

“Does not man have hard service on earth?  
 Are not his days like those of a hired man?  
<sup>2</sup> Like a slave longing for the evening shadows,  
 or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages,  
<sup>3</sup> so I have been allotted months of futility,  
 and nights of misery have been assigned to me.  
<sup>4</sup> When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’  
 The night drags on, and I toss till dawn.  
<sup>5</sup> My body is clothed with worms and scabs,  
 my skin is broken and festering.  
<sup>6</sup> “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,  
 and they come to an end without hope.  
<sup>7</sup> Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath;  
 my eyes will never see happiness again. (Job 7:1-7)

### Even Christians Complain

Are you a complainer? I don’t mean a whiner – nobody likes that. But are you a chronic complainer? What’s the difference? Some psychologists say that complaining is voicing legitimate dissatisfaction with the hope of fixing the situation, while whining is about trivial, unimportant things. They’ve done experiments with three year olds watching adults and they can tell the difference. A related idea is venting – when you’re just getting your emotion out there. Do you complain or vent or whine? While psychologists will point out that there is a legitimate need to complain – to express legitimate unhappiness with a hope of fixing the situation – nobody likes a chronic complainer even when we know that they have real things to complain about. Of course, we all get tired really fast of whiners and venters. Do Christians whine? Do Christians complain? Do Christians vent? Obviously, we do. Should we? Even when we have legitimate concerns, is it a sin to complain? Why do we have things to complain about? What does God do about it? This morning we want to look at a complaint from an Old Testament believer, Job. And we hope to answer those questions, because the truth is, **even Christians complain.**

#### I.

**They complain because life hurts.** Now, I would like to say that if we had a perfect faith, we would never complain. But the Bible records Jesus vocalizing his dissatisfaction with the world as he found it. Now, I don’t think we would never whine if our faith were perfect and when we did vocalize our dissatisfaction – even when we did it with a lot of emotion – we would still trust absolutely in our Father in heaven to deal with the situation. Does that happen? The believer in us does trust God and does vocalize the things that bother us with the hope of finding a God pleasing solution. But the unbeliever is always there, dwelling on and twisting our legitimate hurts into unbelief and attacks on God for how he’s taking care of us. That unbeliever magnifies every little thing. He’s a world class whiner.

Job shows us that sinner/saint combination in action this morning. These seven verses are pure complaint. Job was enduring trial and pain the likes of which you and I are unlikely to experience all at once. It began with the loss of his wealth. Job was a rich man in one day, he lost it all. That same day, all his children were killed in a tornado. Job was heartbroken, but he clung to his faith and refused to attack God. Then he was afflicted with a terrible disease. He was covered with boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Then Job’s wife and his closest friends turned against him. His wife told Job to curse God and die. His friends attacked him: surely all this was happening because of some secret sin. So Job began to complain. In the early chapters of the book, he remembers to back up and put his trust in God. But as the book goes on, he becomes more and more critical of God, finally accusing him of being unfair. But God didn’t let his faith die. He came to him and rebuked him for his sin. But also forgave him.

Our reading is fairly early in the complaints, before Job has gone completely overboard. But he clearly does hurt. He asks, **“Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man?”** He goes on to compare his life to the meaningless pain and toil of slave who can only look forward to night and few hours rest before he has to get up and work long and hard for nothing again. Then he says, **“When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn.”** Sleepless nights. How many of those have we suffered? We stress over our children and our finances and all that we have to do, and we can’t sleep. The day after a sleepless night is miserable. But we lay there just wishing we could sleep. I know that feeling and I know many of you do, too.

Job had a legitimate complaint, and I think we can understand why he felt the way he did. I think that many of us have faced hard periods of our lives and wondered why we worked so hard for nothing. It must feel that way to lose your house or to have your business fail or to see your pension go up in smoke because your employer went bankrupt. It must feel that way if you see all your income burned up in medical bills. And I know that I’ve spoken with quite a few of you who wrestle every day with medical problems – you have trouble breathing, it hurts to move, you have to take so many pills, it’s a wonder you have any room left in your stomach for real food. All those pills have side effects. Sometimes you wonder if you’re taking pills just because you’re taking other pills.

It is not sinful to acknowledge all that. Now, because we have a sinful nature, the emotion can bubble up past venting to attacking God. We can even have suicidal thoughts. That is temptation building on our sin of feeling sorry for ourselves. But I will say it again, it is not wrong to need to share our hurt with the people who are closest to us. God gives us pastors so that they can comfort us. God gives us families, and friends, and a congregation, so that we can carry each other’s burdens. So it is not sin for me to go to pastors and fellow Christians and family members looking for support. Sadly, because the people we’re turning to are sinners too, sometimes they don’t do all that God wants them to. But God did put them there for us. And, of course, it is not sin to pour out our sorrow to God in prayer. But after we have spoken to him, we need to listen to him – not by searching our own hearts. That’s where the pain is. But by coming to church and hearing his word. By talking to our pastor because his job is to share with us what God says. His job – my job – is to comfort you when life hurts. How can I do that if I don’t hear from you what your pain is?

