Job - Commentaries by William Kelly

Lectures on the Book of Job, Job 8:4-10, Lectures on

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Lect. 3. (Continued)

But there were, to add to the terrible agony that he passed through outwardly, inward agonies. It really was one billow after another overcoming this poor man in such a sea of trouble as never came upon any man since the world began. How was all that? He was stung by the insinuation of his friends (he held to it firmly that it was all false) that he was not a true man, and that he did not love God. He was not conscious of a single sin; nevertheless, he owned it was God. That was what made the riddle, and no wonder at all. It was impossible that it should not have been a riddle, in those days, except by special teaching of God. There was one that appeared later, and Elihu did in some measure understand; but it was the Lord who put an end to all the uncertainty.

Now that Christ has come, there is no ground for it; only, beloved friends, we may treat the gospel now very much as is done in Christendom, and regard it as pretty much the same thing as there has always been, only with a little more light—a sort of new edition of Judaism—improved, that is all. Whereas it is entirely new—it is an absolutely new creation, a new light altogether. It is not merely the dim torch, as it were, on the earth; it is the light of heaven revealed in our Lord Jesus. They had none of that-none whatever. There was a looking for Him, but it was entirely in an earthly way. They looked to Him as the Messiah; they looked for Him as one who would meet their difficulties; but it was very, very shallow—anything that any one of them knew about it. We must not confound prophetic anticipations with the experience of the saints. The prophets did not always understand their own prophecy. They had to search and learn what the meaning was, just as you have to do now; but if you have all the prophecies, they do not give you what the gospel does.

The gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness. They were all occupied with man's righteousness produced by divine goodness, by faith, by looking for the Messiah; but they had no idea of the total judgment of man, and that this is an entirely new thing from God, communicated to the soul. This is what Christendom has never endured and never possessed. It has Christianity, but a very small amount of Christianity is quite enough for Christendom. Well, here then this man breaks out into this rebuke of job for his extreme feeling. How could the man do anything but feel? And what were they about that they did not deeply feel for him? There they were, quite comfortable; and there they were, judging there must be something very bad; and I need not tell you that that deeply wounded the poor injured man. It was pouring vitriol into his wounds; it. was not binding them with wine and oil, cleansing the wound, but, on the contrary, deepening and poisoning it.

And these were his three friends! What a lesson! Well, Bildad goes further, however. He says, “If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression” —there they thought they had him. How could God do such a thing as to kill all his children unless there was something very bad in them? It was all the same principle, and the same false principle. And what shows the falsity of the principle is the universal test. Bring Christ in. Was it any want of God's delight in Christ that allowed Christ to be the greatest sufferer, far beyond Job? It was therefore altogether a false estimate, and a false principle underneath the estimate, to imagine that there must be evil in the person that came to this depth of suffering.

“If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression” —they never could rise above that— “If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; if thou wert pure and upright” —ah! there they were at it again! It was not merely the children then that had transgression! “If thou wert pure and upright” —why, Job was much more so than they— “If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee.” Certainly not; the Lord was going to have the trial brought to its full completion; and He allowed all these discussions in order to bring out everything that was in their hearts, and then came He in with His own word completely setting down these principles which governed the three friends, and Job not able properly to answer them.

He could demolish their arguments, but that is a very different thing. A clever man could, of course, easily overthrow a foolish reasoning; but that is a very different thing from getting in the truth. The truth requires God and His word and His Spirit; and we never can have these in a difficulty except by entire dependence upon God. And if we have got any self-will at work, which was very much the case with Job as well as with his three friends—self-will is a most darkening thing—you never can have the certainty of the will of God where self-will is not steadily seen and judged as altogether beneath you. “Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.”

Then he appeals to another thing. Eliphaz had spoken of his own personal experience; Bildad differs in the manner in which he defends their theme by bringing in the traditions of other people. Those are the two ways in which men are apt to slip away from the truth—confidence in self; confidence in other people no better than oneself; confidence in anyone but God. So he says, “Inquire, I pray thee, of the former age” for people think that a little further back is where we should go. Why, beloved friends, we want to go back to the beginning; we want to go back to God's beginning. People talk about the early fathers; well, that is a great deal too late; why do not they talk about the apostles? Because they are as far from them as they can possibly be. There is not the slightest resemblance—except the mere name of things-a totally different reality. And so it was here. Had they gone back to the garden of Eden? Ah, that is not a former age; that was the beginning where God manifested Himself.

