

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE MESSAGE OF JOB

A. THE PERMANENT VALUE

A Revelation of Experience in fallen Human Nature.

I The Central Figure, Job

II. The Central Fact, Job Stripped

- i. Of Wealth.
- ii. Of Children.
- iii. Of Health.
- iv. Of the Partner of his Love in Faith.
- v. Of his Friends.
- vi. Of the Sense of the Greatness of Personality.
- vii. Of the Sense of Relation to Deity.
- viii. Of the Sense of the Government of God over Good and Evil.

III. The Central Value, Job's Consciousness

- i. The Need. 9:2, 3, 32-33.
- ii. The Enquiry. 14:14, 15.
- iii. The Cry. 16:19-21.
- iv. The Confidence. 19:25-27a.
- v. The Quest. 23:3-9.
- vi. The Challenge. 31:35-37.
- vii. The Awakening. 40:4. 5.
- viii. The Attitude. 42:1-6.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. Fallen Humanity's Need

- i. Intermediation.
 - ii. Light on Immortality.
- iii. An Advocate in God.
 - iv. A Vindicator.
- v. A Judge.
- vi. An Indictment.
 - vii. A true Sense of Self.
- viii. A Vision producing Repentance.

II. The Answers of Jesus

He Meets the Need.
He Answers the Enquirer.
He Fulfills the Meaning.

IN order to make a discovery of the permanent value and the living message of the book of Job, it is preeminently necessary that we should breathe its atmosphere, the qualities of which may perhaps be expressed by three words:

- Sin,

- Sorrow,
- Silence.

It is not a book of solutions; it is rather a revelation of human experience.

- The central figure is Job.
- The central fact of the history is that of his being deprived of everything.
- The central value is the revelation of his experiences resulting from the process.

Job is not an ideal man. He is real. The circumstances in the midst of which we find him are not perfect circumstances. They are the ordinary circumstances of human life, those of sin, of sorrow, and of silence. The experiences, then, are those of a real man, in such circumstances as we are all familiar with in greater or less degree.

In our attempt to discover the living message of the book we shall:

- First observe the process of the stripping of this man to the nakedness of his spiritual being.
- Secondly, we shall examine the central words that he uttered as expressive of his experiences.
- Finally we shall show that the only answers to Job are given by Jesus.

First, then, let us recall the process of the stripping of this man to the nakedness of his spiritual being. Gradually he was divested of all the things that clothe the spirit of a man; or to change the figure, all the things upon which a man leans for help and strength were removed, until we have the tremendous and awful spectacle of a soul naked and alone in the universe of God.

First he lost his wealth. In a few brief hours, or days at the most, he passed from wealth to poverty, from plenty to penury. All the material things upon which he had leaned were swept away. The second stage in the stripping was that of the loss of his children.

Then he lost his health.

After that he lost the partnership of love in the exercise of faith. Out of love for him, and in order to make a way of escape out of the tragedy of his pain, his wife said, **“Curse God and die.”** There had existed the partnership of faith between husband and wife, but that ended, and Job was left to an awful loneliness. The next event in the stripping was that of the loss of his friends. His acquaintances had already departed with the loss of his property.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar proved the sincerity of their friendship:

- first, by the fact that they came to see him in his sorrow;
- secondly, by the fact that they remained in silent sympathy with him for seven days; and
- thirdly, because when they spoke, they said everything directly to him.

He lost the comfort of their friendship, however, because they misunderstood him, and imputed to him sins of which he would not confess himself guilty.

But we must look a little more closely for the discovery of the last movements in the process of stripping.

At the end of the first and second stages, when he had lost his wealth and his children, he said, **“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.”**

Notice very carefully the majesty of that declaration. Even though he had lost wealth, acquaintances, and children, he had not yet lost the sense of the dignity and greatness of his own personality. He still recognized that he was more than all he possessed. When his friends arrived, he poured out in their listening ears all the lamentation of his soul. As I read that lamentation I find that this sense of the greatness of personality was weakened by the overwhelming agony of the suffering through which he had passed.

