

The Voice of Job

by George MacDonald

Job's faith in God's justice and goodness is tested as he suffers greatly, but he holds on to his child-like judgment of God and desires to plead his cause before God.

Scripture: Job 14:13, Job 42:1, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 16:24, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Trusting God"

Description

George MacDonald preaches on the profound themes of suffering, faith, self-examination, and the ultimate need for complete surrender to God. Using the story of Job as a backdrop, he delves into the human experience of pain, doubt, and the search for divine justice. Job's journey from questioning God's ways to humbly abhorring himself in the presence of the Almighty reflects the transformative power of encountering God's glory and wisdom. MacDonald emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's goodness, even in the midst of trials, and the necessity of self-reflection and repentance in drawing closer to the divine.

Transcript

'O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.'--Job xiv. 13-15.

The book of Job seems to me the most daring of poems: from a position of the most vantageless realism, it assaults the very citadel of the ideal! Its hero is a man seated among the ashes, covered with loathsome boils from head to foot, scraping himself with a potsherd. Sore in body, sore in mind, sore in heart, sore in spirit, he is the instance--type of humanity in the depths of its misery--all the waves and billows of a world of adverse circumstance rolling free over its head. I would not be supposed to use the word humanity either in the abstract, or of the mass concrete; I mean the humanity of the individual endlessly repeated: Job, I say, is the human being--a centre to the sickening assaults of pain, the ghastly invasions of fear: these, one time or another, I presume, threaten to overwhelm every man, reveal him to himself as enslaved to the external, and stir him up to find some way out into the infinite, where alone he can rejoice in the liberty that belongs to his nature. Seated in the heart of a leaden despair, Job cries aloud to the Might unseen, scarce known, which yet he regards as the God of his life. But no more that of a slave is his cry, than the defiance of Prometheus hurled at Jupiter from his rock. He is more overwhelmed than the

Titan, for he is in infinite perplexity as well as pain; but no more than in that of Prometheus is there a trace of the cowardly in his cry. Before the Judge he asserts his innocence, and will not grovel--knowing indeed that to bear himself so would be to insult the holy. He feels he has not deserved such suffering, and will neither tell nor listen to lies for God.

Prometheus is more stonily patient than Job. Job is nothing of a Stoic, but bemoans himself like a child--a brave child who seems to himself to suffer wrong, and recoils with horror-struck bewilderment from the unreason of the thing. Prometheus has to do with a tyrant whom he despises, before whom therefore he endures with unbewailing unsubmission, upheld by the consciousness that he is fighting the battle of humanity against an all but all-powerful Selfishness: endurance is the only availing weapon against him, and he will endure to the ever-delayed end!

Job, on the other hand, is the more troubled because it is He who is at the head and the heart, who is the beginning and the end of things, that has laid his hand upon him with such a heavy torture that he takes his flesh in his teeth for pain. He cannot, will not believe him a tyrant; but, while he pleads against his dealing with himself, loves him, and looks to him as the source of life, the power and gladness of being. He dares not think God unjust, but not therefore can he allow that he has done anything to merit the treatment he is receiving at his hands.

Hence is he of necessity in profoundest perplexity, for how can the two things be reconciled? The thought has not yet come to him that that which it would be unfair to lay upon him as punishment, may yet be laid upon him as favour--by a love supreme which would give him blessing beyond all possible prayer--blessing he would not dare to ask if he saw the means necessary to its giving, but blessing for which, once known and understood, he would be willing to endure yet again all that he had undergone.

Therefore is he so sorely divided in himself. While he must not think of God as having mistaken him, the discrepancy that looks like mistake forces itself upon him through every channel of thought and feeling. He had nowise relaxed his endeavour after a godly life, yet is the hand of the God he had acknowledged in all his ways uplifted against him, as rarely against any transgressor!--nor against him alone, for his sons and daughters have been swept away like a generation of vipers!

The possessions, which made him the greatest of all the men of the east, have been taken from him by fire and wind and the hand of the enemy! He is poor as the poorest, diseased as the vilest, bereft of the children which were his pride and his strength! The worst of all with which fear could have dismayed him is come upon him; and worse now than all, death is denied him! His prayer that, as he came naked from the womb, so he may return naked and sore to the bosom of the earth, is not heard; he is left to linger in self-loathing, to encounter at every turn of agonized thought the awful suggestion that God has cast him off!

He does not deny that there is evil in him; for--'Dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one,' he pleads, 'and bringest me into judgment with thee?' but he does deny that he has been a wicked man, a doer of the thing he knew to be evil: he does deny that there is any guile in him. And who, because he knows and laments the guile in himself, will dare deny that there was once a Nathanael in the world? Had Job been Calvinist or Lutheran, the book of Job would have been very different.

His perplexity would then have been--how God being just, could require of a man more than he could do, and punish him as if his sin were that of a perfect being who chose to do the evil of which he knew all the enormity. For me, I will call no one Master but Christ--and from him I learn that his quarrel with us is that

we will not do what we know, will not come to him that we may have life. How endlessly more powerful with men would be expostulation grounded, not on what they have done, but on what they will not do!

