

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
August 18 & 19, 2012  
John Crosby  
Life Verses: Job 29:11-17  
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Legacy takes on all different shapes, doesn't it? Learning to play the violin from your father. Going with your mother to Africa, to Zambia, to see how God's love wants to spread around the world. Leah [Leah Anderson who played the violin music at the offering] is learning all kinds of legacies. You never know when you are going to need them because none of us knows how long we have on Planet Earth.

We have had a fun time this summer. We've taken the Saturday night service and moved it into the chapel, and it's just made it real for us and come to life, but yesterday we had to move back in here because Paul Tshihamba was asked to do a special wedding of a young couple. Right after the engagement, Patrick, the groom, learned that he had stage 4 cancer. His fiancé Katie and he had to work through it, but they decided after months of treatment and prayer and conversation that they were going to be married for as long as God gives them. They were going to create a short season of love as an example that love is stronger than despair. It was a holy moment in the chapel. Part of that reinforces this idea that God speaks to you. God wants to say something to you that will lodge not just in your head but in your heart.

All this summer we have been talking about ways that God speaks to us in what we call life verses or verses that give life. We asked different staff members to share the verses that have given them life for their whole life, and we are asking you to come up here after the service today during the closing hymn, or after the service, to write a part of what your verse of life might be because you see how it takes us in different seasons of life.

<sup>13</sup> For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

What was that about?

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If they fall down, they can help each other up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

A different season. And yet another one,

<sup>15</sup> "...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

God speaks to us and when His Word lodges in our hearts, it changes our lives. Sometimes you don't see that until the end of life and so, since I was going to talk about legacy, I thought it would be helpful to look at where some of those legacies are, gathered together in cemeteries. I thought I would share with you a few ways, legacies, of how people wanted to be remembered.

Or maybe how they did *not* want to be remembered. I started actually with an infomercial. How many of you have seen an infomercial on that seemingly endless, endless display of this product (*slide shown of Ginsu knives*). And just when you think it is finally over, the guy says, "But wait, there's more!" And on and on. Well, the creator of that infomercial was named Barry Becher. He created the phrase, "But wait, there's more!" The family is contemplating etching "But wait, there's more!" on his tombstone as his life words. I hope they do it.

It would be a little bit like Merv Griffin. Merv used to say, "I'll be right back after the message." His tombstone says, "I will not be right back after the message." Sometimes an epitaph summarizes a life in ways that are interesting. Sometimes the grave can tell what people really did during their lives, and sometimes that seems a little odd. Here's one from a long time ago, turn of the century. The gravestone of a very young man, apparently a very attractive young man, says "Lost life by stab in falling on ink eraser evading six young women trying to give him birthday kisses [in the office of the] Metropolitan Life Building." Now the contrasts in that one paragraph are just unbelievable. A boy running away from birthday kisses, dying in the MetLife Building, and that short life will be remembered forever like that.

Sometimes gravestones actually make a statement about the person. I saw one that said, "Here lies Ezekial Aikle. Age 102. The good die young." Think about that for a second. Or this one from another culture. Gustava Guzman's family had the tombstone inscribed, "Rest in peace. A memory from all your sons (except Ricardo who did not pay any money)." A little window of insight from the past. Sometimes people want to follow the Biblical narrative which talks about Cain and Abel and the sacrifice of Abel that was good. "Yet though he is dead, still he speaks." Our last gravestone here is of someone who is dead and yet speaks. "I told you I was sick." I had someone come up to me yesterday after the service and say, "Clearly that was written by someone who was married to a doctor," and she spoke from personal experience.

We all want to be remembered. We all want to believe that our lives, however long or short, have meaning and impact. How do you want to be remembered? This is a place, this community that ought to be where we think about life and death and life beyond death and how the face of God sees everything that is done or said or thought and how God judges that and wants to redeem that. So I've been learning about legacy. I am the only one who is preaching more than once in this life verses series. The staff thought that since I am now over 60 years old, I have lived long enough to have more than one of these life verses. I thought of the verse that I would like to have on my gravestone, and I've been pondering it. It comes out of life experience, doesn't it?

I am sorry that my friend Stan Geyer is not here to hear this sermon. He would have loved it. Stan used to sit right over there. Stan, younger than I, died unexpectedly of a heart attack just this last month, and when I spoke at his funeral, I thought of what I imagined should go on his gravestone. Stan and I both loved the story that Jim Dobson tells about the life of Pete Maravich, the basketball player, who became a friend of Dobson's in Colorado Springs. After Maravich's retirement, they would play pickup ball at noon. In his early 40s, Maravich was waiting for Dobson to come out to play ball. Dobson starts to walk across the court and say, "Hey, Pete." Pete turns to him and falls dead on the court of a heart attack at age 41 and that day is changed forever. Dobson has to go and tell the still-young wife. Then he cancels all his appointments and goes home and waits for his son who had idolized Maravich.

