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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham
on Wednesday evening 5.3.52

Text: Job 37.16

"Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?"

These are the words of Elihu to Job and truly it is very refreshing to read these chapters after the conversations that had previously taken place between Job and his three friends. There was something about Elihu's addresses to Job that was different and it had a remarkable effect upon the mind of Job so that it is not recorded that Job replied against Elihu in anything that he said. In fact it can be observed that it was a turning point in the experience of Job when Elihu addressed him, for we read that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and brought before him His mighty works and under a sight and sense of the majesty of God Job's spirit was broken within him so that he confessed to have uttered what he did not understand and to say, "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". And when Job was brought there it was not long before God turned his captivity which He did when Job prayed for his friends. So that after all Job proved God to be faithful in that even relating to material things He blessed his latter end more than his beginning. So that this could be said of him, "Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase". It can be wonderfully profitable to read prayerfully the dealings of God with men in the Scripture, for no Scripture is of private interpretation. It is good when confirming and humbling teaching is received from the Scripture in our hearts by the dispensation of a divine providence with men. Here it would seem as though Elihu would bring Job to the point, saying, "Hearken unto this O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" as though he had not given them that consideration that he might have given them for his profit. As though Elihu would say It is good for you, Job, to concentrate upon the goodness of God in His works, the justice of God in His ways and the wisdom of God in His dealings with men, for these three points are brought before Job very particularly by Elihu. "Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of His cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?"

It is noticeable that Elihu draws Job's attention to the clouds on different occasions. He does in the former chapter, "With clouds he covereth the light: and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt". The cloud did not actually prevent the sun shining, the sun shines just the same actually as far as itself is concerned behind the cloud, as when there is no cloud, but the difference is in us. We do not feel its rays, there is not the same brightness, a dullness comes, the bright light of the sun is not seen although it is there just the same. So we find in our mind and feelings often by certain dispensations of God's providence that may come to us which are like to a cloud coming between us and the sun's shining rays. So it may be that the children of God sometimes walk in darkness and have no light as we read in Isaiah, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God", though there be a cloud between so that the sun does not shine. Yes, it is God's work you see. "With clouds He covereth the light and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt". But still the point for us to remember is that God balances the cloud. No cloud can be in the air, in the sky, but what is balanced by an Omnipotent Hand.

Clouds are frequently spoken of in the Scripture. In a literal and a figurative sense God made use of clouds to serve His purpose and to convey certain confirming signs. After the great flood He caused His bow to be seen in the cloud as a token of the covenant made with Noah that the earth should no more be destroyed by water, which is seen unto this day when the reflected rays of the sun in the rain cause those beautiful colours to appear. It is the wondrous work of God in the cloud and is always a voice to us that He remains faithful. He brings a cloud over the earth and causes the bow to be seen in the cloud so that there is never a bow without the cloud, indicating divine mercy and faithfulness notwithstanding God's solemn judgments and divine chastenings. So it was by a cloud that the Lord God led and guided His people, Israel, through the wilderness, to guide them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It was in His hand to move that cloud, it was in His hand to cause it to stop, and this was a token of the presence of God with them. At the commandment of the Lord they journeyed and at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents. They always

had to watch and to follow the moving of the cloud before them; it would have been presumption to have moved without it, to have gone before it; it would have been a wicked despising of God's providence not to have followed it. It was in a cloud that the voice was heard on the mount of Transfiguration when the Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured before His three disciples, they heard a voice out of the clouds saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him". It was in a cloud that the Lord Jesus ascended up into heaven after having blessed His disciples at Bethany; a cloud received Him out of their sight. And it will be with clouds that He will come again and every eye shall see Him and they also which pierced Him. All these clouds, even literally speaking, were balanced, that is they were in the hand and under the control of an Almighty power which has absolute management over all the bodies of heaven.

"Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?" If you go out of your house and look up to the heavens sometimes you may see these mighty clouds swiftly moving along in the firmament. No human power can control them and no creature can balance them. Surely there is enough here even apart from the amazing wonders of the sun and moon and stars effectively to silence any atheists for here are the works of God. He can control them. We see the clouds move, change their shape, turn this way, turn that way by the power of the wind that He holds in His possession. He can move these ponderous bodies in the heavens. You look up and you see it looks threatening for a storm. Who can stop it, who can stop the clouds? Who can prevent the great rain of His strength? Only God. "Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds?" It is so with every disposing of His providence among men but particularly here among His people.

