

## JOB'S AUTUMN DAYS

Job 29:1-6

## INTRODUCTION

One thing which can make bad times seem worse is to remember the good times of the past. We have all had such experiences. This, I think, was the case with Job as we find it recorded in the 29th chapter.

Great writers of past centuries have written in their own way about how it is that in every misfortune the worst is to have been happy once. Dante, Chaucer, and Milton have all suggested that there is no greater woe than in wretchedness to recall times of happiness, and that fortune's sharpest adversity is to have the happy days of old keep running through the mind when all of them are gone. One great poet calls this "Sorrow's Crown of Sorrow."

I. Job's life as it was before his great testing experience, 1:1-5.

A. A prosperous and distinguished landholder.

When Job would make his way to the city gate, the young men would withdraw, the aged would stand, and the princes would lay their hand on their mouth in deep respect.

He lived then in the days of "fruit gathering," a time which in those days stood for the season when nature yields her increase and the early rains revive the parched soil and fill man with the energy of triumphant adulthood.

B. A noble inner character "perfect and upright."

II. Description of his "autumn days," 29:4.

A. Including "friendship" or "intimacy" with God.

His blessedness had its source in GOD, not in THINGS.

His piety was a true piety, both Godward and manward (vs. 14).

The word translated "friendship" in the RSV is from the Heb. word meaning "secret," "confidential and intimate circle," or "familiar converse" and in some ancient versions could be translated "when God protected my tent."

The joy of God's presence (vs. 5a) is manifested by the playful gathering of Job's children (5b; lit., "my youngsters"), and by his luxurious living (vs. 6).

B. Job vividly remembered the "good old days" of his prosperity, when God looked on him with favor (2-5a), when he was secure in the companionship of his family and the possession of his wealth (5b-6), highly respected on every hand, even by the princes and nobles of the land (7-11), championed the cause of the afflicted (12-17), and dreamed hopeful dreams of a serene and peaceful life to the end (18-20).

Job's position carried with it not only the enjoyment of privilege but the weight of civic and social responsibility, reminding us that the Christian with wealth also has great responsibility. Much is required from one to whom God has given generously. He was the champion of the wronged and the helpless, even at danger to himself (vs. 17).

C. Especially significant is Job's tender concern for his family's spiritual welfare.

D. Not Job alone, but WISDOM itself, is put to the supreme test.

1. There was a complete reversal of the order in which men's wisdom had come to trust.

## 2. The place of Wisdom Literature in the Bible.

The book of Job is by far the best example of wisdom literature in the Bible. Other books which are in this category of wisdom literature include Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, some of the Psalms, and brief passages in some other contexts. This lit. presents the quality of mind of the wise man, showing his skill and ability to live well and successfully; such wisdom is supposed to be in itself apart from man, above and beyond man, existing ideally with God. It was not unique to Israel, but was part of a general pattern of culture and lit. throughout the ancient Near East. The writer of the book of Job denies the conventional wisdom which taught that divine justice was like a simple mathematical formula. ✓

They said in substance that if one lived right he would prosper, and if he lived wickedly he would suffer for it; therefore, prosperity was a sign of right living, and suffering a sign of sinful living. The writer of Job shows this is not so. Sometimes the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper.

This contradicts the teaching of certain Christian ministers (many on TV) who teach the doctrine that if you give faithfully to their ministry and accept their beliefs and live for God, that God will bless and prosper you. But Jesus, Paul, Peter, and others in the NT said if you are true to Christ, you can expect to suffer persecution in a world which hates your Savior, that many Christians will be poor and needy, and that many wicked people will prosper in this life, but they will have to face the judgment of God, and THEN divine justice will be done.

The traditional wisdom of the wise men of the ancient Near East and of the modern evangelicals tends to foster arrogance among the fortunate and guilt among the unfortunate Christians in the world (of whom there are many hundreds of millions).

The writer of Job had learned that man is more complicated than the traditional wise men believed. Material prosperity, poverty, and suffering were related to many other factors besides simple religious faith and right living.

The book of Job teaches, moreover, that the nature of God cannot be reduced to such a simple definition or description as the wise teachers assumed. God might have many other reasons for allowing the righteous to suffer than they could possibly understand. The wisdom of men is not the final explanation for everything. God has his own reasons beyond our human reason, and perhaps, as J.B. Phillips said, "our God is too small."

