

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 23

This chapter contains three memorable verses. “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” (3). “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (10). When these two verses are isolated from the rest of the chapter and placed together, it becomes immediately apparent what the heart-cry of Job is. It is a thirst for knowledge. Not merely for knowledge of the mind, but a heart knowledge, a spiritual, living heart experience of God comparable to the knowledge which God has of him. Then there is, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (12).

23.1-2. Do all think like this when they are grievously afflicted? Scarcely. Even with the help of Job who came through this experience, as James says (James 5.11), “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy,” not all seek the Lord with their whole heart in their afflictions. We see, then, that it is the gift of God to His own to be able to seek the Lord until he appears for us. If we could have heard Job’s complaint and seen his anguish, he declares that it would only have been the surface of his suffering. Though groans are wrung from him, what he is actually going through is more severe still.

23.3. “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” The very presence of the Lord would comfort him. “Thy lovingkindness is better than life” (Psalm 63.3). “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10.29-31). Job longs to find the essence of what scripture afterwards declares. He feels that he would be comfortable in God’s presence, even though there be aspects which are formal, like pleading in a law court. God would put strength in him, not berate or batter him. But he feels battered in his body and berated by his friends. He has that feeling in the highest and truest sense, about the most important of all issues, that we sometimes feel when we have a complaint against a firm and give up on the lesser representatives and want to go to the very top. That way is usually closed off by secretaries and under-managers, but something akin to this is the feeling Job has about these things which have happened to him.

“That I might come even to his seat.” The experience Job here longs for throughout this chapter is the experience of believers today, and was probably his after he was restored, thereby enabling him to declare it by the Spirit so feelingly in this chapter. The New Testament says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4.16). “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mathew 11.28).

23.4-5. Firstly, he proposes that he would make an orderly presentation of the facts as he sees them. Then, secondly, he would like to hear and come to an acceptable understanding of the Lord’s own explanation. When we are faced with the issues of life (Proverbs 4.23) and the issues from death (Psalm 68.20) we have the whole Bible to hear what God will say to us.

Thirdly, in 23.6-7, he believes that God, who is perfect and therefore perfectly just, would not overrule him or put him down without a reasonable hearing. “No, but he would put strength in me.” We all know what it is like to be so nervous that we can’t write down what we really know in an examination, or speak how we know we can in an interview or take in all that is said by the doctor when we are dreading to hear the worst. Now Job is confident that the Lord would strengthen Him at that very moment. What a wonderful thing it is to know “that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3.16).

A great and fundamental principle is established here. If God commands that which it is impossible for a person to do by nature He graciously gives the power to those who are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His dear Son (Romans 8.29) to perform it. When the Saviour says to the man with the withered hand, “Stretch forth thine hand” he “stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other” (Mark 3.5). A second fundamental principle is also established. “So should I be delivered for ever from my judge.” The ultimate fulfilment of this principle is expressed by, “once saved always saved.” That is, the judicial act of pardon and justification, and all that is included in the outcome, is irreversible. “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4.17-18).

23. 8-10. Whereas Job may search for the Lord in every direction the Lord Himself does not need to search. His perfect knowledge knows everything about Job. It is a most comforting thing to the believer to know that God knows everything about him and yet has called him, saved him and accepted him in the beloved Saviour “warts and all” as Cromwell put it.

“When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” Job never curses God so passes the test which Satan proposed and God allowed. And it is verses like this which enable us to see the tip of the iceberg. We see what faith lay underneath all that Job was going through. Though he might “whinge” as we say, and not without good cause we might add, though he might frustrate the comforters with what they interpret as blasphemous words and desire that which is forbidden as they think, namely to know God in a personal way; though at the end of chapter 17 Job may appeared to have sinfully lost hope, “Where is now my hope?” (17.15); yet all the time, underneath, deep in his spirit there is faith. It is beautifully and confidently expressed here and we do well when times are hard to assert “when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Essentially it is justification and not sanctification that is the grounds of his assurance here. Even Bildad understood this when he responds (25.4) “How then can a man be justified with God?”

“Ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1.7).

23.11-12. The way that Job has taken is to hold the Lord’s steps. That is to follow in the way of holiness as he has received it. If this is the earliest book of the Bible, as is possible, he is referring to that which has been passed on by word of mouth, by faith and practice, with maybe certain things already written down. We who have a completed Bible have much more cause to know God’s way and to hold the steps He has outlined for us.

“I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” Here is the priority above all priorities. Necessary food is a daily requirement in normal circumstances. The word food is supplied by our translators, is not in the original, so we may well think of food and drink. “Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14.8). Food is a life or death matter. But the food of God’s word is an eternal life matter and has consequences way beyond this life. So Job has got his priorities right and we should learn from him. The value we put on God as Creator and the things which He says (bearing in mind that He spoke and the world was made) is crucial. To obey them will be the making of us.

“Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (Psalm 119.111).

23.13-14. Job understands that the purposes of God are immutable because He is unchanging, and therefore what is appointed for him cannot be altered. They can, of course, be concluded. The Lord’s perfections do not allow for alteration. It may be said of the Lord, “the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (Exodus 32.14; Genesis 6.6-7) but this is simply an accommodation to our way of thinking and respects not the settled purposes of God. “Many such things are with him.” Our lives are full of complexities but all the ins and outs were all scheduled by Him from the very beginning.

23.15-17. We like to think we are in control. It is troubling to think that we are not so, and that we must give account to our Maker. Precisely because “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55.8-9) we know we do not have the measure of Him who originated and made all things we, like Job, by nature are troubled at His presence. If, by “soft,” were meant pliable and malleable that would be good. But Job means his heart is melted, like wax or jelly, and rendered helpless. The fear of God of which Job speaks here does not stem from a guilty conscience for he does not have a guilt complex, as we have seen. He is seeking to think through why it is that God did not permit him to die in health, in the prime of life, without having to go through such dark times and painful experiences. Why is he so exposed to such dark things? The Lord clearly has matters of deepest significance in mind. He spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8.32). We cannot be spared painful things, through sin.

“Neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.” The unusual way of putting this emphasizes how grim Job’s situation was, for it makes us pause. We might think of him as covered in darkness but that darkness itself could be said to be covered is striking. If there was something grisly that we did not want a child to see, we might lead the child away or tell him to look the other way. The picture here is of covering the object. But when that object is “darkness,” meaning the dark and painful and inexplicable things through which Job was going it is indeed a striking way of saying that he wishes they had been spared him.