

"The end of the Lord."

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All God's dealings with His people have a definite end in view. If, in the first place, we recognize that this is a fact, and if secondly we gain some understanding of what the end is, we shall be stabilised and tranquillised in our souls; we shall be patient and enduring unto the coming of the Lord.

If we open the Epistle of James at his fifth chapter we shall find that in the first six verses he contemplates the early Christians as being defrauded and even killed by the ungodly. Then in verses 7 and 8 he exhorts them to patience: they were to endure unto the coming of the Lord, when everything will be rectified, when the end God had in view in all His dealings with them will be reached and the riddle which His ways had presented will be fully solved. In verse 11 he reminds them that while waiting for the coming of the Lord they had the comfort of the Scriptures and particularly of the book of Job. The history of that patriarch has been put on record that future generations might have a clear insight into the object that God has before Him in allowing even the direst calamities to overwhelm His people.

We doubt if there is living upon earth to-day one Christian who is not more or less tried by circumstances. Moreover, in the great majority of cases they are not only tried but also very much perplexed and often tempted to quarrel with God's discipline and find fault with His ways. We are all of us apt to reason about such things as did Asaph before he went into the Sanctuary. He tells us about it in Psalm 73, and records that going into the Sanctuary of God he gained an understanding of the end of the ungodly, which solved the riddle of God's previous dealings with them. It was *their* end, however, which Asaph discovered. *God's* end, the object He has before Him, in all His dealings with His people, is another matter; and it is this that we find in the closing chapter of the book of Job.

We have "heard of the patience of Job." It has indeed become proverbial. It is not likely that in all the history of the world before or since has such a combination of disasters fallen upon one man in one day. The various happenings were as co-ordinated as to rule out all idea of chance and make it manifest that they were directed from the unseen world. Job's friends felt this and so did Job, yet he endured and gave God time to work out His seemingly dark design to its bright conclusion.

Our patience may be very small compared with Job's. We indeed may hardly have had the patience to read through the forty-two chapters of his book, while he had the patience to endure the sufferings and trials which those chapters record! The Apostle James said to his fellow-believers, "Ye . . . have seen the end of the Lord." We may well ask ourselves if we have seen it. It is still worth seeing. It will strengthen our feeble patience if we observe it. Let us read Job 42 with that object in view.

Having read the chapter, let us endeavour to summarise what we have seen as to the end of God's dealings with him.

1. *Job was enriched by an increased knowledge of God Himself*, for he said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee." In these words he contrasted his former knowledge which had been by report merely with that which he **had now acquired by direct** observation. He had, if we may so put it, exchanged knowledge acquired at second hand for knowledge of a first-hand sort. Formerly he knew *about* Him but now *he knew Him*.

"Mine eye seeth Thee." Not exactly the eye of his head — for the Lord was in the whirlwind and there was no visible shape before his eyes — but the eye of his mind. He had gained a direct apprehension of, and contact with, God. Was there no gain in this? There was *immense* gain.

Precisely this is the first great end of all God's dealings with His saints today. Every trial that crosses our paths has this for its object, for there are certain things that can only be learned in the school of experience. We do not underrate the importance of Bible study. God forbid that we should! There are things that can only be learned in God's Bible-study School. There we must go and sit if we would be instructed in God's thoughts and get delivered from our own thoughts. Sound doctrine is of the utmost importance and there alone, with the Spirit of God as our Instructor, can we get it. But to graduate in the *experimental* knowledge of God we must enter His school of discipline — a school which offers to us a life-long curriculum.

The Scriptures are full of examples which show us the value of God's school of discipline. A peculiarly striking example is the case of the sisters of Bethany, as recorded in John 11. They had a very trying experience, for it must have been tantalizing beyond words to know that all would be well if only the Lord appeared, and yet there was that unaccountable delay, that apparent indifference, until death supervened and their hopes crumbled to dust. Still in the final issue how greatly were they enlarged in the knowledge of Jesus! What a **display** they witnessed not only of His **power** but of His love! They gained an insight into His divine affections that could never be exactly duplicated during an eternity in heaven.

"The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above.
His angels know His blessedness,
His way-worn saints His love."

Now it is exactly thus for us today. Let us earnestly pray that we may not miss this "end of the Lord" in all the trials we may be called upon to face. If this be the happy finish to the story of our difficult circumstances we may well endure with patience.

