

THE SIGHT OF INIQUITY NO. 2711

A SERMON
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*“Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?”
Habakkuk 1:3.*

IN this discourse, it will be my endeavor to assign some reasons why God causes His people to see iniquity in themselves and in others

I. We will begin with the first part and inquire, WHY DOES GOD CAUSE US TO SEE INIQUITY IN OURSELVES? What is the reason of the discoveries which the Holy Spirit sometimes makes to us, of the evil of our hearts? It is well known, to all who love the Lord, that there are seasons when the Holy Spirit takes us into the darkest chambers of our being and there reveals to us evils which, perhaps, we had never suspected: “Son of man,” He says, “I will show you what great abominations there are within you.” He lays bare the loathsome kennel of the human heart and lets us look at all our deformity and depravity. He takes us to the rock from where we were hewn and to the hole of the pit from where we were dug. He bids us look with horror upon our natural state and see that awful and hideous corruption that still remains in our hearts—even though we have been regenerated by Him. Why does He do this? We will answer the question in several ways.

Sometimes, *He does it to confirm us in the doctrines of grace.* My brothers and sisters, Arminianism is the natural religion of us all. I think one of the surest ways in the world to put down all our self-sufficiency and all our erroneous views of the gospel is for God, the Holy Spirit, to show us our own depravity. A man may talk glibly concerning free will as long as he knows nothing about himself—but when the Lord has shown him what he is by nature, he will say no more about that matter. Or if he talks about it as a mere theory, he will not believe it in his inmost spirit. A man untaught of the Spirit says that sinners, of their own free will, turn to God. He says that they do, by their own strength, at least to a great degree, though assisted by the Holy Spirit, keep themselves and that, to some extent, their final perseverance is dependent on their own diligence, and is not left entirely in the hands of God. But I am sure that if the Spirit takes him into the secret chambers of his heart and lets him see his own iniquity, he may go on talking about his own free will, but he will come out singing of God's free grace, for he will say, “O Lord, if You had not begun the good work in me, it never could have originated in such a filthy pool as my heart! And if You do not carry on the work from first to last, it will soon come to a standstill. If I am not robed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, I must stand naked before Your bar. And if the work is not entirely Your own or if You are to be turned away by any sin or sinfulness in the creature, then, O Lord, I know I must perish!” And this right view of the subject will drive him to believe in discriminating grace, in irresistible vocation, in omnipotent keeping and in the infallible perseverance of all the Children of God!

It is noteworthy how the belief of one of the doctrines of grace naturally leads to the belief of all the rest. The system of the gospel is so logical, its truths fit so well into one another, that you cannot get a right knowledge of one of them without, at once, or in a very short time, discovering the others! The Lord begins by teaching us His foundation truth of our utter depravity—He burns it into our conscience by bitter experience and by terrible discoveries of our sinfulness—and He knows right well that the other doctrines will follow and that, when this truth is really understood by us, it shall not be long before we have orthodox views of the whole covenant of grace and the great system of the gospel of Jesus. This, I think, is one reason why the Lord gives His people revelations of their own iniquity and defilement, that they may be sound in the faith and may believe nothing but the doctrines of grace.

Moreover, I believe that He does this to *keep them humble*. If our Master did not sometimes let us have a look at ourselves, we would be fearfully proud. The old Puritans used to say that God has given the peacock black feet, that he may not be proud of his bright feathers and that, in like manner, he has allowed His people to have the black feet of their own sinfulness, that they may not glory in any of the graces which God the Holy Spirit has given them. And that while they have those graces, so bright and beautiful, they may still look down on their own natural depravity, and humble themselves before God. We are all, by nature, as proud as Lucifer. If any man thinks himself to be incapable of pride, he is very proud, indeed: “Ah,” says one, “I know I can never be flattered.” But, sir, you flatter yourself to an extraordinary degree when you say that! Pride is natural to us all—it is woven into the warp and woof of our being. We shall never get rid of it till the worm has eaten up our flesh—nothing will ever cover up our pride except our winding-sheets—and when our bodies are wrapped up in them, and our souls are caught up to dwell with God, then, but not till then, shall pride be thoroughly cast out of us! Our communion with Christ, our progress towards heaven, our increased knowledge, our good works—all these things have, through the evil heart of our unbelief, a tendency to puff us up, though, in truth, being all given to us by the Spirit, there is no legitimate cause for pride in any of us! And therefore, God, to keep His people in their right place, humbles them with discoveries of their own sinfulness. If their ships had all sail and no ballast, they would soon be wrecked. So, when God fills His people with abundant revelations, He also sends them a thorn in the flesh—the messenger of Satan is sent to buffet them that they may walk humbly with God and bow their heads in submission before Him—knowing themselves to still be unclean, apart from the work of Christ Jesus their Lord, which He has worked out for them.

