

## Can A Man Live Again?

### Job 14

Intro: This morning we have one of the great questions in the Bible: "If a man dies, can he live again?" I wonder if you've noticed that the Bible is often most penetrating and profound in its questions. For example, there is the question Jesus asks of his disciples in **Matthew 16:15**, "Who do you say that I am?" That's a probing, personal question. It demands an answer and your answer will determine your eternal destiny.

Or think of the question Jesus asks in **Mark 8:36**, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" It's a penetrating question that cuts straight through the materialistic, he-who-dies-with-the-most-toys-wins philosophy of our world. If you gain the whole world but lose your eternal soul – what is your profit?

The central question of our text this morning is equally pressing. "If a man dies can he live again?" That's a particularly relevant question in a time of pandemic. Over 200,000 people have died so far from the Coronavirus, 50,000 in the United States alone. Those are just estimates – but let's remember that those numbers represent actual people. Every digit represents a real person with a name and a family and a personality – someone who just recently walked and worked and loved and lived among us, and is now gone. Never to return.

The question Job asks here is a question being asked by 200,000 families who have lost a precious part of their life – a beloved father or mother, a cherished husband or wife or son or daughter. And they ask the question through tear-stained eyes and from broken hearts – *"If a man dies, shall he live again?"*

Of course, while the coronavirus has made death seem more real – the human mortality rate remains unchanged at 100%. Everyday people are perishing: from sickness, old age, accidents, suicide, war, and hunger. Every day, people weep over the loss of a loved one. Their cries would be deafening if we could gather them into one sound. In a world full of dying men, this is a profoundly relevant question: *"If a man dies, will he live again?"*

As Christians, we are quick to go the answer – but it is good to pause and feel the weight of the question. We live in a world where most, by far, don't know the answer – and yet they feel the crushing reality of the question as they stand by a grave or funeral pyre. Will I ever see my loved ones face again? Will I ever hear their distinctive laugh, see their distinctive smile? Or is death really and truly the end? Nothing more.

This is not a hypothetical question for Job. He asks it from the ash heap of his life, and in the shadow of his own demise. He believes he is about to die. In chapter 14 Job is reflecting on the matters of life, death and eternity from the perspective of a death bed.

## I. The Facts of Life

<sup>1</sup> "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

<sup>2</sup> He comes out like a flower and withers;  
he flees like a shadow and continues not.

What an epitaph to write over the lives of men – “few of days and full of trouble”. We spend so much time and energy to make it otherwise – we work hard to make our days many and full of comforts. But in the end – this is the always the truth.

### A. Few of Days

Job speaks of what is true for every person “born of woman”, in other words, for every human being, no exceptions. When you are young, 80 or 90 years seems like an incredibly long time. But when you reach those years – you realize that your days are exactly as Job describes them – few. And fleeting.

**Ps 103:15** As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;

<sup>16</sup> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

I have to say that this fact is becoming increasingly clear to me. My life on this earth is a fleeting thing. Dad passed away in January, and it will only be a few short years before I follow after him. We are born like a flower, and in a few years we wither and die. We will flee like a shadow and be no more.

Richard Baxter, a well-known Puritan pastor said of his preaching style: “I preached as a dying man to dying men.” I’ve always thought that was a striking metaphor – a good reminder that we should be earnest in our preaching. We should act like we are dying men preaching to dying men. I’ve always thought it was a very good metaphor - until it dawned on me that it isn’t a metaphor at all. It’s actually a fact. I am a dying man and the only people I ever preach to are dying people. Nothing metaphorical about it.

### B. Full of Trouble

Man’s days are few and full of trouble. Oh, the troubles we experience in this life. Sickness, sin, relational heartache, loss of loved ones, frustration in our work. Thorns and thistles abound. Moses wrote of this poetically in Psalm 90:10

“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty;

yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”  
*“Their span is but toil and trouble.”* This was pressed home to me as a boy growing up on the farm. I loved the farm but, man did we experience trouble.

