

The Endurance of Job and the End of the Lord

Scripture Note on Job 27: 6.

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"*My righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go.*" This passage, as usually quoted, is taken to mean that Job was determined to appeal to God for *standing* before Him on the ground of his own righteousness, as contrasted with that righteousness of God which we know to be revealed in the gospel (Rom. 3).

This meaning is, on the face of it, unlikely, for the righteousness of God in the gospel sense was not revealed until the gospel came (Rom. 1). The testing which Satan was allowed to bring on Job was not to discover whether he had soul-salvation and a righteous footing before God, but whether or no Job feared God because of the prosperity and the material advantages which Satan alleged to be quite sufficient to induce piety in a man.

Job's Friends.

The men who heard of the calamities which befell Job seem to have taken the ground that the ways and providences of *God* were always to be interpreted by the worthiness or unworthiness of *men*. They evidently had in their minds certain standard instances of men who were pious, and whose circumstances showed every mark of the favour of God; and of others who, being wicked, were overwhelmed by public judgments. With a comparatively superficial knowledge of the wisdom of the Almighty, or of the reasons for His discipline, they deduce for themselves, and then bring before Job in an aggravating way, their conclusions, that he richly deserved all that he was suffering.

Their Suggestions.

Without going into details, these "miserable comforters," as Job calls them, endeavour to hit upon some possible sin in his own past life which might account for his miseries under God's displeasure. *Or*, suggested one, his children must have been very wicked to be cut off so suddenly. *Or*, perhaps the stubbornness with which he resists these insinuations might be occasioned by pride which had to be broken. *Or*, there might be some secret sin nursed at the moment which made the consolations of God so small. *Or*, there might be some motive in his heart, some secret counsel, which the all-seeing

Creator had to thwart, and for which he had to judge him. Past, present, and future are all ransacked by them to try and fix on the poor sufferer some adequate reason for such unique sufferings and calamities.

Job's Replies.

To all these, Job answers that neither in the past nor the present was there the smallest known departure from his duty; and as to the future, he had not the slightest intention to move from the orbit appointed for him by God's will. At his wife's suggestion he might have cursed God and died, and so ended his misery, which *she* felt to be insupportable. But *he* felt it was a poor thing to give God a bad name; for although he knew Him but dimly, he knew Him too well to do that. All the past when recalled could be considered with a good conscience in the fear of God; in the present, although he was so crossed and burdened and suffering, he was sure God would explain everything satisfactorily *if only he knew where to find Him*; as to the future, far from being diverted from piety by any calamities undergone, or by any lust of sin or gain — he was determined that even if God slew him, yet he would trust in Him.

His Point of View.

While feeling in the keenest way every pang that Satan had been (as we know) allowed to inflict upon him, and while refuting with all his heart and energy the insinuations of his "friends," Job powerfully clears the character of God from the injustice which he knew their suggestions involved in His ways, *i.e.* of condemning him for sins he had not committed.

At the same time it was perfectly inexplicable to him that he, who had daily feared God, should be so abandoned to anguish. Any challenge as to the rectitude of his conduct he was prepared to meet; and if the miseries were not a judgment for misconduct, it seemed as though the Creator had become cruel to him for nothing, and that he was set as a target for the arrows of the Almighty from mere caprice.

His Lessons.

Poor Job. He little knew the tenderness of the heart that was leading him to sound the depths of his own mind. He was to learn *himself* in his own insignificance, in the smallness of his outlook, in the poverty of his conceptions of God. He was to learn the moral nothingness of his being, and the depravity and loathsomeness of it, in that it could impudently arraign the Almighty at its tribunal, and pronounce Him cruel and unjust in those providences which befell Job, simply because *he* could not see the reason why. In short he was to learn through deep sorrow that all unconsciously he had been making *JOB* the centre for himself; and that the worst immorality is to judge of *GOD* by what *Job* thought He ought to be and do. For in effect this was to make himself better, greater, more just than God — as Elihu points out (Job 30).

The Text in Question.

But now as to Job 27. He evidently passes censure on God for the apparent cruelty that made his life so bitter. But as long as he lives (ver. 3) he is determined that he will not yield to sin. Whatever the three friends allege, he will not admit a false charge (ver. 5), and in spite of their harsh judgment is determined to pursue the integrity of all his former life to the day of his death. It is in this context that

he says, "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go." That is, that nothing could induce him to turn from what he knew to be right. He therefore adds, "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." He was for maintaining a good conscience all his days, like Paul later (Acts 23: 1, 2 Cor. 1: 12, 1 Tim. 1: 19).

It may be urged that Saul of Tarsus discovered that his good conscience did not preserve him from error, and that his righteousness which was of the law was found to be but dung in the presence of the glory of Christ. This is true. But while he learned to value Christ as displacing all that man is even at his best, this did not induce him to give up the cultivation of a good conscience. In fact for the maintenance of a good conscience in the future it was necessary that life for him should be "not I, but Christ."

The End of the Lord.

Could it have been otherwise with Job? Once his lesson was learnt, that *he* was a part of a vast scheme of order and government which depended upon *God*, and which therefore had God for its centre and circumference, and not *Job*, would he not henceforth have new thoughts of the majesty and unerring goodness of God; goodness which knew how to bring order out of chaos, and good out of evil? Would he not also have learnt to distrust himself, and the reasonings and conclusions of his own mind, as well as those of his friends' minds, and have discovered the wisdom of waiting on God till the bright light that was in the cloud could be seen?

He would by no means surrender his integrity, he would by no means let go his righteousness. But, as Elihu puts it, his "righteousness," or his "uprightness" (see Job 33: 23, 26) would now be to bow under God's hand, to trust in the searchings of His discipline, to learn the lesson God would teach; in short, to look away from himself to God, and to live on that new principle before Him, centred in Jehovah and no longer in self.