Beloved, you can bear me witness that when you have had sad discoveries of your own heinous guilt, you have been deeply humbled. Sometimes your good works have been a great evil to you because you have prided yourself upon them, and so brought yourself to the edge of the precipice of presumption. But manifestations of your guilt, brought home to your conscience by God’s Spirit, have been of essential service to you by teaching you not to be high-minded, but rather to fear and to remember that your standing in grace is not of yourself, and, therefore, you must not boast. That is another good reason, if there were no other, why we may bless God for showing us our own iniquity.

A third reason why God sometimes shows His people their own wickedness is *to make them submissive in the hour of trouble*. A Pharisee, of all people in the world, would be the worst man to be in Job’s position. If I must be in a hospital, I would rather be there as a publican, than as a Pharisee. For a Pharisee, nothing would be good enough—he would think his pangs and miseries were great, indeed, for so righteous a man to have to endure! He would think he had no right to suffer. But the poor publican would say, “I am a great sinner and these miseries are not a millionth part of what I deserve to suffer. These aches and pains are nothing compared with what I merit at the hand of God. Therefore I will bear them all with submission. Why should a living man complain? I am still out of hell and, therefore, I must not murmur.” Ah, brothers and sisters, we have a great difficulty to keep murmuring down! There is very much meaning in that old English word, murmur. Just sound it—it is *mur-mer*. Any child can say that! It is one of the easiest words to speak and that is why, I think, we have that word for complaining and grumbling, because murmuring is such a very easy thing. Anyone can murmur, anyone can grumble, anyone can complain. Murmuring seems to have been bred in the bones of the children of Israel, for, in the wilderness, they were almost always murmuring—murmuring for water when they were thirsty, murmuring for bread, then murmuring for meat, murmuring because the Anakims were tall—murmuring first, for one thing, and then for another! They were always at it. They were continually murmuring for 40 long years in the wilderness.

Yes, and many of us are all too apt to imitate them. But the surest way to cure us of murmuring is to let us know our own evil. A man who has been taught to realize his own wickedness and his own evil disposition will be less likely to murmur than anyone else. The poor wretch who has had the rope round his neck and has been ready to be hanged, when he gets his pardon and goes his way—you will not find him murmuring at the fare that is provided for him! He will say, “Oh, it is such a wonder to me to be alive at all! It is such an act of mercy that I have had my life spared, that this dry bread becomes like royal dainties, and this cup of cold water tastes to me like the richest wine might do to another man.” The Lord thus often take His children into the strip-

ping-room and into the starving-room, and lets them see that all their afflictions are less than they deserve—that their troubles are but as the small dust of the balance compared with the mountains of tribulation and anguish which they deserve to have received in hell!

Again, when the Lord reveals to us our iniquity, it is *to put us on our watchtower*. When He shows us the sin that is in our heart, it is like a captain pointing to a few skirmishers who have just come before an army that is advancing: “There, my men,” says the captain, “you see those soldiers—they are the advance guard of the enemy. Look sharply after them, for there is a great army behind them, so be on your watch.” Thus the Holy Spirit points out to us our evil desires and corruptions. He wakes us up to see them and when we have seen them, he says to us, “Take care! This little that I have shown you is to warn you of a great army that is behind. These few evil ones that have just appeared to your vision are but the outriders of a host of black things that are ready to attack you, so, be always upon your watchtower, and be constantly looking out for foes.” I think that soldiers need to have a few alarms on their march. If they had none, they might become careless and relax discipline—and then they might be enticed into a defeat—be surprised and cut off. But when they have a few enemies to harass them on the flank and rear, they are more likely to be watchful and to keep a sharp look-out, so that, in case of a sudden attack, they would be ready to repel the foe. The absence of enemies is apt to breed a slothfulness which disables—times of ease seldom suit God’s soldiers. Holidays ruined the army of Hannibal and it is for our good that God stirs up the Amalekites to make us ready for the battle lest we should be surprised by even worse adversaries!

