

Sabbath School Lesson #13 – The Character of Job – 17-23 December 2016

Christ was the anchor of the faith of Job in time of trial, as He was to Abraham when by faith he offered Isaac. James says of Abraham, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:22) – we will return to focus on this memory verse. We first deal briefly with affliction of Job and his faithfulness.

Like Job, we may thank God for our afflictions, if we believe that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6) – it is so even if we trace our trouble to our own transgressions, for chastisement from a loving parent (and, “God is love” (1 John 4:8)) is not a token of anger. And we must never forget that whoever or whatever may be the means of our affliction, it comes from God or He permits. If it is the means of teaching us obedience, is it not a valid reason for thanksgiving! We may not see any reason why we are afflicted; Job did not for a long time, but the end demonstrated “that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). Hezekiah had served God “in truth and with a perfect heart” (Isaiah 38:3), and yet when he was left to himself he revealed things in his heart of which he was ignorant; but God knew them. The same was the case with Job, and affliction was necessary to make him know himself so as to abhor himself (Job 42:6), and to know God as he could not know Him in the time of unbroken prosperity.

“Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed” – it does not disappoint us, and therefore we can “glory in tribulations also” (Romans 5:3). It may seem to us that the tribulations are altogether out of proportion to that which was lacking. For instance, Job was already “perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1), – why should he need to suffer so much?

Simply because the lesson could not be learned with less. God desires that we should be “perfect and entire, wanting in nothing” (James 1:4), and when we know that only “divers temptations” can accomplish this result, we shall count them “all joy” (James 1:2), and give thanks for every one that brings us into closer communication with our loving Father.

Afflictions are necessary to fit us for service. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation [even though our transgressions have brought them upon us], that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Unthankfulness is that which transformed men who once knew God into heathen (see Romans 1:21-23), and thankfulness for all things the recognition of God in all things, – will change a heathen into a Christian. How essential, then, that they whose lifework is to make known “the God of all comfort” to the heathen should have learned this lesson, in which one never can be proficient without undergoing suffering. And how foolish to complain or to be discouraged over that which in God’s hands can work nothing but good! Learning from the afflictions of Job, let us then welcome each rebuff that turns earth’s smoothness rough, each sting that bids not to sit nor stand, but go.

We turn to our memory verse to consider the character of Job in light of faith and works. Job was an upright man (Job 1:1). He did the works of sacrificing for his children lest they had sinned: “And it was so, when the days of *their* feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings *according* to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job 1:5). Justified by works? Ah, let us first read a few plain declarations of Scripture about works. “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, the just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:10-11). “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 24:23).

Does faith exclude works? and does the preaching of justification by faith ignore the necessity for good works? Never. “Do we then make void [that is, transgress] the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). “Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall he justified” (Romans 2:13). So that,

however justification comes it must make the man a doer of the law. Jesus told the people to work. Said He, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed." Then the Jews asked Him how they should do the work, saying, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Here is the reply: Jesus "answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:27-29).

Thus we see that the works which God requires are all in faith; "but *faith which worketh by love*" (Galatians 5:6). But some one will say, 'I know people who make a great deal of faith, and yet their works do not correspond; therefore I do not believe that faith alone will justify a man; in fact, the apostle James plainly says that Abraham was justified by works.' It is a very presumptuous thing for one to say that he does not believe that faith justifies, when, the Bible so plainly declares that it does, and that he who is justified by faith has peace with God (Romans 5:1). But let us look for a moment at what James says. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14). 'There,' you may say, 'faith is not sufficient for justification.' Not quite so fast, please.

What is the trouble with the man who says he has faith, and has not works? Simply this, that he has no faith! If he had faith, he would have works, for *faith works*. The question that the apostle asks is simply this: 'Can faith save a man who says that he has it, but who really has it not?' In other words, what doth it profit, though a man say he hath a thousand pounds, and has not a farthing? Will the thousand pounds do him any good? Certainly not. Why not? Is it because money is not good for anything? Not at all, but because in order for a man to get any benefit from money, he must actually have it, and not merely say that he has it.

'The devils have faith, but they are not justified,' you may say. Not quite so fast, please. It is true that the devils believe that there is one God, but that is not faith with them. They have seen God. More than that, they have felt His power. Their belief in the existence of one God is the belief of actual experience. Their belief causes them to tremble, and faith does not do that. Faith "worketh by love," and "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear" (Galatians 5:6 and 1 John 4:18). The devils have no faith. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). That which is dead does not exist; therefore faith that has no works is not real faith at all. It is only a form; it is a sham. 'But,' you may say, 'what will you do with the next verse?' We do nothing with it but believe it. Let us read it:

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (James 2:21). The question admits but one answer, and we answer, Yes. But we would remind the reader that the apostle did not make the division into the verses as they are numbered, and we must not assume that the subject ends with that verse. We have heard very many people refer to Abraham as proof that men are justified by works, quoting the twenty-first verse, as above, but those who argue so fail to go any further, and quote the next two verses, which complete the reference to Abraham. We will quote those two verses:

"Seest thou how *faith wrought* with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And *the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness*: and he was called the friend of God" (James 2:22-23). So we see here, when Abraham, worked it was his faith that was working; and those works by which he was justified were simply the fulfilment of the scripture, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." The works were the product of his faith, and showed that he had it in perfection. Faith includes everything that a man can do to please God; for "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (verse 24). That is, a man is justified by the works of faith, and not by dead faith, which does not work. In this, James and Paul are fully agreed.

The idea of justification by works is seen in the words which the Jews asked Jesus: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Mark it, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" They were fully convinced that they could do the works of God, and of course a man must be able to do the works of God, if he is justified by works, for the righteousness of God is the only righteousness that is of any worth. To be able to do the works of God, one must have to begin with power and goodness equal to the power and goodness of God. Justification by works is simply exaltation of self against God.