It is evident that he was beginning to doubt the dignity of his own being, and when a little later we come to his reply to the first address of Eliphaz, not only is that sense of the greatness of personality weakened, it is lost. He cursed the day he was born, and cried out for the darkness and desolation of the grave, preferring death to life, wishing that he could cease to be.

The stripping was not yet over. Bereft of his children he had said, **“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”** That was a declaration resulting from a sense of his relationship to Deity.

In his lamentation that also was weakened, and by the time we come to his answer to Eliphaz, he cried out to God, **“Why hast Thou set me as a mark for Thee?”**

He had lost his sense of relationship to Deity as a gracious relationship.

Yet one step further.

After the loss of health, and the partnership of love in faith, he said, **“Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”**

In that question there is manifest a conviction of the government of God over good and evil. When we come to his answer to Eliphaz, all the questions he asked show that he doubted, if not the fact of God’s government, certainly the justice of it. He had lost his final anchorage.

Thus we see him, stripped of wealth; acquaintances; children; health; the partnership of love in faith; friends; his sense of the greatness of his own personality; his sense of intimate relationship to God; and his sense of the government of God over good and evil.

All the things that men lean upon are gone. We now stand watching the naked spirit of the man. What was left to him? God was left, and Job never denied Him. Self was left, and he could not escape. Between God and himself there seemed to be no place of meeting, no reconciliation. God and self were absolute certainties, but he was in circumstances so full of agony, that there seemed to be no place of rest, and no possibility of relief.

In the course of his controversy with his friends, he occasionally uttered cries out of the very depths of his experience.

Intensely interesting are his answers to his friends, full of satire and thunder and tremendous invective poured upon the men who were misinterpreting him. Notwithstanding this the speeches of Job are finally not so much an answer to these men, as the wail of his own soul; and the deepest things of all were spoken to the God he could not find, of the self that he could not understand, out of the midst of anguish and conflict which had no explanation.

Let us attempt to gather up these profoundest utterances.

I find the first in the ninth chapter. The words were spoken in the course of an answer to Bildad.

**“How should man be just with God?
If he will contend with him,
He cannot answer him one of a thousand . . .
For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him,
And we should come together in judgment.
Neither is there any daysman betwixt us,
That might lay his hand upon us both.”**

That is not an answer to Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar. It is the cry of a smitten soul.

“**How should man be just with God?**” does not mean, How can a man be justified by God? but rather, How can a man argue his case with God, how can a man contend with God? There is still manifest his conviction of the existence of God, and his certainty of himself, but he enquires, How am I to find my way to God? And if He asks me questions, How am I to answer Him one of a thousand?

Then he exclaims in complaint,

**“Neither is there any daysman betwixt us,
That might lay his hand upon us both.”**

Said this man in effect, If I should find my way to God, I could not argue with Him. Oh, that there were some one in the universe who could bring us together; who could put his hand on God, and on me; who could represent God to me, and me to God.

The next word occurs in the course of an answer to Zophar.

The opening words of that answer were,

**“Man that is born of a woman
Is of few days, and full of trouble.”**

Having made this general affirmation, he continued,

**“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
And that the tender branch thereof will not cease.
Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, And the stock thereof die in the ground;
Yet through the scent of water it will bud, And put forth boughs like a plant.
But man dieth, and wasteth away:
Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?”**

That was a wail of hopeless despair, in which he declared that a tree has a better chance than a man. But continuing he exclaimed,

**“If a man die, shall he live again?
All the days of my warfare would I wait, Till my change come.
Thou shouldest call, and I will answer Thee:
Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands.”**

That is as though Job had said, If I could but believe that a man could live again, I would bear all the conflict and would wait. This was hardly the expression of a hope; it was only a sigh. Yet there was in it a gleam of light in the midst of the terrible darkness. He could not find a daysman able to put his hand on God and on himself. He declared there was nothing for him but death. A tree had a chance, but a man had not. Suddenly there flamed across his spirit a wonder, an enquiry, which came out of his essential nature. It was an affirmation of his consciousness of the need for more time and space for the realization of life than life itself seemed to afford.

