refuse to pay them. They also had slaves in Job's time, and they had no choice but to work all day without pay. Maybe some of you know what it's like to work really hard and have nothing to show for it.

A Wells Fargo employee just wrote the CEO asking for a \$10,000 raise for all employees. He cited the massive profits the bank has made and how he's barely getting by. In this email he cc'd over 200,000 of his fellow employees. He's only gotten two negative emails back because people can relate. Maybe some of you are working and working but still have loans and debts to pay. Maybe some of you are doing fine financially but don't like your job. Every day is harder and more draining than the last. Life is bitter because it's full of hard labor.

Second, life is bitter because it's full of pain. (v. 4-5) Job is suffering from insomnia and sickness. Job had a great life where his biggest concern was if his children had sinned at their party. But now Satan is haunting his dreams and he's so anxious he can't sleep. He's also covered in boils or sores, which are absolutely gross.

Maggots are eating his flesh and his sores are scabbing with dirt. Have any of you ever been so sick you couldn't sleep? Why did the fall have to result in colds, allergies, and sneezing? Maybe some of you have much more serious medical problems. You can't remember the last time you slept through the night. You have to take pills or wear an oxygen masks. Maybe some people don't take your illness seriously. They laugh at you and say nothing is wrong. Life is bitter because it's full of pain.

Third, life is bitter because it's full of waste. (v. 6) Job feels like he has nothing to show for himself. In verse six he describes his life like that of a "weaver's shuttle." Now I know practically nothing about weaving, looms, and yarn. All I know about yarn is that it hides everywhere in my house. Or as my wife would say, her yarn is "actively present." A "weaver's shuttle" is like a small boat that holds a spool of yarn. It's used with a floor loom to make a rug you can hang up or lay on the floor. When you weave a rug, there's a space called a "shed" that opens up. You pass the shuttle back and forth through the shed as the rug slowly grows. The rug is made one line of yarn or cloth at a time, so it takes a long time. There's lots of action going back and forth without much to show for it till you're done. Job feels like his days race by, his nights drag on, and he has nothing to show for it. It's similar to how you may feel about how you spend your time. You're always busy, always running, and always getting older with nothing to show for it. Life is bitter because it's full of waste.

Life is bitter because it's full of hard labor, pain, and waste. But the sourest fact about life is it always leads to death.

Life is bitter because it ends in death. (**Read 7:7-10**) The NIV translates verse 7 "Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again." In verses 1-6 Job has been addressing his friends, but starting in verse 7 he talks to God. He complains directly to God that his life is like a breath. Job complains he's so sick he believes he is going to die. The eyes of his friends will no longer see him. And he even thinks God will no longer be able to look upon him. In verse 9 Job says that everyone goes down to Sheol and none come back. Job is so low he rejects the idea of a resurrection of the body. He believes that both sinners and the righteous go to the underworld and never return. Life is bitter because it ends in death.

I have two simple applications from this point, an "A" and a "B".

A: When you're bitter at life, talk to God about it. When you hate your jobs or are overwhelmed with anxiety, talk to God about it. When you're frustrated with a wasted life or that life is almost over, talk to God about it. When you're sad that those around you are dying or in pain, talk to God about it. Job isn't afraid to complain to God and neither should we. He directs his speech toward heaven and I think that's okay. *A:* When you're bitter at life, talk to God about it.

B: Death kills everyone so we need to be ready. My mentor David just died two weeks ago. One of the things he liked to say is that last time he checked, the mortality rate is still 100%. That means that you and I are going to die. It doesn't matter if you workout all the time and eat green vegetables, you are going to die. And if you watch TV all day and eat junk food, you're also going to die, maybe even sooner. So the question is, are you going to let the bitterness of death consume you? There's only one way to conquer the bitterness of death, through Jesus. When you put your trust in him, you'll have the last laugh at death. *B:* Death kills everyone so we need to be ready.

As maybe you've noticed, Job is really bitter about life. It's better to admit life is bitter than to pretend it's not.

Life is bitter because something is wrong (**Read 7:11-16**) In verse 11 Job says, "I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." Another way we can translate the word "bitterness" is "narrowness". Job is literally saying, "I will complain in the narrowness of my soul." Job's spirit is in a deep, dark, narrow valley. Perhaps you know exactly what that is like. You too have walked through a deep, dark, narrow valley. You are overwhelmed by sin, guilt, and hardships.

Maybe some of you have read Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. The story is an allegory for a Christian's pilgrimage to eternity. The hero Christian journeys down the "straight and narrow" to the Celestial City. He encounters bogs, bandits, mountains, and the dragon Apollyon. At one point he travels through "The Valley of the Shadow of Death." Here he encounters gloom, terror, and demons. Valleys are a part of our journeys too. Maybe like Job you also suffer in the narrowness of your soul. Sometimes you'd rather die than go on another day. You know the world is broken and it scares you. God doesn't want us to act like nothing is wrong. God knows there's something wrong. Life is bitter because something is wrong.

