Job 7:7a Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath.

 I can tell you that when you look at all the readings that we have for the church you will see that the book of Job is only called upon twice as a text to consider, both of those times in series B, the one we are following now. I can understand why that is true, but gosh if you are going to use Job as a reading at least pick a part of Job that is uplifting and positive. Yet I think the idea of just picking a text from Job is so that we can then consider the message of the whole of Job and what it means for us. So if you would, we are just going to jump in and talk about everything we can to make sure you grasp the point of Job. Our theme will be: **UNDERSTANDING JOB.**

 To begin, the Book of Job starts by speaking of Job and his life. Job, it seems lives or is a contemporary of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, some feel a contemporary of Moses. Either way, what you need to grasp is that Job is called by the Lord, **“blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.”** It is clear that Job is richly blessed by the Lord for we are told he has 7 sons, 3 daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants.

 But the book of Job also tells us that as angels were presenting themselves before the Lord, Satan himself also came. Yes, I will tell you that Satan answers to and is limited by the Lord our God. Satan comes and challenges the Lord concerning Job basically telling the Lord that Job is only a believer and such because God **“has put a hedge around him.”** Satan challenges that if God were to take away Job’s blessings that Job would curse God. The Lord allows the challenge making this stipulation to begin: **“Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”**

 Satan attacks and it is a vicious as we would expect. In one day Job will lose everything! First his oxen and donkeys and the servants with them. Then the sheep and servants. Then the camels and servants. Then his sons and daughters and the servants around them. By the time the day is over, everything, everything that Job had was gone. Let all of that sink in. Consider such a loss in your life and how you would respond. Do you remember Job’s response? **“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.”** That dear people, is a confession of faith. That is what it means to trust God and to have no doubts ever that no matter what happens, the goodness, grace and love of God still stands and overcomes! Tragedy upon tragedy and Job simply and wonderfully clings to the Lord.

 If you would just a little reminder to all of you to contemplate and imitate this wonderful faith of Job. It is clear Job’s focus is not this life or what is found in this life, but Job has a greater perspective, a confidence that though this life may be one of horror and grief, because of God’s grace, goodness and love it is all endurable. I think we can say that Job’s attitude is that because of the Lord our God we can never lose but are always those who overcome the world and the cesspool it can often be. And just so you know, that is exactly what we are reminded of in 1 John 5:4, **“For everyone born of God overcomes the world.”** Pretty awesome and gracious things to think about.

 Of course, the history of Job does not end there. Satan is miffed because Job has not cursed God and so Satan comes back making another accusation against the Lord. Satan says, **“Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life, but stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”** Please note that God will allow Satan to personally attack Job but the limitation is that Satan cannot take Job’s life.

 Now at this point, we need to talk clearly here. First, we don’t know everything that God knows or every reason that God has for allowing this attack of Satan upon one of his children. What we do know is that these attacks are tests of faith. A test of faith is where something happens to us, good or bad, that causes us to draw closer to God or to grow in our faith in God. For us, it is the outcomes that determines if we have faced a test where we are drawn closer to God or a temptation where we have been drawn away from God, perhaps even to the point where we have lost our faith. Tests can come in any form and fashion, any time or point of our lives. Tests can be short or long, lightweight or crushing. Here is something important to know. No matter what you are going through, your choice as a child of God is either to completely trust in God, to trust his love and grace, to know that He is a God who is not the author or doer of evil but who is always, always working in your life to make your salvation sure and certain. Please note that God will not ever work outside of what He has revealed in his Word.

 The other choice you have is to be filled with anger, despair, and rejection of God. To decide that God is evil or weak or worthless, that God cannot and will not love you. But remember, it is not always bad things that become our temptations. Sometimes it is good things that Satan uses to destroy our souls and faith. Satan may bless you with wealth or love or happiness or maybe wonderful kids and family and….you get the picture don’t you? If the end result of what is going on in your life is that you turn away from and in despair and anger reject the Lord you have been lured into a temptation of Satan to the destruction of your soul.