- Cows and calves died from every imaginable cause and method. PBB wiped out the whole herd.
- Machinery routinely broke, sometimes spectacularly – like the time my brother fell asleep driving the 870 Case down the road, plowed into the ditch and blew out the entire front axle.
- A windstorm blew a portion of the roof off the barn, a fire burned the upstairs bedrooms of the house and a few months after that was repaired, another fire took down the whole thing.

But we could all tell stories of troubles, of losses, and failures and miseries and heartbreak. As it says in Job 5:7, “Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward.”

The question is **“Why?”** Why does it have to be so hard? Why does it have to hurt so much? Why so much pain? Why such short, hard, years and then death? As Job considers the toil and trouble of life, he also considers the reason why life is this way.

### C. Under Judgement

Job knows that the world is the way it is because the world is under the judgment of God. He believes that this is why he is dying – God is judging him.

<sup>3</sup> *And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you?*

<sup>4</sup> *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one.*

David penned similar thoughts in **Psalm 143:2**

*“Enter not into judgment with your servant for no one living is righteous before you.”*

You see, the deepest problem with the world is that we are unclean – and we can’t fix it. Every person born as a descendant of Adam is born “in sin”: with a defiled heart so that we love the wrong things, and a deformed mind so that we believe lies, and a deficient will so that we choose what is evil. This is the great fact and crisis of the world. And there is no fix here on earth. ***“Who can bring an clean thing out of an unclean?”***

**Jeremiah 13:23** *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”*

This is the crisis of our life, and of the world. There is a deep-down defilement in our very nature that has brought mankind under the judgement of God – and we can’t fix it. This is why man’s days are few and full of trouble. And this is why we die.

## II. The Finality of Death

As Job considered his own imminent death – it seemed full of nothing but loss. The death of a person is so final, so irrevocable. Better to be a tree!

<sup>7</sup> “For there is hope for a tree,  
if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,  
and that its shoots will not cease.

<sup>8</sup> Though its root grow old in the earth,  
and its stump die in the soil,

<sup>9</sup> yet at the scent of water it will bud  
and put out branches like a young plant.

A tree might seem dead but, at the scent of water it can come back to life! But not man.

<sup>10</sup> But a man dies and is laid low;  
man breathes his last, and where is he?

<sup>11</sup> As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up,

<sup>12</sup> so a man lies down and rises not again;  
till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep.

Now remember, Job is living approximately around the time of Abraham, 2000 years before Christ. He does not have a Bible. He doesn't have the writings of Moses. He certainly doesn't have a verse like **Philippians 1:21**, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” or **Revelation 14:13**, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” Job doesn't have those verses. Consequently, for Job, and for Old Testament believers in general, death seems much more like a dead end. Sheol, the place of the dead, is routinely described as a place of darkness, loss and gloom.

This is what Job has come to. As he looks back over his life – he sees that, even with all the blessings God had given him – that the banner over his years reads “few and full of trouble.” And now he was dying, under the judgment of God, and, unlike the tree, with no chance of ever coming back into this world.

But in the sorrow of his death bed, somehow, by the work of the Spirit, Job finds another hope. As he prepares to leave this world, he senses the possibility of a world to come.

## III. A Future Reality

<sup>13</sup> Oh that you would hide me in Sheol,  
that you would conceal me until your wrath be past,

that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!  
 As Job contemplates Sheol, the place of the dead, a thought occurs to him – “What if death could actually be a place of relief from wrath, a place of rest until the storm of God’s judgment is past? What if death were actually a form of sleeping – and that God would appoint a time to wake him up? That’s exactly what Job wishes to be true!

And that brings the profound question: ***“If a man dies, shall he live again?”*** Is it possible? Is it feasible that a man could actually die with the hope of coming back to life? If that **were** true – well it would change everything! Then Job could die in peace. He says, *“All the days of my service I would wait till my renewal should come.”*

The word for renewal means change or transformation. It is a magnificent thing to consider. What if death isn’t an ending at all? What if it is part of a process of renewal – sort of like a caterpillar entering into the cocoon soon to emerge as a beautiful butterfly? What if dying wasn’t a dead end – but a door, an entering into a new world and a new life? Better yet, what if death were an entrance into a new, fully reconciled relationship with God?

