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"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord..." Isaiah 1:18

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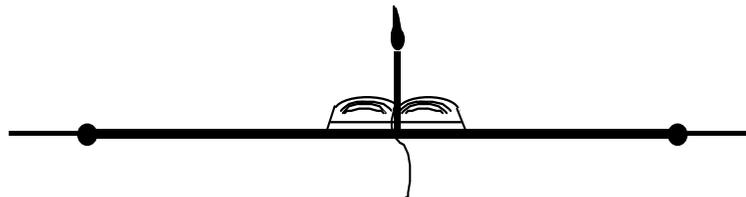
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Old Testament Study: Exodus 15:22-23

In the Wilderness, pt. 1 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

²²So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.

²³And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur” (15:22). When God separates a people unto Himself, it is not only needful that that people should be redeemed with “precious blood,” and then brought near as purged worshippers, but it is also part of God’s wise purpose that they should pass through the wilderness ere they enter into the promised inheritance. Two chief designs are accomplished thereby. **First**, the trials and testings of the wilderness make manifest the evil of our hearts, and the incurable corruption of the flesh, and this in order that we may be humbled — “to hide pride” from us; and that we may prove by experience that entrance into the inheritance itself is also and solely a matter of sovereign grace, seeing that there is *no worthiness*, yea, *no* “good thing” in us. **Second**, inasmuch as when Jehovah leads His people into the wilderness He goes with them and makes His presence and His love manifest among them. Inasmuch as it is His purpose to display His power in saving His redeemed from the consequences of their failures, and thus make their need the opportunity of lavishing upon them the riches of His grace, we are made to see not only Israel, but God *with* them and *for* them in the waste howling desert.

Trial and humiliation are not “**the end of the Lord**” (James 5:11), but are rather the occasions for fresh displays of the Father’s long-sufferance and goodness. The wilderness may and will make manifest the weakness of His saints, and, alas! their failures, but this is only to magnify the power and mercy of Him who brought them into the place of testing. Further: God has in view our ultimate wellbeing — that He may “**do thee good at thy latter end**” (Deuteronomy 6:18); and when the trials are over, when our faithful God has supplied our “**every need**,” *all*, all shall be found to be to *His* honor, praise, and glory. Thus God’s purpose in leading His people through the wilderness was (and is) not only that He might try and prove *them* (Deuteronomy 8:2-5), but that in the trial He might exhibit what *He* was for them in bearing with their failures and in supplying their need. The “**wilderness**,” then, gives us not only a revelation of *ourselves*, but it also makes manifest the *ways* of God.

“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur.” This is the first time that we read of them

being *in* “the wilderness.” In 13:18 we are told that “**God led the people about the way of the wilderness,**” but that they had not then actually entered it is clear from v. 20 — “**And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.**” But now they “**went out into the wilderness.**” The *connection is very striking and instructive*. It was their passage through the Red Sea which introduced God’s redeemed to the wilderness. Israel’s journey through the Red Sea speaks of the believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3, 4): Typically, Israel were now upon resurrection-ground. That we may not miss the force of this, the Holy Spirit has been careful to tell us that “**Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness.**” Here, as in many other passages, the “three days” speaks of *resurrection* (1 Corinthians 15:4).

It is only when the Christian’s faith lays hold of his oneness with Christ in His death and resurrection, recognizing that he is a “**new creature**” in Him (see II Cor. 5:17), that he becomes conscious of “**the wilderness.**” Just in proportion as we apprehend our new standing before God and our portion in His Son, so will this world become to us a dreary and desolate *wilderness*. To the natural man the world offers much that is attractive and alluring; but to the spiritual man all in it is only “**vanity and vexation of spirit**” (Eccl. 1:14). To the eye of sense there is much in the world that is pleasant and pleasing; but the eye of faith sees nothing but death written across the whole scene — “**change and decay in all around I see.**” It has much which ministers to “**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,**” (I John 2:16), but nothing whatever for the new nature. So far as the spiritual life is concerned, the world is simply a *wilderness* — barren and desolate.