I will give only one more answer to this first question and then I will pass to the other point. The Lord often shows us our iniquity *to make us value salvation all the more*. You know that the man who thinks the most of a doctor is generally the man who needs him most. When we are well, we often make jokes concerning doctors—we talk about their killing the people and so on—but when we get ill, we send for them! We laugh at them while in health, but we are glad to make use of them when sick. So it is with the Lord’s people—they may, perhaps, think lightly of Christ when they do not see or feel any present need for Him—but when they discover their own leprosy, then it is that they value the great Physician! When they realize their own ruin, then it is that they prize the God-given remedy. It is a great service to us, sometimes, to show us our bankrupt schedule. Every man has had a bankrupt’s schedule because we are all bankrupts by nature. We set up in trade for ourselves and we soon became bankrupts. We never paid even a farthing in the pound, but our Lord Jesus Christ paid it all for us—yet we would not know how great was His grace in doing so, did He not remind us of our debts and of how very poor we are in our own hopes of meeting debts so immense, so infinitely beyond all our powers to discharge. God says to His children, “I brought you out of prison, but you do not think much of My deliverance, today, so I will take you back to prison and let you see once more what kind of place it is. And then you will think more of the Breaker who broke your chains and set you free. I have opened a fountain that sparkles with living water. You have been drinking of it day by day till you are full, but you do not know its value. Come, I will put you in the hot, howling wilderness and you shall feel the pangs of thirst—you shall have all the water in your bottle spent—then you will know the preciousness of the rippling fountain which grace has opened for thirsty sinners! You have been feasting every day at My table. You have scarcely known what hunger is. I will put you, again, in the desert of conviction and make you hunger after righteousness—and then you will prize the bread that came down from heaven, and think more of Jesus Christ, My Son, than you would have done had it not been for this showing of iniquity and grievance.”

All these things of which I have spoken are matters of *heart* experience to all true believers. Many persons do not know the plague of their heart. But you who love the Lord will acknowledge that however quaintly I have put these things, there is great truth in them. It is even so—we have had very solemn times, all of us who believe in Jesus—since we first knew the Lord. There have been times when we could not tell our right hand from our left in spiritual matters. If anyone had asked us, “Are you the Lord’s?” we dared not have answered, “Yes, we are,” for our corruptions were so strong, and unbelief had become so rampant, and poor faith seemed to be so slumbering, like the fire in the ashes, that we could not tell whether there was any fire or not! O brothers and sisters, do we not remember when we have sometimes knelt down in anguish, and cried, “O Lord, I long to have this point decided, “am I Yours, or am I not? If it is so, why am I thus? Why this wrestling of two armies in the Shulamite? Why is it that these contentions and these

wars are carried on in my spirit? Show me why You contend with me, and why my sin contends with me! O Lord, show me where I am vile”? And have we not found that these times of sore conflict have been of essential benefit to us? We have grown strong by these griefs! The sight of iniquity has made us wiser, more cautious, more prudent, more humble, and more affectionate—and made us more firm in our belief in our Savior than we had ever been before!

II. Now I will try to answer the question of the text in another sense: “Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?”

Sometimes, the iniquity and grievance are not in ourselves but IN OTHERS. Some of you may not have much of this world’s goods. You, perhaps, live in a house where there are very ungodly people—down in your court the Sabbath is always broken. In the street where you reside, you seldom hear anything on the Sabbath except oaths, curses, profanity and everything which constitutes a breach of the day of rest. And others of you, by your very connections, are called to mix with evil companions whose speech, instead of being seasoned with salt, seems seasoned with brimstone, flavored only with blasphemy and having perpetually in it the very brogue of hell! There are some of you who are called to labor with workmen who, instead of endeavoring to help you to heaven, seem trying, like Christian’s neighbors and wife, of whom you read in, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” to pull you back to the City of Destruction. You are, perhaps, asking this question, “O Lord, why am I in such a condition? Why has Your providence put me where I am thrown into contact with evil men? ‘Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?’” I will tell you three or four reasons why the Lord acts thus towards you.

