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SEEKING GOD TO ORDER OUR CAUSE BEFORE HIM

SERMON

by

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preached at Broad Oak Chapel, Heathfield, on Wednesday evening, May 22nd, 1946.¹

Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me.

Job 23 v. 3 - 6.

One of the greatest mysteries of godliness in experience - that is, so far as it is viewed by reason - is that it is ordained to be a path of tribulation to the kingdom. I wonder how many of us here are really willing for our times to be in God's hands,² willing for the government to be upon His shoulder;³ I wonder how many of us are willing for the key to be in His gracious hand, for the key of the house of David to be upon His shoulder;⁴ or, in a word, how many of us can *really* pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" (Mat. 6 v. 10)? This is above nature. What course should we take if we were left to follow the dictates of our own natural inclinations? How should we put what appears to be crooked straight? How many depths should we voluntarily go into? How many furnaces would we voluntarily place ourselves in? How often should we hedge ourselves up against that which our nature desires? Oh, my friends, faith sees in the sovereignty of God, in all His divine disposings, eternal wisdom, goodness and power, and it is very sweet. It is a rest, to rest in the will of God, and I venture to say this, that if you have grace in your heart, and God permitted you to be your own guide, to go your own way, instead of bringing yourself as you might think to a condition of satisfaction and rest, you would bring yourself into desolation, trouble and death.

Hezekiah was brought by experience to acquiesce in the will of God, and more than that, looking upon his afflictions, he said, "By these things men live" (Isa. 38 v. 16) - by the very things which threatened to destroy. As Samson returned to find honey in the carcase of the lion which was slain (Judges 14 v. 5 - 9), so I believe that some of you have found in many a trouble which threatened to devour, when the Lord has mercifully delivered you, or it may be, in the exercises, the fears and conflict of the trial, that there has been a taking of honey from the carcase of the lion.

¹ The chapter read at this service was Isaiah 30.

² "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. 31 v. 15).

³ "The government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9 v. 6).

⁴ "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder" (Isa. 22 v. 22)

Well, Job was a man who walked in this pathway of affliction, much misunderstood, very much misrepresented. It is astonishing how those three friends - and there is every evidence that they were godly men - mistook God with respect to His dealings with Job; they misjudged God in that matter, and so nothing was right; they saw nothing with respect to Job's case in the light of God. This godly, afflicted, wounded man had the extra trouble of receiving reproaches and sword-thrusts from his godly friends. Said one of them to him, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace" (Job 22 v. 21). Well, you may depend upon it, that Job was more acquainted with God and had a far richer experience than his three friends had, but he opens this chapter with a broken and a contrite heart. "Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning" (v. 1, 2). This is not an ordinary experience. I would not at all dare to pretend to have gone to the depths of Job, but I do remember one, and more than one, occasions when I have felt that a particular stroke has been heavier than my groaning. There is something very sweet about the groaning of the Lord's people. It is such upon whom the Lord looks from heaven, the height of His sanctuary. There was more music in the ears of God in the groans of this afflicted man than ever there is in "the laughter of the fool", which is "as the crackling of thorns under a pot (Eccl. 7 v. 6); and perhaps some of you have felt it when you have met a piece of bruised corn - "Bread corn is bruised" (Isa. 28 v. 28) - a real chastened child of God in the furnace, with their heart broken and dissolved, with their mouth in the dust, as was David's, when he said, "I was dumb ... because Thou didst it" (Ps. 39 v. 9) - the tender fear of God, recognising His hand, bowing before God.

And then it is as though he answers the charge: "Acquaint now thyself with Him" in the language of the text, as though he would say, 'Well, it is God I would *find*, whom I am *seeking*; none else can do me good; "oh that I knew where I might find *Him!*"' My friends, if ever we have spiritually been brought to make the same inward inquiry, there is some good evidence that the same work of grace as in Job is in our hearts. Job does not say a word about his lost property; he says not a word about his bereavement, not a word about his poor sore body, full of boils. It is GOD. Has God ever made himself more necessary to you than all things beside? I consider that these are points, vital points in experience, for our examination.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" - as though Job would say, 'I don't mind what I have lost; I am not concerned about the pains of my poor body, if I could but find God.' Do you know the feeling? Have you ever been submerged, immersed, in the midst of trouble, and felt you could leave things just where they are, leave it in the hands of God either to remove it, or do according to His will, if you could but find Him? You would hang upon Him; you would hang upon Him in your rags, in your weakness, in your trouble, if you could but find God. Asaph felt the same; he said, "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73 v. 28). If I find God, I find life, I find eternity, I find righteousness, I find eternal peace, I find the Mediator, I find a High Priest, I find the Way to God. What matters what I don't find, if I find Him? Do you know it? Do you know it from this point of view, under a sense, a *real* sense, a discovery, of what you are? Oh, the reality of an experience of the fall, a real experience of ruin, a real view of ourselves as shipwrecked, a sight of ourselves in the blessed mirror of the Word of God, of all our deformity and depravity; and yet faith in the midst of that condition honouring God above it, seeing in His blood more power, an infallibility which is above all sins and guilt, seeing in the righteousness of Christ that which can cover every folly, every fault, seeing in the person of Christ, in the fulness of His divine merit, that which will swallow up all the demerit of sin; and for

