

BARUCH AND GOD'S MESSAGE

Baruch is before us as the theme of our contemplation this morning—the companion of Jeremiah the prophet, and his helper in writing down the messages of the Spirit (Jer. 45). There are various interesting features in his case which will make it profitable for us to consider him. First, he is before us as a sorrowing man. He is represented as saying,

“Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.”

Here is something to note: it may strike us as strange at first. It is natural to assume that the prophets of the Lord, and all who had to do with them in the way of actual service, were men to whom inspiration and the exercise of authority secured the enjoyment of their position; and placed them beyond the weariness and painful endurance which we find incident to the position of a saint in these days of Gentile ascendancy. A consideration of this case will dispel all feelings of this sort, and enable us to see the point of James' advice to—

“Take the prophets for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.”

They were fellow-sufferers with us.

When we ask the cause of Baruch's depression of mind, the facts supply a ready answer. As the companion of Jeremiah, he shared the odium that belonged to the position of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was pretty much alone in Jerusalem. The princes, the elders, and the priests—corresponding to the clergy and the upper classes of our day—were all against him; and under their leadership, the common people held him in contempt. His own testimony is,

“I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day” (Lam. 3:14).

His own feelings in contact with them and his estimate of them are manifest from Jer. 9:2-3:

“Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord.”

Between the derision manifested by the people towards Jeremiah and Jeremiah's sense of their worthlessness, it is easy to understand his statement that *“for peace he had great bitterness.”* The asperity of his position was so sharp that he felt inclined to shut his mouth. He said,

“I will speak no more in his name,” for the reason given:

“Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily.”

He even went so far as to curse the day of his birth, saying,

“Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed . . . Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?” (20:14, 18).

This helps us to realise what James testifies of Elijah and the prophets in general, as true, that they were men, *“subject to like passions as we are.”*

As companion of a man of this experience, Baruch shared in the dreariness of the situation as expressed in his words,

“I fainted in my sighing, I find no rest.”

Are we not often distressed with a similar experience arising from a similar cause? By the truth we have become companions of the Despised and Rejected of men, who said,

“It is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master.”

Companions of his companions, we may often feel cast down like Paul, but not destroyed: fainthearted and unrestful like Baruch. *“Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts”* is not

exhilarating. We may often feel dreary in the performance. Let us not be too much dejected. The present world is an evil world under any circumstances. Evil is ingrained in the constitution of things.

"Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."

People in effect imagine we can escape it by one contrivance or another. They constantly tug at their chains. It is a vain struggle. We are in the grasp of sin's bondage and we cannot be free except in the way provided in Christ. It is better to quietly and finally accept our fate with resignation, and lay hold of the blessed hope God has given us in the gospel. It is a help in the doing of this to remember that the prophets and their companions have been sighing, sorrowing men who have had to fortify themselves by the consolation of the truth.

God sent a message to Baruch by Jeremiah. What a great honour that the God of Israel, the Almighty Creator of all things, should send a message to a mortal man to comfort him! It may be said that here, at all events, the case of Baruch differs from ours. For a time no doubt it does; but it is only a question of time. There is a time for everything. Our times and circumstances do not admit of individual messages as appropriate just at present, but there is a message waiting for us all. Christ comes with a message to every man who will appear before him. It will be individual to each man at the judgment seat. This may appear afar off and not analogous to the message sent to Baruch. It will not seem either when the time arrives. It will be near and pointed and practical and appropriate. It will be a message of comfort to the sorrowing and faithful.

"He will satiate the weary soul, and replenish the sorrowful soul" (Jer. 31:25).

He will *"comfort all that mourn."* He will give unto them *"beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."* For this joyful consummation, if we are among Zion's mourners, we have only to wait. It is difficult to wait, perhaps, but this waiting is the only attitude full of promise.

"They shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Therefore, as Paul exhorts,

"Cast not away your confidence . . . which hath great recompense of reward. For he that shall come will not (always) tarry."

The longest time possible to man is short. Every man's life is shut up at the end, not far off, like a road with a wall built across. We have only to wait till then, for the end of life is the arrival of resurrection to every man's consciousness. Thus, not a long way off, our message waits. God give us a good message.

What was the message to Baruch about? It was about Baruch's sorrows.

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow."