Job's child-like judgment of God had never been vitiated and perverted, to the dishonouring of the great Father, by any taint of such low theories as, alas! we must call the popular: explanations of God's ways by such as did not understand Him, they are acceptable to such as do not care to know him, such as are content to stand afar off and stare at the cloud whence issue the thunders and the voices; but a burden threatening to sink them to Tophet, a burden grievous to be borne, to such as would arise and go to the Father. The contradiction between Job's idea of the justice of God and the things which had befallen him, is constantly haunting him; it has a sting in it far worse than all the other misery with which he is tormented; but it is not fixed in the hopelessness of hell by an accepted explanation more frightful than itself. Let the world-sphinx put as many riddles as she will, she can devour no man while he waits an answer from the world-redeemer. Job refused the explanation of his friends because he knew it false; to have accepted such as would by many in the present day be given him, would have been to be devoured at once of the monster. He simply holds on to the skirt of God's garment--besieges his door--keeps putting his question again and again, ever haunting the one source of true answer and reconciliation. No answer will do for him but the answer that God only can give; for who but God can justify God's ways to his creature?

From a soul whose very consciousness is contradiction, we must not look for logic; misery is rarely logical; it is itself a discord; yet is it nothing less than natural that, feeling as if God wronged him, Job should yet be ever yearning after a sight of God, straining into his presence, longing to stand face to face with him. He would confront the One. He is convinced, or at least cherishes as his one hope the idea, that, if he could but get God to listen to him, if he might but lay his case clear before him, God would not fail to see how the thing was, and would explain the matter to him--would certainly give him peace; the man in the ashes would know that the foundations of the world yet stand sure; that God has not closed his eyes, or--horror of all horrors--ceased to be just! Therefore would he order his words before him, and hear what God had to say; surely the Just would set the mind of his justice-loving creature at rest!

His friends, good men, religious men, but of the pharisaic type--that is, men who would pay their court to God, instead of coming into his presence as children; men with traditional theories which have served their poor turn, satisfied their feeble intellectual demands, they think others therefore must accept or perish; men anxious to appease God rather than trust in him; men who would rather receive salvation from God, than God their salvation--these his friends would persuade Job to the confession that he was a hypocrite, insisting that such things could not have come upon him but because of wickedness, and as they knew of none open, it must be for some secret vileness. They grow angry with him when he refuses to be persuaded against his knowledge of himself. They insist on his hypocrisy, he on his righteousness. Nor may we forget that herein lies not any overweening on the part of Job, for the poem prepares us for the right understanding of the man by telling us in the prologue, that God said thus to the accuser of men: 'Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?' God gives Job into Satan's hand with confidence in the result; and at the end of the trial approves of what Job has said concerning himself. But the very appearance of God is enough to make Job turn against himself: his part was to have trusted God altogether, in spite of every appearance, in spite of every reality! He will justify himself no more. He sees that though God has not been punishing him for his sins, yet is he far from what he ought to be, and must become: 'Behold,' he says, 'I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.'

But let us look a little closer at Job's way of thinking and speaking about God, and his manner of addressing him--so different from the pharisaic in all ages, in none more than in our own.

Waxing indignant at the idea that his nature required such treatment--'Am I a sea or a whale,' he cries out, 'that thou settest a watch over me?' Thou knowest that I am not wicked. 'Thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet!--that the way I have gone may be known by my footprints! To his friends he cries: 'Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?' Do you not know that I am the man I say? 'Will ye accept His person?'--siding with Him against me? 'Will ye contend for God?'--be special pleaders for him, his partisans? 'Is it good that He should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock Him?'--saying what you do not think? 'He will surely reprove you, if ye do secretly accept persons!--even the person of God himself!

Such words are pleasing in the ear of the father of spirits. He is not a God to accept the flattery which declares him above obligation to his creatures; a God to demand of them a righteousness different from his own; a God to deal ungenerously with his poverty-stricken children; a God to make severest demands upon his little ones! Job is confident of receiving justice. There is a strange but most natural conflict of feeling in him. His faith is in truth profound, yet is he always complaining. It is but the form his faith takes in his trouble. Even while he declares the hardness and unfitness of the usage he is receiving, he yet seems assured that, to get things set right, all he needs is admission to the presence of God--an interview with the Most High. To be heard must be to have justice. He uses language which, used by any living man, would horrify the religious of the present day, in proportion to the lack of truth in them, just as it horrified his three friends, the honest pharisees of the time, whose religion was 'doctrine' and rebuke. God speaks not a word of rebuke to Job for the freedom of his speech:--he has always been seeking such as Job to worship him. It is those who know only and respect the outsides of religion, such as never speak or think of God but as the Almighty or Providence, who will say of the man who would go close up to God, and speak to him out of the deepest in the nature he has made, 'he is irreverent.' To utter the name of God in the drama--highest of human arts, is with such men blasphemy. They pay court to God, not love him; they treat him as one far away, not as the one whose bosom is the only home. They accept God's person. 'Shall not his excellency'--another thing quite than that you admire--'make you afraid? Shall not his dread'--another thing quite than that to which you show your pagan respect--'fall upon you?'