They were all arguing on the ground of righteousness. Not one of them had taken in, up to this and for long after, any thought of grace. And Job only arrived at it at last by the intervention of God. There he was dust and ashes. There he took the place of nothingness and worse than nothingness; and then it was he was blessed; then it was that he was vindicated by God, and not till then. So Bildad goes on with this, “Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?” But we want the words out of God's heart; it is not any but His heart that can do. “Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water?” Well, that is just what their condition was—mire and water, no substance at all, but just mire and water; and their thoughts were no better than the flag that grew out of the water, or the reed

that grew out of the mire. And he talks about the hypocrite being no better than a spider's web. That is just exactly what they were, though they were not hypocrites; but still they were all wrong in their reasonings, and wrong reason is never better than a spider's web.

And so he describes in a very lively and wonderful manner the man that had known the hypocrite, and all this was a sly hit at Job. There is where they were so very wrong. “He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure. He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap” to get a little strength from the heap— “and seeth the place of stones.” That is what the reed does in order to get tenacity. “If he destroy him from his place, than it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee.” That is the case with man upon the earth; he passes away, and his memory is so forgotten that the place itself even says it never saw him, or it was all completely forgotten. This he applies to the hypocrite. “Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man.” But God was trying and troubling the perfect at that very moment; they never could take this into their minds; they did not understand it nor believe it in the slightest degree, and hence their reasons were all false, and more than that, thoroughly unkind; and it is a sad thing to be unkind to what is good and true, as also it is a sad thing to be very kind to what is not good and what is not true. This is what they were about; that is where they got through want of the guidance of God, and of the truth.

Chap. 9. Now we come to a very grand chapter, but still we find the lack of Christ. Job raises that question. “I know it is so of a truth.” He did not deny what they were saying, about the hypocrite, in the least; he agreed with them fully. Only he said, as it were, “You are all mistaken in thinking I am a hypocrite.” “I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God?” There was the great difficulty for him. He fully believed in God's faithfulness to himself, and His faithfulness to His children generally; but still where was the ground? Well there was no ground yet at all. It was all hope. It was a hope of the Christ that was coming, without their knowing how Christ would answer to that hope. They only knew it would be all right, but how, they had no idea. That Christ should become the righteousness of the believer—oh, what a wonderful thing that is! Well, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of Jehovah's righteousness; but I do not believe the prophet Jeremiah understood anything about it at all. How could he? Nobody could. Look at the apostles themselves. They had all the Old Testament to help them, and all the teaching of the Lord Jesus during the time of His ministry, yet they were entirely ignorant of it. They had not a notion of it until the cross began to enlighten them, and particularly the resurrection, and fully, the Holy Ghost—the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. He brought in the truth that was in Christ, but their eyes were holden that they could not take it in—could not see.

So Job describes in a very grand manner what God is in His ways—His uncontrollable power and authority. He knew man was weak and faulty. Nevertheless, Job did not doubt that God would see him through all his difficulties, but on what ground of righteousness he could not conceive. If man was a poor sinful man, and nevertheless God showed him saving mercy, how was man to be just? You cannot put justice and sins together until you have got Christ, who died for the sins and rose again for the believer's justification. There the sins are completely blotted out. How could Job know anything about that? Nobody knew it; no man on earth. Their idea of the Messiah was more of a great king that would be full of goodness and mercy to his people upon the earth. But that He should be made unto us righteousness as well as wisdom and sanctification and redemption! oh, dear no! they did not in the least understand; how could they?... I daresay that the people in Christendom think it was all known pretty much as they know it now. There was no power, no joy, no peace, but always entreating that God would show them mercy as poor, miserable sinners; there was no idea of salvation. Well, here Job describes God's power in a wonderful way. “Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars; which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.” Very grand; wonderfully so; and very true. “Which maketh Arcturus” —that is in the constellation of Arctophylax or Bootes (the Herdsman), near the seven stars which people call “Charles Wain.” The Arabs called the latter, however, a very different thing, viz., “The Greater Bear.” They made the four stars to be the body, and the three stars were the tail. However, this is Arcturus; and Orion and the Pleiades go by the same names still. These are all in the northern sphere; but the people of those days had penetrated enough to cross the line, and they were aware that there was a southern world. They did not know much about it; they knew very little. Of course they did not know America, except very obscurely. There were hints from time to time that there was something in the west; but in the south they had no idea of Australia or New Zealand.

He goes on, “which doeth great things, past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not; he passeth on also, but I perceive him not. Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?” (verses 6-12). That is exactly where poor Job was. He was quite sure that it was of God, and that is the very thing that made the difficulty. Because his conscience was pure toward God, and he knew the goodness of God, and yet how was this? He could not understand it, neither did they in the slightest degree. “If God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him. How much less shall I answer him?” There he is beginning to feel his weakness. He was not a proud man; but as all men are, till they learn in the way that I have described, he had a very good opinion of himself. That must all come down. If a man is to be blessed, or a woman, the blessing will not come by a good opinion of oneself; that is wrong, and the greatest hindrance to the blessing of God, and the enjoyment of His grace. “Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer.” There, you see, was thorough piety. “But I would make supplication to my judge. If I had called, and he had answered me, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice.”