A little later he exclaimed,

**“O earth, cover not thou my blood, And let my cry have no place.
Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, And my record is on high.
My friends scorn me; But mine eye poureth out tears unto God;
O that one might plead for a man with God,
As a man pleadeth with his neighbour!”**

Notice carefully the marvel of this word. Job was passing into deeper darkness, and yet suddenly uttered this most remarkable word. It was the cry of his spirit; it was prayer. It revealed a profound conviction.

**“Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my record is on high.”**

This was an affirmation of his belief in the existence of God, and of the fact that He was in heaven, on high, that is, enthroned. He believed in God, but thought of Him as at a distance. Upon the basis of this conviction he expressed his desire that God would maintain the right of a man with God, and a son of man with his neighbour. He had said but a little while before, There is no daysman who can put his hand upon God and upon me. Now he declared that absolutely the only way for his case to be argued with God would be for God to argue it with Himself, that He would maintain the right of a man with God.

The passionate cry of his spirit was that God would become an Advocate with Himself on behalf of a man who had lost everything, and was conscious of his need.

A step further, and he uttered even more remarkable words.

**“I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And that He shall stand at the last upon the earth:
And though after my skin worms destroy,
Yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself.”**

I would note that the word “**Redeemer**” here also means “*Vindicator*”; which is the thought of the Hebrew word, as applied strictly to God. The business of the God was always that of vindication, when the one to be vindicated was unable to vindicate himself. The vindication might be by ransom or revenge.

So said Job, “*I know that my God liveth,*” that is my present conviction; “**and that He shall stand at the last**” - not, in the latter day, but at the end of this conflict. This was the language of the court of justice. Job was making appeal for vindication, and affirmed his conviction that his Vindicator would stand up at the end upon the dust, that is, as a prevailing Advocate.

On the basis of this conviction he declared,

**“And though after my skin worms destroy,
Yet in my flesh shall I see God.”**

A question arises here as to whether this sentence means, “**in my flesh**”, or, *apart from my flesh*. It certainly may mean either.

Dr. Davidson gives an illustration from King Lear.

When one of his daughters said that it was necessary for her to write a letter “from my home,” the context shows that she meant when she was away from home. He holds therefore that Job meant, When I have done with my flesh, I shall see God in my spiritual life. I do not so understand it. Whereas the context in King Lear may demonstrate the fact that by “from my home” his daughter meant when she was away from home, the phrase itself might certainly have meant that she wrote when she was at home; and I personally believe that Job used the word in this sense.

It was a tremendous affirmation coming up out of his spiritual nature, that even though his flesh seemed to be in process of destruction, yet from it, that is as still being in it, he would see God. It is quite true that he immediately added, “**My reins be consumed within me,**” thus revealing the fact that he passed again into consciousness of the darkness about him. Nevertheless the affirmation was in itself a flash of light out of his essential spiritual nature. I do not suggest that Job could have interpreted it in the full evangelical sense in which we understand it to-day.

Still later he cried,

**“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.”**

When he said this, his confidence was overshadowed; he was again in the region of despair; he declared the hopelessness of the search; and yet faith in God was tenacious, and he longed to find Him, and stand before His judgment seat.

Yet again he cried,

**“Oh that one would hear me!
Behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me,
and that mine adversary had written a book”**

The word “**adversary**” here was a legal term, indicating *an opponent in the case to be tried*. He thus challenged God to indict him, and in pride declared that if such an indictment were written he would carry it upon his shoulders, and bind it unto him as a crown, going as a prince into the presence of God.

