

## T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Job 1:6-11; 2:9,10; 42:7,8,10

## Job's Spiritual History

Job is introduced to us as a man in great fullness: fullness of possessions and of wealth, fullness of good works and of personal righteousness, and standing before God in acceptance. Then there begins a course in his experience, the meaning and the secret occasion of which is altogether hidden from him. He knows not the why nor the wherefore, but he finds himself suddenly in the course of being stripped of everything. One thing after another is stripped from him – all his possessions, all his relations, all his friends and all his righteousness which is of works – and with it all come the investing, the encompassing, the onrushing of those hostile forces with their suggestions of accusation, condemnation, judgment. There is an encompassing of spiritual antagonism and of a spirit of death, with God hidden, withdrawn behind the clouds, and Job is left stark, bare, apparently alone, a stripped and afflicted man, oppressed in spirit, bewildered in soul and in anguish of body. The circle of all his relationships narrows to the closest, the nearest – his own wife – who bids him renounce God and, in so doing, surrender his life, for that is what is meant. The man has come right down from a great height and a great fullness to a very deep depth of utter emptiness, weakness, helplessness, and is as good as dead.

In the course of that history a transition takes place. You can hardly perceive it, but it does take place. It is a transition from a righteousness which is of works to the righteousness which is of faith. Whereas earlier he pleads his own cause on the basis of his own righteousness and his own works, you find him being stripped of all that and at the end of it all he is saying, “Wherefore I abhor myself” (Job 42:6) And yet he is still holding on to God, but this is a righteousness which has no foundation in his own goodness and works now. It is a righteousness which is by faith in the mercy of God. With that transition, that change from one basis to another, something else has happened. Satan has gradually been edged out of court. At the beginning Satan is there in full power – or almost so – with a great deal of liberty, doing pretty much as he likes. Then there is an almost imperceptible point at which Satan has stepped out of the scene and Job is left alone with God. Satan has had all his ground taken away, he has had to withdraw and give up the fight, he is completely worsted. Then comes resurrection from the dead into a place of new spiritual power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way, investing Job with a new fullness which is not now the fullness of his own works, but the fullness of Divine grace; not the fruit of his own labours, but the gift of God; not what he himself has brought about, but what God has given him. That is Job's spiritual history in a few words.

## Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation

In saying that, we are able to look further and discern Another, a greater than Job, standing in His own fullness and in all His own rights, accepted with God, of whom God could say ‘There is not another – not only in the earth, but in the universe – like Him’. And then, because there is something in the universe that is evil, something that has to be undone, to be robbed of its power and put out of court, that One in all His fullness is steadily stripped and laid bare in the vortex of this terrific controversy. Picturesque words are used to describe these forces of evil: “They compassed me about like bees” (Psa. 118:12). The whole scene is set in a spiritual realm where the forces of evil are rampant, accusing, condemning, judging, appraising. It is an atmosphere of terrible antagonism and terrible spiritual death. He is brought right down, “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor. 13:4), stripped stark naked, emptied, with God's face hidden behind the cloud. “Thou hast forsaken Me!” You can almost hear that in Job from time to time, “Thou hast forsaken me!” How much more real was that in the case of this greater One. “Having put off from Himself the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15). They are ruled out of court, the great spiritual opposition has been brought low. And up from the grave He arose, back to a place of new power, opening the door for God to come in in a new way and make Him a minister to His own brethren with a new significance, investing Him with all the heavenly fullness. It is in PRINCIPLE the same as Job's experience.

## Paul's Stripping and Filling

The principle is repeated in limited, much more limited, ways. Read that little Letter to the Philippians and hear the Apostle speaking about the fullness which was his, the righteousness of works. He could speak about being full, about the time when he had all things, things which were gain to him. And then this man was stripped of it all. There is no man in the New Testament who speaks more of his own unrighteousness and

unworthiness and of the worthlessness of the righteousness by works than does Paul. He was stripped of it all, everything in this life, everything natural, his own ability to accomplish anything, to achieve anything. And yet, with all the suffering and all the terrific assaults of evil powers upon that man, we see him living in the power of a resurrection, of an ascension union with Christ which says, "I have all" (Phil. 4:18); "All things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:21). All things are ours. You see, this is the same principle.

### Through Suffering to Glory

In saying that, you have got to the heart of this whole matter of what is power with God, what is the ground upon which God comes in. It is just contained in that phrase, through suffering to glory. Job suffered for the rights of God, that is the point. He did not know it, but that is what it meant.

