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## The Vindication of Job

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

*Reading: Job 42*

"But He knoweth the way that I take; When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" Job 23:10.

"Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

We see that, at long last when the Lord turned the captivity of Job and came into action to vindicate His servant, He made the ground of that vindication quite clear in this statement to Job's friends, "...ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right...". As to Job, the part of the statement is just as definite and emphatic, "...as My servant Job has". So that the ground of Job's vindication was that, after all, Job had said the thing which was right and, after all, Job's friends had not said the thing that was right concerning the Lord.

We need at the outset to be clear again as to what the right thing was. If it was, and always is, the ground of vindication, the ground upon which God encamps, we must know what the ground is and be very clear about it. It is very simple and can be put very concisely. The wrong thing upon which Job's friends had persisted was that Job's sufferings were because of sin and that they were punishment for sin. It can all be gathered up into that. There is no doubt about it that such was their interpretation of Job's sufferings. They were seeking to bring home to him sin as the cause of all his sufferings. Therefore his sufferings, in their view, were punishment from God because of sin.

It is quite clear that their procedure with Job was the result of their own conclusion, their own judgement, the working of their own minds. They made their own superficial deductions. They did not know what had gone on in secret, what lay behind the whole experience. They knew nothing of that depth of meaning which is disclosed to us, and which had not been disclosed to them at the time, when God challenged Satan concerning Job, that he was a perfect man and that there was none like him in all the earth, good and upright. That was God's view of Job. He did not say that to Job's friends. God had never said to these men, "Now Job is a good and upright man, and there is none like him in all the earth!" If He had said that to them they would not have carried on with Job as they did, but because they did not know God or God's mind, and because they were not in touch with the heart of God, they came to superficial conclusions which proved disastrous for them and brought upon God's servant untold suffering.

We have to be very careful that conclusions are made in the depths, that they are not simply the workings of our own minds or judgements arrived at on a superficial level as we look at things on the outside. That is one of the lessons of this book. These friends knew nothing of the real spiritual background. They really knew nothing of God's thought. They were living upon a merely legalistic basis and concluding that if a man suffers there is something wrong with him. How superficial that is! And they carried that to very great lengths. God says emphatically at the end that they had not said the thing that was right.

God said, "Ye have not spoken OF ME the thing that is right. It was not Job, it was concerning ME!" God was bound up with this. Here is a matter in which God and His servant are one, and to put the hand upon Job is to put the hand upon God; to come to such conclusions about Job is to involve God. The point at issue was this: if a man were living for God, though his light might not be perfect, his spiritual life not flawless, he might not be infallible, there might be points which could be picked out which represent defectiveness in him, but if that man lives for God as far as he knows how and is standing for God on this earth and then that man comes under suffering, not for any positive sin wilfully or carelessly committed, it questions the righteousness of God to say that suffering is punishment. In effect it says God is not righteous! That was the controversy that God had with these men.

I think Job 23:10 touches very directly upon the whole situation. They said, "You are suffering punishment for sin!" Job said, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold"! Why the suffering? Not punishment for sin, but for refining, for spiritual purifying, enrichment, enlargement. Is not that the very thing that comes out in the end of the vindication? Job is a man of far greater stature at the end than at the beginning, and a man never gains stature like that under pulverising punishment of God for sin. He goes through suffering, but the suffering is refining. "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold". That involved God in another way. That was the right thing which Job said. God is righteous, and if God allows suffering, that suffering may heave up all the very depths of my own nature and bring me to the point where I show what I am - and no one would say that Job did not show some bad side under the suffering. He went a long way in complaining. God is doing a thing like that. He is not consigning the man to judgement and destruction because of what he is, but bringing him through fires to save him from what he is. That is a great thing to say about God. That puts God into a different light altogether. Although Job's friends did not recognise it, they were so blind in their own conceits, yet they were in effect saying, "Here is a man who is seeking to live for God, and God comes in and smites him! God is unrighteous!"

The whole question is one of the righteousness of God, so far as the arguments of men are concerned. The right thing was that it was refining unto a fuller life, and that justifies God, it puts God in a just place, whereas unconsciously they were putting God into an unrighteous place.