Several things suggest themselves here. A man's sorrow is not a blithesome subject of discourse to other people; but it is otherwise to himself. It may not be exactly an elating subject, but it is comforting. What more consoling to a man groaning under some distress, than for a powerful sympathetic friend to sit down with him, so to speak, and enquire into his trouble, and give him promises and assurances of a solacing character? This was Baruch's experience in this case, and its interest to us lies in the fact that we have to deal with the same God who condescended to send to Baruch a message on the subject of his sorrows. We are not allowed to hear from Him as yet; but all things are known to Him, and He is not unheeding of the troubles of those whose hearts are toward Him. Nay, He may even contrive their trouble for them.

"Happy is the man whom God correcteth" (Job 5:17).

It is an arduous experience and difficult to endure; but the upshot will be unmixedly beneficial. Therefore it is written,

“My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:11).

In the midst of the trouble, He giveth consolation, causing light to arise to the upright in the darkness (Psa. 112:4).

“He makes a way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13).

He comforteth those of His who are cast down (2 Cor. 7:6). He establishes, strengthens, settles, after they have suffered awhile (1 Pet. 5:10). These things are all testified, and constitute a ground of consolation to all, even in this deserted century, who place their hope in God and keep His commandments.

Baruch’s case is evidence that the eyes of the Lord are open to the righteous and His ear open to their cry. This truth is illustrated in many ways in the Scriptures. Nothing is more powerful in this way than the statement of David, by the Spirit, concerning himself and his son:

“Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”

Therefore, in the midst of all our troubles, let us not be utterly cast down. Let us have it as a mental reserve to draw upon, the recollection that we are in the hands of god who will not suffer the billows to go over our head to our destruction, but will come to our release when we have suffered sufficiently. In the darkest hour we may always rally ourselves like David.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psa. 42:11).

David indulged in this gleaming comfort at a time when he was saying,

“O my God, my soul is cast down within me . . . My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me.”

We can never be in a lower deep than these words represent. David came through it all, a joyful victor at last, ready for the place that awaits him in the triumphant throng that will surround the Lord in the day of His glory; and shall we lie down in despair? Nay, nay, let the outward man perish: the inward man is renewed day by day, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

What was the pith of God’s message to Baruch? It was a piece of advice which carries with it certain instructive conclusions.

*“Seekest thou great things for thyself? **seek them not.**”*

Baruch had evidently been turning his eyes in the direction of great things. It was not much of a wonder. He had become weary of the continual self-denial involved in his companionship with a derided prophet of the Lord. He saw everybody around him looking after themselves, *“seeking their own,”* as in Paul’s day (Phil. 2:21).

“From the least of them even to the greatest of them everyone was given to covetousness” (Jer. 6:13).

From which it follows as a reasonable conclusion that most of them were partly successful and well-to-do. Baruch had evidently begun to think that he might as well try among the rest, or, at all events, make some effort to place himself beyond the reach of evil. God’s advice in the case is before us:

“Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.”

Why was this advice recorded? Not for Baruch's exclusive benefit. It is doubtless true here what Paul says of another case:

"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe."

The advice to Baruch is advice to every son of God.

"Seek them not."

It is advice conveyed in many forms:

"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."

"Labour not to be rich."

"Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."

These are some of the forms in which the same exhortation is delivered directly to ourselves. They are meant as practical counsels. We may disregard them now, and join the world in its race for distinction and wealth; in that case the day will come when we shall discover that our eyes and ears have been strangely sealed to the monitions of wisdom.

The reason connected with the counsel given to Baruch was personal to himself, but is nevertheless not lacking of application to us. God said,

"For, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh."

This doubtless referred to the deluge of calamity that was about to break upon the whole country of Judah, by the hand of the Babylonian army, and sweep everything before it, as intimated in verse 4:

"The Lord saith thus, Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land."

The applicability of such a reason to us lies in the fact that a similar fiat has gone forth concerning the kingdoms of the Gentiles, in the age in which we live. A time of trouble such as has never yet visited them, is about to come; and the present order of things is to be broken up, in anger and great judgment, and the kingdom of God to be established over all. The advice not to seek great things in the present *aion* is therefore of equal cogency to what it had in Baruch's case. In a sense, it may have very little application to us, because none of us have it in our power to aspire after great things. Still, if it cannot apply in this way, it may operate negatively in helping us to be content with that poor and lowly form of life in which it has, in all ages, pleased God to seek the heirs of the coming kingdom and glory; and to wait with composure the storm that will sweep away the kingdoms of men, and clear the way for that order of things in which righteousness, godliness, wealth, security, and peace, will gladden the earth for evermore.

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