

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 175

It is written,

“The entrance of thy words giveth light.”

We find this to be true. We have the words of God. The Bible, given by inspiration, is “*the words*” of God in their modern survival. We are favoured more than we know in having them. We admit them to an entrance in the periodical reading of them, and we find they give light. They open the eyes of the mind to the fundamental and true relations of history, life, action and destiny—to which by nature we are dark. The effect is to give a sense of light—light as regards where we are, the road we ought to take, and the issue of the otherwise aimless current of existence. This light we could not have without the mind of God. The mind of God might come to us direct by the Spirit, but in our day it is imparted to us in the Scriptures. There only in our day can we find it, and in some form or other, we find it in every part—Old Testament or New; history or prophecy; vision, genealogy, or exhortation.

Rapidly taking the three portions of today, let us see and absorb the light they shed. We have first Job. He is to us a reality. What if the wise of this world have reasoned themselves into dimness? We take the guidance of James (5:11) and of Ezekiel (14:14) and accept his story as the lesson of patience, righteousness, and truth—which it could not be apart from reality. What then do we see? Job a righteous man—in God’s sight, a paragon—“*none like him in the earth,*” “*fearing God and eschewing evil*”—yet withal, a great and wealthy man—“*the greatest of all the men of the East.*”

The inventory of his estate shows enormous wealth, from which we learn that though riches are dangerous as Jesus and the apostles teach, it is possible for a rich man to exercise a faithful stewardship. How this is to be done, we see in Job’s description of his own case in vindication against the envious insinuations of his somewhat shallow, though in a way godly, friends. The particulars may be read in chapter 31. He did not despise the cause of his servants. He did not withhold the poor from their desire or cause the eyes of the widow to fail. He did not eat his morsel alone or see any perish for want of clothing. He did not neglect the cause of the fatherless, or make gold his hope. He did not rejoice because his wealth was great, or suffer himself to be glad at the calamities of those who hated him. He opened his door to the traveller, and freely acknowledged his shortcomings, at the same time deferring not to the influence of neighbours. This is the picture of a rich godly man, which no rich man can make a mistake in imitating, and by imitating which, he turns into a friend that “*Mammon of unrighteousness*” which is otherwise liable to be his destroyer.

Next, look at that one trait in Job’s character which is singled out for record as justifying God’s declaration that “*there was none like him in the earth.*” His grown-up sons were in the habit of feasting in one another’s houses on stated days by turn. After each of these occasions, Job was in the habit of rising early next morning, and “*offering burnt offerings,*” for them all. Why? He said,

*“It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. **Thus did Job continually.**”*

Ponder this, and you will realise that it is a something that in our day would be considered the height of fastidiousness—over much righteousness, “too particular,” “goody goody,” etc. Such are some of the epithets by which moderns of every hue would shame us out of our godly scrupulosities. What shall we say? Are we to take our cue from man or from God? Can there be a moment’s doubt? Here, then, is what is well pleasing to God—such a constant practical sense of His reality and such an acute susceptibility to considerations of His honour and holiness as to cause fear of complicity with sin, and to lead us to daily humiliations before him in invocation of His pardon. “Burnt offerings” are not now required: but we have a better sacrifice than Job offered. We have the crucified and risen Christ, “*who offered himself without spot to God*”—in whose name we may at all times approach the invisible Father in confession and supplication.

Next, we find this greatest and most righteous of all the men of the East, suddenly flung from the pinnacle of prosperity to the lowest depths of loss and woe. By an extraordinary combination of calamities, he is stripped of all his possessions and laid low in a state of painful and loathsome disease. How are we to read this? It is most important that we read it aright. It is a matter in which almost all people are liable to fall into the mistake made by Eliphaz and Job's other friends who came to comfort him. Their question was,

"Who ever perished being innocent?"

Their contention was, that Job's troubles were a proof of Job's wickedness—righteous though he seemed in human eyes. In this they did Job a grievous wrong, for which they had to humble themselves under God's rebuke afterwards. Job's troubles were really permitted to manifest Job's righteousness, and to show to all subsequent generations of God's children the way that trouble ought to be taken. The reading of the narrative shows this.

It was needful that such a lesson should be placed in their hands, because God's plan was to develop them in and by trouble. *"Through much tribulation"* they were to enter the Kingdom. Why it should be so, we may discern if we study man. He cannot, without trouble, be made to learn his position in the universe as a mere and utter dependant upon the God of heaven and earth. In prosperity, he is liable to grow too self-conscious: too self-important. The self point of view absorbs all and dims off his neighbour and his God. When this is the case, the man is a mere creature like a comfortable elephant or a well-conditioned cur. There is a certain kind of breeding essential for acceptable intercourse with polite society. People understand this; they do not so readily understand that there is a certain kind of breeding necessary for fellowship with God—(a fellowship which in all cases where it is effectual is to be eternal). The breeding necessary for fellowship with God consists of a just and lively estimate of the relative positions of God and man. A man must feel and see that God is all and that man in himself is nothing; that all things are derived "out of" God, and subsist in him by His great power and His wonderful contriving spirit; and that man is God's own work and property, and only fit to live if he fulfil God's object in making him.