This is what “renewal” means for Job. In his mind, the primary glory of this renewal would be a renewed, relationship with God! It would involve intimacy and love.

<sup>15</sup> You would call, and I would answer you;  
 you would long for the work of your hands.

The language has the sound of a wish – something being imagined. It’s like he is fantasizing about what would be ideal, amazing, astounding and incredible. As Job, in his suffering, feels the pressing weight of what he believes is God’s wrath – it must have been such a glorious thing to consider the possibility of God longing for him – like a parent longing for a long-lost child and calling to him to come.

Wouldn’t it be something if death could end like that – with God calling his children because he longed for them and they would answer Him from their grave and run to him to live with him forever! Wouldn’t it be something if this were true!?

But how could it possibly be true?? Sin is the great obstacle standing between a dying man and eternal life – and we can’t remove our sin! But what is impossible with men is possible with God! Job believes that God is willing and able to overcome even his sin.

<sup>16</sup> For then you would number my steps; you would not keep watch over my sin;  
<sup>17</sup> my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.

In other words, God would remove his sins from him – as far as the east is from the west. His sin would be covered, sealed up, done away with – never again to interrupt his relationship with His God. And because Job’s sin is removed – death is destroyed! That man will rise again!

O what if this could be possible? What if this could be true?? And of course, the Scriptures are written *precisely* to convince us of this one thing – that this very thing is true! Not only is Job’s wish possible – it is an accomplished FACT in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Listen to what Jesus says in **John 5:24**

<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

How is that possible? How is it possible that simply believing in Jesus Christ could have such astounding, incredible, eternal implications??

Jesus covered over our sin – the word for that is “atone” – by shedding his blood for us.

- **Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,
- **Revelation 1:5** “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...”
- **Romans 5:9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

This is precisely what Jesus wants us to understand and believe – that His atoning death and victorious resurrection have made Job’s wish a reality for all those who come to Him. Jesus’ death becomes our hiding place! In his dying He covered over our sin by paying the penalty of our guilt. And in His rising He sealed our justification and our glorification. Because He lives, we too shall live!

The gospel’s answer to Job’s question is better than Job could have imagined. The question he asks is, “If a man die, shall he live again?” The answer isn’t simply yes. It’s better than that. Do you remember the question Jesus asks of weeping Martha at the

tomb of her dead brother? He said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believed in me will **never die.**" (John 11:25-26). Those are astounding words!

Press this home. Move this from your head to your heart! Think of what God has done for you in Jesus Christ! The epitaph of your life has been radically altered! No longer does the inscription over your days read "few and full of trouble" but rather "unending and full of glory!"

The troubles we do face in this world are "momentary afflictions that cannot compare to the glory that will be revealed in us. Think about it!

Spring mornings can be incredibly beautiful. What if every beautiful morning was just a preview and promise of a coming eternal dawn?

How would your life change if you actually grasped the secret of the world – that glory lies just behind the veil?

How could your life change if you were convinced that God has so loved you in Jesus Christ that he gave his own Son to death – so that you will never die? That in Jesus Christ, you really and truly have eternal life and so you need not fear death ever again. The Bible tells you that this is exactly what is true. This is what Jesus Christ has accomplished. He is the resurrection and the life. He died and rose again so that a man may never die – and thus need never fear anything again.

There is just one question remaining – it's the question Jesus asked Martha. "Do you believe this?" Do you believe this Martha – right now, in the very face of death, are you willing to see the unseen and believe the impossible – simply because I say it is true. "Do you believe this?"

And he asks that question of you. Do you believe that Jesus all that Scripture says he is - and that he has accomplished all that Scripture says he accomplished? Then Job's wish will be your reality. When you die, your soul will go immediately into the presence of the Lord, and your body will sleep until God the Father calls.

"Death cannot destroy forever, from our fears, cares and tears, it will us deliver. It will close life's mournful story, make a way, that we may, enter heavenly glory."