Then followed a long period of silence so far as Job was concerned. Elihu spoke, but Job did not answer him. Suddenly, in the process of the speech of Elihu, the Lord spoke. God challenged him to attend, and then made pass before him visions of His power in the material universe, in His dealings with animate and inanimate creation. In answer to this theophany occurred the next word of Job,

**“Behold, 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.”**

These words were the outcome of the awakening of his naked spirit to the sense of the power of God.

God had said no word to him about sin. God had uttered not a sentence about his sorrow. He had not spoken a sentence in explanation of the mysteries that had enshrouded him. Rather He made His glory pass before him, He put the universe in relationship to Himself, and made Job spectator. Job answered the unveiling by exclaiming, I am nothing. Job meant, I do not count, I have been answering and arguing, I will say no more. Then there was a second unveiling of the Lord, in which with great tenderness and gentle satire He challenged Job to take the seat of government in the universe, giving two illustrations of His purpose and power, those namely of behemoth and leviathan.

Then Job exclaimed, **“I abhor myself, and repent.”**

Let us group these words. We see this man stripped of everything, but left with the certainties of God, himself, and conflict.

Out of these circumstances of intense and utter spiritual loneliness he asked for a daysman, for intermediation between himself and God; suggested the ultimate problem, **“If a man die, shall he live again?”**; uttered a prayer to God that He would argue with Himself about a man; then broke out into a great expression of confidence from the depths of his nature, **“I know that my Redeemer [Vindicator] liveth.”** This was almost immediately forgotten, and he proceeded in his quest, **“Oh, that I knew where I might find Him.”** He challenged God to come out of hiding, and to write his indictment.

Then suddenly he was brought into a sense of the presence of God in the universe, and said, **“I am vile,”** I will say no more. At last, without a word about sin or salvation, but only as the result of the unveiling of the power and glory of God, he abased himself and said, **“I repent.”**

Have these cries of a human spirit ever been answered? The question is important, for if it were possible for us to pass into similar circumstances, these are the things we should say.

When all the things upon which men depend are taken away, these are the essential cries of humanity in its alienation and distance from God.

- First there is the need of a daysman who can put his hand on God and on man.
- That Daysman has appeared, and we have felt the touch of his hand.

“If a man die, shall he live again?” That is the surging, agonized cry of this materialized age.

We treat it often with shocking flippancy, but this is only an attempt to hide the agony. We have the answer, He hath **“brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”**

Job said, Would that God would argue my case with Himself. Jesus came to declare that God has argued with Himself the case of man. Then in beautiful sequence comes the affirmation, **“I know that my Redeemer liveth.”**

We take up Job’s language with fuller, richer meaning. Job demanded that he should find his way to God as Judge. God hath appointed One Who shall judge the world, and every man can come to that Throne, and argue his case in the presence of Christ.

Job asked that his indictment might be written. That is a most popular challenge to-day. Men are everywhere asking that God will write their indictment, and prove them sinners. The answer of God to that challenge is to be found in the revelation of His law in the ethic of Jesus. In the presence of the revealed glory of God, Job exclaimed, **“I am vile.”**

The answer of Jesus to that consciousness is that:

- He first agrees therewith, and demands that man shall deny himself in order to find himself.
- He then declares that no man is of small account, but in the estimate of God he is worth the stoop and suffering and dying to save him.

Finally Job said, “**I repent in dust and ashes.**” Jesus gives repentance unto life, and lifts out of the dust and ashes into the dignity and glory of partnership with Himself.

In Job we see a soul stripped naked; and hear the language of challenge, of need, and of enquiry. I turn to the New Testament and I find One Who answers the challenge, meets the need, and replies to the enquiry.

Tear up your New Testament, and fling it to the winds; crucify the Christ of God, and let there be no resurrection; and the book of Job still lives, the unanswered agony of a soul.

Retain the New Testament, and the agony becomes an anthem, and the despair merges into ultimate victory.

~ **end of chapter 18** ~

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