In the desolation of this man, the truth of God seems to him, yet more plainly than hitherto, the one thing that holds together the world which by the word of his mouth came first into being. If God be not accessible, nothing but despair and hell are left the man so lately the greatest in the east. Like a child escaping from the dogs of the street, he flings the door to the wall, and rushes, nor looks behind him, to seek the presence of the living one. Bearing with him the burden of his death, he cries, 'Look what thou hast laid upon me! Shall mortal man, the helpless creature thou hast made, bear cross like this?' He would cast his load at the feet of his maker!--God is the God of comfort, known of man as the refuge, the life-giver, or not known at all. But alas! he cannot come to him! Nowhere can he see his face! He has hid himself from him! 'Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No! but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.'

He cannot find him! Yet is he in his presence all the time, and his words enter into the ear of God his Saviour.

The grandeur of the poem is that Job pleads his cause with God against all the remonstrance of religious authority, recognizing no one but God, and justified therein. And the grandest of all is this, that he implies, if he does not actually say, that God owes something to his creature. This is the beginning of the greatest discovery of all--that God owes himself to the creature he has made in his image, for so he has made him incapable of living without him. This, his creatures' highest claim upon him, is his divinest gift to them. For the fulfilling of this their claim he has sent his son, that he may himself, the father of him and of us, follow into our hearts. Perhaps the worst thing in a theology constructed out of man's dull possible, and not out of the being and deeds and words of Jesus Christ, is the impression it conveys throughout that God acknowledges no such obligation. Are not we the clay, and he the potter? how can the clay claim from the potter? We are the clay, it is true, but his clay, but spiritual clay, live clay, with needs and desires--and rights; we are clay, but clay worth the Son of God's dying for, that it might learn to consent to be shaped unto honour. We can have no merits--a merit is a thing impossible; but God has given us rights. Out of him we have nothing; but, created by him, come forth from him, we have even rights towards him--ah, never, never against him! his whole desire and labour is to make us capable of claiming, and induce us to claim of him the things whose rights he bestowed in creating us. No claim had we to be created: that involves an absurdity; but, being made, we have claims on him who made us: our needs are our claims. A man who will not provide for the hunger of his child, is condemned by the whole world.

'Ah, but,' says the partisan of God, 'the Almighty stands in a relation very different from that of an earthly father: there is no parallel.' I grant it: there is no parallel. The man did not create the child, he only yielded to an impulse created in himself: God is infinitely more bound to provide for his child than any man is to provide for his. The relation is infinitely, divinely closer. It is God to whom every hunger, every aspiration, every desire, every longing of our nature is to be referred; he made all our needs--made us the creatures of a thousand necessities--and have we no claim on him? Nay, we have claims innumerable, infinite; and his one great claim on us is that we should claim our claims of him.

It is terrible to represent God as unrelated to us in the way of appeal to his righteousness. How should he be righteous without owing us anything? How would there be any right for the judge of all the earth to do if he owed nothing? Verily he owes us nothing that he does not pay like a God; but it is of the devil to imagine imperfection and disgrace in obligation. So far is God from thinking so that in every act of his being he lays himself under obligation to his creatures. Oh, the grandeur of his goodness, and righteousness, and fearless unselfishness! When doubt and dread invade, and the voice of love in the soul is dumb, what can please the father of men better than to hear his child cry to him from whom he came, 'Here I am, O God! Thou hast made me: give me that which thou hast made me needing.' The child's necessity, his weakness, his helplessness, are the strongest of all his claims. If I am a whale, I can claim a sea; if I am a sea, I claim room to roll, and break in waves after my kind; if I am a lion, I seek my meat from God; am I a child, this, beyond all other claims, I claim--that, if any of my needs are denied me, it shall be by the love of a father, who will let me see his face, and allow me to plead my cause before him. And this must be just what God desires! What would he have, but that his children should claim their father? To what end are all his dealings with them, all his sufferings with and for and in them, but that they should claim their birthright? Is not their birthright what he made them for, made in them when he made them? Is it not what he has been putting forth his energy to give them ever since first he began them to be--the divine nature, God himself? The child has, and must have, a claim on the father, a claim which it is

the joy of the father's heart to acknowledge. A created need is a created claim. God is the origin of both need and supply, the father of our necessities, the abundant giver of the good things. Right gloriously he meets the claims of his child! The story of Jesus is the heart of his answer, not primarily to the prayers, but to the divine necessities of the children he has sent out into his universe.

Away with the thought that God could have been a perfect, an adorable creator, doing anything less than he has done for his children! that any other kind of being than Jesus Christ could have been worthy of all-glorifying worship! that his nature demanded less of him than he has done! that his nature is not absolute love, absolute self-devotion--could have been without these highest splendours!

