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Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by the Pastor, Mr. J. Delves, on Sunday evening, 28th, October, 1956. Text. Job 5, verses 17 - 19.

Hymns 761 465 335
Reading Job 5.

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

These are striking words: words of Eliphaz to Job. Indeed, they were spoken to him under the most unusual, unparalleled circumstances - extreme in their nature. So that when we come to think of these circumstances in which Job was then placed, (having by a swift succession of painful losses, seen everything go, and himself covered with boils,) it may seem somewhat ironical to say, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." Yet in this chapter are some very reasonable, fitting words of counsel; very truthful words too, in relation to afflictions that may come upon us, some of which may be very mysterious to us. But the point with Eliphaz here seems to be, to show that God is to be regarded in affliction, not only in the sense that His hand is in it, but with regard to the purpose that He may have by it; for although Job was brought so low, as he was, yet eventually, even Job was favoured to see the happy end of this affliction. How wonderful are the ways of God!

In the Scriptures we have to see, as we considered in the case of David this morning, how some chastenings have indeed been self-procured, so to speak: that is, they were on account of grievous backslidings and because of the pride that was in the heart of David when the Lord thus dealt with him. Thus sometimes we may

have to see that divine chastenings are for some particular sin that may be secretly indulged in, or may be by outward practice; but this may seem to be a point with regard to the Lord's people, that He will not just leave His people to go their own way, (although that may be so for a time, perhaps for a long time). If indeed they are the purchase of His blood, He will, in His own way (which may be by painful means) restore them in His mercy, and prepare them for that inheritance He has provided for them.

The case of Job seems to be altogether different. It was not because of some base backsliding on the part of Job, that the Lord permitted these grievous afflictions to come upon him - yet at the same time we know they were for a particular purpose. They were a great and sharp trial to his faith, the means of causing him to say some harsh things, yet we have to see that his faith and constancy were maintained. He "did not charge God foolishly" because of these things, but could say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." And indeed, in the Lord's own time, he did. So this may ~~seem to~~ show that it is better for us to leave the cause of things in the Lord's hands, knowing that He only knows the real cause. Some afflictions may be to try our faith, and indeed, with respect to chastening, the very nature of chastening is to purge our dross, refine the ~~gold~~ and bring us into closer conformity with ^{Christ} God, all designed to work for our good, although it may be, at times, we can hardly see how ^{his} they ^{be} can be. ~~It may sometimes be like~~ Paul states in writing to the Hebrews, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for

From the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

I had a little rather choice conversation with a friend of very many years at Hastings, one who had been much afflicted in her earlier days - months attending Hospital, and a long time in Hospital too. She said that on one occasion, she said to her Doctor, somewhat impatiently, Shall I ever get better, Doctor? He said, Of course you will if you have patience, ~~And she said,~~ almost immediately after, ^{she} *Said* the Lord spoke to her in those words;- "Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." She was a very choice, gracious character in those days and she is still, ~~as~~ one who always walked very uprightly, a commendable character even naturally; and now years after she says, I have better health now than I had in my younger days, by the Lord's goodness. So it was rather a sweet little conversation. What a mercy it is to hear the Lord's lovingkindness even under chastenings! I can remember her in those days very well having to attend Hospital month after month and under much suffering too. Well, are not the ways of God mysterious? Are they not wonderful? Has He not a purpose for good in all that He does or may dispose to lay upon His people?

I had a little time with our aged friend Miss Stevens, at Camberwell this afternoon. She was in a favoured spot and said she would not have anything altered. She just longs to be taken home to be with her Lord. Perhaps I might also say here, that she wished her kind love to the friends, and would I thank them for all their kindness

to her, in receiving her when she came a stranger to his chapel. But have we not cause to thank the Lord for her? And as I told her, her prayers, (although she may feel to be but of little use from a practical point of view) can be of much strength to us, even if they go up from a bed of weakness and bodily infirmity. She mentioned that verse to me which she felt had been so good to her

"Sinnar, thou hast done the deed;
Thou hast made the Saviour bleed!
Justice drew its sword on Me!
Dierced My heart to pass by thee."