Maravich had come into their family, and Dobson's son wanted to be just like him. Dobson waits till his son is home from school and takes him back to the kitchen. They sit down and he says, "Son, I've got some bad news. Pete had a heart attack, and he's dead." And in one of those times where it doesn't matter if you are a teenager or not, Dobson's son bursts into tears. Dobson reaches forward and gives his son a hug that seems to last forever. They sit in the kitchen and just talk about Pete. Then Dobson turns to his son and says, "You know, son, some day somebody is going to come to you and say that I'm dead just like Pete, and I want you to remember this, son. Two things. By the time you hear that message, I have already walked through the gates of heaven, and I am just fine. And I want you to remember that the most important thing in my life is that I am waiting just inside the gates of heaven for you. The most important thing in my life is that you walk through the gates of heaven." I have probably used that illustration two or three times in the last 12 or 15 years, and whenever I tell the story, I cannot look over there because Stan Geyer is crying. It went deep into what made him tick. And if I saw Stan cry, then I'd cry, too.

Tony Campolo spoke here one time. Tony is a famous advocate for the poor. We were in the old sanctuary, and the place was just packed. He gets to a point in his sermon where he is saying, "I know I'm closer to the end than I am to the beginning and when I die, I have this image that it will be like in Matthew 25 when the Good Shepherd comes and separates out the sheep and the goats. Everybody stands in front of Jesus and Jesus goes, "Goat!" "Sheep!" "Sheep!" "Goat!" "Goat!" "Goat!" And Tony Campolo says as only he can, "Finally in this dream, I am standing there looking up at Jesus and Jesus asks, "Do you have anybody to speak for you?" "Then I wake up," Campolo says. That is his legacy. What is your legacy? Who will speak for you?

All that has been going through my mind. May I just give you my idea? If I die before you do, this is what I would like at my memorial service. It is from an odd place in the Bible. It is from the Book of Job, the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter. All the great things in his life have been stripped away from Job but instead of cursing God, he reflects. Job says,

<sup>2</sup> "How I long for the months gone by,  
for the days when God watched over me,  
<sup>3</sup> when his lamp shone on my head  
and by his light I walked through darkness!  
<sup>4</sup> Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,  
when God's intimate friendship blessed my house,  
<sup>5</sup> when the Almighty was still with me  
and my children were around me,  
<sup>6</sup> when my path was drenched with cream  
and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil.  
<sup>7</sup> "When I went to the gate of the city  
and took my seat in the public square,  
<sup>8</sup> the young men saw me and stepped aside  
and the old men rose to their feet;  
<sup>9</sup> the chief men refrained from speaking  
and covered their mouths with their hands;  
<sup>10</sup> the voices of the nobles were hushed,  
and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

And this is the part that I want for me,

- <sup>11</sup> Whoever heard me spoke well of me,  
and those who saw me commended me,  
<sup>12</sup> because I rescued the poor who cried for help,  
and the fatherless who had none to assist them.  
<sup>13</sup> Those who were dying blessed me;  
I made the widow's heart sing.  
<sup>14</sup> I put on righteousness as my clothing;  
justice was my robe and my turban.  
<sup>15</sup> I was eyes to the blind  
and feet to the lame.  
<sup>16</sup> I was a father to the needy;  
I took up the case of the stranger.  
<sup>17</sup> I broke the fangs of the wicked  
and snatched the victims from their teeth.

I crave that. I want not only to be known as that kind of person before I die, I want to *be* that kind of person. I don't want it to be on reputation. I want it to be who I really am. I want *you* to know who *you* really want to be. I want you to be what you really think would not only please God and bless other people but would bring you fully alive. I think it brings me fully alive when I hear, "I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth." I love that. I come alive. Yours should be different from mine. What would God want for you?

Well, if you have one of these life verses, you sit in it. You go back to it again and again, and as I went back to it, I learned different things from Job. I learned that our lives are defined by pain as much as by accomplishment. That it is the totality of our journey and not just the highlight reel, not just the places where we mess up, not just the beginning or the end. It is the whole thing. From Job I heard God say that over time, the opinion of others will capture some of the truth about you. All of you are limited to know just one side of me and I just one side of you. The only one who sees it all is the God who loves us, so my life ought to be played for an audience of one and not 5,000.

Then I learned from Job that what we invest in, what we invest our time and our heart and our effort into, shows what our real priorities are and over time, and sooner or later, maybe not even until after we die, sooner or later one way or another, they will be exposed. My prayer today is that you will go home and think about what legacy you would like to write today in your Bible that people will see when they thumb through it after you are dead and say, "Yes, that was her. She wanted to be like that." "Yeah, that was him. That's how I remember him." What would God say to you that you want to put in your book of life, and how would you create a legacy?

