

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES

Job 42:12a

If you are new to this church, we have, for the past several weeks, been looking at Bible verses that have become favorites to me. So far we have been looking at verses that I chose – at least for a period in my life – as my "life verse." I've been sharing these not only because they are great verses worthy of consideration but also in the hope that maybe, just maybe, YOU might latch on to one of these verses and begin to claim it as YOUR "life verse," even if, like me, you later choose an entirely different verse. Today we bring this autobiographical examination of verses to an end. This will be the last of my "life verses" (at least for now), though we will, in the next number of weeks continue to examine some of my favorite Bible verses.

So I had chosen Romans 8:1 as my life verse and that was good for 15 or 20 years...and then I chose Matthew 5:6 for 10 or more years...and then I chose Isaiah 66:2b.

But about five years ago, as part of the Men's Discipleship group (a 5:30 am exercise and Bible memorization program held here at the church building during the school year), Job 42:12a came to be considered. Let's turn to that...

Job 42:12a

Now, I don't know about you and your take on your life. But around five years ago I had just turned 60. To date I had

- graduated from 3 colleges and seminaries
- married the girl of my dreams
- headed up a museum in Philadelphia
- bought and restored an 18th century stone house in Lancaster
- made the Million-dollar club in real estate
- had 5 children
- become the pastor of two good churches
- disciplined many in the ways of Christ
- performed over 150 weddings and 50 funerals
- traveled to some 30 or so countries
- learned to play the trombone, learned to golf (some good golfers would dispute me on this), learned to fly fish, restored lots of antiques, learned to play squash, shot an 8-point buck, and restored a '59 Austin Healey Sprite (which you can see in the parking lot this morning)

My life had been **full and complete**. In many ways, like many of near retirement age, I could start spending my life looking BACK.

Like Job, the one that Job 42:12a was written about, I could spend the rest of my life contemplating my gains and losses, my victories and defeats. For just as there were many things that I had done that were good, there were those other things...those bad days...those times that I would just as well forget. And in that sense, are any of **us** really all that different from one another or from Job?

Now Job's losses were great. Indeed, his losses were great only BECAUSE his gains had been great. Let's read about his gains and his losses...

Job 1:13-22

I don't know about you, but by the time I was 60 I considered myself to have been tremendously blessed.

- Athletically I always have thought of myself as a late bloomer. I never involved myself in sports growing up. I was too busy taking care of our horses. And once we left farm life I got into cars. So my learning to aggressively play badminton (for example) was something that came later. And as for running, I don't know if I ever ran more than a mile in my life... until about 5 years ago. But now I have run literally hundreds of miles
- When I met Ruth I thought (and rightly so) she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. When she agreed to go on that first date I knew I had ONE CHANCE to win her heart. Little did I know, at that time, that she would become my wife and the very good mother of our five children.
- As for church life, I knew I wanted to lead. I was a frustrated preacher from the time I was in college. Little did I know that God would bless my role and that the church I pastored in Lititz would grow as it did, or that Burning Hearts would become as strong and sweet spirited as it is?

I have felt blessed. Job became rich...really rich. I never reached that point, in the same way, but I certainly felt blessed.

Some years ago I needed some repair work done to my Kawasaki Vulcan motorcycle. So I had it in the shop. When they called a few days later to tell me that the bike had required more than expected work and that the repair was close to \$1,000 I was taken back. And in a manner in which I was almost mumbling to myself I said something like "I'm not a rich man." After hanging up, I began to accuse myself of my **sinful, unthankful, ungodly attitude**. "Not a rich man?" What? I was in good health, had a loving wife, 5 children, a house that has become a sanctuary, a sports car to drive, a loving church to pastor. I had come to know of the saving grace of God in Christ and was certain of my eternal home in heaven. And on top of all that I owned a motorcycle that had now been repaired and was ready for the open road...and I just told that man that I was not rich? **You ungodly, unthankful man...how DARE YOU lie to that man at the motorcycle dealership**. And so when I finally went to pick up the bike, I said to Charlie, "I said to you on the phone that I am not a rich man. That was not true. I am **one of the richest men I know**...maybe not in terms of cash in the bank, but in every other way imaginable." And with that he smiled and handed me the bill.

Well, Job had been a rich man in EVERY WAY (including having plenty of money in the bank, so to speak), but it was taken away.

And as the rest of the book of Job addresses, his life became one of looking back, considering what had been LOST, instead of what was ahead.