She repeated that verse to me! What a place to be in! What a favoured spot! So in regard to afflictions, Eliphaz here says 'they do not come forth of the dust'. Many things may seem, from our point of view, to come by chance, but nothing comes by chance in God's account, although the wise man says, "Time and chance happeneth to them all." He means, as men see things, but there is no time and chance with God: His hand is in every cross, every affliction, that may be laid upon us, is it not? "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust", does it? "Neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Why is man born unto trouble? he was not born unto trouble, so to speak, in his first creation, before sin marred it all; he was God's fair creation, pure and upright. How long that continued we do not know; but this we do know, sin entered, trouble came, death, affliction, sorrow came, and so it has been ever since; and truly now it may be said, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

But the point I wanted to come to is this, Eliphaz says such people are happy in these afflictions or rather under these chastenings; He refers to all these painful calamities that came upon Job

as a chastening - that is, as we may take it, a discipline, a means of discipline in his case, for wise ends and purposes, evidently.

"Happy is the man whom God correcteth." If we look at this, then, as they bear upon the life and experience of the Lord's children, we may enquire, Wherein is this happiness? Does not chastening (in and of itself) have an opposite effect? Is it natural to us to be happy in trouble? Do we like afflictions? Yet is it not a noticeable feature, that often the Lord's dear people have their happiest times when they are in deep waters, in afflictions? Moreover in Psalm 66 the Psalmist attributes all to the hand of God being in these things. "Thou broughtest us into the net; Thou laidst affliction upon our loins we went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." There is a happiness then, even under divine chastening. Have not some of you experienced a very sweet touch of His mercy under a chastening rod? Can it ^{be} seem, in any sense true that such are those whom the Saviour favours much?

"Know, whom the Saviour favours much
Their faults He oft represses;
He takes peculiar care of such,
And chastens whom He loves."

Are not some things hard to believe in these particulars? Yet how true they are, are they not?

"Behold!" As though Eliphaz would say, Job, there is something particular in this, ^{it is} not an ordinary, commonplace thing ~~this~~ --

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth!" Wherein then is this happiness? I believe it is in several things to be known in the experience of an exercised soul, and nowhere else either; for this happiness consists in the Spirit of adoption, and as sanctified is an evidence of sonship. People may have a lot of trouble, you

now, without any evidence of sonship in it, but when the Lord deals with His people in a particular way, in chastening, and sanctifies it to them, He shows them that the chastening is because they are His own children. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children." Says the apostle, "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." "What son is he whom the Father chasteth not?" Here then is the secret of happiness from this point of view. It may be some of you here, perhaps many, have known just that sweet moment when (although perhaps flesh and blood have been very resentful to the nature of the trial) there has been that sweet whisper in it, I love thee well, My child. The spirit has been broken before the Lord and you have known a little of the happiness that there can be, even under the Lord's corrections. Have there not been times when He has spoken a kindly word to you? mingled it, shall I say, with the rod? so that, although you may have had to smart for your folly, you have had such a view of His mercy, as to have broken you to pieces before Him. Is there not a little soul-happiness there? Is not this an experience peculiar to the Lord's redeemed family?

There is another reason. The happiness of chastening may be by a particular sense of His love toward you in it. There can be a happiness there. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Does not a wise father correct because he is a wise father? and because of his love to his children? Is not this the cause of fatherly correction? So it is in grace. It is in the love that lieth behind it. What wonderful love it is, too! So we are advised in a hymn,

"His chastening, therefore, prize,
The privilege of a saint;
Their hearts are hard who that despise,
And theirs too weak who faint."

what mercy many have seen in a correcting rod! "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth."

But there is another source of happiness that is sometimes known under divine correction and chastening, and that is, the soul is brought into closer and sweeter communion with the Lord under His correcting hand. In a word to the church of Laodicea, the Lord said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." What will make us open the door then? The Lord's chastenings. By this knocking we may understand His chastening often -- a figure of speech of course it is, but a striking one. Where, under the chastening, the Lord is knocking at the door, He is testing our attitude towards Him under these corrections; He is knocking at the door. And what is it to open the door? The exercise of faith and love toward Him under correction. What does He do then? He comes in and holds communion and fellowship. Is not this profoundly sweet? Is there not happiness in this - or blessedness? "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of Thy law."

