



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 15, 2013

Advent 3

Sermon Text: [Job 1:6-22](#)

Pastor Paul Kuehn

First Lesson: [Isaiah 35:1-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 146](#)

Second Lesson: [James 5:7-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 11:2-11](#)

Promises Made: God's Kingdom Gives Us Strength and Courage

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is our Savior from sin, and by whose promise we are guaranteed eternal life in heaven, God's grace, mercy and peace be yours in abundance my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Christmas is a time when we reflect on the classics, right? We like to read the good old Christmas stories that we've known since we were little and can probably recite by heart. Maybe we enjoy watching some of the Christmas classics on TV. I can think of one movie that I watched over and over again during Christmas time. Maybe some of you are familiar with it. *It's A Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey.

It's a story that I think many of us are probably familiar with, one that many of us can perhaps recite by heart. George Bailey, a man who does a lot of good things, finds himself all of a sudden falling on hard times. His life is in shambles. Everything seems to be going wrong. He seriously considers ending it all, until God sends an angel to show him just how valuable his life really is and how valuable he is to God.

We all might think we know the story of George Bailey, but I wonder, do we ever miss what is really trying to be said in that movie. The movie writer seems to be focusing our attention on how much value we all have, based on the things that we do, the impact that we have on other people. But there is maybe a sub-point there that gets lost in the movie. George Bailey had someone watching out for him even when life got really bad. Not just some angel, some guardian angel looking over his shoulder and seeing how life was going, he had a God and Father up in heaven who knew every step and every moment of his life and even was with him when things got really bad.

Does that remind you a little bit of the story of Job? Does it remind you at all of your story, when your life gets bad and things get tough? This morning as we reflect on the story of Job, we are led to ask ourselves the question, how well do we really know the story of Job, and are we missing the point of what God is trying to tell us? As we read these verses of Job, hold onto the promises of God. They are more than just words. They are God's precious gifts and treasures to us.

With that in mind, we turn our attention to Job 1:6:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised."*

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

These are the Words of God upon which we meditate.

Brothers and sisters, how well do you know the story of Job? If you read that story in the Bible before, you're probably saying to yourself, "Pastor, I know how it all turns out in the end. Job undergoes this test. He endures through it. And God restores all of those blessings that Job lost. It all works out in the end." You and I know that from looking back in history. But do you know how many chapters of Job exist between when God takes all of those blessings away and when he gives them back? Thirty-nine chapters of Job talking with his so-called friends.

In the meantime, Job has no idea what the Lord has in store for him, no idea what is going to happen. All he knows is that he had the Lord's goodness, the Lord's blessings, in a tangible way, in his hands. He had family and friends and property and wealth and a house and security and in one fell swoop, all of a sudden all of those blessings he was holding in his hands were emptied out and taken away.

Tell me brothers and sisters, when would you and I break? Put yourselves in Job's shoes for a moment. That shouldn't be all that hard to do. I'm sure we've all had days where we felt exactly like Job, where everything seems to be going wrong and nothing seems to be going right. No sooner does one messenger come bearing bad news to us, then another messenger comes our way. Satan seems to keep piling one blow after another upon us, and all of a sudden we find ourselves on our knees in prayer.

When does it happen? Does it happen when we lose our job and some of our wealth is taken away? We no longer know how we are going to be able to support our family and loved ones. Does it happen when some catastrophe strikes our house? A tornado, snow building up on the roof so that suddenly the roof caves in, and all of a sudden we find ourselves without a place to live? I don't know that any of us have had it quite as bad as Job did here, but it doesn't do us any good to think that someone else had it worse off than we did. When we are in the midst of those trials and troubles and tribulations, we feel exactly like Job did.

Think for a moment, what if you were to be told that most of your family had been killed? Wouldn't that bring you to your knees in prayer? Saying, "God, please take this burden away from me! God, you promised me that in all things you would be working for my good and the good of those who love you. Didn't that include my family and loved ones? Doesn't that include me? How can you possibly work this situation for my good?"

That's when we are encouraged to hold on to the promises of God, because they are more than just words. It doesn't seem that way sometimes. When we think of God's promises to us, sometimes it feels like all we are holding onto are empty words, a kind thought or sentiment. Haven't you ever had someone make an empty promise to you? Mom or dad promises you a certain gift for Christmas. Christmas rolls around and the gift isn't lying underneath the tree. You have someone who promises to be your friend, to be there for you when you need them most. Then tragedy strikes your life and all of

a sudden that friend is nowhere to be found. We sometimes look at the broken promises that others make to us and we think, "God must be the same way. He has a lot of promises that he gives to me in his Word, but he can't possibly keep them all." That's the way Job began to feel as his suffering continued.

