

Finding God's Order in Our Disorder

Many years ago, my newly-married wife and I were visiting Dr. Robert G. Lee in his house on Stonewall Street in Memphis, Tennessee. After he escorted us through three rooms of books we entered his "inner sanctum" where he studied. Every available space seemed cluttered and I could not see the top of his desk. I recall what he casually said as we entered the room, "I know it looks like a mess here, but I know where everything is."

The story is also told of a little boy who looked up in his mother's lap as she did some needlepoint. Upon noticing the jumbled threads of the underside, he said, "Mama, what are you doing? It looks like a mess from down here." She told him not to worry; Mama would show him what she was doing later. After a few days, she picked him up and said, "Look at this." The little boy marveled at the beautiful flower his mother had formed. She said, "From where you were sitting it looked like a mess, but all along, Mama was making this flower."

Job said, "*But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10). The word tried is from the Hebrew word, *bachan*, which has been translated: to examine, scrutinize, to test, to prove, to try. Sometimes the way we take looks like a mess, but the Lord knows the way we are going and the way we should be going. "*Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me*" (Psalm 139:5). Even in the midst of our disorder, God shall bring order. I would like to share with you a brief Bible study in Job 23:1-10 that shows us this great truth. First of all there is:

I. The Frustration of Our Trial

Sometimes the trial through which we have entered is beyond our expression. Job 23:1 and 2 says, "*Then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*" Job is saying that the inflictions he has experienced cause him to groan, but his pain goes deeper than he has described by his lamentations. When the trial gets this deep, we feel extremely lonely because no one really knows how much we hurt. Earlier in the book of Job, he cries out after he was given arrogant advice, "*I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all*" (Job 16:2). One of my favorite African-American spirituals says, "Oh, nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Glory Hallelujah! Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down; Oh, yes, Lord; Sometimes I'm almost to the ground, Oh, yes, Lord." How true is the phrase, "Sometimes I'm almost to the ground," and then sometimes we feel we under the ground.

Job went on to say in Job 23: 3, "*Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!*" There are times when the trial seems beyond our intercession. In Job's attempts at prayer, he hits a dead end. He can't find God in what he is experiencing. In his exasperation he says in Job 9:33, "*Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.*" Although these words speak to us of Christ who will come to be, in the matter of salvation, our "Daysman," the One who will come between us and the Father, Job was crying out for some help. He needed someone to get through to God for him, because he could not. Have you ever felt this way?

At this point we must guard our heart, because we may find ourselves beyond understanding. In Job 23:4, 5, Job said, "*I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.*" As the frustration escalates, we are tempted to give God some arguments, such as, "Why me? Why not others who are not loving or serving you?" We may be so bold to say, "Lord, I don't deserve this." Without being too simplistic, we might counter with, "Why not us?" We might remind ourselves when Peter enquired what was to happen to John after being told how he was to die, the words of our Lord, "*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*" (John 21:23). As far as what we deserve, all of us could rightly say, if we got what we deserved, we would all go to Hell. "*But by the grace of God I am what I*

am..." (I Corinthians 15:10).

When the Mid-Easterner referred to direction he did so as he faced the east, the rising of the sun. With that in mind, please notice in Job 23:8, 9, "*Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*" Therefore forward is east, backward is west, left hand is the north, and the right is south. There is a most interesting phrase used in Job 23:9, which says, "*On the left hand, where he doth work....*" The left hand refers to the northern direction. The Bible says, "*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King*" (Psalm 48:2). We see that Heaven is in the sides of the north, paralleling the earthly Zion. God works on our left hand or in the heavenlies. Heaven is God's workshop. Job is saying, "There doesn't seem to be much order even out of God's workshop for my life. But that is one thing we can be sure of - that God is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Robert Browning wrote, "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." For God's children there is:

II. The Consolation During The Trial

Rest assured, God is not against you. Job 23:6 says, "*Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.*" God reminds us, "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31). Not only will God not plead, which means "to contend" with us, He will give us the needed power to make it through the trial. God will strengthen you! II Corinthians 12:10 encourages us with these words: "*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*"

And the added consolation comes from knowing that God knows you. He knows who you are, where you are and the outcome of it all. Job 23:10 says, "*But he knoweth the way that I take....*" Jesus said, "*For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*" (Matthew 6:32). Finally there is great comfort in knowing:

III. The Conclusion of the Trial

Good news - trials are restricted to term limits! Job 23:10 reads, "*When he hath tried me....*" We see God takes us so far, but not beyond the point of unbearableness. The phrase, "hath tried" shows us that every trial has a beginning and, thank God, an ending! This, too, shall pass.

The finished product is gold! Job 23:10 tells us the final phase: "*I shall come forth as gold.*" Our trials parallel the process of finding, mining, and refining gold. Gold is found in the rough. Sometimes it is found in nugget form, but often it has to be mined out of the rock. It is not unusual to find three grams of gold for one ton of rock. God has ordained the trial, because He needs to take us out of the rough. Then gold needs to be separated from alloy. God says, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing...*" (II Corinthians 6:17). The gold is thoroughly cleaned before it is finally used. At the last, it is polished and made for display. Whether it is a piece of jewelry or ornamentation in specialized building, gold is not made to be hidden. Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16).

- Pastor Pope -

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