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MEDITATIONS
on
THE HISTORY of JOB

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INTRODUCTORY

IN our meditations on the First Psalm we have dwelt on "Blessed Prosperity." But all GOD'S dealings are full of blessing; He is good, and doeth good; good only, and continually. The believer who has taken the LORD as his SHEPHERD, can assuredly say in the words of the twenty-third Psalm, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever;" or, taking the marginal reading of the Revised Version, "Only goodness and mercy shall follow me." Hence, we may be sure that days of adversity are still days of prosperity also, and are full of blessing.

The believer does not need to wait until he sees the reason of GOD'S affective dealings with him ere he is satisfied; he knows that all things work together for good to them that love GOD; that all GOD'S dealings are those of a loving FATHER, who only permits that which for the time being is grievous, in order to accomplish results that cannot be achieved in any less painful way. The wise and trustful child of God rejoices in tribulation, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience," experience, hope-- a hope that "maketh not ashamed; because the love of GOD is shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY GHOST which is given unto us."

The history of Job is full of instruction, and should teach us many lessons of deep interest and great profit. The veil is taken away from the unseen world, and we learn much of the power of our great adversary; but also of his powerlessness apart from the permission of GOD our FATHER.

GOD'S TESTIMONY AND CHALLENGE

"The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD." Job 1:21

In the 8th verse of the 1st chapter, GOD Himself bears testimony to His servant; "that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth GOD, and escheweth evil"; and in

the 2nd chapter and the 3rd verse, He repeats the same testimony, adding: "still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst Me against him, to destroy him without cause." Stronger testimony to the life which GOD'S grace enabled Job to live can scarcely be imagined. The chastisement that came upon him is declared to have been without cause so far as his life and spirit were concerned. Let us thank GOD that the same grace which enabled Job, so long ago, to live a life that pleased GOD, and received His repeated commendation, is unchanged; and that by it we may also live lives that will be well-pleasing to Him with whom we have to do.

Satan would very frequently harass the believer in times of sorrow and trial by leading him to think that GOD is angry with him-- that this is a punishment for some unknown offense, and many of the comforts and consolations that might otherwise be enjoyed may thus be clouded. Do we not rather see from the Word of GOD that He is like a glad father, delighting to be able to encourage a strong, healthy son to undertake some athletic feat which will entail arduous effort and careful training, or to stimulate him to prepare for a difficult literary examination by a prolonged and toilsome course of study, knowing he will obtain honors and permanent advantage from his attainments? So, our HEAVENLY FATHER delights to trust a trustworthy child with a trial in which he can bring great glory to GOD, and through which he will receive permanent enlargement of heart, and blessing for himself and others.

Take the case of Abraham: GOD so thoroughly trusted him, that He was not afraid to call upon His servant to offer up his well-beloved son. And here, in the case of Job, it was not Satan who challenged GOD about Job, but GOD who challenged the arch-enemy, the accuser of the brethren, to find any flaw in his character, or failure in his life. In each case grace triumphed, and in each case patience and fidelity were abundantly rewarded; but more of this anon.

THE UNSEEN HEDGE

The reply of Satan is noteworthy. He does not need to ask, "Which Job?" or, "Where does he live?" He had considered GOD'S servant, and evidently knew all about him. How came it that he was so well acquainted with this faithful man of GOD? It may have come about in this way: those subordinate spirits of evil who are evidently under the control of Satan had in vain tried ordinary means of temptation with the patriarch. Probably reporting their want of success to some of the principalities and powers of evil, these likewise had essayed their diabolical arts, but had not succeeded in leading Job to swerve from his integrity. Last of all, the great arch-enemy himself had found all his own efforts ineffectual to harass and lead astray GOD'S beloved servant. He found a hedge around him, and about his servants, and about his house, and about all that he had, on every side-- an entrenchment so strong that he had been unable to break through, so high that, going about as a roaring lion, he had been unable to leap over, or to bring disaster within the GOD-protected circle.

How blessed it must have been to dwell so protected! The work of Job's hands was prospered-- his substance increased in the land, and he became the greatest as well as the best of all the men of the East, for in that day GOD manifested His approval largely, though not solely, by the bestowal of temporal blessings.