The first is, *to let you see what you might, yourselves, have been*. John Bradford—you have probably heard the story a hundred times—when he used to see people going past his window, on the way to Tyburn, to be hanged, said, “There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God. If it had not been for the grace of God, John Bradford, too, would have been hanged.” When you hear men swearing, you can say, “That is what I would have done if the Lord had not kept the door of my lips.” When you see men taken up for robbery, you can say, “That is what I might have been if God had not kept me from sin.” When you hear of the drunken brawl or the murderous affray, put your hand on your heart and say, “Ah, the same sort of evils might have come out of this heart of mine, for human hearts are very much alike. ‘As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man.’ There is not much difference, by nature, between one heart and another, so that man is a picture of what I might have been if the restraining hand of God had not kept me back from sin.” You know that, sometimes, drunks help to make men sober. Occasionally, drunks are good apostles of temperance, for, when they come reeling through the streets, in all their bestial stupidity, a man very naturally says, “What a fool that fellow makes of himself!” And it leads him to say, “I must avoid that evil thing because I would not make myself as foolish as he is.” I think it was the old Greek lords who used to make their slaves drunk in order to keep their children from the vice—by letting them see how disgraceful a drunk looked.

Thus, perhaps, God allows wicked men to come in our way *to make us see the evil of sin, that we may turn from it, pass by it, abhor it, and not indulge in it*. I have no doubt that the wickedness of men may be employed under the divine Wisdom and the overruling hand of God for the sanctification of His own people. Just as sometimes a book that is full of bad spelling is one of the best things for teaching a child how to spell well—by leading him to correct the mistakes in spelling—so the Lord permits us to see this other kind of bad spelling in order to teach us how to spell aright. We have to correct ourselves by the evils of others and to learn from their wrongdoing to avoid the sins into which they have fallen. Wrecks may sometimes be made into beacons—the ruin of one man may be a warning to another. It is so with the Christian, for he knows how to use his sight of iniquity and of grievance, as he beholds it in others, as a reason for avoiding the same iniquity in himself.

In the next place, God sometimes allows us to see the sins of others, *to teach us to admire His sovereignty* which plucked us as brands from the burning. We look at our neighbors and see them drinking down sin as a greedy ox drinks down water, and we say, “What has made us to differ from them?” Grace—free grace. And then we ask, “Why has grace come to us, and not to them? Why have these favors been given to us, and not to the rest of mankind?” And we are obliged to say, with Christ, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Your sight.” When only one member of a family is converted, what a proof that is of divine sovereignty! When there is a holy mother with an ungodly husband, and wicked children, what an illustration that is of the sovereignty of

God, in that one is taken, and the others are left! And when, in a house, two women have been grinding at the mill, and one has accompanied her grinding with the songs of Zion, and the other has accompanied hers with the voice of cursing, what a proof there has been of the sovereignty of God who, “has mercy on whom He will have mercy,” for, “it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.”

Yes, Christian, God has put you in the very midst of sin to make His grace the more conspicuous. If you ride in the country and you see a field of wheat, you will very likely not notice one of the ears at all. But as you are going along, you see a hedge, and, by some chance or other, a grain of wheat has been dropped into the ground under the hedge—and from it a single ear of corn has grown up through the brambles—and there it stands alone. Very likely you nudge your friend who is riding with you, and say, “There is an ear of wheat growing up among the rambles.” It seems the more astonishing and notable from the place where it is growing! So, I think a Christian in the Church of Christ is not a thing to be wondered at so much. The sovereignty of God is not so much seen among the righteous by themselves as it is when we find the Christians growing up amid the bushes and brambles of an ungodly world—and proving themselves to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.” Who ever noticed glowworms in the daytime? But, in the night, you will see them shining among the leaves! They were there by day, I daresay, but nobody saw them! But in the night, with their little lamps glowing, everyone admires them. So the Christian, when he is in good company, is a blessed man and great instance of divine love—but when, in the order of providence, he is put into a dark place where there is little of gospel light and truth—then it is that his lamp begins to be most useful and he is more noticed than he ever was before. This is why the Lord sometimes puts His people there, to make His sovereignty, His power, His might and His grace the more apparent. Even as men sometimes set jewels in foils to show their brightness and put dark spots in their picture to make the lights more apparent, so the Lord, in His providence, permits His people, sometimes, to sojourn in evil places. Like Lot, to dwell in Sodom, and like Abraham, to go down among the Egyptians, or with the Philistines, in order that divine grace may be displayed—and the Lord’s name may be exalted!