There is another source of happiness, and that is in the fruits brought forth; they are usually brought forth by chastening, are they not? because chastenings bring us to heart-searching, that is, confession of sin if they are sanctified - confession of sin, waiting on God, godly sorrow and repentance; if trial is sanctified it will do this. This is the "peaceable fruit". "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward (what a beautiful afterward) it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." And is there not a happiness in this? O, it is a favour to be chastened,

Although it may be a painful experience to us! How can it be a favour to be chastened? It is a Fatherly dealing. It is an evidence of His Fatherly favour and love towards His children. So said Eliphaz to Job here, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:" do not despise it, Job. Poor Job was in a sad case, was he not? more inclined to faint than despise it, but even so, wonderful to say, Job could say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD." "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

What are we to understand by the despising of the chastening of the Almighty? There is something rather solemn about this, is there not? It is the Almighty's chastening! Why should He use that word? Why should the Name of God be brought in here? Was it not to set forth His infinite power, that He, God, has supreme power over all things, nations, men, circumstances, - all things - life, death, that He is an infinite Being? "Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." A solemn consideration is this! The chastening that may be laid upon one and another, is the chastening of the Almighty - but what is it to despise it? To despise the chastening may be, just to take it as a matter of course, as that it may come alike unto all men, as the wise man speaks, from a certain point, with regard to certain things, that they come alike to all, as a beast dieth so does a man die, and so on, but that has respect to the ordinary nature of things in regard to our bodies and not to our souls. It is not for the Lord's people to take things as a natural course, as the world often does; although we have to acknowledge, that some people who make no profession of religion, bear their

offerings bravely and commendably; but still they do not know this secret. This seems to show that it behoves the Lord's people to walk very tenderly under chastenings and afflictions and to seek that they may be an example of patience in them. To despise the chastening of the Almighty is to look upon afflictions as merely common to us in the ordinary course of things, as having nothing more in it than this, that it comes alike to all, I must make the best of it, and get through as well as I can. But it is not like this; it is right for us to use the means as we all do, but the thing is, to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in it, that it comes not forth of the dust or merely springs out of the ground, as it were, by some contingency.

Another way of despising the Lord's chastening may be indulging a spirit of indifference under it. Are we not capable of this if left to ourselves? What indifference belongs to us by nature! - not indifference to the thing itself, not indifference to the affliction that may be upon us, or the trial through which we may be passing, but indifferent to the Lord's purpose in it, indifference to the hand that has laid it upon us; a spirit of indifference, a hardness. This is like despising the Lord's chastening, not 'opening the ear to discipline' but closing the ear.

Not only so, but we may despise the Lord's chastening, if left to ourselves, by a spirit of rebellion under the chastening. Who has not known that? Is it not so natural to us? Does it not belong to our fallen nature to fight, as soon as the Lord touches us? Is it not grace alone that brings us to His dear feet, acknowledging the mercy of His dealings? If we are left to ourselves how hard we can become, how indifferent, how rebellious, how proud we may be, even under a chastening!

But there is a happiness! There is no happiness in despising it, is there? Happiness does not consist in that. You will not find any happiness in the chastening, all the time you kick and rebel against it; but if the Lord comes into it, if He comes right into your heart when you are in the deep waters, and speaks a kind, tender, gracious word in your heart, that will bring happiness, and can open up in your soul's feelings such a view of His lovingkindness, His mercy, His grace, His faithfulness, as to melt you before Him - and this is where the happiness is! Then all the rest comes out of it. The spices begin to flow out; love begins to flow toward Him, the 'peaceable fruit' appears; there is no quarrelling, no self-justification, no argument, or qualifying this or defending that, but just a falling into His hand like clay in the hand of the Potter - and this is where the happiness is. Well, I believe this - if you have had any happiness under the Lord's corrections, then it is an evidence that you are one of His children and the end will be heaven. I say, the end will be heaven. It is sure to be, because the chastening is a parental evidence. What a wonderful mercy!