Then there was this other governing factor in the case of Job. All unseen by men and unknown even by Job, Satan was standing as the accuser. We know how the story opens, the challenge of Satan to God, or, rather, in the first place God's challenge to Satan concerning Job: "Hast thou considered My servant Job? For there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man...". Satan flung back to God, "Does Job fear God for naught? Job is a very wealthy man, stands in a position of great influence, everybody thinks a great deal of Job, it pays to serve God in Job's case! Take away everything so that the gain of serving God, so far as this world is concerned, is removed, and the godliness of Job will go! Job's God will go with Job's goods, and Job's godliness will disappear when it no longer pays to serve God!" That is the sneer of the devil. He accuses Job before God of only being godly because it pays. "But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face"! Now, whatever Job did - and he did a lot - he never did that. He cursed the day that he was born, he cried out at times in anguish, he rebelled, but he never cursed God; and he never did what his wife suggested that he should do: curse God and take his own life. But Job, with all those terrible bouts, those paroxysms which brought him to the place where he regretted that ever he had been born, where he wished that the man who bore the news of his birth had never been born, that anything to do with his having come into being might fall under an anathema, never cursed God.

In spite of those awful paroxysms he survived, he came up to some sublime points: "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold". "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him". "I know that my redeemer lives". "Yet... shall I see God". They are pinnacles of triumph. They are the comings up from great depths. They mark a mighty reviving in the servant of God. They declare that the devil is a liar from the beginning. They declare, without any uncertain sound, that God is right and that when God is in the life of a man, He is more than all that the man possesses. Take away everything, and God is more than everything else. It is the answer to Satan. Clear and strong the answer to Satan's challenge is, "All right, I give you permission to take it all away, to strip him". And indeed Job was stripped, but never of God; God remained. The accuser was answered. It was proved that Job did not serve God for himself, not for the things that God gave him, but for God Himself.

We can hear over the ages the great triumphant cry of the apostle, which answers to this book so fully: "Who shall separate us from the love of God (Christ)?" (Rom. 8:35). Then there is the long catalogue of things which make up life, and the catalogue of adversities. Paul exhausts them all, and then, with one inclusive declaration he says: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us". It is not what we get from the Lord, but it is what the Lord is Himself. That is the basis of triumph.

Job's friends knew nothing of that background, and Job perhaps knew nothing about that background, but he came through to that position, and it was on that ground that God vindicated Job. Job's interpretation of God was right. Job's relationship with God was right. His experience had to be explained in another realm where God was doing a *mighty* thing which touched even the ultimate forces of evil. God was showing unto principalities and powers that they could do their utmost, their worst, but they could not get in between Himself and one who is His by faith. They could take everything, and the individual concerned might go down into the trough of the wave and simply wallow there, and the raging tempest go on around. There may be many doubts, fears,

cryings out, some rebellion, some bitterness, a wish to die, a regretting that ever there had been a life at all; and yet, something more than all that. God is bound up with the life of a man or woman who is honestly and truly devoted to Him. Though there may be imperfections, weaknesses, flaws, God is bound up with that life, and all the work of Satan cannot destroy that relationship.

It is a mighty thing. How far you are able experimentally to enter into this I do not know, but I have no doubt that many can go some way with Job. You know some experience of deep trial, in which, so far as you are concerned, you have well-nigh let go, you have felt that the end had come. You had questioned everything, and yet you knew in your heart of hearts that, conscious of many imperfections which in your own being were contrary to God, weaknesses and flaws in your life and character, nevertheless you knew that you were towards the Lord and that deliberately you had never turned from God, and taken another course. And yet here you are subjected to an experience which is tearing you to pieces. Those who have gone that way in any measure (it may be some are going that way now in measure) know that you can come out of the trough of that wave and know that you are just exactly where you were before you went into it with the Lord, and the Lord is exactly where He was; the spiritual relationship is untouched. We regret what we said in those times, and how we felt, and we have to go to the Lord and acknowledge that we have been very unfaithful in our thoughts and feelings about Him, but afterwards the relationship is unbroken, it is just as it was, the Lord is there. This is a mighty thing. It is a deeper thing than hell, it is a mightier thing than the devil himself.