I have another answer, and, I think, a better one, to the question of the text: “Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?” Why, my brothers and sisters, God shows us the sin of our fellow men, *that we may set more earnestly to work, and that we may be the means of saving souls and extending the kingdom of righteousness*. When a captain takes his soldiers out to look at the enemy, it is like what I heard of a celebrated Scotchman, whose words I am scarcely able to pronounce correctly: “Now, lads,” he said, “there they are! If you dinna kill them, they’ll kill you.” That was their choice and so it is with us. God brings us to walk in this city, where harlotry and vice are to be seen on every side, almost at noonday. Now then, soldiers of the cross, if you dinna kill them, they’ll kill you. If you do not stand up for your Master, and keep the banner of the cross in the air, the enemy will be more than a match for you! I have been struck, sometimes, when I have looked in a window, and seen pamphlets full of all manner of obscenity and infidelity and wickedness—and they have had the most blessed effect upon my mind, for I have thought: “Well, if there is so much wickedness, so much the more reason is there why every minister should be in earnest, and why every Christian should seek with all his might to do good.”

Some of you live in very nice villas in the country. You do not go among the poor people and you do not know what they are like. If you were to walk through some of the back slums and narrow alleys of London, you would say, “Oh, I never thought there could have been such places upon earth!” And if you could go where I have sometimes gone, up an old creaking staircase where you have to stoop your head for fear of hitting it against a beam. And go into a room and see a whole family there. And go into another room and see a whole family there—and go a little further and see another family all crowded and packed together—and then hear their language and see their utter ignorance of everything concerning Christ, almost as unenlightened as the Hottentots in their kraals in Africa—you would go away after seeing them, and say, “There is great reason that we should all be in earnest. We ought to be up and doing, sirs. We ought to be working well for our Master after such a sight as this!” Oh, but instead we cover up our iniquity in this land a great deal! We border all London with fine streets so that when a foreigner rides through them, he says, “What a grand city it is!” A varnished hypocrisy! What is there behind those

streets? What will you find behind those palaces at the West-End? The very lowest places upon earth, where the poor are stowed away together by hundreds! We border the city with something that looks respectable, but, alas, for the internals of this city—how much of wickedness and sin dwell there! I bless God that there are some of you who are obliged to live where you see the wickedness of this city. I thank God that some of you cannot go to your houses at night without seeing wickedness on the road: “Why,” you ask, “do you bless God that there is this wickedness?” No, I do not, but I bless God that you have to see it, because you will be the people who will go to others and say, “Strive for the salvation of men. Work, I beseech you, to do good, because the world is still full of wickedness and the dark places even of this city are full of the habitations of cruelty.”

It is a long time since I have made a good speech at a public meeting, but I do remember doing it once. I stepped out as one of the speakers was delivering a very pretty oration, and I went into a neighboring house to speak with a woman who wished to join the church. It was not in London. When I entered the house, there was the husband horribly drunk. He had got his wife up in a corner, and, with all his might, was trying to beat and bruise her—he was even tearing her arms with his nails till the blood freely flowed from her arms and face. Two or three friends rushed in and dragged him away. She said she had endeavored, in all meekness, to persuade him to allow her to go to the house of God that night, and the only reason why he treated her so badly was because he said she would be always going to that place of worship. And when I had seen that sight and looked on the poor, bleeding woman, with tears in her eyes, I went back into the place and spoke like a man who had got his heart and his whole body full of fire! I could not help it—I was all on flame against the sin of drunkenness, and sought, with all my might, to urge the members of the church to do all they could to scatter the light of the gospel in a neighborhood which was so dark and black and filthy and abandoned. And I think it would do all of us good, when we are about to preach, if we were, sometimes, to be dragged through some of the worst parts of London—to let us see the wickedness of it. It would do our Sunday school teachers good, many of them, for they would then be more in earnest with their children. And I think it would do good to some of our old friends who sit and sleep through almost all the service and are never much more than sleeping partners in the concern! If they did but know how the battle was going on—how tough the struggle and how stern the conflict—they would wake up from their slumbers and go forth to the battle! And they would stand shoulder to shoulder and deal blow after blow against the common enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the welfare of man!