2. *In gaining this knowledge of God, Job gained a corresponding knowledge of himself in an experimental way*, for he added, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Thus it ever is. The more we know of God the more, by way of contrast, we know ourselves. Self-knowledge of this sort is very painful but it is very wholesome, for it leads to salvation from self, which is a deliverance of the first magnitude.

There was a time in Job's history when things had been very different in every way. He describes it in Job 29, and the pronouns "I," "me," and "my" seem to tumble over one another all through the chapter. He was prosperous and flourishing and mightily content with his performances. Verse 11 of that chapter stands in striking contrast with verses 5 and 6 of our chapter. Then he stated, "when the ear heard *me*, then it *BLESSED me*; and when the eye saw *me* it gave witness to *me*." Now he says, "I have heard of *Thee* by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth *Thee*. Wherefore I *ABHOR myself* and repent in dust and ashes." When the eye was filled with Job there was one story to tell. When Jehovah filled the vision and Job was only seen as in the light of His presence the story was quite another. This self-knowledge can only be reached in an experimental way. The worthlessness of our nature is very patiently stated in Scripture, and of course we do well to believe its holy denunciations and humbly bow before God's Word as convicted by it. Yet it is one thing to believe in the worthlessness of the flesh and another thing to learn it by humbling experience. In Romans 7: 18, Paul did not say "I

believe," but "*I KNOW* that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing;" and that chapter details for us the sad experiences through which he reached that knowledge.

Have we learned this much needed lesson? It is the narrow gate that leads to a large place of blessing in the liberty of the Spirit. It is a part of the "end of the Lord" in all our trials.

3. *Job himself was much altered; his own character brought more largely into conformity with the gracious nature of God.* This feature is not perhaps so immediately apparent; but it unquestionably underlies what we have in verses 7 to 10 of our chapter.

Job's three friends had not as yet been humbled as Job had been. At last, as recorded in Job 40: 3-5 and Job 42: 1-5, Job had spoken of God the thing that was right and the three friends had not reached this point. They had only ceased speaking, had only laid their hands upon their mouths, because Job had talked them to a standstill. They were now instructed of God as to the course they were to take. They were so to act as firstly to render a testimony to sacrifice on the only ground upon which sinful men may have to do with God; and secondly to humble themselves by seeking the intercession of the very man whom they had been accusing and maligning. They were to be the humble applicants and Job was to act as a priest of God! This was "the end of the Lord" — very desirable indeed — as to the three friends.

But what of Job? Well, here he is still in his bodily wretchedness, stripped of all earthly possessions, sitting in the dust heap. In his smitten and afflicted state he had proved himself an intellectual prince amongst men. Handicapped as he was, he had taken on these able men in argument and talked them to silence. They had said cruel and uncalled for things to him and he had repaid them with added interest in hot words, cutting with sarcasm. Now, however, the wordy storm is over and the three friends approach Job's heap of ashes with the animals of sacrifice and in a very different spirit. Did the men of the east hear of these strange doings and gather round in their crowds to see what would happen? — we wonder.

If they did, they saw a lovely sight. The Lord had told the three friends that the man who had argued so hotly *against* them would now intercede *for* them. The sacrifices offered, they draw near and ask his prayers. The afflicted patriarch arises from the dust and though still stripped like a beggar and covered with boils he acts like a prince and a priest. The Job that they knew had disappeared, submerged beneath a new Job formed in the character of the God whom he now knew with a first-hand knowledge, The hot feeling, the animosity, the sarcasm gone. Prayer is heard in its place. And not prayer for himself, not a cry for deliverance from his boils and poverty, but prayer for them, in a warm stream of kindly intercession.

Formerly Job thought he was great, as chapter 29 witnesses. Now he really was great, with the only kind of greatness that abides for ever — moral worth in the likeness of God. Behold this bereaved, beggared and boil-smitten man in conscious nearness to God, lovingly interceding for three men well favoured and healthy who had formerly filled him with annoyance. It was a delightful triumph for the kindness of God. Job was immeasurably promoted in spiritual grace. God's end in all Job's sufferings was a worthy one, if we think for the moment of this feature alone.