That lay behind Job's experience, and his friends knew nothing about that spiritual side of things, and Job could not for the time being understand it, but God knew it all. Here is the case of a man who, despite many weaknesses and failings, was right in his interpretation of God, but who appeared to be wrong in every way. *Everything* to appearances argued that Job was wrong. Everything has gone wrong! Everything has broken down! Everything has come under a blight! All that he was occupied with - his work, his interests, his activities, his own physical life - and the man himself for a time went into a realm of complete bewilderment, stunned and dazed. Then all the *good* people around him say, "The man is wrong!" Those whose judgement is relied upon, those who are looked to as not being bad people but godly people, who are standing for God (and these friends of Job professed to be standing for God; they told Job they were not really arguing as men of the world, they were arguing for God and were trying to persuade this sinner to come back to God) argue that you are wrong. Job was under a universal cloud, suspected, doubted. There was nothing whatever that supported Job's position that he was right. Here is a man who is vehemently standing upon a certain ground to interpret God, and the rest of the world is against him and his interpretation and says he is wrong, that he is standing for a false position. It is a tremendous thing to see that, for that is what is here clearly. And in the end God says that man was right, and the others were all wrong.

It is possible to be in a position like those friends of Job. God save us from any false conceits about any position which we may occupy. But it is just possible for a right man to be universally believed to be wrong. It is possible to be utterly alone with God, right, and no one believe it or understand. Let us put it round the other way. To be immune from suffering such as Job's, never to have the touch of such an experience as he went through, to be where his friends were quite outside all this travail and suffering, to be free from all this trouble, may never mean that such people are right and that because they are not having that kind of experience God is particularly favourable toward them.

What is the force of all this? It is all intended to bring home to us the tremendous necessity for getting God's views about things, for that deeper touch with the heart of God which will save us from many disastrous positions. Here are several positions which represent disaster from the Divine standpoint. Here is the superficial judgement of that which is taking place in the life of some child of God and which superficial judgement adds to their suffering because it is false. That judgement will bring us into collision with God sooner or later. We must be careful. There is something about human nature which almost immediately jumps to conclusions like that. Somebody is going through a deep time, then it must be that the Lord has something up against them! Punishment and chastening are two different things, they belong to two different realms. Let us not confuse them. Punishment is judgement unto a destruction, chastening is the dealings of God unto refining. Chastening is all with the right in view. Chastening is a thing full of hope; the afterward is a great thing. Punishment is in the dark to despair. Punishment is a barren, desolate land. The Lord's people have not discriminated between those two things. Somehow or other we get into a wrong position when we say, "Now I am going through this suffering so that I shall not go to hell afterwards. I am having my suffering now, but the ungodly will have their suffering afterwards; they will go to hell!" Do not get your mentality mixed up like that. Do not believe that sort of thing. Your hell was borne by Christ on the cross. You are saved from hell, not by enduring suffering now, but by faith in what He suffered for you in His cross. We are not going to escape from hell more or less, purgatory or any such line of things, simply because we suffer now. Our suffering now is not in that realm of judgement or punishment. It does not touch the question of escape from hell. Our suffering now is unto an enlargement of life, an increase of capacity for glory. "Our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). It does not say, "Our affliction, which is but for the moment, saves us more and more from hell and its punishment!" That is not the realm of things at all. It is capacity for glory through suffering which is in view.

One last word to put it round the other way. Beware of the accuser who, when you are having a bad time and going through suffering, comes along perhaps through friends who suggest very nicely that your suffering is consequential upon your having got into a wrong position and gone wrong and the Lord is therefore up against you. He will come in many ways to try and get that into you, and when once he has lodged it, you are done. Do not believe it. If you have done wrong as a child of God and yet have kept your face in the right direction and are seeking to have wrong things put right, that is the opposite of going on in wrong with impunity. In that case you will not be punished for your wrong, but you will be chastened, and that is very different. If the enemy says it is punishment, you will come under condemnation and go out into the dark. If you believe it is chastening, though it may be because you have done wrong, there is hope. Always keep your eye towards the light, and do not allow those dark things to come in from the enemy.

Remember, there is judgement for those who persistently go on in the wrong; it must end in that. But if you are walking with your face towards the light, keeping short accounts with God, even chastening for wrong doing is with hope of a blessed afterward. "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward..." (Heb. 12:11). What is the "afterward"? It is the afterward of being sensible. When I was a boy and had some chastening it was not pleasant but very grievous, and the grievousness took some time to wear off; but having become a man I say quite definitely, without any hesitation or reservation, that it was a good thing that I had that. If I had not had it I should have lost something. It is the "afterward" of getting to a sensible position, where you see the value of that. It was unto good. "Afterward it bears the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."