faith, under the drawing power, the sweet attraction, of Christ in the gospel, to give vent to this text, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!"

There are times, my friends, when cases are so urgent, together with a real, inward, felt sense of the blessedness of Christ, that you would be willing not to return home, as it were, to what you possess, but you would be willing to go *anywhere* where Christ might direct you if you might but be with Him, willing under the power of faith to do as Abraham did; "he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11 v. 8).

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" What a different language is that which comes universally from the world that lieth in wickedness! Oh, hear the dead sounds of the dead world! Oh the sweet sounds that come from a living soul! The world says of gold, 'Oh that I knew where I might find it;' of pleasure, honour, wealth and fame, 'Oh that I knew where I might find them!' Says Paul, I "count them but dung, that I might win Christ, and be found in Him" (Phil. 3 v. 8). Do you know it? Do you know this inward, gracious, spiritual influence, drawing you heavenward, not because of a felt worthiness, not because there is something you can bring, but by the sheer necessity of felt need and the sweet power of faith, hope and love?

"That I might come even to His seat!" I do like this particularity that there is in Job's urgent case. He wanted to come right into the sanctuary, into the tabernacle of God. David was in exactly the same position when he was in trouble; faith directed him to the same blessed, eternal Fountain, began to speak to him. Have you a living faith that *speaks*, speaks for God, "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" (Ps. 42 v. 11 & 43 v. 5). And then it brought him to this; "Send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me" (Ps. 43 v. 3). Nothing else can. Not natural light, the light of intelligence, the light of human education, good as it is, important as it is in its place (and I would ask the Lord's blessing on our young people in all their studies, that they may be fitted for that position appointed for them in the providence of God), but

"Knowledge of all terrestrial things
Ne'er to my soul true pleasure brings."

(Burnham; Gadsby's 771)

'So,' says the Psalmist, 'I need a different light to enlighten the eyes of my understanding; I need a different light to shine upon the road that will lead me to the secret place of the Most High; I need a different truth, a truth about different matters from material; therefore "Send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me to Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles" - right to the secret place - "then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" (Ps. 43 v. 3 - 4).

God will have the pre-eminence. Blessed be His name, He does *get* the pre-eminence in our hearts and in our lives; but oh, what a mystery it is of the life of God in the soul, that those who fear His name and obey the voice of His Servant walk in darkness and have no light! Oh, it is *here* where the power of grace is manifest, where the invincibility of grace is demonstrated.

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat" - to His secret place! It seems to me that Job wanted something different and more intimate than God's general omnipresence and His general omniscience; he wanted that presence which is only known in the church; he wanted that omniscient eye which looks upon His people in all the complacency of immutable love. "Even to His seat ..." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25 v. 14). Asaph found this seat when he went into the sanctuary. You will find this seat when the

Lord gathers you in His mercy by His Spirit and grace, and brings you into intimate and sacred communion with Him. It may be upon your bed of a night; it may be when you are seeking for your Beloved through the Scripture, as you inquire, "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" (Song 3 v. 3), and the Holy Spirit, the blessed Interpreter, accompanies you in your search and brings you to some text, brings some text into your heart, some sweet promise, and you find "the secret place of the Most High" (Ps. 91 v. 1), where he unfolds His blessed covenant.

Are those things more to you than thousands of gold and silver? They were to the Psalmist in the 119th Psalm (v. 72); they were to Jeremiah: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15 v. 16).

