

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday
morning 11th. February, 1973

Hymns 180, 1147, 7

Reading Job 38

Text Job 2.10.

"What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Why I have read this I do not know but it has been hovering through my mind for two or three days and so I have ventured to read it in the hope that I may have light and understanding to treat it in a right and proper way.

The circumstances which Job passed through are to some point familiar to us, but his experience may be said to be unique. It stands forth in the Holy Scripture in the dealings of God with a good man who, it is said, was perfect and upright and one that feared God and eschewed evil. The things that came upon him were not a judgement or punishment upon him because of his sinful ways and practices or any apostacy, for he is recorded as being a man of God, perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil. We need to be cautious about passing judgement on others upon whom things come, as they may sometimes come even to godly, gracious people, but the causes are matters that the Lord Himself can best understand and deal with, far better than other people, for they may err in their judgement. I have read of the hymnwriter John Newton who went to visit some parents who had suffered a sad bereavement in their family, and he said to them that he felt it was a sign that the Lord had not forsaken them. It is the Lord only that can sanctify the dispositions of His providence, and bring good out of evil. But to return to the case of Job, these are the words of his wife who on this occasion evidently did not speak wisely to him and suggested the worst thing that could have been. Even so Job was enabled to hold fast and to endure; and as one stroke upon another came upon him he was able to say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away".

The book of Job reveals quite a number of things I could not

enter into, the calamities that came one after another upon him and the grace that sustained him even when he was in the depths of his trouble. Yet even there he found comfort and was able to say, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold".

The book records a remarkable deliverance that was afforded him as we read in the last chapter so that in the issue, even in temporal things, Job possessed just twice as much as he had at the beginning before these calamities came upon him. He had twice as many camels, twice as many oxen, twice as many asses, so that in a temporal sense he proved his latter end to be better than the beginning.

In the work I have read, which has rested upon my spirit, there are two or three points. There are the good things we receive at the hand of God, but there are also evil things. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?". The third point is that both come from the hand of God. It does not indicate that Job thought the good things came from God and the evil things from Satan; he sees the hand of God not only in the blessing he had enjoyed, but even in the things that had befallen him. This word is recorded in the Annotated Bible like this, "Shall we acknowledge God in the bestowment of blessings and not in the allotment of sorrow?" "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

In the first place then are these good things that we receive at the hand of God, and these, as relating to the Lord's people, have three particular features. In the first place there are His temporal blessings. Although "The Lord opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing" yet He does not open His heart to every living thing. He opens His heart only to His dear people. All creatures are alike dependent upon Him, although not many acknowledge it to be so; but that makes no difference, all creatures are dependent upon a God of providence to sustain them in being, but I believe it can be said that it is only the Lord's dear people who see the goodness of God to them in their temporal things. Worldly people may be wealthy, they may live in their mansions, and they may hold

high positions in church or state, but we have to see for the most part they have no right sense or view of the goodness of the Lord in their temporal blessings. It is only the Lord's people who acknowledge and enjoy His providence in a becoming and acceptable way. Even the mercies of every day life call for thanksgiving; they are among the good things that we receive at the hand of the Lord, these sometimes humble the spirit and bring forth a little gratitude to the God of all our mercies. As you know Paul said to those Philippians "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus". It is a mercy to have our table spread, and sufficient means to provide for our necessities, so that actually we lack nothing. We can witness to this, we lack nothing, we have all necessary comforts in our homes, far more than many of our fore-fathers enjoyed. Here then are good things that we cannot command ourselves, when we look upon the wonders of creation, and think of those challenges that God put before Job to silence and to convince him; when we think of the Lord's answers to Job, we may well tremble under a sense of the Majesty of God. He causes the sun to shine upon the earth by day and the moon by night. He balances the clouds literally. Many things altogether beyond our control, if we are the Lord's people, are seen to be in His hand, controlling them. So it is with our bodies, our health, our faculties, our reason, and our liberties that we enjoy up to now, although I sometimes wonder what the future may bring. Here we are; the good hand of providence has watched over us, and we have been brought thus far. We can enjoy our Sabbath days, as far as the Lord may favour us. All these are temporal blessings. According to the history of the children of Israel the Lord promises all these good things to them in the land flowing with milk and honey conditionally; that is, if they walk in His ways and observe His laws and ordinances, His blessing would be in their basket and in their store, but if not, His curse would come upon them in their basket and in their store; which eventually came to pass. It is a humbling thought if we can view it like this that although we must have so often provoked Him and sinned against Him, and perhaps had hard thoughts of Him sometimes, yet still He bestows the good things

of His providence upon us.

But there are greater things than all this - "Shall we receive good at the hand of God" - these greater blessings are those spiritual blessings that the Lord bestows upon His redeemed people. I am here speaking before an open Bible and is not this a great blessing? There were days when godly people possessed a Bible at the peril of their lives, and were willing to give in some cases all they possessed of their substance to possess a Bible; but we have an open Bible at very little cost to us. This is a blessing indeed, and how far do we value it? I have to confess I feel I do not value it as it becomes me to. But here is this blessing; we have an open Bible, and we are free to read its sacred pages, none lawfully daring to make us afraid. We do not read our Bibles today at the risk of imprisonment and even death, as did some of the martyrs of bygone days. Do we really value this blessing as we should do? Perhaps I might here refer to our young people. Do you really value an open Bible, this sacred revelation of a supreme Being, of His divine perfections, of His will, His law, His Gospel, His providence and many, many other things beside? I fear it may be that we do not value it as would become us to, although I trust we do value it, and I hope you do. I hope that it will be your guide through your journey here below. It can bring much sweet comfort into the heart even in those extreme circumstances of one's life. I remember when I was out in France in the first war, creeping one terrible night into a dug-out amidst the bombing and shelling, with my life in great danger, finding some comfort in reading a few verses in the Holy Scriptures. If you are concerned about your soul's state you can find much instruction, help and guidance in the Holy Scriptures; and if you are concerned about your providences, and the concerns of this life you may also find guidance in the Holy Scriptures. I am sure the Lord's blessing is upon young people who look up unto Him to be their God, and to guide them in the difficult path of life, and more than all this to bless them with the blessings of His grace and number them among His people. I hope this exercise is in the heart of some of you young people, in fact I believe it is, and I trust it may

be true of each of you; for where this exercise is, I am sure you will see the good hand of the Lord go before you in your matters. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God?"

