

*Outline: Takes the breath right out of you  
So remember to breathe*

**Introduction:**

Sometimes life feels like we're living in the land of Oz – one big nasty dream where we're trying to get home and away from all our problems or our troubles. If only we could click our heals together or get a glimpse of the Emerald City it would all be over. Then we realize that Oz is just a fantasy, a dream, that it's not real, and life is.

The bulletin doesn't have a type-o. We live in a real place, not like Oz, but in Uz. We don't know exactly where Uz was, but it was somewhere in the Middle East, most likely, in the area that has dominated the news and our conversations and for some of us, maybe even our lives the past 20 years. What we do know about Uz? It was the place where the Old Testament believer Job lived. Here are the first four verses of the book of Job (read 1:1-4). Now we're not in the land of Uz right now, but in a sense, we are always living in it, because the life Job lived is very much like the life we live.

**1. Takes your breath away**

Things were great for job – he had wealth and health and a loving family and was well respected, “the greatest man in the East.”

But the verses in our lesson for today come from a man who sounds anything but blessed. Have you ever had the wind knocked out of you – perhaps when you are going across the middle and you get drilled, or your boyhood buddy sucker punched you or you just fell out of bed and landed on your back? I had a friend who would always have an “asthma attack” during the toughest part of basketball practice. I always thought Kurt knew how to play the asthma thing just right, until I saw him have a major, gotta go to the hospital now attack. It was terrifying to watch. The breath was sucked right out of him. The verses in our lesson come from Job who just got the wind knocked out of him. This is his “I'm not in Kansas anymore moment.” Things were bad?

First he lost his wealth (Read Job 1:13-17). Then he lost his family (Read Job 1:18-19). Next Satan took his health away from him (Read Job 2:7-8). Now you know what he means when he said, “My body is covered with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering (7:5).” Things don't get any better. His wife curses him (Job 1:9). Then finally his three friends come along to comfort him. Their message? It's something like this: “You must have really screwed up to get this all from God. You better confess to God or it will get even worse.” With friends who accuse like that, who needs enemies.

Now you understand Job's response to those friends. He's trying to get them to understand what he is going through, to get them to sympathize with him just a bit, to try and explain his innocence. He compares living in the land of Uz to

- Hard military service (v.1), which is no picnic but is a matter of life and death.
- To long empty days of futility, working like a hired man who has nothing to show for his work or even a slave who can only look forward to the evening shadows and then end of the day.
- To long nights of tossing and turning, worrying and being filled with anxiety, wondering if he'll ever fall asleep, dreading the morning when he will have to get up again and face the misery.

That’s life in the land of Uz. Sound familiar? It should because it is the same land you and I live in, the same land Adam and Eve lived in. Remember God’s conversation with the first couple after they sinned? To Eve God said, “The greatest thing that happens in life, the giving of a new life, bring a child into the world will also be one of the most painful.” Then he tells her this wonderful thing called family won’t be so wonderful. “You will want your husband to love you but he won’t. In fact there will be times when he rules over you. “ After than not so joyful news God turned to Adam and said, “With painful toil you will endure all the days of your life. And when it’s over, the breath will be taken right of you for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

We live in that same land of Uz – a land where there are thorns and thistles, where Satan is the prince of darkness, where there is cancer and divorce and unemployment, where days of work never seem to end and there are nights where you never fall asleep because you have so much on your mind.

This past Friday, I met a man who lived in the land of Uz. His name is Robert Lippelt who splits time between the summers of South Dakota and the winters of Phoenix. As he was making his way south for winter, Robert got in a horrible accident. He is in Kindred Care because he needs a trach to help him breathe. He can’t walk. He can’t talk so well. He has no family. He has had the breath taken right out of him. And he is a Christian. But even Christians live in a world tainted with sin. With much suffering, the Bible says, we will enter the kingdom of God.

That’s tough – but that’s living in the land of Uz.

Ready for a little lighter moment? Do you remember Scarecrow’s question:

Do you suppose we will meet any wild animals? Mmm... we might... says the Tinman.  
Any animals that eat... s – s- straw? Some, but mostly lions and tigers and bears.  
Lions? Yes. And tigers? Yes... and bears. Oh my...

And what were they missing, Dorothy and her companions?

## 2. So remember to breathe

See if you remember. “What makes a king out of a slave? What makes the flag on the mast to wave? What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist or the dusky dusk? What makes the muskrat guard his musk? What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder? What makes the dawn come up like thunder? What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the “ape” in apricot? What have they got that I ain’t got???

Exactly! Courage.

The lion was lacking courage, listen to what Job was lacking: “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.” “Without hope.”

Job compared life to a weaver’s shuttle before he expressed his lack of hope and courage. A weaver’s shuttle is something a weaver uses – duh? To weave yarn and to make beautiful rugs and sweaters and things. As the weaver pumps his foot the machine weaves things together – rags stick up all over, loose ends are out of place, what the weaver sees isn’t the most beautiful. But when the weaver is done, she flips over her work and there is the finished product, beautiful colors woven perfectly together.

Job’s life would turn out beautiful under God’s hand and direction, for God will not break and bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering candle (Isaiah reference). And God would not allow Job to break either. In fact, if there is any glimpse of hope in this lesson for today, it’s this: while Job’s faith was weak, almost at the breaking point, his faith was still there, leading him to pray, leading him to plead, “Remember, O god, that my

life is but a breath.” And God did remember. Job would later receive his wealth back and be given a new family and live another 140 years. Job would later boldly confess, “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end I will see him with my own eyes. I and not another.” (Job 19:23ff.)

And God remembered you too. He came into this world and breathed our stale and sinful air. In this ugly world he lived a beautiful life that God now counts as our own. Jesus is the one who died on the cross, fighting for every breath until he finally breathed his last, so your life and breath and soul might never end. And the end? Not a chance. Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples and here’s how the Bible described their first conversation: “Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven.’”

Jesus gives you the very breath of his Spirit in baptism and through his Word and the message of his love. Here he breathes into you forgiveness and hope and courage and life. And so the Apostle Paul says, “Suffering produces patience, patience perseverance, perseverance comfort and comfort hope.”

So don’t forget to breathe. The trainer in one of my workout tapes says that. “The tip of the day is “Don’t forget to breathe.” It will help your endurance, your stamina, your strength. Why not spiritually do the same thing? Exhale your sins by confessing them to God, breathe out your troubles in prayer to God and then inhale his forgiveness, his love, his strength and simply live with joy knowing that all things are in his hands.

I mentioned Robert Lippelt before. How would you answer the question he asked me the other day after we read these verse from Job: “Do you think it’s OK for me to pray that God takes me to heaven? I know his will is done but is that all right?” My answer? I told him I didn’t think it was a whole lot different than Job’s prayer. Your asking God to have mercy, to give peace, to keep his promises, to remember you.

And until he answers that prayer, remember to breathe, because life in the land of Uz can take your breath away. And then when you’re not in Kansas anymore, when you are standing before city with the golden streets, your breath will be taken away. Amen.

SDG – Phil Sievert

*Remember this was written to be spoken (don’t judge the grammar too harshly). If you wish to pass it on to others let me know so I may edit it to be read and list my resources.*