In the light of this truth, let us then look at the words at the head of this sermon: 'Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave!' Job appeals to his creator, whom his sufferings compel him to regard as displeased with him, though he knows not why. We know he was not displeased but Job had not read the preface to his own story. He prays him to hide him, and forget him for a time, that the desire of the maker to look again upon the creature he had made, to see once more the work of his hands, may awake within him; that silence and absence and loss may speak for the buried one, and make the heart of the parent remember and long after the face of the child; then 'thou shalt call and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands;' then will he rise in joy, to plead with confidence the cause of his righteousness. For God is nigher to the man than is anything God has made: what can be closer than the making and the made? that which is, and that which is because the other is? that which wills, and that which answers, owing to the will, the heart, the desire of the other, its power to answer? What other relation imaginable could give claims to compare with those arising from such a relation? God must love his creature that looks up to him with hungry eyes--hungry for life, for acknowledgment, for justice, for the possibilities of living that life which the making life has made him alive for the sake of living. The whole existence of a creature is a unit, an entirety of claim upon his creator:--just therefore, let him do with me as he will--even to seating me in the ashes, and seeing me scrape myself with a potsherd!--not the less but ever the more will I bring forward my claim! assert it--insist on it--assail with it the ear and the heart of the father. Is it not the sweetest music ear of maker can hear?--except the word of perfect son, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!' We, imperfect sons, shall learn to say the same words too: that we may grow capable and say them, and so enter into our birthright, yea, become partakers of the divine nature in its divinest element, that Son came to us--died for the slaying of our selfishness, the destruction of our mean hollow pride, the waking of our childhood. We are his father's debtors for our needs, our rights, our claims, and he will have us pay the uttermost farthing. Yea, so true is the Father, he will even compel us, through misery if needful, to put in our claims, for he knows we have eternal need of these things: without the essential rights of his being, who can live?

I protest, therefore, against all such teaching as, originating in and fostered by the faithlessness of the human heart, gives the impression that the exceeding goodness of God towards man is not the natural and necessary outcome of his being. The root of every heresy popular in the church draws its nourishment merely and only from the soil of unbelief. The idea that God would be God all the same, as glorious as he needed to be, had he not taken upon himself the divine toil of bringing home his wandered children, had he done nothing to seek and save the lost, is false as hell. Lying for God could go no farther. As if the idea of God admitted of his being less than he is, less than perfect, less than all-in-all, less than Jesus Christ! less than Love absolute, less than entire unselfishness! As if the God revealed to us in the New Testament were not his own perfect necessity of loving-kindness, but one who has made himself better than, by his own nature, by his own love, by the laws which he willed the laws of his existence, he needed to be! They

would have it that, being unbound, he deserves the greater homage! So it might be, if he were not our father. But to think of the living God not as our father, but as one who has condescended greatly, being nowise, in his own willed grandeur of righteous nature, bound to do as he has done, is killing to all but a slavish devotion. It is to think of him as nothing like the God we see in Jesus Christ.

It will be answered that we have fallen, and God is thereby freed from any obligation, if any ever were. It is but another lie. No amount of wrong-doing in a child can ever free a parent from the divine necessity of doing all he can to deliver his child; the bond between them cannot be broken. It is the vulgar, slavish, worldly idea of freedom, that it consists in being bound to nothing. Not such is God's idea of liberty! To speak as a man--the more of vital obligation he lays on himself, the more children he creates, with the more claims upon him, the freer is he as creator and giver of life, which is the essence of his Godhead: to make scope for his essence is to be free.

Our Lord teaches us that the truth, known by obedience to him, will make us free: our freedom lies in living the truth of our relations to God and man. For a man to be alone in the universe would be to be a slave to unspeakable longings and lonelinesses. And again to speak after the manner of men: God could not be satisfied with himself without doing all that a God and Father could do for the creatures he had made--that is, without doing just what he has done, what he is doing, what he will do, to deliver his sons and daughters, and bring them home with rejoicing.

To answer the cry of the human heart, 'Would that I could see him! would that I might come before him, and look upon him face to face!' he sent his son, the express image of his person. And again, that we might not be limited in our understanding of God by the constant presence to our weak and dullable spiritual sense of any embodiment whatever, he took him away. Having seen him, in his absence we understand him better. That we might know him he came; that we might go to him he went.

If we dare, like Job, to plead with him in any of the heart-eating troubles that arise from the impossibility of loving such misrepresentation of him as is held out to us to love by our would-be teachers; if we think and speak out before him that which seems to us to be right, will he not be heartily pleased with his children's love of righteousness--with the truth that will not part him and his righteousness? Verily he will not plead against us with his great power, but will put strength in us, and where we are wrong will instruct us.

For the heart that wants to do and think aright, the heart that seeks to worship him as no tyrant, but as the perfectly, absolutely righteous God, is the delight of the Father. To the heart that will not call that righteousness which it feels to be unjust, but clings to the skirt of his garment, and lifts pleading eyes to his countenance--to that heart he will lay open the riches of his being--riches which it has not entered that heart to conceive. 'O Lord, they tell me I have so offended against thy law that, as I am, thou canst not look upon me, but threatenest me with eternal banishment from thy presence.