And that is a trap that any of us can fall into: spending our lives looking back.

I had breakfast this past week with a former pastor of a church here in Lancaster County. He had been the founding pastor of that church...a church that had grown tremendously through

the years. And a church that he would likely still be at had he not **entered into a fallen moral state**, in the end bringing shame on his own name and on our Savior's name. Years have now gone by. He is terribly sorrowful for his moral failure. There is no way to relive the past or even repair his wrongdoing. It is what it is and it is not good. But life...time...has continued to go on.

And now, seated across from each other at the table at Panerra Bread, we discussed his future. And what did I talk to him about?

Job 42:12a.

For what I wanted to say to him was, "You have repented of your sin. The damage done is what it is. But have you ever thought...has it ever even entered into your mind...that your **BEST YEARS** may yet be **in the future**?"

That's why I latched on to Job 42:12a five years ago. Unlike my pastor friend my life wasn't characterized by moral failure. But that sense that maybe the best years are yet to come is what I was grabbing hold of and that is why I wanted my fallen pastor friend to latch on to that verse as well.

Maybe...just maybe...**the BEST is yet to come.**

And maybe the best...the VERY BEST...is yet in **your future as well!**

Now let's make some points from the scriptures regarding all of this...

1. God's blessing or withholding of blessing is all up to God.

Christian people are often quick to grab hold of Jeremiah 29:11... (let's turn to that)...

Jeremiah 29:11

Burning Hearts member Tim Martin spoke on this verse just a few months ago. I understand why people would **want** to grab hold of that verse. It sounds so good (in the same way that Job 42:12a sounds good). And I have no problem with people **desiring to "claim" that verse for their own future**: desiring from God His blessing: plans for them to prosper. The catch with Jeremiah 29:11 is that we need to consider the context and to whom this verse was addressed. So while one may desire to "claim" the promise of that verse for themselves they need to be careful not to suggest or infer that Jeremiah 29:11 was written with them in mind. For just as one may suggest that Jeremiah 29:11 was God's promise to them another could equally suggest that Ezekiel 5:17 was God's promise to them. Do you know Ezekiel 5:17?

Ezekiel 5:17

You see, does anyone want to "claim" Ezekiel 5:17? No. That's because we don't like the idea that God's plan for us might be famine, wild beasts or a sword. Right?

But who is to say what God's plan for you might be? No one knows. God's plan for His dear Son was that he would be wounded, crushed, pierced and killed (see Isaiah 53 and Acts 4:27-28). Why should we assume that His plan for us would be any different?

So God raises up and God brings down, and we should never forget that.

When Job was going through his great loss and sufferings, did not Job see his agonies as also having come from God's hand? Yes he did. Satan was the instrument of Job's loss and suffering but Job saw it all ultimately coming from God's hand. And that is how we should see it as well. We may not understand it, but that is how we should see it.

So God **MAY choose to make our latter days better or greater than our earlier days...or he may not.** Personally, I'm trusting God either way but I am **hoping** for His richest of blessings.

2. God's promise of all things working together for good is ONLY addressed to the believer: those who are called by God and who love God.

Romans 8:28

Considered by some to be the greatest verse in the entire Bible, Romans 8:28 teaches that this promise for "good" is **only given to the believer.** Non-Christians erroneously try and claim this verse (even though they may not know of the actual Bible verse) all the time when they suggest, "Well, I believe there's a reason for everything...and things will work out alright in the end." Well...yes and no.

- There IS a reason for everything, and
- Things WILL work out in the end as far as God's design is concerned.

But if they think everything is going to work out fine for THEIR GOOD...FOR THEM...
PERSONALLY...well, nothing could be further from the truth!

But if you have been born again and are part of God's family, then there IS a good plan for you. And even if that plan for you personally includes a LOT of suffering, heartache and trouble...it will work out for good, even for your good, in the end.

3. The blessing of God may be physical.

For Job it was very physical

Job 42:10-17

Now if you look at these numbers of his animals, they are TWICE what he had before God, via Satan, took them all away.

And as for his sons and daughters, they were all replaced. Assuming the wife he had AFTER all of his hardships was the same wife he had BEFORE all his hardships began, there must have been a change in the wife's attitude. For it is hard to imagine him making love to the same woman who during the midst of his trials had said to him (you can read this back in chapter 2, verse 9 of Job),

"Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Yes, that hardly sounds like a **supportive, loving mate**, or one that one might want to have a romantic relationship with.