So here it seems Eliphaz attributed it all to the Lord's hand; "He maketh sore, and bindeth up; He woundeth, and His hands make whole." Here then, Eliphaz seems to see the point. Here, he speaks wisely and truly. "He", that is the Almighty, "maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole." There were charges brought against Job, as Did ever anyone perish being innocent? You must be guilty of some secret sin - otherwise this would never have come upon you. All human reasoning, was it not? But they got no nearer, so Job left speaking with them; but when Elihu began to speak he seems to silence all the rest. We do not hear anything

about the other three men or Job either. What wholesome words Elihu was given to speak!

Here then we have the counsel of Eliphaz, "Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For ~~He~~ maketh sore, and bindeth up; He woundeth, and His hands make whole." Has He ever wounded you? Has ~~He~~ made you sore? How does the Lord wound people and make them sore? He may do it under solemn conviction of sin; He may make the conscience sore under sharp and piercing convictions; He may wound and make sore by some grievous, heavy loss or some sharp and bitter trial you may have to walk in; but this is the point to observe - He maketh sore, He woundeth. Is not the hand of the Lord in this then? He may have many different ways of making us sore, and wounding us, but even so, it must be the same hand that must bind up the wound, that must heal the sore. He maketh sore, and bindeth up, - it must be the same hand. And Have not some of you known something of this? Has there not had to be a bringing down? Have we not been shown hard things, some of us? Has there not been a resentment? Have we not felt sore sometimes by the Lord's dealings? But the more we "kick against the pricks" the more sore we become. The more still we can be in the chastening the better for us. "He maketh sore." We may try to bind up the sore ourselves, or to make ourselves whole, but we have to prove it must be by the same hand. "He maketh sore, and bindeth up." How does He bind up a sore, wounded conscience then? Why in the language we had in the hymn this morning:-

"Jesus heals the broken-hearted;
O how sweet that sound to me!
Once beneath my sin He smarted,
Groansd, and bled to set me free."

Ah! that will heal your wounds. That will bind up the sore; if thy

Conscience is wounded by sin, if God has wounded it, then nothing can heal it but sin-atoning blood. The precious blood of Christ alone can heal the wounds of sin. The balm of Gilead is the only balm to heal a wounded conscience or a conscience made sore by conviction of sin. What a mercy it is where this is the case, is it not? Has not this been known and experienced by some here? I do not question this. If it be some painful, hard, distressing, afflicting providence with which He wounds thee or makes thee sore, how can He bind up that sore or make that wound whole? He can do it by the same hand. He can do it by bringing the unction and savour of a gracious promise into your heart that can turn you round, move the rebellion, enable you to fall at His feet and acknowledge His goodness to you, perhaps even in the bitter waters. So it was with the children of Israel when they came to the waters of Marah; they were filthy, brackish, stale waters. We cannot drink them, they said; but when the 'tree was cast into the waters' they were made clear and sweet. I do not suppose they had ever had sweeter water than "the waters of Marah" after the tree was cast into them. So it is in the bitter waters of trial, the Lord can make the bitter waters sweet and heal them by His presence. He can remove all the bitterness from it and make it the sweetest experience in your life.

"He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee." Beautiful language! What does Eliphaz mean by this? A definite number is taken for an indefinite, the number seven denoting a complete circle. It means that the Lord will never leave us, nor forsake us, according to His promise, He will bring us through, bear us through life and through death.

We may look upon the seventh trouble as "the last enemy to be destroyed"; all trouble will then be left behind.

"He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

May the Lord sanctify His dealings and give us to receive profit in them, so that we may be the more exercised, more prayerful, more watchful; and not only so, but led into a deeper experience of divine lovingkindness in all His dealings. So said the Psalmist, "Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes." That can be in the furnace, can it not? In fact, it is often so, but I must leave it.

May the Lord be very gracious to us as a people, sanctify every dispensation of His hand, give us to watch His hand and seek that we may be profited and more conformed to His suffering image.

Let us remember the words here.

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."