Job believed this, Job believed in God as we read at the beginning. After he had suffered all those distressing losses, he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord", and later to his wife, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil". That is in other words shall we acknowledge Him in the bestowment of blessings and not in the allotment of evil, trouble, affliction. So in the experience of God's people, God suffers dark clouds to come as it were between them and the shining of the sun in the heavens. It is not always a clear sky with us is it? Even naturally it is not often that you see a sky without a cloud and less often, possibly,

in the experience of a soul or in the footsteps of God's providence. Truly at times it may be so but at all times, whatever the conditions, it is good for us to remember that there is One who balances the clouds. Elihu would bring Job to this point, "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" It may be that at times you have looked up to the heavens, especially those who may be engaged in outdoor labour, more particularly dependent upon the weather; you may sometimes have looked up on a day and said, O if only those clouds would disperse; how we need the sun. At other times you may have looked up and welcomed the clouds and said, I hope there will be a good rain this day, the land is so parched and dry. We have to acknowledge that we cannot balance them, we cannot bring the clouds up neither can we disperse them; and if God disposes to bring a cloud before the sun and thus command it not to shine no human hand can move that cloud. God will hold it as it were just as long as He disposes. Sometimes I have noticed, and I know you have done, a cloud passing before the sun and the different degrees of light when that cloud is passing before the sun. Sometimes it peeps a little, quite brightly even through the cloud, and then the darkness thickens again. It is as though for a moment light is seen even in the cloud and to this Elihu refers later when he says, "Now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds; but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them". How true this is in the spiritual experience and providential leadings of the people of God in this wilderness. Clouds come before the sun, do they not? but no cloud comes before the sun that is not well balanced by an infinitely wise God and, with respect to His dear people, by a gracious God.

Spiritually a cloud is held there by God for a purpose and truly for a wise purpose too. For "He commandeth it not to shine." God causes the dark shadows as much as the bright rays to balance the sun. He balances the sun, He holds that mighty orb in the heavens by His mighty power and He balances the cloud that comes between. Have you a dark cloud? Have you a cloud of darkness in your spiritual feelings? Is it dark with your soul, almost like to midnight? Why? Because there is a cloud before the sun, not because the sun is not shining but because of the cloud that is between; but yet it is well balanced. The cloud is in the hand of a wise God as much as the sun and every ray of the sun is balanced as much as the cloud that comes between. "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?"

Does not this refer also to the moving of the cloud by the same hand from before the sun? Have you not looked up to the heavens and seen a cloud gradually pass from before the sun and the bright clear rays of the sun shine again upon you and upon the earth? So the Lord balances it or disposes it in the experience of His people. Those balancings of the clouds too refer to the fact that the Lord moderates by infinite wisdom every judgment and every chastening and every affliction that may befall His people. By clouds spiritually we understand darkness, trouble, affliction and temptation. Where is a child of God who does not know these? "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?" This can be a very confirming experience in the soul. The Lord controls the cloud of darkness; but there may also be a dark cloud of temptation; yet that cloud is balanced by the same God. "Thus far shalt thou come and no further." Satan, that great adversary of our souls, will go just as far with you and me as God disposes and no further. It is true the cloud of temptation may be very dark, and may for the time almost drive one to despair but the Lord balances it. Even in the case of Job the Lord balanced the cloud. It was a very dark, threatening cloud, I do not know anyone who had a darker cloud go before their sun than Job had for truly he was brought into great extremities; but even so it was only as far as God suffered Satan to go. He allowed him to go so far but He balanced the cloud all the way through so that even in the darkness Job was able to say, "He knoweth the way that I take and when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold". Some of you may have seen the balancing of that cloud of temptation by deliverance out of it in the Lord's time. The Apostle said to the Corinthians, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape". Now this is where the Lord balances the cloud. He does not allow one of His children to come into temptation from which there is no way of escape in God's account because He balances the cloud and it never gets out of His control. He is able "with the temptation to make a way of escape".