I think you have to start with the end. You have to say, "I want to be like that," and then start to live toward that. If you are 94 years old, or even if you are 11 years old, you are already creating your legacy. I thought this through and this is how I think I would advise somebody to create their legacy. I would say, first, examine your life, what Admiral Stockdale called the brutal truth. Look for the brutal truth of your life. If the proverbial bus hits you as you leave today, what is your legacy going to be? You can't know where you are going if you don't know where you are. Examine what is most important to you. What would others say about your life?

Second, I believe that if you want to create a legacy, you should explore your world. You may not be called to be Mother Teresa. You may not be called to be Bill Gates. You are called to be

the best *you* that you can be so explore *your* world for the places where God wants you to make your mark, the opportunities for you to bring light and life, and then let God take care of the outcome. You don't create your legacy so much as you walk in that path and others and God will determine the outcome.

The third thing I would do after examining my life and exploring my world to see where I might make a difference is that I would pray more. That may sound weird, but I would pray more. I would pray for courage because I believe that nothing significant comes without change and change is pain. Change involves sacrifice and sometimes confrontation. You will not have a legacy unless you pray for the courage to step out of the middle. Legacies are not formed in the middle of the path. I am not saying they are formed by the famous. That is not it at all. Legacies are formed by people who will move out of the center of the stream and pray for courage to do something different.

That leads to No. 4. If I were going to create a legacy, I would encourage you—dream big; start small. Dream big! Why would you want to say, “Oh, I would really love a third-rate life”? “I would like to live a not-so-miserable life.” I would not like to have the outcome of my life be that people would go, “Thank God that’s over.” Dream big! Not headlines big. Kingdom-of-God big. I would like to see my family restored to health. I would like to see the children that I bump into say, “That’s what I want to be like when I grow up.” I would like to hear the workplace that I leave say, “The place isn’t the same without her.” Dream big but start small! Last year one of our staff ran into a spiritual brick wall. Came in to me and said, “I sort of believe this. I’m not really sure. This God stuff is on autopilot now.” We went through a season of asking, “How can you put into your life some of the things that will help you have faith when belief is stretched?” Live faithfully even when the emotions are gone. He got help and is doing wonderfully. He came back to me this last month or so and said, “Wow! I’m in a different place” and I said, “That’s great! You have taken the first step.” You know what the most important step in a journey is? It is the *second* step—I’m going to *keep* going. Don’t jump to the end. When you dream big, start small, setting direction and pace and repetition into your life that will change things over time, no matter how much time God gives you.

That ties into No. 5. I believe people who have legacies have committed themselves publically as Job did. We wouldn’t know about Job’s dreams unless Job told people who were close to him. If you would like to be different, you need to tell somebody what different would look like so they can tell you if you are making progress or not. As Job shared his dreams, the sharing of it increased their power. The hearers were different because they heard the dreams and the speaker was different because—“Oh, golly!” Pastors say, “Oh, golly” when they are afraid to say, “Oh, God!” “Oh, golly!” “Oh, God, now I’ve told somebody else.”

No. 6. People who have legacies are infectious people. Part of Jim Doudiet’s legacy here, I’ll just make him squirm for a second, is that he believes in a life of Godly stewardship. He has infected me with a disease. I see the way that people use their money differently 15 years after meeting Jim because he has infected me. Sometimes the power in our lives comes when we join other people to a greater cause—when we challenge others, when we bring something out in other people, when we cheer other people on, when we model. Remember the quote I used from Jim Dobson, “The most important thing for me as a parent is that you walk through the gates of heaven.”

I went into Starbucks yesterday. The barista, who is a member of our church, writes a different saying up on the chalkboard each week. This week the saying was perfect. "We keep telling parents to get off of our back and only later realize that with all their flaws, they are the only ones who always had our back." Wouldn't you like that to be your legacy? As a grandparent or an aunt or a parent? Wouldn't you like that to be your legacy even if it came today with the price of a phone call where you had to apologize or say, "I don't know if I told you lately...." Even if it came at the cost of a stamp when you wrote a note that would live after you, apologizing or praising or encouraging because that's infectious.

I know bad-character is infectious. I have children. Too often they are like their father. But the other day I was somewhere with Katy, one of my girls. We are in a checkout line, and I find myself chatting up the checkout clerk. "Oh, I love that! Where did you get those earrings? That is so nice. You know, I find that this time of the day it is hard to stay awake. How do you stay awake?" My daughter is behind me and her eyes are rolling. "Oh, Dad, you're killing me. You're embarrassing me. Can I just pretend that I am with somebody else?"

And I realized as I watched my daughter's eyes that I had seen eyes roll like that before. My eyes. My father had done that. Over and over at checkout counters, he would stop for just a second and it wasn't like he was going to get a better deal or get faster service, but he would stop and make the checkout girl feel just for a second like she was a human being. That was because my father was a salesman, and he knew rejection and what that felt like, and he knew the power of encouragement. Now my children are infected with the disease. They can't help it.