"I would order my cause before Him." It is but very little use ordering your cause before men. Alas that we are such fools as to attempt it so often! Oh, it is great for faith to get hold of God. Sometimes a sense of the nothingness of men will make you "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils" (Isa. 2 v. 22). 'If I can but find God, I will order my cause before Him; it would be ordering my cause before infinite wisdom; I would order it before eternal power; I would order my cause before unsearchable riches; I would order my cause before Him who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending" (Rev. 1 v. 8), who sees to eternity.' Oh, what a sweet hope there is in taking a hopeless case to the God of hope! "Happy is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his Help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 146 v. 5). Well, I don't see how any other man can be happy, because, if this God is *our* God, who can be against us?⁵ So that, my friends, although it is painful and distressing, there is mysteriously a kind of blessedness in the wretchedness of a child of God; there *is*; and there is a sweetness in their bitterness. Paul said, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7 v. 24). Blessed wretchedness! It was the same wretchedness as Isaiah felt when he said, "Woe is me!". Blessed woe! Blessed to be brought to it in the same way as Isaiah was. This was the reason for it: "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6 v. 5). It reduced him to a woe in himself, a wretched man in himself.

Well, faith will take this *wretched* man, and order a *wretched* cause before the great God. Have you ever done it? I wonder what causes are represented here this evening.

"I'd tell him how my sins arise."

(Watts; Gadsby's 727)

Confession of sin is blessed. It may appear to be a contradiction, but I do feel this, that true confession of sin is sweet; it has repentance in it; repentance has hope in it; and there is no cause that a child of God would more urgently order before God than the cause of his sin. Have you ever wished that you could? It needs liberty, the liberty of the Spirit to find power to confess sin so as to empty one's self in confession. I use that expression because years ago I felt it in the middle of the night; I felt, in the confession of sin, guilt removed. Oh to find confession enter into the ears of the great High Priest, and not to return, to find that rest and peace flowing from Calvary as you confess sin under the power of the Holy Ghost!

"I would order my cause before Him." And, dear friends, do value *conviction* of sin. You will never order your cause without conviction. I believe that, when the Holy Ghost convinces of sin, then sin is soon set before us, set up in our consciences, in the light of God's countenance. You will never see it and feel it as it is seen and

⁵ "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8 v. 31)

felt by that penetrating light, but oh, when what is discovered is *confessed*, and you feel the sanctifying power of divine grace, so that for the moment you are enabled to say,

“I’m clean, just God, I’m clean!”⁶

“I would order my cause before Him.” You may have a wilderness to take to Him. You won’t take it with a smiling face; you will be clothed in sackcloth and in ashes, but it is good, my friends, to take a wilderness unto God. It would be terrible but for the covenant, but for the Gospel, except for Christ. It *will* make Him precious to you; it *will* make His sacred and perfect humanity, whereby He was made “perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2 v. 10), precious to you. You can only order such a cause with your faith upon the Person and work of Christ; then you can “open your mouth wide.”⁷ It is honouring to God to open your mouth wide. It may appear presumptuous; faith often has the appearance of presumption; unbelief and pride often wear the guise of humility. It does look humble to just get the lips a little apart and say a few things. That is not ordering your cause. If you were in Job’s case, and had a faith’s view of “the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2 v. 9) in Christ - and there for sinners - you would open your mouth *wide* for Him to fill it.

“I would order *my* cause before Him.” It is well when our own cases swallow up every other case. There is a certain way in which a selfish religion is commendable. If we were more spiritually minded, and more exercised in secret before God, and more exercised with respect to our condition of soul, we should not talk so much about other people, and yet this would give us prayer for others. But gossip - and religious gossip - are part of the thorns and briars that overgrow the soul. Well, my friends, take your cause to Him; I was going to say, ‘the worse, the better.’

“The poorer the wretch, the welcomer here.”

(Hart; Gadsby’s 155)

Go in your weakness, in your rags.

“I would order my cause.” Oh, you would lose sight of man. It is *Him - Him* right through the Scriptures, and when the Holy Ghost in His gracious influence is in our heart, it will be *Him*, and your soul will be your first concern. Everything else will be subservient.

“I would order my cause before Him.” You may have the cause of a family - a difficult cause. Well, who can help you? I think we said at Mayfield on Sunday evening, there are many things that start apparently wrong that end right; there are many things that commence with trouble, that end in joy. You may have some very crooked things personally, relatively, circumstantially, some very close things in your family. Well, where will you take them? Where will you go for advice? Says Job, “To which of the saints wilt thou turn?” None of them! “Oh that I knew where I might find Him. I would order my cause” - my daughter, my son. “I would order my cause before Him” who said, “I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” (Jer. 32 v. 27)

Faith says,

“Can prayer reverse the stern decree
And save a wretch condemned like me?
It may; at least I’ll try.”

⁶ “We’re clean, just God, we’re clean” (Hart; Gadsby’s 29).

⁷ “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Ps. 81 v. 10).