But if thou look not upon me, how can I ever be other than I am? Lord, remember I was born in sin: how then can I see sin as thou seest it? Remember, Lord, that I have never known myself clean: how can I cleanse myself? Thou must needs take me as I am and cleanse me. Is it not impossible that I should behold the final goodness of good, the final evilness of evil? how then can I deserve eternal torment? Had I known good and evil, seeing them as thou seest them, then chosen the evil, and turned away from the good, I know not what I should not deserve; but thou knowest it has ever been something good in the evil that has enticed my selfish heart--nor mine only, but that of all my kind.

Thou requirest of us to forgive: surely thou forgivest freely! Bound thou mayest be to destroy evil, but art thou bound to keep the sinner alive that thou mayest punish him, even if it make him no better? Sin cannot be deep as life, for thou art the life; and sorrow and pain go deeper than sin, for they reach to the divine in us: thou canst suffer, though thou wilt not sin. To see men suffer might make us shun evil, but it never could make us hate it. We might see thereby that thou hatest sin, but we never could see that thou lovest the sinner.

Chastise us, we pray thee, in loving kindness, and we shall not faint. We have done much that is evil, yea, evil is very deep in us, but we are not all evil, for we love righteousness; and art not thou thyself, in thy Son, the sacrifice for our sins, the atonement of our breach? Thou hast made us subject to vanity, but hast thyself taken thy godlike share of the consequences. Could we ever have come to know good as thou knowest it, save by passing through the sea of sin and the fire of cleansing?

They tell me I must say for Christ's sake, or thou wilt not pardon: it takes the very heart out of my poor love to hear that thou wilt not pardon me except because Christ has loved me; but I give thee thanks that nowhere in the record of thy gospel, does one of thy servants say any such word. In spite of all our fears and grovelling, our weakness, and our wrongs, thou wilt be to us what thou art--such a perfect Father as no most loving child-heart on earth could invent the thought of!

Thou wilt take our sins on thyself, giving us thy life to live withal. Thou bearest our griefs and carriest our sorrows; and surely thou wilt one day enable us to pay every debt we owe to each other! Thou wilt be to us a right generous, abundant father! Then truly our hearts shall be jubilant, because thou art what thou art--infinitely beyond all we could imagine. Thou wilt humble and raise us up. Thou hast given thyself to us that, having thee, we may be eternally alive with thy life. We run within the circle of what men call thy wrath, and find ourselves clasped in the zone of thy love!

But be it well understood that when I say rights, I do not mean merits--of any sort. We can deserve from him nothing at all, in the sense of any right proceeding from ourselves. All our rights are such as the bounty of love inconceivable has glorified our being with--bestowed for the one only purpose of giving the satisfaction, the fulfilment of the same--rights so deep, so high, so delicate, that their satisfaction cannot be given until we desire it--yea long for it with our deepest desire. The giver of them came to men, lived with men, and died by the hands of men, that they might possess these rights abundantly: more not God could do to fulfil his part--save indeed what he is doing still every hour, every moment, for every individual. Our rights are rights with God himself at the heart of them. He could recall them if he pleased, but only by recalling us, by making us cease. While we exist, by the being that is ours, they are ours. If he could not fulfil our rights to us--because we would not have them, that is--if he could not make us such as to care for these rights which he has given us out of the very depth of his creative being, I think he would have to uncreate us. But as to deserving, that is absurd: he had to die in the endeavour to make us listen and receive. 'When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.' Duty is a thing prepaid: it can never have desert. There is no claim on God that springs from us: all is from him.

But, lest it should be possible that any unchildlike soul might, in arrogance and ignorance, think to stand upon his rights against God, and demand of him this or that after the will of the flesh, I will lay before such a possible one some of the things to which he has a right, yea, perhaps has first of all a right to, from the God of his life, because of the beginning he has given him--because of the divine germ that is in him. He has a claim on God, then, a divine claim, for any pain, want, disappointment, or misery, that would help to

show him to himself as the fool he is; he has a claim to be punished to the last scorpion of the whip, to be spared not one pang that may urge him towards repentance; yea, he has a claim to be sent out into the outer darkness, whether what we call hell, or something speechlessly worse, if nothing less will do. He has a claim to be compelled to repent; to be hedged in on every side; to have one after another of the strong, sharp-toothed sheep-dogs of the great shepherd sent after him, to thwart him in any desire, foil him in any plan, frustrate him of any hope, until he come to see at length that nothing will ease his pain, nothing make life a thing worth having, but the presence of the living God within him; that nothing is good but the will of God; nothing noble enough for the desire of the heart of man but oneness with the eternal. For this God must make him yield his very being, that He may enter in and dwell with him.