My daughter Maggie just spent a year in Guatemala with the International Justice Mission, a group that our church supports. IJM reaches out to the poorest of the poor around the world, those who have been mangled by injustice, and they bring legal help to them. In Guatemala, the signature sin is sex abuse, often inside families but even in neighborhoods. People are quiet about this sexual abuse because it is often accompanied by threats, "If you tell, I will hurt your parents." "If you tell, bad things will happen." IJM tries to bring this terrible thing to light. Maggie's job was to take the testimony of children and translate their stories from Spanish into English so that the English-speaking lawyers could prepare a defense. She would be writing down these incredibly sickening things that adults had done to the children who trusted them, and she would start to cry. In that little office where children came for aftercare, the kids would sneak under her desk and steal M&M'S and walk away laughing. She called her mom and said, "Mom, I think I have to see a counselor." The infection that marks a Godly legacy does not always come from naturally good areas. Could I infect you this morning just a little bit? Could I infect you?

The archbishop of the Melkite Church in Palestine, a subdivision of Catholicism, is coming to the United States next month. His name is Archbishop Elias Chacour. He is a two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee. He has been known as a peace activist for over 50 years for trying to bring Jews, Muslims, and Christians together. He is adored as a saint and vilified as a traitor and he, I think, by the grace of God is to come and preach here in the middle of September. He is going to talk about how the God who invites us home invites us to reconcile. If Elias were to have a life verse, this man who saw his father and mother kicked out of their house in the upper Galilee—they lived where Jesus lived, never to be able to return—if he were to have a life verse, it would be this one from the Book of Matthew,

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

His story is told in a book called *Blood Brothers*. I asked four or five friends in the congregation if they would buy a book. They said, "Sure. How much does it cost?" And I said, "Why don't you make it a thousand dollars, a couple thousand bucks." So they expensed a book for themselves so that you can have a copy free. As you leave today, we would ask each single or family unit, to take a copy of *Blood Brothers* from the round table. It is a great story. It goes fast. It is powerful. It will let you hear Archbishop Elias Chacour better when he comes to speak next month and I believe by the grace of God, it will infect you with the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just a last thing on legacy. It's about tone. When you say, "This is what I want my life to be," it sounds noble and that's good, but it can also sound like "Look at me," and that's bad. I want my legacy to be that people will say, "He was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. He helped the powerless." But it is not just about me. I want to be like the beggar who has received a loaf of bread sharing it with another beggar. That is what a legacy is to look like.

When Tony Campolo told that story about his own sense of Judgment Day and said, "So there I am in front of the throne of heaven and the Shepherd is there and asks, "Who'll speak for you?" Tony says, "You know what I'm going to say? I'll say I sponsor about 16 kids, and I'm going to say, 'This one and this one and this one, you. Come here. Stand here. I've been paying fifty bucks a month for each one of you for years. Come and tell them what I did.'" He says, "I want to be surrounded by the children that Jesus loves and make sure that Jesus lets me in." His legacy is those children.

I believe that you and I will stand in front of Jesus someday, but I think Jesus will not say up or down depending on how many kids we sponsor. I think Jesus will save us by grace because we have asked. Forgiveness and love. I believe He will want to hear the voices of those who will speak up for us like they spoke up for Oskar Schindler at the end of *Schindler's List*, saying, "Oh, you saved my life. My grandmother is here because of you." Those people will surround him in front of the throne of heaven.

Legacy takes into account that this is an eternal battle. The apostle Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, if it is only for this life we have hope, we are fools and idiots to be pitied, but if we are building a legacy that lasts forever, our lives here and now need to be different. Another part of this same great Book is where Job is told to curse God. Job says, "No!"

<sup>25</sup> I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that in the end...

on the last day,

....he will stand upon the earth.  
<sup>26</sup> My flesh may be destroyed,  
yet from this body...

even though I die,

I will see God.

Job knows and now, so do you. The only legacy that matters is that when your eyes close for the very last time, you know that they will open again. The eyes of your heart will open. As your body lies there, the eyes of your heart will open and see the Great Shepherd, and the only legacy that matters will be when we hear Jesus say, "Well done. Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done! Come now into what I have planned for you." Let's pray.

Lord, Jesus, it is odd in a death-defying, youth-deifying culture to talk about our legacy, the product of a life that goes too fast and yet, Lord Jesus, we believe that it will bring us to life, life with You. We believe that if we are to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant," it will be because we came to You and followed You. The love that would not let us go did not let us go, the Shepherd came for us when we were lost and when He said, "Follow Me," we looked for others we could bring along the way. Bless us. Bless others through us. Let us hear Your voice now and forever more. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we pray. And all God's children said,

All: Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*