Ah, my brothers and sisters, we need to know more of the evil of men, to make us more earnest in seeking their salvation! For if there is anything in which the Church is lacking more than in any other matter, it is in the matter of earnestness. Whitefield said, in one of his sermons “O my God, when I think how this wicked city is perishing, and how many are dying for lack of knowledge, I feel as if I could stand on the top of every hackney coach in the streets of London to preach the gospel.” Why did he say that? Why was his zeal so burning? Because he had seen the sinfulness of men and marked their follies. We shall never be thoroughly in earnest till we are thoroughly aware of the evil that is before us. When the horse sees the precipice, he throws himself back and will not madly dash himself down. So is it with the Church of Christ—if she could see the evil that is before her, she would surely draw herself back, with energy, to save her own children from plunging into the yawning gulf! Yes, sirs, you have iniquity in your very midst and at your doors! You have iniquity everywhere round about you and yet, how few of you are striving to do anything for Christ! You are asked to help in this great battle, but you have so many other things to do, you cannot help us. You are asked to do something in this cause, to give it a little of your time—but you cannot manage it. You are asked to speak, but you have so little ability, you cannot do it. One half of the people who call themselves Christians need to be asked 50 times to do a thing and then, when they agree to do it, they are not worth having, because they are only pressed men—they are not one half so good as volunteers! I would that all of us knew the evil state of this world and the wickedness of men—and then I think that all of us who love the Savior would start up from our seats and each one would say, “Here am I! Let me be a volunteer against the enemy! Let me, in my measure, whatever little measure that may be, go forth to serve my God, to practice virtue, and by a holy example, and by every other means, seek to stem the raging torrent of the iniquity of the age.”

Now, my dear friends, in closing, allow me just this one remark to another class of hearers. There is one who, but a little while ago, was an abandoned sinner. He could drink, he could swear, he could break the Sabbath and curse God. One day he stepped into the house of God, and the Lord met with him, and now he is in misery—such as he cannot describe. His heart is all broken, his conscience is as if it had been lashed with the tenfold whip of the law of God, and as if salt had then been rubbed into his wounds. He is smarting all over with the wounds of his conscience, inflicted by the angry and fiery law of God. He is crying, in his agony, “O Lord, I must perish, I know I must! I see such wickedness in my soul, that I must perish and be cast away.” No, poor soul, no—that is not the right answer to the question of the text! The question is, Why does the Lord show you iniquity? I will give you the right answer. *It is in order that He may deliver you from it.* If God has broken your heart, He has broken it on purpose to give you a new one. If He has killed you by the law, He has killed you on purpose to make you alive by the gospel. If He has wounded you in your conscience, He has done it that He may have room to pour in the oil and the balm of Christ Jesus. If He has stripped you, He has only pulled off your rags that He may put on you a perfect robe of spotless righteousness. And if He has cast you into the ditch, so that your own clothes abhor you, as Job words it, it is that He may take you to the fountain filled with blood and give you a perfect washing! When the Lord pulls a man down, He does it in order that He may build him up again! When He breaks a man’s heart, it is not for the mere breaking’s sake—it is that He may make it anew! If you have misery in your conscience on account of sin, God has had dealings of love with you and He has purposes of love concerning you: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.”