Is there no analogous spiritual blessing to be enjoyed now-a-days? Thank GOD, there is. Every believer may be as safely kept and as fully blessed, though, perhaps, not in the same way, as Job-- may be delivered from the power of the enemy, and preserved in a charmed circle of perfect peace. The conditions are simple, and are given us by the Apostle Paul in the 4th chapter of Philippians 4:4-7, "Rejoice in the LORD alway..... Let your moderation [your gentleness, or yieldingness] be known unto all men. The LORD is at hand." Not your power of resistance of evil, and of "maintaining your own rights ", but your spirit of yieldingness, believing that the LORD will maintain for you all that is really for your good; and that in any case He is at hand, and will soon abundantly reward fidelity to His command. And lastly, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto GOD. And the peace of GOD, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through CHRIST JESUS."

How is it that believers so often fail to enjoy this promised blessing? Is it not that we fail to be anxious for nothing, and to bring everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving before GOD? We may bring nine difficulties out of ten to Him, and try to manage the tenth ourselves, and that one little difficulty, like a small leak that runs the vessel dry, is fatal to the whole, like a small breach in a city wall, it gives entrance to the power of the foe. But if we fulfill the conditions, He is certainly faithful, and instead of our having to keep our hearts and minds-- our affections and thoughts-- we shall find them kept for us. The peace, which we can neither make nor keep, will itself, as a garrison, keep and protect us; and the cares and worries will strive to enter in vain.

THE TESTING OF JOB

Reverting to the history of Job: the great accuser, having no fault to find with his character or life, insinuates that it is all the result of selfishness. "Doth Job fear GOD for nought." Indeed, he did not, as Satan well knew! Nor has anyone, before or since, ever feared GOD for nought. There is no service which pays so well as the service of our HEAVENLY MASTER; there is none so royally rewarded. Satan was making a true assertion, but the insinuation he connected with it, that it was for the sake of this reward that Job served GOD, was not true.

To vindicate the character of Job himself in the sight of the angels of GOD, as well as of the evil spirits, Satan is permitted to test Job, and take away all those treasures for the sake of which alone Satan imagined, or pretended to imagine, that Job was serving GOD. "All that he hath," said GOD, "is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand."

SATAN'S MALIGNITY

And soon Satan showed the malignity of his character by bringing disaster after disaster upon the devoted man. By his emissaries he incited the Sabeans, and they fell upon the oxen and the asses feeding beside them, slaying the servants with the edge of the sword, suffering one only to escape-- and this, not in any pity or sympathy, but that he might bear the message to his unhappy master, telling of the destruction of his property and servants. The evil one appears, also, to have had power to bring the lightning from heaven-- by which the sheep, and the servants caring for them, were destroyed. Here, again, one servant only was left, by his message to increase the distress of the

afflicted man of GOD.

Working in another direction, the Chaldeans were led to come in three bands and carry off Job's camels, slaying all the servants with the edge of the sword, save the one left to convey the evil tidings. And, as if this were not sufficient, even the very children of Job, his seven sons and three daughters-- children of so many prayers-- were swept away at one blow, by a terrible hurricane from the wilderness, which smote the four corners of the house so that it fell upon them, leaving only one servant to bear witness of the calamity. One only of all his family-- his wife-- seems to have been left to Job. But so far from being a spiritual help to him in this hour of sorrow and trial, she lost faith in GOD; and when further calamity came upon him, and he was in sore bodily suffering and affliction, his trial was added to by the words of his despairing wife: "Curse GOD, and die." We see from this, that even she was left to Job through no mercy on the part of the great enemy, but simply to fill the cup of affliction to the full in the hour of his extremity.

GRACE SUFFICIENT

But He who sent the trial gave also the needful grace, and in the words which we have already quoted, Job replied: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD."

Was not Job mistaken? Should he not have said: "The LORD gave, and Satan hath taken away?" No, there was no mistake. The same grace which had enabled him unharmed to receive blessing from the hand of GOD, enabled him also to discern the hand of GOD in the calamities which had befallen him. Even Satan did not presume to ask of GOD to be allowed himself to afflict Job. In the 1st chapter and the 11th verse he says: "Put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face;" and in the 2nd chapter and the 5th verse: "Put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." Satan knew that none but GOD could touch Job; and when Satan was permitted to afflict him, Job was quite right in recognizing the LORD Himself as the doer of those things which He permitted to be done. Oftentimes shall we be helped and blessed if we bear this in mind-- that Satan is servant, and not master, and that he and wicked men incited by him are only permitted to do that which GOD by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge has before determined shall be done. Come joy, or come sorrow, we may always take it from the hand of GOD. Judas betrayed his Master with a kiss. Our LORD did not stop short at Judas, nor did He even stop at the great enemy who filled the heart of Judas to do this thing; but He said: "The cup which My FATHER hath given me, shall I not drink it?" How the tendency to resentment and a wrong feeling would be removed, could we take an injury from the hand of a loving FATHER, instead of looking chiefly at the agent through whom it comes to us! It matters not who is the postman-- it is with the writer of the letter that we are concerned: it matters not who is the messenger-- it is with GOD that His children have to do.