Now if God is the one who gives us life, the real question is, "How could God do this?" When Job looks at everything that has happened to him, there's only one conclusion."

God is unfair (7:17-21)

Sometimes it feels like God has it out for us. (**Read 7:17-19**) In verses 17-19 Job asks God why he bothers with people. Why God do you set your heart on us? Why God do you test us? Why God do you watch us? When we're honest with ourselves, sometimes it feels like God is against us. Is all the time God spends on Job and on us really worth it? If God didn't pay attention to us, would we really be that important? It's interesting to note that in a backward way Job is saying we matter to God. He doesn't like all the things God is doing, but he does admit God cares. Sometimes it feels like God has it out for us.

I know some of you have taken the ACT, SAT, or other school or work tests recently. I never took the SAT but I took the ACT twice and did about average each time. When I worked as a bank examiner, I had to take tests after our training classes. At that job I took a yearly assessment that I disliked so much I only took it once. From those tests I learned that I was not called to be a bank examiner. Although tests are never fun, they are designed for our good. Your teachers make you take tests to ensure you are learning and growing. Your office makes you take tests to ensure you understand what you're paid to do. God tests us to reveal our hearts. God tests us to deepen our relationship with him. God tests us to ensure that we are growing in our faith and walk. God tests us for our good even when it feels unkind. Sometimes it feels like God has it out for us.

Sometimes it feels like God is unfair. (**Read 7:20-21**) In verse 20 Job is saying, "If I sinned, which I haven't, why does it matter to you, God?" Job is right that he hasn't sinned, but he accuses God of unfairly targeting him. In verse 21 he asks "Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?" Again, this is not a confession of sin, but Job asking why God doesn't just forgive us. If God is so big and grand, why not just forget our unintentional sins? Why can't God just look away from our sin and move on? If God did that, he would actually leave us in our sin. God shows us attention because he wants to change us. He wants

to give us eternal life, but he can't do that if he ignores us. He wants to turn our bitterness and despair around even if it costs him.

See Job needs to try roller skating. Job is skating fast toward bitterness, hopelessness, and despair. And he needs a loud voice to come out of nowhere and say, "Switch directions!" He needs God to come and reverse his hopelessness.

Christ reverses our hopelessness.

Christ reverses our hopelessness. Coming up later in the book of Job we'll see Job declare his faith in God. Although in this chapter he flat out denies the resurrection, in chapter 19 Job believes. Job 19:25–26 says, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God," (ESV) Job will find hope because he'll take his eyes off himself. He'll look toward the coming Messiah and hope in God. When we're bitter and suffering, that's what we need to do as well. We need to look toward Christ and how he suffered on the cross. When we come to the cross, we realize we don't suffer alone. Christ has experienced our pains, nightmares, sorrows, and hurts. Christ reverses our hopelessness.

Where life was bitter now life is sweet. *Yes* life is full of hard labor that sometimes isn't rewarding. But if Christ has called us to these jobs and the people we work with, it gives us hope. When we realize God has set us where he has us for a reason, it changes us. Now I have a new purpose—to glorify God and to share the gospel. *Yes* life is full of aches and pains we'd rather not have. But if Christ has given these trials to us, we can trust it is for our good. God is going to use these sufferings to increase our joy in heaven. *Yes* life is full of waste and sometimes lacks meaning. But when we trust God has it all under control, nothing is meaningless. He can use our good and bad days for good. *Yes* life is bitter because everyone dies sooner or later. But Jesus has conquered the grave and offers all who trust in him eternal life. God promises he'll even return you to your body in an awesome way. *Yes* something is wrong in this life but God knows it. God sent his Son Jesus to fix that wrongness on the cross. Just like pilgrim we go through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. But God is using those valleys to prepare us for eternity. Where life was bitter now life is sweet.

Where God was unfair now God is just. We are all born in sin and will die in that sin unless God delivers us. Job wished that God would just walk away but praise God he didn't. Praise God that he has judged his Son Christ Jesus in our place. God has crucified Christ for our sins so that he can forgive us. The cross is where justice and mercy meet. God killed his own Son so that we don't have to die. And God gives us eternal life if we'll just trust in him. Christ pays for your dirty record and you get his clean record. Where God was unfair now God is just.

Life is bitter. God is unfair.

Christ reverses our hopelessness.

Life is sweet. God is just.

Do you feel hopeless? Do you feel lost? Do you feel like the darkness won't lift? Christ reverses our hopelessness. I opened by talking about John of the Cross and his poem the "Dark Night of the Soul." John suffered from physical ailments, attacks by his enemies, and depression. Maybe some of you are going through things that are just as bad. Early in his ministry John named himself after the cross. His desire for the cross helped him know God in the midst of suffering. When you go through suffering, the cross is the best

place to look. Imagine focusing so much on the cross you change your name too. “Anthony of the cross, Sean of the cross, Betty of the cross, Emily of the cross...” When we focus on the cross, God will give us a new hope. Life is bitter. God is unfair. Christ reverses our hopelessness. Life is sweet. God is just.