 Why do I say all of this? Because this study of Job is in many ways a study of exactly what Satan may throw at us. For Job, he is going to be struck with complete illness, boils that cover his body and his only relief is scraping himself with a piece of pottery. His wife begs him to curse God. He will have three friends who supposedly come to give him comfort and help but they are the absolute worst ever. Those three friends attack Job’s faith, integrity and knowledge, all in the name of God and knowledge, and yet those friends are not godly, not knowledgeable and not those who speak the truth of God. It is because of the people around him and the bodily difficulties that Job has that we hear some of the things we do.

 So consider the words of the text we read. Listen again: **“Does man not have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months or futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. ‘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.”**

 Do you catch the despair and agony of this man? He is suffering and having an absolutely bad time of it. You can hear his agony in his words and if you can’t identify with this man and his misery then I would suggest you pinch yourself to make sure you are alive in this world. Maybe all of us haven’t been as deep in despair or as hard pressed as Job is physically but we have all had our share of problems and troubles so that these words and the sadness of these words strikes a cord! Yeah, the truth of the matter, since we all know each other so well, is that every one of us has had those moments, those times of trouble and hardship that just seem to make life a place of cruelty and darkness. Welcome to the fact that our world is tainted by sin and all the problems that sin brings.

 I pray that if your struggles are like Job’s that you have a Christian support system around you and not friends like Job who lead you to the world’s ways and confuse and distort the whole thing. Here is what I will tell you, the rest of Job’s struggles in a nutshell. Job will literally despair of his life. Job curses his existence, tries to fight off his friend’s bad advice, and yes, Job will question God and wrestle with God’s roll in the misery he is in. This dialogue that takes place seems to go on forever in the Book of Job but again I will tell you there are lessons galore to be learned. So let me help with some of those lessons.

 Lesson 1: No matter what you think you read in Job or that you think that somehow Job has said something evil or wicked then you would be wrong. Here is what God, who speaks at the end says, **“My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”** Let that sink in. There are times when Job seems in his questions to go too far and yet God says he did not. So read Job carefully and with this fact of God always in your mind.

 Lesson 2: Though Job may despair of his earthly life and curse his misery, please note that Job does maintain his faith in the promises of God. To grasp that just consider what has to be the most famous passage in all of Job. Job 19:23-27 **"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, 24 that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! 25 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** In those words Job is confessing His trust in the promised Savior and that because of that Savior he will one day be alive again, He will see God with his own eyes and reap the benefits of what God has promised! Nothing in this world can ever, ever, trump this heavenly, eternal life promise of God.

 Lesson 3. In Job, God still comes across as God! I find it wonderful that when God does speak it is with challenge and with the absolute authority of God. God begins with these words: **“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”** The value of this lesson, of all the questions that God throws at man, questions that we cannot answer or even get close to answering remind us clearly and truly that God is God. I believe it is okay to ask questions of God and seek the answers of his Word but it is not okay to begin to presume that you have greater knowledge, greater insight, and greater wisdom than God. I would tell you point blank, that the moment you begin to think you know more than God then you really are not worshiping or even having faith in the true and only God. God is what He says he is and not what we want to think He is. To seek answers is one thing, to decide that your wisdom, the world’s wisdom is greater than God is quite another. Most of you are aware of the motto of my entire ministry: God said it. I believe it. That settles it! God is God.

 Lesson 4. Even in his misery, it is clear that Job held onto the hope and joy of eternal life with the Lord. This truth for all who believe has never changed. Paul wrote: **“I consider our present sufferings not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”(Ro. 8:18). 2 Co 4:7-9 “but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”** Or verse 17 of that same book and chapter: **“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”** The promises, the power, the wonder of God found in Jesus is our everything. Because of his victorious redemption we have the wonder of eternal life and salvation with the Lord. It is this promise, this hope that is our foundation and complete hope!

 Thank you Lord, for this book and its lessons. May we have the faith of Job! May our lives, no matter what trial you bring upon us, be to the glory of Jesus and draw us all the more to the confidence of eternal life. Amen.