

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

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CHAPTER 5

THE FAMILY RODS

WE HEAR of the "**rod of the wicked**," and we are told that it "**shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous**" (Psalm 125:3). This may mean that wicked men are GOD's rod for chastening His people, and that, though permitted to light upon them, it shall not rest or abide upon them, but shall be destroyed, as was the Assyrian, who was used by GOD as the "**rod of his anger**" for afflicting Israel.

In this sense it gives us the blessed assurance that the triumph of the wicked over the saints is short, that their devices and oppressions shall last but for a moment, and that the church's sufferings at their hands shall soon be over. Wicked men may be the sword of GOD (Psalm 17:13), as was Pilate, when he lifted the sword against the man that was Jehovah's friend, or as Herod was when he beheaded John in prison; but that sword shall soon be broken. A wound now and then it may inflict, but that is all. It neither moves nor smites save when GOD allows. Nor does it come, save with a blessing on its edge. "They mean it not so," yet GOD means it, and that is enough for us. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him. "**There shall no evil happen to the just... He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.**"

But the "**rod of the wicked**" may mean that rod with which He smites the wicked in His fierce anger. In this sense there is no rod for the righteous. Such a rod never either lights upon them nor rests upon them. Their rod is not the rod of the wicked. It is the family rod.

They have done with wrath. Over them no curse can ever rest. "**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.**" The rod may seem to speak of frowns and anger, but it is only a seeming; there is not a glance of vengeance in the Chastener's eye. It is a correcting rod, but not a destroying one. Its object is not to punish but to chasten; not to injure but to bless. "God distributeth sorrows in his anger," (Job 21:17) but these are not for His saints.

GOD has, however, not one rod for His children, but many. For each child He has a peculiar rod, and at different times He uses different rods. It will be profitable for us to consider what those are, and how they are applied.

1. Bodily sickness. The body operates very powerfully upon the soul both for good and for evil. In what way or to what extent we cannot tell. Nor do I wish to discuss this question at all. But, knowing how the soul is acted on by the body, I cannot help think that one of GOD's designs in sickness is to operate upon the soul through the body.

We are not conscious of this; we cannot analyze the process; the effects are hidden from view. Yet it does seem as if sickness of body were made to contribute directly to the health of the soul in some way or other known only to GOD. Hence, the apostle speaks of delivering "**such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus**" (I Corinthians 5:5).

On this point, however, I do not dwell; only it would be well for us to consider whether GOD is not by this intimating to us the exceeding danger of pampering the flesh: for the weakening of the flesh does help forward the strengthening of the spirit; and the mortifying of our members which are upon the earth - the crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts - does tend to quicken and invigorate the soul. Apart from this, however, there are other things to be kept in view.

Sickness prostrates us. It cuts into the very center of our carnal nature; it exposes in all their deformity "**the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**" What vanity is seen in these upon a sickbed! These are our three idols; and these, sickness dashes down into the dust.

Sickness takes us aside and sets us alone with GOD. We are taken into His private chamber, and there He converses with us face to face. The world is far off, our relish for it is gone, and we are alone with GOD. Many are the words of grace and truth which He then speaks to us. All our former props are struck away, and we must now lean on GOD alone. The things of earth are felt to be vanity; man's help useless. Man's praise and man's sympathy desert us; we are cast wholly upon GOD that we may learn that His praise and His sympathy are enough.

"If it were not for pain," says one, "I should spend less time with GOD. If I had not been kept awake with pain, I should have lost one of the sweetest experiences I ever had in my life. The disorder of my body is the very help I want from GOD; and if it does its work before it lays me in the dust, it will raise me up to Heaven." It was thus that Job was "**chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain,**" that after being tried he might "**come forth as gold.**"

Sickness teaches that activity of service is not the only way in which GOD is glorified. They also serve who only stand and wait (see Job 23:10). Active duty is that which man judges most acceptable; but GOD shows us that in bearing and suffering He is also glorified. Perhaps we were pursuing a path of our own and required to be arrested. Perhaps we were too much harassed by a bustling world and needed retirement, yet could find no way of obtaining it till GOD laid us down, and drew us aside into a desert place, because of the multitude pressing upon us.

No one of the family rods is more in use than this, sometimes falling lightly on us, at other times more heavily. Let us kiss the rod. Let us open our mouth wide to the blessing, seeking so to profit by each bodily ailment, slight or severe, that it may bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. "I know," says one, "of no greater blessing than health, except pain and sickness."

2. Bereavement. This is the bitterest of all earthly sorrows. It is the sharpest arrow in the quiver of GOD.

To love tenderly and deeply and then to part; to meet together for the last time on earth; to bid farewell for time; to have all past remembrances of home and kindred broken up - this is the reality of sorrow. To look upon that face that shall smile on us no more; to close those eyes that shall see us no more; to press those lips that shall speak to us no more; to stand by the cold side of father, mother, brother, sister, friend, yet hear no sound and receive no greeting; to carry to the tomb the beloved of our hearts, and then to return to a desolate home with a blank in one region of our souls, which shall never again be filled till JESUS come with all His saints; this is the bitterness of grief; this is the wormwood and the gall!

It is this rod which ever and anon GOD is laying upon us. Nor is there any that we need more than this. By it He is making room for Himself in hearts that had been filled with other objects and engrossed with other loves. He is jealous of our affection, for He claims it all as His own; and every idol He will utterly abolish. For our sakes as well as for His own He can suffer no rival in the heart.