What was all this about in heaven? Satan had come to God and God had indicated His servant Job. "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" "Oh, yes, I have considered him all right, I know all about Job!" "You can see the sneer, the leer" "Yes, I know Job. There is not another like him in all the earth! Him! DOES Job serve God for nought? I have so spoiled all your work, God, that even the best among men have an ulterior motive. Even the best of men, as you would call them, on the earth are time-servers. You think that Job serves you because he is devoted to you? He is only serving you for what he gets out of you! You have not a man after all, even Job, who is so disinterested and selfless as to trust you and serve you without the idea of reward. I have spoiled that whole lot for you and your best are like that!" This is what is implied, this is the sneer of the devil, that he has spoiled God's work to the very last man, even to the best. "All right," says God, "you claim that there is nothing whatever in the whole creation that will satisfy Me, that will provide Me with ground for My pleasure? I accept your challenge. I take away the hedge that you talk about. You go and touch him. Touch all that he has first of all." You know the story. One thing rushes upon another. Read that first chapter again and see the repetition, "While he was yet speaking, there came also another..." Someone else came with another terrible tale of woe, one thing on another. Before one thing is through, there is another. All that he has is taken – sons, daughters, cattle, camels, sheep, everything – yet, in all this, Job sinned not with his lips.

Satan has to come back again. "Well, what about it?" says the Lord. "What about Job?" "Oh, yes, but you put forth your hand and touch his body!" "Very well, go and touch his body, but touch not his life." Yes, it is becoming very deep and terrible. You know what happens – the terrible physical affliction and then his wife saying, "Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die," "Put an end to it all." Oh, Satan is behind all this so subtly. Satan has been forbidden to touch Job's life, but he has come round in such a way as to try to get him to take his own life. It is the same thing. Satan cannot take it, but he thinks he can get Job to take it. Satan is after his life, but he does not get it, and Job goes through this terrible experience, this devastating time. We do not know how long it lasted, but it must have been a long time and been very drastic, but in the end Satan has not proved his case. Through the very work of Satan, through the very discipline, God has only changed the ground from one which could not ultimately stand up to Him – that of righteousness which is of works – to a ground which does stand up to God. It is a marvelous thing to see that the very ground that makes it possible for God to be glorified and justified and vindicated – the ground of righteousness which is according to faith – was the ground on to which Satan forced Job. There is the sovereign hand of God. The Lord is – may I use the word? – very clever. Satan thinks he is clever; the Lord can outwit him.

What we must get at is this point. We see the spiritual history in the transition from the objective to the subjective, from the outward to the inward, from the hearing of the ear to the seeing of the eye – "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee" – from the righteousness which is of works, to the righteousness which is according to faith. We see that transition as an essential thing to give God His ground.

### God Served Through Suffering

Now the point is that there is a service to God which lies in an altogether different realm from the realm of things earthly and temporal. "My servant Job." He is God's servant, but the real service of Job's life was fulfilled in a spiritual realm, out of sight. It was fulfilled through temporal things, it is true, but there is a background to all this. These were not just happenings in his life, the ordinary misfortunes which could overtake any man. Something is happening in the unseen, in another realm where, through all this, God is being served in a peculiar way. What is the object? What is the end in view? It is just this: God must eventually be vindicated in creation by having glorified humanity. When God undertook to create man, He undertook all the responsibility and all the liability of creating man, and it was a tremendous liability. You get down into the depths with Job and sometimes you will ask ultimate questions, 'You created me, I am your responsibility, I lay

the responsibility at your door.Â' God says, Â'I accept that, and when I undertook responsibility for creating man, I did so with the unalterable determination to have man glorified at the last; a glorified humanity is the only thing that will vindicate Me.Â' Satan has done everything in his power to defeat God in that intention of a glorified humanity. The whole battle in the unseen has to do with that, and the very work of Satan is being sovereignly used by God toward that end. JobÂ's last state is only, of course, a figure, a suggestion, of man raised from the dead and exalted to a very high position and filled with Divine fullness Â– all through grace, all through the mercy of God acting sovereignly. That is the end in view.