Another good thing that we receive at the hand of God is the Gospel. The Bible is full of the Gospel, and the fulness of the Gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ, He shines through the sacred page with the sweet lustre of heaven. He shines in the glory of His Person and work, in the Prophecies, in the Psalms, and in the New Testament. O what a wonderful mercy it is to know Him, to be seeking Him, and to be seeking after the blessings of His Gospel! I was reading the other day in Philpot's writings referring to that Scripture, "In whom we have redemption through his blood"; he says, "It does not say 'in whom we shall have it', but 'we have it already'," The glorious, blessed Son of God has already come and accomplished the work He came to do, laid down His life, shed His blood to accomplish redemption for His people. We have it already. "In whom we have redemption through His blood", but what the Lord's exercised people desire to feel is its application to them. They long to feel something of the virtue of His precious blood, of their own interest in the Beloved, to assure them it is all done for them. I would like to say that I believe it has all been done for every gracious, seeking, praying soul, whatever they may feel to lack in themselves; yet it is done for them. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me". What good things there are in the blessed Gospel, which His people receive of the hand of God. One of these is the pardon of sin. It is the Lord's blessed promise to bestow it upon them. He has declared Himself to be a sin-pardoning God; and this is particular redemption. We cannot say that all people know this blessing of heaven. It is particular to His dear people, though some of them, many of them, may feel to lack it to their satisfaction as to the application of it; yet even so their faith looks to Calvary for it, and there is a waiting upon the Lord, to receive it, and to feel it in a personal application. "In whom we have redemption through his blood".

"Every grace and every favour
Comes to us through Jesus blood".

Another of these good things is the justification of our persons, for we are said to be justified freely by His blood, and also peace made through the blood of His cross; with many other things. Here are spiritual blessings then, they rise above the blessings of this life although the latter can be "richly enjoyed", and can bring blessings in a natural way. But the holy, glorious, blessed Gospel brings blessings in a spiritual way. Here are the blessings of redeeming grace and dying love for poor sin-burdened souls who are ready to perish, as they may feel; here are heaven's blessings for those who feel unworthy of the least of His mercies. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God?"

There is also a third feature of this, and that is the blessing of heaven which those who have crossed the chilly flood enter into and enjoy for ever, world without end. The blessings of heaven are the blessings of eternal life. "I give unto my sheep eternal life." These are the blessings of heaven and the ultimate issue, we read of those before the throne of God that they are uniting in holy adoration before the Lamb Who was slain to redeem them.

O dear friends, what a wonderful mercy it is to know something of the Gospel! It can sanctify to us the Lord's temporal blessings, it can support us in times of need, and when under burdens and trials it can be our strength and stay. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" According to the Lord's appointments unto us, we shall receive both good and evil. Here it must be observed that this is not evil in a moral sense, as though we may impute sin to God, or make Him the author of sin; God forbid! By evil here is not meant moral evil, it consists in the disposings of the Lord in His dealings with His people for their good, and for the refining of His work in their souls under, and by means of, divine chastening. In Isaiah the Lord speaks like this, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." In the book of Amos it is recorded, "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Jeremiah in the Lamentation says "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" By evil here

then is not intended anything sinful on the part of God, but His dealings with His people in solemn correction, it may be, some chastening, some disposings of His providence designed to be for their good. Sometimes this can include afflictions that come upon the Lord's people, it is true afflictions are the effect of the fall but when the Lord lays afflictions upon His people this is for their profit. It is a chastening, designed for our profit, the Apostle Paul confirms this as an evidence of the Lord's love to His people, "Whom He loveth He chasteneth". Things are laid upon our bodies that may be hard to bear and can be a great trial of faith, but they do not come by chance. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." All these things are in the hand of God, whatever afflictions come upon our bodies, these two opposites, good and evil, the Lord uses for our good, He balances the clouds, He can make an affliction sweet when His blessing is felt in it. He can be very near to His people in times of trouble and affliction, as He has been. Shall we receive good and shall we not receive evil - that is afflictions, and sometimes adversities too, in different ways in the circumstances of our lives? The Lord deals with His people in a particular way, things that come are not just chance and often the good hand of the Lord has been seen in adverse things, though some of them may have been very painful things. They are not sinful in themselves, although there can be much sin on our part in connection with them, much rebellion and resentment in the heart against the Lord's dealings. But if the Lord is pleased to visit us with His presence and blessing, it removes the rebellion, resentment and revolting against His will, we can fall into His hands and feel that He has done all things well.

There is this path of tribulation, things come upon us, we know not what may befall us even in a moment, but it is the privilege of the Lord's people to feel that good and evil, that is adverse things, tribulations and trials that come in providence, are woven together for our good. As the Apostle records it that all things will work together for our good.

There is then a receiving at the hand of the Lord not only His blessings as such, but His dealings in trials and afflictions that can be very dark in themselves, and they often are, yet He uses them to cleanse us from the mire and dross, and to bring a poor rebellious one to His dear feet, so that thus sanctified evil is made to work for good. This is our privilege as His dear people then to prove that we receive both at His hand and that both are appointed for our good. Amen.