

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

### **It could be worse?**

February 2nd has come and gone. It was Groundhogs day. Somewhere way up north they’ve consult a little critter in order to give them a glimmer of hope that winter may be cut short and enter into an early spring. If the Groundhog sees its shadow and retreats to hibernate - that means there will be another six weeks of winter. If however the groundhog doesn't that means there will be an early spring. Groundhog day wasn't much to celebrate until a movie came out in the 90's with the same title.

*Groundhog Day* - in the movie Bill Murray relives the same day over and over again. He's trapped. Some days are the worst days of his life, then he tries to end the cycle through suicide only to wake up the next morning in the same hotel room, the same day, the same nightmare. It couldn't be any worse. There is no escape. There is nothing he can do about it and that's the part that sounds like the life of Job. Job couldn't find any comfort. He couldn't find any exit from what seems to be an endless cycle of suffering. Our reading is depressing. But life couldn't get any worse for him. So the words, “It could be worse,” seem insulting rather than comforting.

I doubt any of us have suffered to the same extent as that of Job. But there are days when we question if life could get any worse - and then it does. At those moments where do you turn for comfort? A cute little critter? A warm fuzzy feeling that gives thanks for being better than others, after all, “It could be worse.” Those words and even that groundhog don't offer any hope or comfort. We know that even when life can't get any worse in Christ it does get better.

But those words, “It could be worse,” certainly wouldn’t comfort Job who seems to be worse off than anyone. Remember what has already happened to him. He had everything but suddenly without warning it was all taken away from him. Sabeans raided his oxen and donkeys. Fire fell from the sky and burned up his sheep. Then Chaldeans raided his camels. A mighty wind struck the corners of a house killing all of his children, sons and daughters. It looks like God’s hand has gone out against Job.

But it’s not over yet. God allows Satan to afflict Job’s health and he scrapes the sores on his body with a broken piece of pottery to gain some semblance of relief. His wife wishes he would just die. His friends come and accuse him of horrific sins, badgering him for the next 36 chapters. After an endless cycle of suffering. It could be worse hardly seems like a sufficient source of comfort, like consulting a little critter for some semblance of hope that the winter nightmare might be over. It’s no wonder that early on in the book of Job we find him pouring out his heart.

He really is suffering and struggling. The word he uses to describe hard service is a military term. It’s like basic training that never ends. He longs for a bit of rest. Even a bit of shade would be great because that would mean the day is coming to a close, the work would be over, and wages - comfort, rest, relief would be in sight but the days seem like an eternity and stretch into months and the nights aren’t any better as he spends his evening tossing and turning unable to find a comfortable position. His skin is calloused and broken, tearing with every movement. There is no comfort in an endless cycle of the same day over and over again. It couldn’t get any worse.

Job suffered. We suffer. When we look at his life we realize, “It could get a lot worse.” Our life might be more like Job’s. So... yes life could be worse. The cup is half full crowd agrees. We are thankful that life is better than it could be. Think of the people out there who have it worse off. Be positive. But what do you say to those for whom life couldn’t possibly get any worse? What would you say to Job? “It could be worse.” I fail to see how.

The problem with gaining comfort at someone else's miserable state is that it always could be worse. To base any comfort on the fact that we aren’t suffering at the moment to the same extent as someone else another is to look for comfort based on what we can see and not what we hear in his word. That’s scary because if we base our worth on the failure of others what happens when we are the failures? When life doesn’t go as planned do we assume God has abandoned us? Moreover the motivation, “It could be worse,” is entirely guilt driven, not gospel centered, as if demanding, “You don’t have anything to complain about. Why aren’t you grateful life isn’t worse?”

There is very likely someone out there suffering more than you. Like those up North and Punxsutawney Phil who just predicted another six weeks of winter - when by all appearances Spring is already here for us. But even in the likelihood that you are suffering as much as Job if not more - there is hope can comfort.

Not because, "It could be worse," but because, "It will be better." With God in control even those very bad moments can be used for your good. God is able to use even the bad and wicked things that happen to us or done by us for good. God is in control and that means, "It will be better."

If there is anywhere to look for comfort and hope in this world it's found where Job is still looking, ***"Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath;"*** My life is as a poor frail creature. It's like a breath here one moment and then gone another. His confidence doesn't stand on his health, his strength, his success, or how much better his life has been from others but on his God. His Redeemer. Even in these miserable moments he still looks to God to save him.

Just 12 chapters of abuse later, Job proclaims, ***"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another."***

That didn't come because somewhere out there in the ether, someone, somewhere, was suffering more than Job. It came because of God's promise made to his people, "I will fix this." The devil intended to destroy this world. The devil intended to destroy Job's faith. God took the very worst that the devil could do and used it for Job's blessing and benefit. That's not the only time God took the worst that mankind could imagine and use it for good. On the cross Jesus became that man of sorrows familiar with suffering. Jesus, however, knew why he was suffering.

Job never found out. God came, questioned Job but never answered his demands to know, "Why?" Job never discovered how the Devil tormented him. God never told him he had a plan and a purpose for his life.

But we know how the book ends and that Satan is never heard from again. The pain and suffering he's inflicted on countless souls will be gone. That's the way the book of Job ends. That's how the Bible ends as well. It only gets better. There is no promise that life will work out. Jesus has made the promise ***"In this world you will have trouble but take heart... I have overcome the world"*** But no matter what happens, God will never leave us or forsake us. He can take whatever comes our way and use it for good. He will accomplish his will no matter

what. His will is to restore the perfect world he once created. His will is eternal life in heaven with him forever.

The next time the devil intends to destroy your faith. Don't compare your life to others. Don't guilt yourself into being positive because life is better than others. Instead of looking to the world around us - look to the words and promises of God. And then encourage others living through a recurring nightmare, those whose life couldn't get any worse with these words, "It will be better." Life will come to a close here on earth and we will never hear from the devil again and that is all God's doing.

So instead of a recurring nightmare where we long for sleep but get none, where we long for rest but never find it, we will wake up each morning and it can't possibly get any better. That groundhog Phil made his prediction and it could be worse but we live in California. No matter what the weather we can always be sure that God cares for us and can make us of all things including snow or allergies for good.