

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Retributive Punishment – 5-11 Nov 2016

Christ would have us allow Him to abide in us so that we may understand the deep things of God for our salvation and the longsuffering of God. But the three friends of Job did not understand the character of God, and their testimony in general is not to be relied on; but they did have some idea of His greatness; and Zophar stated it well in the following words: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9).

"It is very natural for human beings to think that great calamities are a sure index of great crimes and enormous sins; but men often make a mistake in thus measuring character. We are not living in the time of retributive judgment. Good and evil are mingled, and calamities come upon all. Sometimes men do pass the boundary line beyond God's protecting care, and then Satan exercises his power upon them, and God does not interpose. Job was sorely afflicted, and his friends sought to make him acknowledge that his suffering was the result of sin, and cause him to feel under condemnation. They represented his case as that of a great sinner; but the Lord rebuked them for their judgment of His faithful servant" {3BC 1140.5}.

"There is wickedness in our world, but all the suffering is not the result of a perverted course of life. Job is brought distinctly before us as a man whom the Lord allowed Satan to afflict. The enemy stripped him of all he possessed; his family ties were broken; his children were taken from him. For a time his body was covered with loathsome sores, and he suffered greatly. His friends came to comfort him, but they tried to make him see that he was responsible, by his sinful course, for his afflictions. But he defended himself, and denied the charge, declaring, Miserable comforters are ye all. By seeking to make him guilty before God, and deserving of His punishment, they brought a grievous test upon him, and represented God in a false light; but Job did not swerve from his loyalty, and God rewarded His faithful servant" {3BC 1140.6}. We should not be like the friends of Job, but if we suffer like Job, let us accept it, for the Lord knows our suffering. There is no person on this earth ever suffered anything that was not made necessary. When Satan was given permission to plague Job, the patriarch accepted it as from the Lord, and said, when moved to complain: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10).

The Lord permitted affliction to come upon Job. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). He lets affliction come upon them, but it is only in love that He may teach them. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11). The Lord allowed terrible afflictions to come upon Job, but it was not because He rejoiced in human suffering, but because He would instruct Job, and bring him into closer relation to Himself. As one said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:67, 71).

The Lord calls all to Him, that they may learn of Him, but the only way He can teach us some things is by affliction. "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Even Christ, "though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together with Him (Romans 8:17). Let affliction, then, of whatever sort it may be, everything that is crossing to our disposition, or seems to be contrary to us, even though it be the direct result of our own misconduct, be received as from the hand of the Lord, and we shall be sure to experience good from it. From our weakness, let us learn meekness; for "the meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psalms 25:9). Then instead of being obliged to be taught as the horse or the mule, we shall know what it is to be instructed in the way that we should go, guided by the eye of the Lord (Psalms 32:8-9).

Christ bears our suffering. We do not need to take time or space to recount the things that are stated in the Gospels concerning Jesus and His sufferings. All are familiar with them. Chapter fifty-three of Isaiah lets us into the secret of those sufferings. "With His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). "By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant make many righteous" (verse 11). Here we have a parallel to the statement, "By the obedience of

One shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). How can the obedience of one make many righteous? – Manifestly only by that One’s presence in the many, living the obedience.

So we have the answer to the question as to how Christ by His knowledge shall make many righteous. How does He know? – Not by laborious search and study, but by personal experience. “The Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12-13). And this statement comes in connection with the statement that He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (verse 15). The Lord knows our frame, not simply because He has made us, but because he Himself bears everything that humanity bears. There is not a sickness, not a pain, not a temptation, not an injustice, that oppresses any of the children of men, that does not press with equal weight upon the Lord; nay, indeed it presses more strongly upon the Lord than it does upon us, because but for His sensibility to the touch of pain or sorrow, we ourselves should have no consciousness of it. It is only His life in us that makes us conscious of anything. “He bears the sin of the world” (Isaiah 53:4). He says, “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, and wearied Me with thine iniquities” (Isaiah 43:24). He is one with us, and everything that touches us touches Him.

Yet He keeps silence. Century after century has the human race been piling sin and misery upon the Lord, by their deviation from the truth, the way of life, yet He bears it without a murmur. Here we catch a glimpse of the meaning of the phrase, “the longsuffering of God” (1 Peter 3:20). We have ignored His life in us, and have not sought to learn its ways, so that we might yield to them, and so allow Him to bear the load in His own way, and to live His own life unhindered and unfettered, and He has borne it all uncomplainingly. It was not simply in the High Priest’s palace, and in Pilate’s court, and on Calvary, that Jesus bore insult and abuse and pain without murmuring; He has been doing that from the beginning; and the very thing which is to His everlasting honour, has been set down to His reproach.

Men have charged the Lord with indifference to human suffering, because He did not rise up in His might, and suddenly put an end to it all. How little they know! They do not know that He literally suffers all these evils, allowing them to be heaped upon Him, and that His silence under the burden of sin and oppression and injustice was the only way of salvation from them, to the human race. They do not know that if at any time He had risen up in His might, and cast off the burden, putting a sudden end to all misery, it would at the same time have put an end to the greater part of the human race. But “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15). Blessed thing that He keeps silence, even though wicked men take advantage of His silence, to accuse Him of being altogether like them! As “the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20), so the Lord “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

How many consider that He was stricken for the transgression of the people, to whom the stroke was due? Many today do not know the time of their visitation. They do not know that the Lord hath visited His people, even coming into their flesh, and has thereby redeemed them, suffering all things for their sakes. If they did, they would know that “by His stripes we are healed.” In the fact that the Lord is personally present with each individual, not merely sharing, but bearing, all his infirmities, his sicknesses, his sorrows, and his sins, is absolute and complete deliverance from all these things. No wonder that it is called “the glorious Gospel” (1 Timothy 1:11)! This marvelous Gospel reveals that our very consciousness of our fallen condition carries with it the remedy. What could God do that He has not done?

Shall we stop without learning the lesson of silence for ourselves? Who has not been made to suffer unjust accusation, and even to feel the smack the more keenly in that it came from friends, who ought to have been more charitable. A knowledge of the fact that the Lord has from the beginning borne infinitely more, which He did not deserve, and that He has borne it silently and uncomplainingly, will help us wonderfully to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Matthew 5:12). As He bears every ill that comes upon us, as it comes upon us only through Him, the sting is removed! Surely we ought to be able to endure our little portion uncomplainingly, it only comes to us secondarily, and the Lord bears the whole at first hand.