That the man would enforce none of these claims, is nothing; for it is not a man who owes them to him, but the eternal God, who by his own will of right towards the creature he has made, is bound to discharge them. God has to answer to himself for his idea; he has to do with the need of the nature he made, not with the self-born choice of the self-ruined man. His candle yet burns dim in the man's soul; that candle must shine as the sun. For what is the all-pervading dissatisfaction of his wretched being but an unrecognized hunger after the righteousness of his father. The soul God made is thus hungering, though the selfish, usurping self, which is its consciousness, is hungering only after low and selfish things, ever trying, but in vain, to fill its mean, narrow content, with husks too poor for its poverty-stricken desires. For even that most degraded chamber of the soul which is the temple of the deified Self, cannot be filled with less than God; even the usurping Self must be miserable until it cease to look at itself in the mirror of Satan, and open the door of its innermost closet to the God who means to dwell there, and make peace.

He that has looked on the face of God in Jesus Christ, whose heart overflows, if ever so little, with answering love, sees God standing with full hands to give the abundance for which he created his children, and those children hanging back, refusing to take, doubting the God-heart which knows itself absolute in truth and love.

It is not at first easy to see wherein God gives Job any answer; I cannot find that he offers him the least explanation of why he has so afflicted him. He justifies him in his words; he says Job has spoken what is right concerning him, and his friends have not; and he calls up before him, one after another, the works of his hands. The answer, like some of our Lord's answers if not all of them, seems addressed to Job himself, not to his intellect; to the revealing, God-like imagination in the man, and to no logical faculty whatever.

It consists in a setting forth of the power of God, as seen in his handywork, and wondered at by the men of the time; and all that is said concerning them has to do with their show of themselves to the eyes of men. In what belongs to the deeper meanings of nature and her mediation between us and God, the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them. The show of things is that for which God cares most, for their show is the face of far deeper things than they; we see in them, in a distant way, as in a glass darkly, the face of the unseen.

It is through their show, not through their analysis, that we enter into their deepest truths. What they say to the childlike soul is the truest thing to be gathered of them. To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it--just as to know Christ is an infinitely higher thing than to know all theology, all that is said about his person, or babbled about his work. The body of man does not exist for the sake of its hidden secrets; its hidden secrets exist for the sake of its outside--for the face and the form in which dwells revelation: its outside is the deepest of it.

So Nature as well exists primarily for her face, her look, her appeals to the heart and the imagination, her simple service to human need, and not for the secrets to be discovered in her and turned to man's farther use. What in the name of God is our knowledge of the elements of the atmosphere to our knowledge of the elements of Nature? What are its oxygen, its hydrogen, its nitrogen, its carbonic acid, its ozone, and all the possible rest, to the blowing of the wind on our faces?

What is the analysis of water to the babble of a running stream? What is any knowledge of things to the heart, beside its child-play with the Eternal! And by an infinite decomposition we should know nothing more of what a thing really is, for, the moment we decompose it, it ceases to be, and all its meaning is vanished. Infinitely more than astronomy even, which destroys nothing, can do for us, is done by the mere aspect and changes of the vault over our heads. Think for a moment what would be our idea of greatness, of God, of infinitude, of aspiration, if, instead of a blue, far withdrawn, light-spangled firmament, we were born and reared under a flat white ceiling!

I would not be supposed to depreciate the labours of science, but I say its discoveries are unspeakably less precious than the merest gifts of Nature, those which, from morning to night, we take unthinking from her hands. One day, I trust, we shall be able to enter into their secrets from within them--by natural contact between our heart and theirs. When we are one with God we may well understand in an hour things that no man of science, prosecuting his investigations from the surface with all the aids that keenest human intellect can supply, would reach in the longest lifetime.

Whether such power will ever come to any man in this world, or can come only in some state of existence beyond it, matters nothing to me: the question does not interest me; life is one, and things will be then what they are now; for God is one and the same there and here; and I shall be the same there I am here, however larger the life with which it may please the Father of my being to endow me.

The argument implied, not expressed, in the poem, seems to be this--that Job, seeing God so far before him in power, and his works so far beyond his understanding that they filled him with wonder and admiration--the vast might of the creation, the times and the seasons, the marvels of the heavens, the springs of the sea, and the gates of death; the animals, their generations and providing, their beauties and instincts; the strange and awful beasts excelling the rest, behemoth on the land, leviathan in the sea, creatures, perhaps, now vanished from the living world;--that Job, beholding these things, ought to have reasoned that he who could work so grandly beyond his understanding, must certainly use wisdom in things that touched him nearer, though they came no nearer his understanding: 'shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.' 'Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be righteous?' In this world power is no proof of righteousness; but was it likely that he who could create should be unrighteous? Did not all he made move the delight of the beholding man? Did such things foreshadow injustice towards the creature he had made in his image? If Job could not search his understanding in these things, why should he conclude his own case wrapt in the gloom of injustice? Did he understand his own being, history, and destiny? Should not God's ways in these also be beyond his understanding? Might he not trust him to do him justice? In such high affairs as the rights of a live soul, might not matters be involved too high for Job? The maker of Job was so much greater than Job, that his ways with him might well be beyond his comprehension! God's thoughts were higher than his thoughts, as the heavens were higher than the earth!

The true child, the righteous man, will trust absolutely, against all appearances, the God who has created in him the love of righteousness.