We conclude, therefore, that Job was not mistaken, and that we shall not be mistaken if we follow his example, in accepting all GOD'S providential dealings as from Himself. We may be sure that they will issue in ultimate blessing; because GOD is GOD, and, therefore, "all things work together for good" to them that love Him.

DEEPER TRIALS

Job's trial, however, was not completed, as we have seen, when his property was removed. When the LORD challenged Satan a second time: "Hast thou considered my servant Job....?" Satan has no word of commendation, but a further insinuation: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.... touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." Receiving further permission to afflict him bodily, but with the charge withal to save his life, Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to his crown.

The pain of his disease, the loathsomeness of his appearance, must have been very great; when his friends came to see him they knew him not. His skin was broken and had become loathsome; his flesh was clothed with worms and clods of dust. Days of vanity and wearisome nights followed in sad succession; his rest at night was scared by dreams and terrified through visions; so that, without ease or respite, strangling would have been a relief to him, and death chosen rather than life. But of death there was no danger, for Satan had been charged not to touch his life.

His kinsfolk failed him, and his familiar friends seem to have forgotten him. Those who dwelt in his house counted him as a stranger, and his servant gave no answer to his call when he entreated help from him. Nay, worse than all, his own wife turned from him, and in his grief he exclaimed: "My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of mine own body." No wonder that those who looked on thought that GOD Himself had become his enemy.

Yet it was not so. With a tender Father's love, GOD was watching all the time; and when the testing had lasted long enough to vindicate the power of GOD'S grace, and to prepare Job himself for fuller blessing, then the afflictions were taken away; and in place of the temporary trial, songs of deliverance were vouchsafed to him.

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF THE LORD

Nor was the blessing GOD gave to His servant a small one. During this time of affliction, which, perhaps, was not very prolonged, Job learned lessons, which all his life of prosperity had been unable to teach him. The mistakes he made in the hastiness of his spirit were corrected; his knowledge of GOD was deepened and increased; he had learned to know Him better than he could have done in any other way. He exclaimed that he had heard of Him previously by the hearing of the ear, and knew GOD by hearsay only; but that now his eye saw Him, and that his acquaintance with GOD had become that which was the result of personal knowledge, and not of mere report. All his self-righteousness was gone: he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. Then, when he prayed for his friends, the LORD removed the sorrow, restored to him the love and friendship of those who previously were for the time alienated, and blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning. His sheep, his camels, his oxen, and his asses, were doubled. Again seven sons and three daughters were granted to him, and thus the number of his children also was doubled; for those who were dead were not lost, they had only gone before. And after all this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his children, and grandchildren, to the fourth generation; and finally died, being old and full of days.

May we not well say that if Job's prosperity was blessed prosperity, his adversity, likewise, was

blessed adversity? "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;" and the night of weeping will bear a fruit more rich and permanent than any day of rejoicing could produce. "The evening and the morning were the first day." Light out of darkness is GOD'S order, and if sometimes our Heavenly FATHER can trust us with a trial, it is a sure presage that, if by grace the trial is accepted, He will ere long trust us with a blessing.

In this day, when material causes are so much dwelt upon that there is danger of forgetting the unseen agencies, let us not lose sight of the existence and reality of our unseen spiritual foes. Many a child of GOD knows what it is to have sore conflict with flesh and blood; and yet, as says the Apostle, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against... wicked spirits in heavenly places" (margin). It would be comparatively easy to deal with our visible foes, if the invisible foes were not behind them. With foes so mighty and, apart from GOD'S protecting care, so utterly irresistible, we should be helpless indeed if unprotected and unarmed.

We need to put on the whole armor of GOD, and to be not ignorant of Satan's devices. Let us not, on the other hand, lose sight of the precious truth that GOD alone is Almighty; that GOD is our Helper, our Protector, and our Shield, as well as our exceeding great Reward. "If GOD be for us, who can be against us?" Let us always be on His side, seeking to carry out His purposes; then the power of GOD will always be with us, and we shall be made more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

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