Now, we can see with our own eyes that it is trouble and not prosperity that generates this kind of perception. People in affluence and honour do not readily lend themselves to this idea. They become easily swallowed up with a sense of the importance of their own personal affairs in business and family. Their Bible description is a true portrait for all time:

"Their strength is firm, they are not in trouble as other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as with a chain: violence covereth them as with a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression." They "prosper in the world, they increase in riches."

(Psa. 73:4-12).

"Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them . . . therefore they say unto God, Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?"

(Job 21:8-15).

Because this is the general characteristic of the wealthy, they are unfit for God's use as the final inhabitants of this planet, for God has made the earth for His own glory, and these glorify Him not, but glorify themselves greatly. Therefore it is that God hath called the poor of this world (if they are), *rich in faith*, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to those that love Him; and therefore it is that tribulation is appointed as their preliminary experience. Trouble is the school of their discipline. God inflicts it, not willingly in the sense of delighting to trouble, but with an object, and He guides and regulates that it may effect that object, *"that we may be partakers of His*

holiness.” The trouble will not be allowed to go to destruction. We may thus understand how it is that it is done in love.

“Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.”

We could not be truly wise without it, and without wisdom we could not be acceptable to Him, for—

“The Lord taketh not pleasure in fools.”

Next, we have to note how Job took his trouble. He was not untroubled. Far from it, *“his grief was great,”* so great he cursed his day, and wished he had never been born. In the popular conception, which is traditionally derived and does not result from the reading of Job, *“the patience of Job”* is synonymous with a meek and mild stoicism that took all without a wince, and even with a smile. The patience of Job, as Scripturally exhibited, is to be found in a direction which the popular appreciation cannot follow. It is to be found in his attitude towards God in the matter, and not in his attitude towards the trouble or to his friends who came about.

“In all this, Job sinned not with his mouth, nor charged God foolishly”

—Implying that in the treatment of this subject, it is possible to sin and to charge God foolishly.

Illustrations of this mode of treatment are not wanting in every-day experience. We may have heard men say, “What have I done that this should come to me?” or “I do not believe there is a just God in heaven or He would never allow this to happen,” or “I consider the Almighty is bound to get this world of poor sinners out of the scrape He has allowed them to get into.” In such utterances, men sin with their mouth in that they charge God foolishly. They make the comfort of the creature, whom God permits to live, the standard by which to judge the proceedings of the irresponsible Creator. It is presumption and wickedness. Job’s mode of dealing with the matter is the Scripture model and the model of true reason. He said,

“Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?”

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.”

“He doeth as it pleaseth him.”

“None can say to him, What doest thou?”

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

What is man? A handful of God’s stuff, organised and breathing. And is he not a sinner at that? And is it not the law of the irresponsible Author of his being that the wages of sin is death? What ground of complaint can he have even if God afflict and kill? But instead of that, God is patient and long-suffering, and opens a bountiful hand, giving liberally to all, and granting the capacity of enjoyment. If He send trouble—if He deal death—is it not in His prerogative, and His wisdom, which is guiding all things according to the purpose of His own will? Job’s view of the situation is the only reasonable one. We shall do well to adopt his philosophy without the least reservation. Any other turns on the pivot of human existence, which is a mere shadow. A philosophy fixed on the human point of view is like a ship moored to a flower: it won’t hold. Philosophy fixed on God will endure for ever.

Job’s friends vexed him exceedingly by arguing that Job must have been a bad man to get into such trouble. He would not listen to it for a moment. He said,

“Though I die, I will assert mine integrity.”

The only explanation he had to offer was:

“God doeth as it pleaseth him.”

He could not explain God’s objects, but he had confidence in them, and was prepared to go to the grave, in the full confidence that in the latter day, *“though all consumed his cold remains,”* he would, in his restored and very own flesh, see God *“standing on the earth,”* fully and victoriously revealed in that form and manifestation purposed from the beginning, and shown to the world in the days of Tiberius Caesar, when Jesus of Nazareth, bearing the Father’s name, went forth proclaiming himself the Resurrection and the Life, and the Redeemer of his people from sin and death.

Some profess to find in Job’s tartness of expression indications of the opposite of patience. The fact is they judge, or misjudge, him by the modern standard, which is not the true standard. The

crispness of his truthful personal assertiveness is part of the completeness of his excellent character. A man lacking this element is flat and flabby. His patience was shown in keeping steady towards God in the midst of inexplicable suffering; and not in observing an unruffled front in the presence of superficial and libellous mediocrity. He by no means kept an unruffled front. He even indulged in some degree of satire.

“Doubtless, ye are the people, and wisdom will die with you.”

This was his response to their misapplied platitudes.

“Who knoweth not such things as these?”