God does not, I say, tell Job why he had afflicted him: he rouses his child-heart to trust. All the rest of Job's life on earth, I imagine, his slowly vanishing perplexities would yield him ever fresh meditations concerning God and his ways, new opportunities of trusting him, light upon many things concerning which he had not as yet begun to doubt, added means of growing in all directions into the knowledge of God. His perplexities would thus prove of divinest gift. Everything, in truth, which we cannot understand, is a closed book of larger knowledge and blessedness, whose clasps the blessed perplexity urges us to open. There is, there can be, nothing which is not in itself a righteous intelligibility--whether an intelligibility for us, matters nothing. The awful thing would be, that anything should be in its nature unintelligible: that would be the same as no God. That God knows is enough for me; I shall know, if I can know. It would be death to think God did not know; it would be as much as to conclude there was no God to know.

How much more than Job are we bound, who know him in his Son as Love, to trust God in all the troubling questions that force themselves upon us concerning the motions and results of things! With all those about the lower animals, with all those about such souls as seem never to wake from, or seem again to fall into the sleep of death, we will trust him.

In the confusion of Job's thoughts--how could they be other than confused, in the presence of the awful contradiction of two such facts staring each other in the face, that God was just, yet punishing a righteous man as if he were wicked?--while he was not yet able to generate, or to receive the thought, that approving love itself might be inflicting or allowing the torture--that such suffering as his was granted only to a righteous man, that he might be made perfect--I can well imagine that at times, as the one moment he doubted God's righteousness, and the next cried aloud, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' there must in the chaos have mingled some element of doubt as to the existence of God.

Let not such doubt be supposed a yet further stage in unbelief. To deny the existence of God may, paradoxical as the statement will at first seem to some, involve less unbelief than the smallest yielding to doubt of his goodness. I say yielding; for a man may be haunted with doubts, and only grow thereby in faith. Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to rouse the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood; and theirs in general is the inhospitable reception of angels that do not come in their own likeness.

Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed. In all Job's begging and longing to see God, then, may well be supposed to mingle the mighty desire to be assured of God's being. To acknowledge is not to be sure of God. One great point in the poem is--that when Job hears the voice of God, though it utters no word of explanation, it is enough to him to hear it: he knows that God is, and that he hears the cry of his creature.

That he is there, knowing all about him, and what had befallen him, is enough; he needs no more to reconcile seeming contradictions, and the worst ills of outer life become endurable. Even if Job could not at first follow his argument of divine probability, God settled everything for him when, by answering him out of the whirlwind, he showed him that he had not forsaken him. It is true that nothing but a far closer divine presence can ever make life a thing fit for a son of man--and that for the simplest of all reasons, that he is made in the image of God, and it is for him absolutely imperative that he should have in him the reality of which his being is the image: while he has it not in him, his being, his conscious self, is but a mask, a spiritual emptiness; but for the present, Job, yielding to God, was calmed and satisfied.

Perhaps he came at length to see that, if anything God could do to him would trouble him so as to make him doubt God--if he knew him so imperfectly who could do nothing ill, then it was time that he should be so troubled, that the imperfection of his knowledge of God and his lack of faith in him should be revealed to him--that an earthquake of his being should disclose its hollowness, and at the same time bring to the surface the gold of God that was in him. To know that our faith is weak is the first step towards its strengthening; to be capable of distrusting is death; to know that we are, and cry out, is to begin to live--to begin to be made such that we cannot distrust--such that God may do anything with us and we shall never doubt him.

Until doubt is impossible, we are lacking in the true, the childlike knowledge of God; for either God is such that one may distrust him, or he is such that to distrust him is the greatest injustice of which a man can be guilty. If then we are able to distrust him, either we know God imperfect, or we do not know him. Perhaps Job learned something like this; anyhow, the result of what he had had to endure was a greater nearness to God. But all that he was required to receive at the moment was the argument from God's loving wisdom in his power, to his loving wisdom in everything else.

For power is a real and a good thing, giving an immediate impression that it proceeds from goodness. Nor, however long it may last after goodness is gone, was it ever born of anything but goodness. In a very deep sense, power and goodness are one. In the deepest fact they are one.

Seeing God, Job forgets all he wanted to say, all he thought he would say if he could but see him. The close of the poem is grandly abrupt. He had meant to order his cause before him; he had longed to see him that he might speak and defend himself, imagining God as well as his righteous friends wrongfully accusing him; but his speech is gone from him; he has not a word to say. To justify himself in the presence of Him who is Righteousness, seems to him what it is--foolishness and worthless labour. If God do not see him righteous, he is not righteous, and may hold his peace. If he is righteous, God knows it better than he does himself. Nay, if God do not care to justify him, Job has lost his interest in justifying himself. All the evils and imperfections of his nature rise up before him in the presence of the one pure, the one who is right, and has no selfishness in him. 'Behold,' he cries, 'I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.' Then again, after God has called to witness for him behemoth and leviathan, he replies, 'I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?' This question was the word with which first God made his presence known to him; and in the mouth of Job now repeating the question, it is the humble confession, 'I am that foolish man.'--'Therefore,' he goes on, 'have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.' He had not knowledge enough to have a right to speak. 'Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak:'--In the time to come, he will yet cry--to be taught, not to justify himself. 'I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.'--The more diligently yet will he seek to know the counsel of God. That he cannot understand will no longer distress him; it will only urge him to fresh endeavour after the knowledge of him who in all his doings is perfect. '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.'

