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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves on Sunday evening 11.2.73 at  
"Ebenezer" Clapham

Hymns: 1086, 6, 297

Reading Job 23 and 42

Text Job 23.10

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me,  
I shall come forth as gold."

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It has been the will of God to have recorded in the Holy Scriptures the experiences of godly people. This applies to David and others like him, Abraham, Jacob and quite a number; we have a record of their experiences, what they were called to pass through, the trials they endured, the deliverances they were favoured to see; and this applies to the Lord's servant Job. We can clearly see that he does not stand alone in the Scriptures in relation to the Lord's dealings, although he may appear to be a particular case, but we find in the case of Abraham, Jacob, David and many others that they had experiences in which their faith was sharply tried, especially in the case of Abraham; but in each case we have the benefit of their exercises, and the fact that the Lord brought them through those severe trials, and used them for their good, so that each one could say in the language of Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil". This is not to infer that God is the author of sin or anything evil, God forbid, but He mingles the cup in the lives of His people. He does not design that it shall be always joy or always sorrow. A Father's hand prepares the cup, and He makes no mistake. He alone can sanctify the trial, give strength to bear the cross, resignation to His heavenly will, and grace to commit all into His good hands, both for time and for eternity.

In the context, in the verses preceding what I have read, Job appears to be enveloped in darkness, and the most keen part of the trial would evidently be that he could not find the Lord as he desired. This must be a particularly heavy path, so here he says, "Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning". Oh that I knew where I might find Him". Have you

ever been in such a case as this, when you walked in darkness and had no light, and could not get near the Lord to lay your case before Him? He does not say 'O that I knew where I might find my camels, my oxen and my sheep, and other possessions and to recover them, for then I should be happy' - no - he seems to rise above everything on earth, and he says, "O that I knew where I might find Him". Do you know anything of this? Have there been times with some of you in your spiritual experience, and your providences when you have felt to be enveloped in darkness, could not seem to get help from God, or get near to Him, or pray to Him as you would desire? It is a dark place to be in, but we find the hymn writer saying,

"O that I knew the secret place  
Where I might find my God",

that is to say, where I might have access to Him, communion with Him, lay my case before Him, seek His help and power in my trials and afflictions, O that I knew where I might find Him. Job did find Him. He says here, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." This is where we may see his faith and grace sustaining him so that he could look beyond it all and feel a humble confidence that he would be brought forth, as indeed he was. As concerning the matters of this life in the case of Job it is said that God blessed his latter end more than his beginning. It will be true of every vessel of mercy that their end will be blessed more than their beginning, for when they come to the end of this life's pathway, to the last affliction, the last trial, the last struggle, the last battle, the last fight of faith, the last cry, they will close their eyes and leave this poor world to enter into everlasting glory, and then it will be as the Apostle says of himself, notwithstanding all that he suffered, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us".

This is where Job was, and it may be that this is where some of

you are. He said, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there". When he contemplates the future and what may be before him in the unseen path of life, when he looks forward all is dark - He is not there. He appears to be unable to see the Lord as likely to appear in any future event in his life, it seems as though there is a heavy cloud over the future. "And backward, but I cannot perceive him", when I look back upon my past life I cannot perceive Him. This may seem strange when we think of how the Lord had blessed and prospered him. Even so, whether it has relation to what is before us or what is behind us, when a cloud comes over it we walk in darkness and see not His goings. "On the left hand" - the things which he had and was passing through then all seemed to be dark - "I cannot behold Him". "On the right hand" - even the blessings of His grace were hidden from him. "I cannot see Him".