Read on a few chapters into Job as you hear his friends try to comfort him, and ultimately they fail. In the midst of that suffering, Job begins to complain a little bit. He says, "I don't know what exactly God is doing here, but it feels like he's picking on me. If I could plead my case before him, he would see that he is being unjust. He's treating me unfairly and he really needs to treat me more nicely than he is treating me." At that point, Job needs to go back and remember to hold onto God's promises. They are more than just empty words. They are the precious treasures and gifts of God to you and me.

Again I wonder how well you really know the story of *It's A Wonderful Life*. As George Bailey is thinking about ending it all, what are some of the things he tries to hold onto? He tries to hold onto his good deeds for awhile, the people he's helped out. Maybe they'll come and help him out. That doesn't work out at the beginning. He holds onto his wife and his children, but ultimately he's frustrated. He doesn't know how he is going to take care of them. He finds himself getting angry, blowing up at the people he loves and walking out the door. Finally as he is standing there at the bridge, he says "What do I have to hold onto?" He thinks he has nothing.

That's when God turns him around and says, "You have everything. You do not understand the wonderful life that I have blessed you with, George Bailey. I am always looking out for my children. They are my precious treasure, the people that I love the most."

I wonder also how well you know the story of Job. You and I might feel we know what Job is going through when we've suffered loss, when we've suffered bad news falling upon our ears and upon our hearts. But notice what Job does when all of this bad news is coming his way. Listen to it one more time in case you missed it.

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger (the fourth messenger) came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.

Okay, he's doing what we would expect. He's mourning. He's crying out in pain. But then:

Then he fell to the ground in worship and said:

*“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
and naked I will depart.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised.”*

I think you and I are used to praying to God when things get tough, when times get troublesome for us, but what do our prayers mostly consist of? God, please take care of me and take these burdens away. God, help me get through this because I don’t know how I’m going to get through this by myself. Do we ever say in the midst of those prayers, and also God, thank you for being my God and Father and loving me and taking care of me because I know that even though you’ve taken this blessing out of my life, you are still my loving and faithful God and will continue to love and support me? That’s what Job did when he fell down in worship, when he fell down in worship and said, “You know what? I didn’t have anything when I came into this world and I’m not going to have anything when I leave it, but I have my God. May the name of that God be praised.”

That’s what is truly amazing about Job. He receives all of this bad news, news that would crush you and me, and yet, when he falls to his knees, it isn’t in despair. It’s in worship of a loving God. You and I can do the same. So what if you and I receive bad news this Christmas season? We turn on the news and things in our country don’t seem to be going the way we would like them to. Attacks on Christianity and Christmas, we see them all the time in the news, don’t we? So what if disaster should befall us? God is holding us in the palm of his hand. Do you doubt that? Then look earlier in Job.

As God is standing there with all of his angels and Satan, the deceiver, comes up to him and God asks him, “Satan, what have you been up to?” “Wandering back and forth. Roaming throughout the earth.” Then God does something that absolutely shocks us. He points the devil to Job. “Say, Satan, have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one like him. He’s my dearly loved child. He’s righteous. He’s blameless. He fears the Lord and he shuns evil.” Satan probably wouldn’t have paid Job any mind if God hadn’t pointed him out. You and I are probably thinking, wait. Would God ever do that to me? Would he ever draw the devil’s attention to me and say, “Hey, have you considered my child so and so? They are a really faithful believer.” What is God doing here?

He’s saying to the devil, “No matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, you’re not going to snatch this child from my hand.” The devil says, “Give me a chance. Let me have at your child. Let me take away their blessings. Let me show you how shallow their love for you really is, and they’ll curse you. Give me that chance God.” And God says, “Okay devil. You can have that chance. You can’t touch my child, but you can test them. But just so you know devil, you’re not going to succeed because I’m going to hold onto my servant Job. I’m going to keep his love for me strong. I’m not going to let him go, and you’re going to fail.” That’s exactly how the story of Job turned out. Job’s faith and trust in God were not lost.

Maybe there are some stories we could bear to take a second look at. The story of *It's A Wonderful Life*, the story of Job, maybe your story and mine, and ask ourselves, how well do I really know that story? As I listen to that story, God help me to hold onto your promises. Help me to realize that they are more than just empty words and actions. Your promises are treasure because in those promises, you promise me that you are going to hold onto me. Even though you might point me out to the devil and allow him to test me, you're never going to let go of me. Maybe we might focus on one more promise that God has to give us. Job himself pointed it out. I know that in the end, on the Last Day, I will see the Lord. After my flesh has been destroyed, I will see him. I, myself, and not another. Oh how my heart yearns for that day.

As we remember the promise God fulfilled in sending his Son to be our Savior and focus on the promise that is yet to come, his second coming, may we have that same yearning and eagerness that Job had, recognizing that the promises of God are indeed a treasure and they will be fulfilled. Amen.