And this good Lord, exercising His people, setting an obstacle race before them, putting obstacles in their way - hindrances, rivers, waters, fires, hedges, enemies - looks on and in a victorious voice for the comfort of His dear coming people, each ordering their own cause, says to them, "I am the Lord." "I am the Lord" - not this obstacle, not those enemies, not those circumstances; "I am ... the God of all flesh;" all hearts are in My hand; bring them to Me, and see if you can bring anything to Me that is too hard.'

"I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." What, a sinner? Yes. A blade of withering grass? Yes. One who has spent his Father's substance in riotous living? Yes. A backslider? Yes. What arguments? The gospel; the blood of Christ; the covenant of grace; His blessed Word.

"I would ... fill my mouth with arguments." Oh, the Lord loves His arguing people. You may depend upon it, that if you have a religion like this, you won't argue with other people. If ever you see a controversy between two upon religion, keep as far from them as you can, because "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3 v. 16), and, if you have the "secret of the Lord," which "is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25 v. 14), those that are in the same secret will need no argument. But you *will* argue with God. Oh, *argue*; wrestle with Him, friends. Have you ever argued with Him on your bed, walking along the road, in the fields, in your office? This is life.

"I would order *my* cause before Him and fill my mouth with arguments." Jacob did. He said to the Lord, "'Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good" (Gen. 32 v. 12), Lord; so Thou must.' That *sounds* like presumption; it *honours* God. You may go to Him and ask Him to remember the word upon which He caused you to hope,⁸ and remind Him of it. "Fill my mouth with arguments." Jacob got hold of God; God crippled him, put his thigh out of joint, but, said Jacob, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me" (Gen. 32 v. 26). He reminded God of when he set out, when he saw the ladder, and God said, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28 v. 15). Jacob reminded Him. He said, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me. And he blessed him *there*" (v. 29).

"I would know the words which He would answer me." Oh, how many times have we pretended to pray and never waited for an answer! Now look the thing in the face; unanswered prayers are terrible things. Which would be the longest list, your answered or your unanswered prayers? It would be a mercy if God made this a concern to us - might make it a terror to us. It is a mercy to receive answers. Job had such a case that he would not go away without it; he said, "I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me." You may have some perplexing thing so that you come to this: "Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth ... Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee" (Ps. 143 v. 7 - 8). Well, if you go to the Lord with some particular case for direction, faith will not be satisfied until there is some direction. As we read in Isaiah, "Yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30 v. 20-1). Oh, it is good to be in the hands of God. Asaph said, "'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel." I've had enough of my own; I can see that I have brought myself into slippery places, but "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory"' (Ps. 73 v. 24).

⁸ "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast cause me to hope" (Ps. 119 v. 49).

Will He plead against me with His great power?" This was a solemn consideration. There was no flippancy about Job; he had done business in deep waters; he knew God; he had a sense of His divine majesty; he knew that God was a consuming fire, that He could dash the worlds to pieces. It is a consideration. But oh, he had some inward witness of the Spirit that strengthened his faith to that *good* confidence, that if he could but order his cause before God, He would not plead against him with His great power. What a terrible thing to be an enemy to God, and for God to be our enemy! Job believed that God was *for* him. There was nothing in his circumstances at the time to give him to think so, and I have no doubt that the prosperous wicked, those that were at ease, warming their hands beside the fire of pleasure and of this world's goods, looked at Job and were glad they were not in his place; but faith looks above all seen things. Blessed faith that sees God!

"Will He plead against me with His great power?" He will against some. Oh my friends, how terrible is eternity and an immortal soul! The Lord's people, after all their tribulation and distress and affliction, will enter into that rest that remains for the people of God. They will be complete and perfect in Christ. They see but in part now: they know but in part now; they see but little here. It will be terrible to be perfected in a knowledge of sin, without any hope; to be completed in enmity, in hatred against God, to be completed in knowledge so that there is a knowledge of those things which they have lost for the sake of the world and its trifles, when they have left those trifles, and those trifles have left them, and they are complete in the deformity and image of sin and Satan.

Oh, but says Job - he knew God - "Will He plead against me with his great power? No, but He would put strength in me." Well, I do feel to need this God. I am not worthy of Him, but I *do* need Him. I think, in a sense, I need Him more than anybody in the chapel; I *do*. I don't quite know whether I can say,

"Yet would I glory in the thought
That I shall owe Him most,"

(Newton; Gadsby's 959)

because of a sense of the sin in my nature and in my life which cost Him wounds, sufferings, agony and death.

May we seek Him and find Him. Amen.

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