Moreover sometimes the Lord balances the cloud of darkness and temptation in the experience of His people by giving them a measure of faith to believe that He will bring them through. I do not know

if you can understand me in this but I know there is such a thing as a child of God being persuaded that God will bring him through even in the darkest seasons by the supporting power of His word in the soul and this is how He balances the cloud. You may have noticed sometimes that the cloud passes very gradually from the face of the sun and the light gradually returns in its strength and brightness. At other times it passes away from before the sun very quickly. I think you will notice often that the darker the cloud when God balances it and causes it to move away it moves more quickly than some lighter clouds. God balances the trial. If there is a dark cloud of trial or affliction or some heavy burdensome thing in your life or path you may be comforted by this thought even that God balances it. He has control of it and is using the cloud for some purpose that He knows better than we do. "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?" as though Elihu would say to Job, have you ever had any experience of this before? Have there not been occasions when under some extreme providence or in some particular distress God has worked deliverance in thus balancing the cloud? So it was when the children of Israel came to the Red Sea, they had no power of themselves to move the waters up to a heap on either side but had to stand still and see the salvation of God. That standing still was not a slothful condition or an indifferent one but a test of faith to see what God would do; and how wonderfully He balanced the cloud. So it has been many, many times. There is no extremity that is too hard for God for He is above the ladder and is a covenant-performing God in relation to all the experiences through which His people pass. What a comforting and confirming thought this may be at times. Sometimes heavy and sudden afflictions are like to a dark cloud coming before the sun. Perhaps some disappointing thing, something that you had built on and hoped for too, and it is just brought, for the time being, to nothing, dashed to pieces. A black cloud comes before your sun, and yet He can balance it. He does, He holds it as it were for a time. But remember that no cloud comes in this sense between God and His people to hide them from His view. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him. He can see through the darkest cloud. Moreover, sometimes He brings real blessings out of the dark clouds by the wonderful way in which He balances them. Cowper said:

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head."

He has a wonderful way of balancing the clouds.

"Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?" So God has designed that His wonderful works in nature are illustrative of His greater works in grace. Is not that so? If He had not restrained in some instances or moderated this or that judgment or chastening how could we have borne it? But He sometimes balances the clouds of trouble by supporting grace in the heart. How wonderfully the Lord balances the cloud with Paul when he prayed for the thorn in the flesh to be removed. Like a still small voice, and yet amazingly effective, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness". It was a wonderful way of balancing the cloud. It did not move it away from the face of the sun, but supported Paul so that the cloud was not too dark, or so dark as to drive him to distraction and despair - God balanced it. Have you ever been able to walk comfortably in a trial for a few moments with a little holy submission to the disposings of God's providence? That is a wonderful balancing of the cloud. Sometimes the Lord balances a cloud by enabling one to cast their burden upon Him. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee", that is He will balance the cloud, just keep it in such a place or hold that trial or affliction at such a point that it shall be bearable; or rather He will give strength to bear this or that affliction. He sometimes balances the clouds by making the affliction profitable to us. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory", but only as the Lord balances the cloud. This can be confirming to His dear people in their affliction to see by faith that affliction in the hand of infinite wisdom. Sometimes the Lord, even in nature, causes a few bright rays to break through the cloud, causing the light to be seen in it; He causes His bow to be seen in the cloud which is His covenant promise unto His people, the wondrous work of Him which is perfect in knowledge. You see, no creature is perfect in knowledge; they may be great philosophers or doctors of divinity; they may have a considerable amount of knowledge; but no creature is perfect in knowledge; God is this great God who is perfect in knowledge. He never makes a mistake, does He? He never has to say, as we have

done sometimes, I wish I had acted differently in such and such a matter, things would have gone much better than they did. There is none of this with that God who is perfect in knowledge. His knowledge is perfect of Himself. We do not know ourselves perfectly although we have some knowledge of ourselves. But God has a perfect knowledge of Himself, of His glorious eternal Being and character and attributes and perfections. He has a perfect knowledge of His works and a perfect knowledge too of our works. "I know thy works" was the word to each church in the Revelation. He has a perfect knowledge of where we stand, of what concern we have about eternity. He has a perfect knowledge of the sin that is in us; He sees its workings. He has a perfect knowledge of every desire toward Him, of every exercise in the heart toward God. You say, I have often prayed in vain. Well, how do you know you have prayed in vain? God is balancing that cloud and will cause it to move one day in a wonderful way. He has a perfect knowledge of every secret cry in your heart toward Him, even if there does not appear to be any answer, He knows the cry and marks the secret groan. Is there a dark cloud of despondency? The Lord can read it and He can balance it too because He is perfect in knowledge. Some men may have great power and not use that power wisely, but power and wisdom and knowledge all combine in God and all this is to be seen in the wonderful balancing of the clouds. May the Lord strengthen our feeble faith and give us and our afflicted friends often to see the balancing of the cloud even in their matters.

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
 And scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter,
 And He will make it plain."

Amen

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