4. *God blessed Job abundantly; turning his captivity and giving him twice as much as he had before.* This He did, *when Job had prayed for his friends* — and not till then. The blessings of those days were earthly and material, in contrast with the "spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1: 3) which are the distinctive portion of the Christian. Yet God did not permit the tide of them to once more roll in upon Job until he had been profoundly altered in spirit and character. When at last brought into nearness to God, he exercised priestly functions in a way that reflected the goodness and

benevolence of God, then everything external changed. The boils disappeared, health returned, the ashes were forsaken, kindness and benevolence was poured back into his own bosom by those who had previously misjudged or forsaken him, and God so prospered him that he ended with twice as much as he had before. Job, therefore, was not a loser but a gainer by the divine dealings, even in material things.

And this, too, is one great object that God ever has in all His discipline. Today the blessings conferred are spiritual and not material, as we have seen; but there is many an aged believer who would testify that their very trials and sorrows have **been** instrumental under God's hand in leading them into an enjoyment of His spiritual gifts twice as great as **that** with which they started.

In our case we have to remember that God *has* blessed us with all spiritual blessings, and that His gifts as well as His calling are not subject to recall or to a change of mind. The spiritual blessings are ours, but the apprehension, the realization, the enjoyment of them is another thing; and it is here that great enlargement may be known. That we should be so enlarged is part of God's design in His dealings with us.

5. Lastly, *God conveyed to Job a somewhat hidden but very sweet assurance as to one of the main points of perplexity and exercise of mind through which he had passed.* In the first chapter we read about Job's intercessory sacrifices and his earnest desires for his children, and how they were swept out of life in a way that well might have raised in his mind distressing doubts and fears as to them. In chapter 14 we read his reasonings and mental struggles over the great matter of resurrection, which in his day was not a subject of clear and unmistakable revelation. "If a man die shall he live again?" was his anxious question, and we have the pathetic record of how he tried to spell out an affirmative answer, reasoning from the analogy of a cut-down tree. He succeeded in reaching the conclusion that death was not the end of men; but that in the end his change would come, and he would rise in answer to the call of God. Still at the best it was a conclusion he had reached by reasoning and not a plain word of revelation from God.

The hour for that plain revelation was not yet. It arrived when Christ Himself rose from the dead, and consequently life and incorruptibility came to light by the gospel. Still, by means of His peculiar arithmetic, God gave to Job an intimation calculated to confirm him in his expectations. It looked like faulty arithmetic, but it was really thoroughly correct and full of meaning.

In verse 10 the plain statement is made that "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." This is supplemented by details in verses 12 and 13, so that we may see that this statement covered not only sheep, camels, oxen and asses, but also sons and daughters. If we have a mind to check the arithmetic of God's "two-times table" we have only to refer back to Job 1: 3. We find it correct as to sheep, fourteen thousand as against seven thousand; as regards camels, six thousand against three thousand; as regards oxen, a thousand yoke as against five hundred; as regards asses, a thousand as against five hundred; but when we come to children we find a serious discrepancy, only seven sons and three daughters as against the same number before. Why is this? The Lord gave him twice as much as he had before and no qualification or reservation is attached to that statement.

Was it a mistake? By no means. It was a gracious intimation to Job which doubtless his faith knew how to interpret. Had God given him fourteen sons and six daughters the inference would have been that his former children were as much and as irrevocably lost to him as were his former sheep and camels and oxen and asses. In giving him afresh only seven sons and three daughters, it was in effect God telling him that the first family was not permanently lost, that his prayers and intercessions had been heard and that there was a resurrection world in which he and they should meet again.

So this, too, was part of "the end of the Lord" in Job's case. It must have greatly established his faith and filled his soul with contentment and praise. As in after years he looked back over his strange and trying experiences he must have felt they were worthwhile in spite of being so crushing. He was enriched in every way as the result of them, and God was glorified in him.

These things written aforetime were written for our learning. Have we learned by them? In the New Testament we have the assurance that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8: 28). *All things*, without any qualification. The troubles that come upon us in the church circle as well as in the domestic or business circles; troubles springing from one's brethren as well as troubles arising from the world or from one's own personal mistakes; *all* are included. The fact is, that when most things seem to be combining against us, then most are we entitled to look up to God with enquiry as to what His end may be and to wait with patience to behold it.

It may be ours to behold it and rejoice in it even now; but whether so or not, at the coming of the Lord it will be manifested perfectly.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."