What am I going to say? Obviously, I’m going to tailor my words to your situation. But always – if I do my job right – always I’m going to point you back to Jesus because the gospel of Jesus Christ says that God loves you even when your life hurts. He proved he loved you when he died for you. So I am going to point out that he died for the weakness in our faith. He died for our whining and our over-vocalizing. He died for all the times that our complaints turned into attacks on God because we didn’t think he’s taking good enough care of us. He died for all those suicidal thoughts we sometimes wrestle with. Then he rose and said that all our sin is forgiven. He rose and said that God the Father will not hold our whining and complaining and accusing against us. When he sees us, he sees Jesus always trusting in his Father’s plan for his life. I may even remind you that Jesus died for those church members who haven’t done a good job of listening to you and comforting you.

But I’m not going to stop there. I’m going to remind you that if God chose you before the world began, if he sent Jesus into this world 2000 years ago thinking specifically of you, if he sacrificed his Son so that you will have eternal life, if he made sure that you were baptized, that you heard the good news, if he planted faith in your heart, he will not abandon you. He will walk beside you every day of your life. He will decide what hurts you have to face and he will spare you of all those that would destroy your faith. He will work through his word and through pastors and family members and fellow Christians to give you the strength you need to get through this life. And he will hear and answer every one of your prayers until the day when you stand with him in heaven. Job forgot that for a little while. So God reminded him. And God reminds us, too, when we need to hear it.

## II.

But all that means something hard: there will be pain and sorrow in this life, for us Christians, too. While we deal with the pain and sorrow, sometimes, we’re going to need to say out loud what’s bothering us and why. **Even Christians complain. They complain because life is short.** That’s what Job says at the end of our reading. He says, **“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.”** The prayer reminds me a little bit of the person who says, “Nothing good is ever going to happen again!” Most of

the time, that is whining because most of us are going to experience blessings in the years that lie ahead. But Job's prayer shows how desperate he was. It was not a ringing endorsement of God's love. But even a mustard seed of faith is faith. That believer in him was alive, even while his heart was sinking into despair.

To Job it seemed like everything that he had done had been wasted. Now, his life was speeding to its end. His children were adults when they died. I imagine that he was at a point in life similar to mine when he had come to realize that he was past the time when we usually have children. A lifetime's work has been destroyed and he probably doesn't see how he could rebuild all that he has lost. And his health was clearly in decline. The glory days had come and gone and it seemed so fast. And the grave was drawing ever closer.

Do you ever feel like giving up like that? I'm going to turn 52 this year. There are things that I'm just not going to get to do in this lifetime. How about you? Well, don't give up too fast. Job didn't know it, but God had a plan for him. God was going to restore him. His health would return and his wealth would be greater than it was before disaster struck. What about those children he lost? There is no replacing children when they die. But there is comfort in knowing they have eternal life. And God does give us healing and new purposes in life. In Job's case, God gave him new children and enough life to raise them and see them married. He acknowledged that he had indeed been blessed, once he got over his pride and allowed God to heal his hurt.

Will God heal our hurt in that way? I can't promise that God will replace children who grow up and move out, not even with grandchildren. I hope that happens for Becky and me in due course. But there's no way to know. And you all know of situations where the children aren't dead, but they treat their parents as if they were. I can't promise you that whatever health issues you have to deal with will go away. I will pray for you. I will visit you in the hospital. I will do all I can to comfort you until the day that God calls you home or gives you a better pastor. But it might be his will for you to suffer here. But even if it is, that will only last as long as this life lasts. Job had to die, finally, after all the ups and downs and ups again. His true peace was in the Lord. Job said the words that serve as the basis for one of our most loved Easter hymns: "I Know that my Redeemer Lives." Job said that and he looked forward to standing on this earth in his body after his skin had been destroyed.

After sin and death take their toll on us, after the hurt and the sorrow of this life is done, we will stand upon the earth. With our own eyes, we will see God even if these eyes have long since turned to dust. We will have new and perfect bodies, bodies without sin or age or weakness. And those bodies will live in a new earth, in the light of Christ, in joy forever. Never again will you need a pastor to comfort you, because nothing will ever hurt you when you stand next to Jesus. And if you and I leave this life before he comes back, our bodies will be buried like Job's. They will decay and turn to dust. But our souls will live with him and wait for that day of return.

That is our greatest comfort when life hurts. That is the only comfort we have when we realize how fast our days are speeding away. We have eternity with Christ. And it will be joyous beyond our ability to even imagine. I've using "complain" the way some psychologists use it – speaking of our legitimate hurts in hopes of fixing them. That may seem like a funny way to use the word. But whatever word you use, when life hurts, let me know. Let your fellow Christians know. Let us comfort you with the promises of Christ. Amen.