Well, that was great ignorance of God; because God does answer, and God does hear; and God delights in His children now; now that they are cleared, now that they know Him, He delights in perfect intimacy and love with Himself. “For he breaketh me with a tempest” —and that was true— “and multiplieth my wounds without cause.” Ah! without cause; that is a little too much to say. He had His own wise cause; He had His own blessed end. He meant that Job should be a far happier man and brighter in his state than he had ever been before; and till Christ came it could be only by making him a bag of broken bones —to learn that all the goodness was in God and all the badness was in himself. “If I speak of strength lo, he is strong; and if of judgment, who shall set me a time to plead? If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.” That is what they thought was a terrible blasphemy, but that is what he thinks.

We understand it. The greatest calamity might come, and God send it, and a number of people perfectly innocent might perish just as much as the wicked people-say the sack of a city, or a pestilence sent by God in His moral government. Well, I, say, these things are there undoubtedly, and Job stuck to that. All their tally did not at all drive him from the plain fact which they shirked and shut their eyes to. “The earth,” he says, “is given into the hand of the wicked.” And is not that true? Is not Satan the god, and the prince, of this world? That is wicked enough. And further, “He covereth the faces of the judges thereof,” i.e., he allows the judges to pronounce altogether wrongly and unjustly. That is, somehow or other their faces are veiled from the light, and they judge according to appearance. It is very certain that that is not a

way to judge soundly. “If not, where, and who is he?” Who is he that does that? These things happen; innocent people suffer; guilty people escape; all these things are coming every day—are coming in England. It is not merely in Turkey, or Russia, or Tartary, or China; no, it is in England, in London; and nobody can hinder it. Things are out of course, and will be till the Lord takes the reins.

“If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort myself; I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent. If I be wicked, why then labor I in vain? If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.” That is, God will show him to be defective after all. That is true. If you are resting upon yourself, you are resting upon a ground that is not approved before God. If you are resting upon Christ, you have got the only solid ground that never can be taken from you. So he closes. “For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us.” That is what Christ became; Christ became the mediator between God and men; and not merely a mediator, but a mediator who is equally divine with the God before whom He acts as mediator for us. If there had not been the hand of God in the cross, there could have been no divine redemption. It was God that forsook His Son; it was God that turned away His face from Him; and, therefore, now what is brought in is the righteousness of God. And there is nothing against that. But it is a justifying righteousness; it is not a condemning righteousness. The same God that condemned under the law saved under grace, because of Christ.

Well, then, we come to a great lament in the tenth chapter, and I may be very brief with that; for we shall have a great deal of this lament throughout the Book. We have had it already, so there is no need particularly to dwell upon it. My object is not to go into every word, but to give a sufficiently general understanding of the Book of job. “My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself.” He now despaired of getting any sympathy from them. “I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.” Here I am alone with all my sorrows; here are three dear friends who have not one particle of sympathy with me! no kind of feeling nor compassion for all that I am suffering. They are quite comfortable that they have none of it, and they are quite astonished that I should have any of it; and they think therefore I must be very wicked. It is all false. “I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me.” That God did; he was answered. “Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked? Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth? Are thy days as the days of man? Are thy years as man's days?” That is, he compares himself to a sort of butterfly broken on the wheel. There is this terrible wheel for malefactors, and he, a mere butterfly, is all broken down—God, in all His uncontrollable power dealing with such a poor, weak man as he; every part of his body throbbing with pain, and full of nerves all on the strain of agony from head to foot. “Thou enquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin.”

Job had a perfectly good conscience and therefore he says, ‘Where is it; I want to learn where it is and why it is.' “Thou knowest that I am not wicked.” That he could say to God; and it was perfectly true. It was not that; it was his own satisfaction in that poor reflection of righteousness which the best of men can have here below in himself, but which is no ground at all to stand on before God. “Thine hands have made me, and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me” —after all the love thou hast shown me. “Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay.” He had not made him as an angel; he had not made him as one that was above this kind of suffering. “Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favor, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. And these things hast thou hid in thine heart.” 'You had that in your heart before I was born. You meant me to come into this, and I do not know why.'

“I know that this is with thee. If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.” He asked to be forgiven if there was anything unknown. “If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head.” No, he is thoroughly humble now; at any rate, he was on the way to it. “I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction, for it increaseth.” And he uses very ungodly language now. “Thou huntest me as a fierce lion; and again thou showest thyself marvelous upon me. Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me. Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me! I should have been as though I had not been; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. Are not my days few? Cease then and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death.” You see how little they entered into the bright future. “A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.”

[W. K.]

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