Job’s case read aright will give us a true and healthy standard of manhood in Christ. It will engender within us the noble combination of reverence towards God and courageous independence of man, whom we will benefit but not fear. It certainly will not generate the feeble, sickly, slobbering sentimentality of the modern school of “piety.” On the other hand, it will keep us far from the godless and harsh sterility of modern manliness. It will blend in us in some measure all the elements of wisdom with the resultant beauty of that perfect type of character exhibited in a greater or less degree in all the servants of God, all whose cases were *“written for our learning.”*

The two other portions of our reading (of the light-imparting “words”) we can look at only very briefly. Jonah is interesting more in what it brings out concerning God than concerning Jonah. Jonah thought it was no use going to Nineveh, and therefore tried to evade the command by entering upon a distant voyage. He was made to feel the impossibility of getting away from God. An unassuageable storm obstructed his way. Many storms visit the Mediterranean, but this was a specially caused one, and so were all the attendant incidents. An angel was at work by whose action on the minds of Jonah and the crew, it came to pass that Jonah was thrown overboard and swallowed by a creature specially prepared to give Jonah a voyage of a different character from what he had arranged for himself. For three days in a horror of great darkness, he had time to realise how helpless is man in the hand of God, and was landed at last, with broken will, in a state of perfect readiness to go wheresoever the Lord might send him. (The men who treat this as a fable are not logical unless they deny Christ, and a deal that is undeniable besides. Christ endorses the record of Jonah. The man who believes in Christ is bound to believe in the narrative of Jonah: and he can have no difficulty. If God is in a transaction, what can be impossible? If Christ rose, God was with him, and if with him, then with all those connected with his work in Israel, and therefore with Jonah and therefore could as easily fit up a special fish for Jonah’s living accommodation as make a fish at all.)

When Jonah gets to Nineveh, he finds that his preaching is not of the no-use character he had assumed.

“The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah.”

This may instruct us not to set up our judgment against God’s commandments. Our wisdom is to simply ask, what has He commanded, and do it. And now comes out the beautiful revelation of God’s character.

“God saw their works (that is, that the Ninevites humbled themselves before him) and God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them: and he did it not.”

How constantly is this the proclamation of the Scriptures, that—

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.”

How frequently this was exhibited in His dealings with Israel. *“Many a time turned away he his wrath”* when they repented and amended their ways. To the erring and the rebellious, He has caused it to be expressly declared, that if they will forsake their way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, He will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7). This is a constant encouragement to all. With poor Jonah, it was a discouragement. He made it a reason for running away in the first case. He said to God when he found that Nineveh was spared:

“Was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”

Jonah spoke from his knowledge of Israel's history. He spoke it in bitterness, but it was a truth of great sweetness and consolation. The only danger in connection with it is the danger of presuming on it, that is, sinning recklessly in the confidence of forgiveness. The sin of presumption is unpardonable (Num. 15:30; 1 John 5:16). The mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him: who in a humble and a contrite heart are afraid of offending.

Our reading in Hebrews shows us the God-exalting and man-humbling exercises with which the privilege of forgiveness is surrounded. The Mosaic constitution was *“a figure for the time then present,”* in which the mutual relations of God and man were graphically illustrated. There was a tabernacle in which the divine presence was concealed. This tabernacle stood in a curtain-walled enclosure called a court. None were to enter the court but the priests, and none were to be priests but those chosen and cleansed. Even the priests were to wash with water every time they approached. The tabernacle itself was not to be entered on pain of death, except by those appointed for the service, and the holiest section thereof, only once in the year, and that only by the high priest with the blood of atonement. Sacrifice was always to be offered for trespass. Forgiveness was granted only to those who complied with all these requirements. It seems impossible to miss the meaning of this system of *“figure:”* that God is holy and to be approached only in deepest reverence, and only in the man-abasing ritual of His own appointment. In Christ crucified, the whole meaning converges. In the name of Jesus only (who was made sin for us who knew no sin), can acceptable approach be made to the gracious, yet great and terrible and Holy Creator of heaven and earth. By his hands only (as the intercessor between God and man) can forgiveness be obtained. In holiness only can he be served; *“without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”*

In the belief of the truth concerning Jesus—(the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus)—and in our submission to baptism, the institution of induction, we become related to the true tabernacle whose realities were shadowed in the Mosaic. Covered with the name of the crucified and risen Christ, we have access to all its glorious privileges, if we draw near with a true heart. We obtain the forgiveness of our sins, and the blessing and guidance of God as we walk through “time's dark wilderness of years” towards His glorious kingdom. How great the privilege is will only become fully manifest when we have finished our course: when we have done with mortal life: when we stand in the presence of God's unveiled purpose, at the appearing of Christ—whether by the quick journey of the unconscious grave, or the longer process of waiting for him in this most dreary land of evil. Keeping this certain end in view, let us persevere in that patient continuance in well-doing which has its issue in the peace and joy of glory, honour, and immortality.

Taken from: - “The Christadelphian of 1887”

Sunday Morning No. 175

Pages 71-75

By Bro. Robert Roberts