Now, in the unseen something is going on in relation to that, and God is being served through the sufferings of His own people in this way, that He is being vindicated. What do we mean? We are the LordÂ's people and we have not only been saved in order to be saved, but, in that old, very hackneyed phrase, we have been Â'saved to serveÂ'. God knows that means a great deal more than most people think when they talk about serving the Lord. Read the Book of Job and see what serving the Lord is. The very highest service that could be rendered to God was GodÂ's own vindication, the rights of God in man, GodÂ's vindication in creation. This was not a matter of running about, taking so many meetings, preaching all over the place and doing many things which are called service. Sometimes it means being stripped of everything and being put through a deep and terrible experience in which God can do something in us that makes possible the glorifying of humanity, investing man with glory so that, at the last, with a glorified humanity, God can say, Â'I am vindicated, I am justified in having created man. Does this not justify Me?Â'

While we, at the moment, cannot grasp all the eternal significance of it, we know this thing in principle. It is working out in principle in minute forms and ways with us. The Lord allows us to come into very deep and dark affliction and suffering where we are deprived and stripped of so much. We go down into the depths and Satan seems to be having it all his own way, just riding over us. The Lord seems to be so far away and so hidden and yet, in His faithfulness, He is doing something in us. We do not know what it means. Our constant cry is, Why? Why this? We go through it and then we come out of it. It is a phase and we come out with measure, with spiritual wealth, with a new knowledge of the Lord; we come out with our souls purified into a new place with the Lord and as we look back on it we say, Â'Well, it was pretty bad, but it was worth it; it was terrible, but I have something which justifies it; I know today as I could not have known by any other way and really I justify God; I go down before the Lord, saying that He is right, He has effected something that would not have been effected in any other way and it is worth having. What is more, I am now in a position, like Job, to stand before God on behalf of others.Â' There are others in desperate need and they are not going to get through. JobÂ's friends could not get through with God and they would not have got through but for Job. He stood before God for them in a place of power and influence. God was right, after all, because of the outcome of that experience, the values that have come from it, the knowledge of the Lord, the spiritual strength, the ability to help others Â– that justifies God in His ways.

That is true of many of the LordÂ's people in fragmentary ways, but it is also the whole history of Christ in union with His Church and of His Church in union with Him in a true spiritual position. It is the history of the Church Â– the LordÂ's people going through a terrible grueling time at the hands of the devil, under the sovereignty of God, out of which the Church becomes Â'a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thingÂ' (Eph. 5:27); Â'when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believedÂ' (2 Thess. 1:10). That is the Lord having all the glory out of all the suffering. Is that your experience in a small way? I think you can see something that touches you, but do you recognize the upshot of it? God is saying that this is what He requires in order to be able to move in. Job represents the ground that He needs. Job represents that which is power and influence with Him. What is that? It means being prepared to suffer with Him, prepared to suffer for GodÂ's rights.

We have a great deal more light about this than Job had. Job did not know about that interview in heaven, he knew nothing about Satan appearing with the sons of God and all that took place there, the challenge and the permission given. All he knew was that these things were happening. His cry is the cry of a man in the dark without any explanation and that is very helpful to me. There is a difference drawn here between the bewildered, perplexed, confounded arguments, statements and words of a man under terrible pressure, and sin. Job says some pretty hard things, even to the Lord, and you wonder how God can support that, stand alongside of that. Yes, when we are down under the pressure, the enemy lying to us and God seeming to have hidden Himself and left us, we are bewildered, perplexed and confounded and the whole thing is so terrible that we begin to cry out and challenge God as to His faithfulness, as to His love, we begin to question God. Take heart, God does not call that sin. I do not mean that we can take liberties with God, but we may get to the place where, because of the intense difficulty of the way, the deep suffering and affliction, because God seems to be outside of His universe and Satan seems to be doing all he wants and we are involved and everything that is ours is involved, we cry out even against God and question His faithfulness. These are the cries, the groans Â– almost the

screams – of a bewildered, perplexed, baffled soul passing through an experience which has a spiritual meaning beyond the understanding or knowledge or apprehension of that soul, and God does not call that sin. He understands our frame, our humanity. It would have been sin if Job had done what his wife told him to do, to renounce God. That is sin and Satan would try to drive a soul there. But God is sovereign here and that is not Satan's right. We may go a long way towards that point, but God has the matter in His hands; He has not allowed it to come to pass. I think it is a wonderful thing, when you read all that Job has to say, to hear God saying that in all this Job sinned not with his lips. God is standing by Job.

This is, after all, a marvelous triumph of faith in God because, although Job does go down and does say some very hard things, it is not long before he is up again and saying other good things. His faith is having a terrible time, but he is constantly coming up again and his faith triumphs through it all! – “And after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). That is faith in resurrection.

What is it that prevails with God? Power with God does necessitate our standing for God's rights and serving Him in that intensely spiritual sense. There are all kinds of things here on this earth which may serve the Lord, but there is a service to the Lord which is deeper than things, deeper than our activities here. The greatest service we can render to God is His own vindication and that can only come by Him redeeming, transforming and glorifying humanity. That is what He is doing with us and He is doing it through suffering.