If you are a convinced sinner, Jesus died for you, for He died for sinners. If you can truly say that you are a sinner, I can tell you that Christ Jesus hung upon the cross for you. Look at Him there, bleeding—every drop of blood says to you, “I drop, poor sinner, for *you*.” Look at that gash in His side, from where flows the double stream of water and blood—it say, “Sinner, this stream runs for *you*.” Are you a sinner? If so, Christ died for you, and He has not died in vain—you shall be saved. If you do but know yourself to be a *bona fide sinner*, a real one, no mere complimentary sham sinner, but a real actual one who means what he says, when he declares himself to be guilty and vile—then, as the Lord lives, Jesus Christ died for you on Calvary! You shall behold His face with joy! You shall be numbered with the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, and you shall sing eternal hallelujahs around the throne of God and the Lamb!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

JOB 1:1-5.

Verse 1. *There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.*

That was Job’s character before the trial which made him famous. Perhaps if it had not been for that trial we would never have heard of him. Now, as the apostle James wrote, “You have heard of the patience of Job.” God, by great afflictions, gave to His servant that usefulness for which he had possibly prayed, without knowing how it would come to him. A long-continued life of prosperity may not so truly glorify God as a life that is checkered by adversity. And God, who intended to put honor upon His servant, did as kings do when they confer the honor of knight-hood—they strike with the back or flat of the sword—so God smote the patriarch Job that He might raise him above his fellow men. The Lord intended to make him Job, the patient one, but to that end He must make him Job the sufferer.

From this Book I learn what gospel perfection is. We are told that Job was perfect and upright, yet I am sure that he was not free from tendencies to evil—he was not absolutely perfect. As old Master Trapp says, “God’s people may be perfect, but they are not perfectly perfect.” And so it certainly was with Job. There were imperfections deep down in his character which his trials developed and which the grace of God, no doubt, afterwards removed. But after the manner of speech that is used in Holy Scripture, Job was a “perfect” man. He was sincere, thorough-hearted, consecrated, and he was also “upright.” He leaned neither this way nor that way—he had no twist in him, he had no selfish ends to serve. He was “one that feared God.” Everybody could see that, and, consequently, he hated evil with all his heart.

2. *And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.*

It was a great privilege to have such a family as this, but it brought to Job great responsibilities and many anxieties.

3. *His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.*

A man may be a good man and a rich man, but it is not usually the case. I am afraid that what Mr. Bunyan says is all too true—

***“Gold and the gospel seldom agree—
Religion always sides with poverty.”***

Yet it should not be so, for God can give a man grace enough to use all his substance to his Lord’s glory. I wish that it were more often the case that we could see a holy Job as well as a godly Lazarus—a company of men who would prove their consecration to God by never allowing their wealth to become their master—but being master of all their substance and realizing constantly that it is all the Lord’s. This, after all, is the noblest heritage a man has with the exception of his God. Job, in adversity, could possess his soul in patience because, in his prosperity, he had not let his riches possess him, but he had possessed them.

4. *And his sons went and feasted in their houses, everyone his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.*

This showed that it was not drunken riotousness, or they would not have wanted their sisters—the sweet, gentle, delicate influence of their sisters would tend to keep their feasting what it should be. Besides, they were the sons of a man of God and so they would know how to keep their feasting within due bounds. Yet we are all mortal and fallible—and feasting times are dangerous times. The Puritans used to call fasting, “soul-fattening fasting”—but feasting they might call “soul-weakening feasting.” Solomon truly said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” There is always a risk about feasting and Job was, therefore, a little afraid about how his sons might have behaved.

5. *And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all, for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts, Thus did Job continually.*

They might have spoken unadvisedly with their lips. They might have even taken God’s name in vain. There might have been something about their conduct which was not altogether proper—so their father desired to put the sin of it away. Observe Job’s resort to burnt offerings. He lived before the Jewish law was given, yet he felt the instinct concerning the need of a sacrifice which every believing heart feels when it approaches the holy God. I pray you never give up that idea of coming to God by means of a sacrifice, for there is no other way of access. We may think as we will, but there is nothing else that will ever quiet the conscience and bring us near to God, but the divinely-appointed sacrifice. And Job knew this. He did not think that his sons could be cleansed by his prayers, alone, but he must offer burnt sacrifices according to the number of them all, that they might, each one, have a share in the blessings which those sacrifices typified.

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