

GOD'S OBJECT IN SUBJECTING US TO VANITY

We all know, dear brethren and sisters, that our duty this morning is a duty of remembrance. There are some things that we have to remember that we would rather forget. The remembrance of them brings no pleasure. There are some such things before us in the symbols this morning, though the outcome is good. We have before us death, and we see sin. Neither of these things by themselves are pleasant. But they have their place in the system of life to which we stand related, and must not be ignored. But for sin and death, this table would never have been spread. It is spread as an ultimate remedy for a sore evil. Sin is not a beautiful thing at all. It may be a little bit of sweetness in the mouth. A man would never sin if it did not happen to be sweet; but after that all is gall. Sin is out of harmony with our whole nature. We are God's workmanship; beautiful workmanship—the finest piece of mechanism under the sun—constructed for a certain purpose. Every part of the machine has its perfect place. The law of God defines the place, when we set aside this law, the machine gets out of gear, and there is derangement and misery. This is what happened at the start. Adam sinned, and everything got out of order and brought death. It is all to be put right by-and-by; but not yet, and therefore we suffer. As we read in Ecclesiastes this morning (chap. 8),

"Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him."

If for everything there is a time, then there is a time for what we are suffering now, a time for evil and misery, because it is a time of sin—a time when God is disobeyed, and has been so long disobeyed. This is the explanation of what is the deepest and most distressing problem to ordinary minds. By ordinary minds I mean merely philosophical minds, well stored with science and literature, but unbelieving in regard to the purpose of God. To such it is an insoluble problem, that God should be good, and yet that man—God's creature—should suffer evil. They bore away at that problem, but they cannot make anything of it. In whatever way they contemplate it, it will not come out square and right. They cannot settle it on the supposition that there is no wisdom in the universe; or that there is no goodness; for the whole universe bears witness to these attributes of God in all its arrangements. The difficulty is this: being compelled to recognise the manifest wisdom and goodness, how to account for the evil? It is not to be accounted for upon any natural principle. Only in this way can you account for it all *"for everything there is a time."* Now is the time for evil. God has a purpose in the earth, and the realisation of that purpose requires that the evil now present should be the rule. It is what Paul says in Romans 8,

"The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but 'by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope'."

God has subjected us to misery *'in hope.'* That is the explanation, the full explanation, the perfectly satisfactory explanation of the presence of evil and death in the earth. God has done it; 'and there is hope in connection with it.' What is the hope? With reference to what hope is man subject to evil? No man can tell that by studying in the ordinary channels of science and literature. A man can only tell that by studying God's explanation of the matter. It is the hope of Israel that is spoken of as Paul explains in the same epistle. God has planted a hope in Israel upon a sure foundation. It rests upon the covenants He has made with the fathers, and which He has established to all generations. That is the foundation of all hope for man; and that foundation is universally scouted, by believers and unbelievers alike, that is to say by those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and by those who believe otherwise. By both alike, these covenants, confirmed in the blood of Christ, are regarded as something of no value; a kind of a mere historic glimmer in the ages long past. If we have come to regard the matter in a different light, and to see clearly the outlines of the divine purpose in the midst of

the darkness of the past, we will not glory over our generation in that being the case. It is a sad thing that the millions that form the population of the earth should be so out of fit with their God; for He is their God in so far as He is their Maker. All their ways belong to Him. It is a very sad spectacle, in all towns, in all countries, to see so many perishing hopelessly from the fact that they know not God. It is so very sad that if we did not impose limits upon our sadness, our sadness would be liable to become too sad, too utterly distressing. It would be so sad and distressing as to incapacitate a man for a reasonable and joyful attitude in God. We must look all round to get away from this effect. We should never look at anything by itself; that is to say, apart from that to which it is related. Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes have a bearing upon this. He says (5:8),

"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they."

Marvel not; God 'regardeth.' Note the fact and pass on. The earth is God's property, not ours. He has a plan, and He is not heedless, and human perversities and confusions cannot frustrate His plan. Our part is to do our duty; to do His work, and be not too much distressed at our surroundings; to bear all, and keep our eye on God, and pass on to the promised day. If we do not, we shall be overborne. Say we visit a battlefield the day after a battle. Suppose it to be outside Metz, in the Franco-Prussian war, about 17 years ago. The carnage was dreadful. The weapons were so destructive that whole ranks were shot through as they stood. They did not have room to fall. They were just mown down and lay like swathes of grass before the scythe. The country was filled with slain. The spectacle was appalling. Now a man looking on a spectacle like that without reflection might be tempted to exclaim "There cannot be a God!" Oh! No! There would be no true logic in such an exclamation. The man who knows God does not extract such a conclusion as that from a scene of carnage, though feeling the pain of it as much as any. He says, "This does not suggest to me that there is no God. It tells me that there is a God: for how is it that there is such a thing as war at all in the finest race of creatures on the earth? There is a reason for such derangement; and it cannot be found apart from the Creator of the race." Some say, "Can it be from God who is universal power, and goodness, and wisdom and love?" Yes, strange as it may seem—it is because man has usurped God's place upon the earth, that God has allowed man to come into such affliction. Man has forgotten God, and he glorifies himself to the utmost in testimonials, statues, addresses, magnifications, and memorials of all sorts. At whose shrine is all the incense offered? For whom are all his busy works? For whose benefit, glory, honour, and comfort is all this vast machinery of human life upon the earth? For man and not for God at all. It is the old crime of Belshazzar over again. The crime of Belshazzar is the crime of all mankind.

"Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart . . . and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. 5).

And he was slain that night. Man does not humble himself nor glorify God. It is because of this that God leaves him to manage for a time, and that is the result of his management; that men cut each other's throats on the battlefield every now and then. Yes, say some, "but that is only occasionally; we are not always fighting. We are not so badly off as you make out." Well, what are you, between? Why, a state of things so bad that many actually prefer war itself to this slow furnace of "peace" in which men are smelting down into one great muddle of miserable life. People are not aware of how bad their lot is. They take life as it is now as a matter of course. Well, we did so ourselves once; but the Truth came and opened our eyes, and showed us what man is in himself, and how differently he is when God takes him in hand. A man does not know how to appreciate the present state of things until he knows the Truth. *"The misery of man is great upon him,"* and there is no explanation but one, and that

is the one the Bible furnishes. The wise of this world do not profess to have an explanation at all. The more intellectual they are, the less disposed they are to have views on the subject, one way or another. They say, "We don't know. We are agnostics. It is a riddle, there might be a God. We don't say there is not; but on the other hand, we don't know that there is." Now in the Truth it is not a question of whether it be this explanation, or some other one. This is the only one—that evil is God's work as well as good. The Bible says so.

"I form the light, and create the darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things" (Isa. 45:7).

"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

Some may say, "It makes no difference when we have made that discovery. The evil is there all the same." I may safely appeal to all present whether it has not made a great difference to know that evil is of God and is part of His purpose. In my own case it has brought unspeakable relief. It has taken away the dreadfulness of the problem of human life, as it now is upon the earth. It has acted like the removal of a great nightmare. It has abolished the gloom of heaven and earth; has presented the vast universe as a house of glory—a calm, tranquil, majestic temple of infinite wisdom and power and goodness, with earth's misery a mere episode—subject to vanity for only 7,000 years. You say, 'only'! Yes, only. People whose minds are narrowed down to the little circle of present life may think it a tremendous 'only.' That is because they have not learnt to see WHAT IS—endless space and existence; endless time, before and behind—ages infinite in the measureless realms of being. We advisedly say 'only.' It is a great thing to be able to say 'only.' It helps a man to bear the present roughness of the way. What are 7,000 years? How long has the sun been? How long has the earth existed? Cutting through the crust of the earth as cutting through a cheese, you can read the history of the past (not the history of Adam's race, but the history of the globe), and it shows us a history of countless thousands of years. Where did the earth come from at the beginning of those thousands? It never made itself. We never see anything make itself! Going back to the beginning we are bound to say one very foolish thing, or one thing which is very wise; either that something made the earth that had no power to make it, or that God made it, who had. It is only the fool that hath said in his heart, "*There is no God.*" God made it. How long has God been? He has had no beginning, and can have no end. For ever and ever, backwards and forwards. Think of it. You say the mind cannot grasp it. No. How could you with mortal brains? But those very mortal brains which God has given us tell us that it must be so. How could it be otherwise? There are many things that we cannot grasp. We cannot grasp our own brains. Think of it, sit and think; what is thought? We know it and we feel it, but we cannot grasp it. It is a fact nevertheless. So a beginningless wise power must be a fact, though we cannot grasp it. Now 7,000 years—what is it? A mere watch in the night. God will only afflict this earth 7,000 years, and then He is coming to us Himself, to be manifested upon the earth.

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away"

(Rev. 21).

Christ himself will be here in glory, and heaven will be opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. God is everywhere; His Spirit fills immensity; and when a sympathetic relation is established between Him and the inhabitants, there will be no gulf between heaven and earth. Let us only be in sympathetic relation with Him, and there is no space to us. Such is the glorious reality. What a cordial it would be to the mind if we could now feel God's attention, and feel the sympathetic reaction of His mind to us as we speak to

Him. It is surely coming. We walk by faith; but see how wise a preparation for sight that faith is. How should we be fit to appreciate the glorious coming if we were not prepared by faith! Faith is a splendid thing. It gives us a few mortal years of preparation in what appear as ages of evil, but which are really part of the good in view of the preparation they afford for the perfect Age beyond, when “*the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.*”

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2
Pages 67-71
By Bro. Robert Roberts