But by that woman or some other, God gave him a **whole new set** of children: 7 sons and 3 daughters.

Sometimes, we can lose our fortunes only to gain them back again.

- Back in the 1980s, Donald Trump went bankrupt...several times. But by the late 90's he was on a roll.
- Samuel Colt, the inventor of the Colt revolver, went bankrupt, only to later become very wealthy
- The same can be said of John Stevenson, the inventor of the Stevenson omnibus, the 19th century's horsedrawn forerunner to the modern bus. Indeed, Stevenson, a Christian, bemoaned his bankruptcy and vowed that when he would again get back on his feet he would pay back all of his former creditors. That happened. And some years later one of those now **paid in full** former creditors put up a big sign and attached it to an omnibus that he purchased from Stevenson. And on that sign, in big letters he had painted, "This is how John Stevenson pays his debts!"

You may lose everything. But is that the end? Probably not.

4. The blessing of God may be something other than physical.

I had been the senior pastor of a thriving large church and, in a sense, I "lost" that pastorate. But what did God do for me? He blessed me with a sweet, happy church family – something I had been missing for many, many years. And what kind of price can one place on that?

There is no price! For like the ad on t.v. goes, "Some things in life are **priceless.**"

- Contentment is priceless. 1 Timothy 6:6 says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."
- Having a clear conscience is priceless. More than one man or woman has left a business relationship because their conscience didn't sit well with what was being done through that business. Now they may earn less, and they may not have the potential for financial gain they once had. But they can now lie on their bed at night and be at peace with themselves. And how do you put a price on that?
- Or how many people have left a church where they may have unhappily been for years... decades even. And they wonder what will become of them? But they then find themselves involved in a fellowship where they are happy and blessed and feel well-fed week after week. And that fellowship has become their home, their family, their community. And then they wonder why they stayed so long at the former church.
- Or, how many people have ended up having lost a spouse: by death or by divorce. And they have wondered, "What will the future be like now?" And then God has brought into their life someone that is truly **BEYOND ALL THEY COULD HAVE ASKED FOR OR EVEN IMAGINED!**

I recall having a wedding for a man now 20 or so years ago. His wife had been a good and godly woman whom he greatly loved. But then she died. Prior to her death, she said to her husband, "When I'm gone, I want you to remarry." And then...catch this now...she told him of the woman she had in mind – a woman whose own husband had died some years earlier. This good woman died, I had her funeral, and within about two years I had this man's wedding...to the woman whom his wife had pointed out! He said to me, following the wedding, "I am a very blessed man. For now I have had **TWO** great wives!" And so he did.

(I must tell you that his story reminds me of the man whose dying wife said much the same thing to this man. "I want you to promise me that when I die, you'll remarry," she said. "Yes, love," he replied. "And I want you to give your new wife all my clothes to wear. Will you do that for me?" To which he replied, "That will never work. She's a size 12 and you're an 8."

That's when you know the husband was just a bit TOO ANXIOUS for the next chapter in his life!)

Some years ago, Steve Sjogren, a pastor from Cincinnati, Ohio, wrote a book entitled Conspiracy of Kindness. It was a book about how the people of God might minister to our lost world: not just by talking to them about Christ but by actually serving them. The book, which talked about Sjogren's life and the lives of those around him, detailed how the people from Sjogren's church would do all sorts of things for those not in the church – everything from picking up trash to cleaning the bathrooms at some local establishment – all to "show God's love in a practical way."

A few years after the book came out, we paid to have Steve Sjogren come and speak to the church I pastored in Lititz. It was a good weekend with Steve. Before he left I asked him if he would autograph my Bible. At the time I was using a New International Version Bible.

Just as I mentioned some weeks ago how as a teenage on-fire Christian I had come to see how people would often sign their names and then put a Bible reference...their "life verse" after their name...Steve signed his name. I have that Bible here with me...

Here is what he put...

*Dear Doug,
The best is yet to come!
Steve Sjogren
1 Cor. 3:6*

1 Corinthians 3:6 is "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (That's a life verse that seems even more obscure than some of the ones I have chosen).

But catch Steve's challenge to me...
"The best is yet to come!"

That's what Job 42:12a is about. And that is what I pray for you, even as I pray for me: that **God might bless our latter days**...the years ahead...EVEN MORE than he has blessed them so far!

Wouldn't that be grand! And may Jesus receive the praise for it. Amen? Amen.