Job had his desire: he saw the face of God--and abhorred himself in dust and ashes. He sought justification; he found self-abhorrence. Was this punishment? The farthest from it possible. It was the best thing--to begin with--that the face of God could do for him. Blessedest gift is self-contempt, when the giver of it is the visible glory of the Living One. For there to see is to partake; to be able to behold that glory is to live; to turn from and against self is to begin to be pure of heart. Job was in the right when he said that he

did not deserve to be in such wise punished for his sins: neither did he deserve to see the face of God, yet had he that crown of all gifts given him--and it was to see himself vile, and abhor himself. By very means of the sufferings against which he had cried out, the living one came near to him, and he was silent. Oh the divine generosity that will grant us to be abashed and self-condemned before the Holy!--to come so nigh him as to see ourselves dark spots against his brightness! Verily we must be of his kind, else no show of him could make us feel small and ugly and unclean! Oh the love of the Father, that he should give us to compare ourselves with him, and be buried in humility and shame! To be rebuked before him is to be his. Good man as Job was, he had never yet been right near to God; now God has come near to him, has become very real to him; he knows now in very deed that God is he with whom he has to do. He had laid all these troubles upon him that He might through them draw nigh to him, and enable him to know him.

Two things are clearly contained in, and manifest from this poem:--that not every man deserves for his sins to be punished everlastingly from the presence of the Lord; and that the best of men, when he sees the face of God, will know himself vile. God is just, and will never deal with the sinner as if he were capable of sinning the pure sin; yet if the best man be not delivered from himself, that self will sink him into Tophet.

Any man may, like Job, plead his cause with God--though possibly it may not be to like justification: he gives us liberty to speak, and will hear with absolute fairness. But, blessed be God, the one result for all who so draw nigh to him will be--to see him plainly, surely right, the perfect Saviour, the profoundest refuge even from the wrongs of their own being, yea, nearer to them always than any wrong they could commit; so seeing him, they will abhor themselves, and rejoice in him. And, as the poem indicates, when we turn from ourselves to him, becoming true, that is, being to God and to ourselves what we are, he will turn again our captivity; they that have sown in tears shall reap in joy; they shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Then will the waters that rise from God's fountains, run in God's channels.

For the prosperity that follows upon Job's submission, is the embodiment of a great truth. Although a man must do right if it send him to Hades, yea, even were it to send him for ever to hell itself, yet, while the Lord liveth, we need not fear: all good things must grow out of and hang upon the one central good, the one law of life--the Will, the One Good. To submit absolutely to him is the only reason: circumstance as well as all being must then bud and blossom as the rose. And it will!--what matter whether in this world or the next, if one day I know my life as a perfect bliss, having neither limitation nor hindrance nor pain nor sorrow more than it can dominate in peace and perfect assurance?

I care not whether the book of Job be a history or a poem. I think it is both--I do not care how much relatively of each. It was probably, in the childlike days of the world, a well-known story in the east, which some man, whom God had made wise to understand his will and his ways, took up, and told after the fashion of a poet. What its age may be, who can certainly tell!--it must have been before Moses. I would gladly throw out the part of Elihu as an interpolation. One in whom, of all men I have known, I put the greatest trust, said to me once what amounted to this: 'There is as much difference between the language of the rest of the poem and that of Elihu, as between the language of Chaucer and that of Shakspeare.'

The poem is for many reasons difficult, and in the original to me inaccessible; but, through all the evident inadequacy of our translation, who can fail to hear two souls, that of the poet and that of Job, crying aloud with an agonized hope that, let the evil shows around them be what they may, truth and righteousness are yet the heart of things. The faith, even the hope of Job seems at times on the point of giving way; he

struggles like a drowning man when the billow goes over him, but with the rising of his head his courage revives. Christians we call ourselves!--what would not our faith be, were it as much greater than Job's as the word from the mouth of Jesus is mightier than that he heard out of the whirlwind! Here is a book of faith indeed, ere the law was given by Moses: Grace and Truth have visited us--but where is our faith?

Friends, our cross may be heavy, and the via dolorosa rough; but we have claims on God, yea the right to cry to him for help. He has spent, and is spending himself to give us our birthright, which is righteousness. Though we shall not be condemned for our sins, we cannot be saved but by leaving them; though we shall not be condemned for the sins that are past, we shall be condemned if we love the darkness rather than the light, and refuse to come to him that we may have life. God is offering us the one thing we cannot live without--his own self: we must make room for him; we must cleanse our hearts that he may come in; we must do as the Master tells us, who knew all about the Father and the way to him--we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow him.

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