Perhaps the joys of an earthly home are stealing away our hearts from the many mansions above. GOD breaks in upon us in mercy and turns that home into a wilderness. Our sin finds us out; we mourn over it and seek anew to realize our heavenly citizenship and set out anew upon our pilgrim way, alone and yet not alone, for the Father is with us.

Perhaps we are sitting "**at ease in Zion,**" comfortable and contented, amid the afflictions of a suffering Church and the miseries of a world that owns no Saviour and fears no GOD. Jehovah speaks and we awake. He takes to Himself some happy saint, or smites to the dust some wretched sinner. We are troubled at the stroke. We mourn our lethargy. While we slept, a fellow-saint has gone up to be with CHRIST, and a fellow-sinner has gone down to be with the devil and his angels. The death of the one stirs us up; the death of the other solemnizes and overawes us.

Thus as saint after saint ascends to GOD, we begin to feel that Heaven is far more truly the family home than earth. We have far more brethren above than we have below. And each bereavement reminds us of this. It reminds us, too, that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and makes us look out more wistfully from our eastern casement for the first streaks of the rising dawn. It kindles in us strong desires for the day of happy meeting in our Father's house, when we shall clasp inseparable hands and climb in company the everlasting hills.

Meanwhile it bids us give our hearts to JESUS only. It does for us what the departure of the two strangers from Heaven did to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration - it leaves us alone with JESUS. It turns into deep experience that longing for home contained in the apostle's words, "**having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.**"

The more that bereavement transforms earth into a desert, the more are our desires drawn up to Heaven. Our treasures having been transferred to Heaven, our hearts must follow them. Earth's hopes are smitten, and we are taught to look for "**that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.**" The night is falling and the flowers are folding up; but as they do so they bid us look upward and see star after star appearing upon the darkening sky.

3. Adversity. This may be the loss of substance, or it may be the loss of our good name, or it may be the falling away of friends, or it may be the wrath of enemies, or it may be the disappointment of our hopes: these are what is meant by adversity.

But let Job tell us what it means. "**Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening**" (Job 12:14). "**He hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company... I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark; his archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare;... he breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant... My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death**" (Job 16:7, 12-14, 16). "**My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart**" (Job 17:11) "**He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths; he hath stripped me of my glory and taken the crown from my head; he hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree . . . He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me**" (Job 19:8-10, 13).

These are some of the drops in the bitter cup of adversity that was given to that patient saint to drink. And they are recorded for our use, on whom the ends of the world have come, and to whom these last days may perhaps fill a cup as bitter and protracted as his.

Yet let us "**count it all joy when [we] fall into divers tribulations, knowing this, that the trying of [our] faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing**" (James 1:2-4).

We are cast into poverty, but how can we be poor so long as CHRIST is rich; and is not this poverty sent to make us prize His unsearchable riches and to buy of Him the gold tried in the fire that we may be rich? Our good name is lost through slander and false accusation. The finger of public scorn is perhaps pointed at us, and wicked men are exalted over us triumphing in our reproach. Yet have we not the approving eye of GOD, and is it not enough if He still honors us and knows our innocence?

Let our good name go if GOD sees fit thus to humble us. We have the "**white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it**" (Revelation 2:17).

Friends fall off and enemies arise: false brethren turn against us, and we are doomed to bear the revilings and persecutions of those whom we have never wronged but ever loved. But the friendship of JESUS is still ours. No earthly disaster or persecutor can ever rob us of that. Nay, the coldness of those we counted on as tried and true only draws us the closer to Him, the warmth of whose love knows no abatement nor end. Joseph passed thoroughly this trial, and the Lord set him upon Pharaoh's throne.

- Moses passed through it and became "**king in Jeshurun.**"
- Job passed through it and was blessed a thousandfold.
- Daniel passed through it and was exalted with double honor.

Let us "take . . . the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. 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" (James 5:10, 11).

Oftentimes nothing but adversity will do for us. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice" (Jeremiah 22:21).

We need to be stripped of every earthly portion that we may seek entirely our portion in Jehovah Himself. We need to be turned out of a home on earth that we may seek a home in Heaven. Earth's music is too seducing and takes away our relish for the new song. GOD must either hush it or take us apart into a desert place that we may no longer be led captive by it but may have our ear open only to the heavenly melody.

We cannot be trusted with too full a cup, or too pleasant a resting-place. We abuse everything that GOD has given us, and prove ourselves not trustworthy as to anyone of them.

- Some GOD cannot trust with health; they need sickness to keep them low and make them walk softly all their days. They need spare diet, lest the flesh should get the mastery.
- Others He cannot trust with prosperity; they need adversity to humble them, lest, like Jeshurun, they should wax "**fat and kick.**"
- Others He cannot trust with riches; they must be kept poor, lest covetousness should spring up and pierce them through with many sorrows.
- Others He cannot trust with friends; they make idols of them, they give their hearts to them; and this interferes with the claims of Jehovah to have us altogether as His own.

But still in all this GOD dealeth with us as with the members of His own family.

Never for a moment does He lose sight of this. Neither should we. So that when these things overtake us, when we are thus "**judged,**" we should feel that we are "**chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world**"; we should learn not merely to submit to the rod, but to kiss and welcome it, not merely to acquiesce in chastisement, but to "**glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed.**"

We should learn not merely to praise GOD in affliction, but to praise Him for it.

We should see that the lot of the afflicted is far more enviable than that of him who is "**let alone**"; and, instead of trembling when we see the dark cloud of sorrow coming over us, we should tremble far more when we see it passing off, lest, perchance, that which came charged with blessing to us, should, through our stoutheartedness and unteachableness, leave us callous and unblessed.

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