### III. Job's Ultimatum of Faith

A. His plea for a Mediator, 13:20-21  
*and 9:33-35 ("umpire")*

B. The assurance of a Redeemer ("Goel"), 19:23-29.  
*(vindicator)*

C. The "Next of Kin" whose business was to maintain the rights of an innocent wronged relative and vindicate him.

D. This points, of course, to Christ as our Redeemer and mediator.

E. The "But now" of <sup>chapter</sup> 30:1, 9, & 30 stands in marked contrast to the happy memories of chapter 29.

1. The sufferings of the present time.

(See Paul's statement in Rom. 8:18).

2. With our limited insight we often misinterpret events that happen to us.

There is a Chinese story about an old man whose horse strayed off and was lost. His friends in the village toiled up the hill to offer their condolences; but the old farmer looked at them and smiled. "How do you know this is bad luck?" he said.

Soon the lone horse came back and brought with him a whole drove of wild horses. Whereupon the friends toiled up once more, this time to offer their congratulations. But the farmer asked them, "How do you know this is good luck?"

In a week or two his son, who with so many horses about had almost learned to ride, fell and broke his leg. Again the pilgrimage, the condolences, and the question, "How do you know this is bad luck?"

The next month war broke out, and his son was not drafted because of the injury. It is hard to say to what lengths the story might have been extended! But it does illustrate how out of much weakness sometimes comes strength, and out of difficulties can come rich benefits, and vice versa. The Christian faith, however, goes much beyond the oriental philosophy of bad luck. We believe that if we are a child of God our Heavenly Father directs our life by His loving and gracious providence.

#### IV. Job's Ultimate Challenge to God, 31:35-37.

A. Job has remembered his happy past and his miserable present, and he can find nothing in his heart or life to justify his present tragedy and suffering.

B. He asks not for mercy, but instead makes a princely challenge to God to meet him in an equal and honorable encounter. He had asked before, in 13:22, for God to answer him, but there had been not a word from God until now.

The word for "prince" is the word commonly used for the kings of Israel, especially David & Solomon, and it implies self confidence, social responsibility, authority, and power. This is the only instance in the whole Bible (or in any other ancient Near Eastern literature, as far as I know) where a mere man approaches the deity as a PRINCE. He faces God with the assurance and dignity of an Arab sheik, ready to argue with an equal.

C. For our purposes we may consider the discourses of Elihu parenthetical (chapters 32-37). They introduce a new speaker who has not been mentioned before, and who is likewise ignored in the discourses of the Lord in the epilogue. We can go from "The words of Job are ended" (31:40b) right to the Lord's answer and disclosure to Job in 38:1 to the end of the book. It comes as a thunderbolt in the blue sky of Job's pride and self-righteousness right after Job's challenge of the Almighty in chapter 31. The point to stress here is that Job DID go beyond his "Autumn days" and "Winter Days" into another "Springtime" of restored days of blessedness. And this gives us confidence that God will do the same for us if we let him have his way and lead us through our testing experiences of life.

## V. Job's Response to the Lord

A. First he was silent, 40:1-5

B. Then he gave way to confession and repentance

1. He repented, not for any sin which might have caused his suffering, but for the foolish things he had said about his own goodness and God's justice.

2. He recognized God's omnipotence (42:2) and his own rashness (42:3).

C. Job's real problem had been alienation from God. His solution was reconciliation with God.

His peace came not from answers to questions but from the realization that God was there and that he cared. He learned that a man may suffer the loss of all things and yet be sure of the love of God.

His intellectual questions had not been answered, but now he could say with Paul: "I rejoice in the Lord greatly....I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:10-13). He endured his "Autumn Days" with a triumphant faith. He suffered bitter physical, mental, and spiritual anguish, without having the faintest idea what the reasons were, without any real consolation from his wise friends, indeed without any explanation from God, but he came out of his trials confessing that God's grace is sufficient and his will is best. If Job could do this, we Christians who live on this side of Calvary and the Empty Tomb, in the clear light of the Gospel, should not find it too difficult to walk in childlike trust with our dear Savior wherever he leads.

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