I wonder whether some of you have travelled this path, or may be travelling this path, with regard to your own things; the future looking very dark, and the past having a cloud over it. The disposings of providence and the blessings of His grace all seem hidden, everything so to speak covered up, you walk in darkness and have no light; and yet even so Job comes to a point where amidst all the darkness and the hiding of God's face, he finds some consolation; and this was not when he was looking at his things but when he was looking at the Lord's way with him. But, he says, and this is a remarkable 'but', I go forward to the left, to the right and all is dark, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". This appears to have been a consolation to him, and may have been to some of you under some afflictive conditions. There was just a point here, you see, amidst it all, that was very sweet, "He knoweth the way that I take". This was not the way of Job's choice, but the way of the Lord with him, and may so be rendered, "He knoweth the way that is with me", that I am walking in, He knows all about it, and this can be a consolation to the Lord's dear people, "He knoweth the way that I take", however dark some things may be to us, there is nothing dark with God. It is said in the Psalms "the darkness and the light are both

the way you have to walk in. "When He hath tried me". The trial, you see, can be a trial of faith, the Apostle Peter refers to this, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ". It is when He appears to deliver you from it, when He appears to support you in it, when He appears to your comfort, strength and stay, "When He hath tried me".

This can be a trial of our graces, and the circumstances through which the Lord calls His people to pass can incorporate a heavy trial of their faith. This may often refer to adverse providences, afflictions, dark things, hard things, which are a trial of our faith, and our hope - "When He hath tried me" - and that will last just as long as the Lord shall dispose. He tries the faith of His people then by things He lays upon them, and yet though He tries their faith, He strengthens it, He tries their hope sometimes and yet in the trial He strengthens it. Sometimes He tries our love and yet in the trial He strengthens that love. This shows that all His appointments are ordered for our good, although to us it may seem impossible to see or understand; but there is one who understands. Is the path a dark one? He knoweth. Is the cross a heavy one? He knoweth. Is the burden a pressing one? He knoweth. Is the future dark with you? He knoweth. Have you many fears about your own case? He knoweth. Are you in a deep conflict? He knoweth the way that is with you, and there is no path too dark, no burden too pressing for the Lord. Nothing is too much for Him. He is able to remove mountains and fill valleys for His people. "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me...". The trial must serve its purpose then. It is not wise to attempt to force our own way out of a matter or a trial. No, it is the saint's privilege when the Lord tries them to be still and know that He is God.

"When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". It may reveal a measure of confidence in the case of Job, for it was a great thing to say under prevailing circumstances. "I go forward but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him".

"but I shall come forth as gold". Here is faith then; and what does Job mean by coming forth as gold? He does not mean that he will come forth to prove and show that he had never sinned, that he had been pure in the furnace, that he had never feared or faltered, no - it was very different from that. This coming forth as gold with Job appears to commence with a solemn confession following some demonstration of the Majesty of God to him as we read of in chapter 40. "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth". Here we see him coming forth as gold, he is not proclaiming his greatness, goodness and integrity; but the tide is beginning to turn when he says of himself, "Behold I am vile". He is coming forth as gold in deep confession, he comes forth as gold in a gracious repentance. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes". He is indeed coming forth as gold. He has had a stripping but now he is coming forth as gold, and this commences with a solemn confession of his vileness, not his goodness, and is followed by deep repentance - "wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes". This coming forth as gold is further referred to in the Lord accepting him. These friends of his are instructed to offer up sacrifices, and the Lord says, "My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job." He is coming forth as gold. These three friends did not understand Job, they came to their own conclusions about the things that had come upon him; surely it must have been a judgment for some reason or other. - No - they were no help to him at all. The Lord did not accept them, but we find the Lord saying of Job "Him will I accept"; offer up these sacrifices and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept. This appears to be a beautiful point in coming forth as gold. First there is a solemn confession of his vileness, a gracious repentance, and a fervent prayer.

There is also a third point, and that is a double blessing was

granted unto him in regard to his possessions, he had twice as much as he had before. It appears too that a number of friends and acquaintances came to see him to comfort him in all the afflictions that the Lord had brought upon him. "Every man also gave him a piece of money". How long the space of time may have been we do not know but here is the conclusion of the whole matter, "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters". "After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days." What a history, what an experience! I suppose we shall never know how many have been blessed in reading the book of Job. I knew a friend in Brighton who was in very humble circumstances and she had an offer of marriage from a man who attended the chapel and she accepted it and they were married; but she has told me that before the wedding day was over she realised that she had made a sad mistake. She had a path of heavy trial, but she said that in her trial she found such sweet comfort in reading the book of Job, and Job's trial seemed to be sanctified to her so that she was helped along until the Lord brought deliverance, and her husband died. "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning". "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Amen.