The wilderness is the place of *travelers*, journeying from one country to another; none but a madman would think of making his *home* there. Precisely such is this world. It is the place through which man journeys from time to eternity. And *faith* it is which makes the difference between the way in which men regard this world. The unbeliever, for the most part, is content to *remain* here. He settles down as though he is to stay here forever. “**Their inward thought is, their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their land after their names**” (Psalm 49:11). Every effort is made to prolong his earthly sojourn, and when at last death claims him, he is loath to leave. Far different is it with the believer, the *real* believer. *His* home is not here. He looks “**for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God**” (Hebrews 11:10). Consequently, he is a stranger and pilgrim here (Hebrews 11:13). It is of *this* the “wilderness” speaks. Canaan was the country which God gave to Abraham and his seed, and the wilderness was simply a strange land through which they passed on their way to their inheritance.

“**And they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water**” (v. 22). This is the first lesson which our wilderness-life is designed to teach us. There is nothing down here which can in anywise minister to that life which we have received from Christ. The pleasures of sin, the attractions of the world, no longer satisfy. The things which formerly charmed, now repel us. The companionships we used to find so pleasing have become distasteful. The things which delight the ungodly only cause us to groan. The Christian who is in communion with his Lord finds absolutely nothing around him which will or can *refresh his thirsty soul*. For him the shallow cisterns of this world have run dry. His cry will be that of

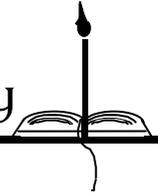
the Psalmist: **“O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is”** (Psalm 63:1). Ah, here is the believer’s Resource: *God* alone can satisfy the longings of his heart. Just as he first heeded the gracious words of the Savior, **“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink”** (John 7:37), so must he *continue to go* to Him who alone has the Water of Life.

“And when they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah” (v. 23). A sore trial, a real test, was this. Three days’ journey in the hot and sandy wilderness without finding any water; and now that water *is* reached, behold, it is *“bitter!”* “How often this is the case with the young believer, aye, and with the old one, too. We grasp at that which we think will satisfy, and only find bitter disappointment. Has it not proved so? Have you tried the pleasures, or the riches, or the honors of the world, and only found them *bitter?* You are invited to a gay party. Once this would have been very delightful; but now, how bitter to the taste of the *new nature!* How utterly disappointed you return home. Have you set your heart on some earthly object? You are permitted to obtain it; but how empty! Yea, what you expected to yield such satisfaction only brings sorrow and emptiness” (C. Stanley).

Israel were now made to feel the bareness and bitterness of the wilderness. With what light hearts did they begin their journey across it? Little prepared were they for what lay before them. To go three days and find no water, and when they reached some to find it bitter! How differently had they expected from God! How natural for them, after experiencing the great work of deliverance which He had wrought for them, to count on Him providing a smooth and easy path for them. So, too, is it with young Christians. They have peace with God and rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. Little do they (or did we) anticipate the tribulations which lay before them. Did not we expect things would be agreeable here? Have we not sought to make ourselves happy in this world? And have we not been disappointed and discouraged, when we found **“no water,”** and that what there is was **“bitter”**? Ah, we enter the wilderness without understanding what it is! We thought, if we thought at all, that our gracious God would screen us from sorrow. Ah, dear reader, it is at *God’s right hand*, and not in this world, that there are **“pleasures for evermore.”**

As we have said, the **“wilderness”** accurately symbolizes and portrays this world, and the *first* stage of the journey forecasts the whole! Drought and bitterness are all that we can expect in the place that owns not Christ. How could it be otherwise? Does God mean for us to settle down and be content in a world which hates Him and which cast out His beloved Son? Never! Here, then, is something of vital importance for the young Christian. I ought to start my wilderness journey *expecting* nothing but death. If we expect peace instead of persecution, that which will make us merry rather than cause us to groan, disappointment and disheartenment at not having our expectations realized, will be our portion. Many an experienced Christian would bear witness that most of his failings in the wilderness are to be attributed to his starting out with a wrong view of what the wilderness is. Ease and rest are not to be found in it, and the more we look for these, the keener will be our disappointment. The first stage in our journey must proclaim to us, as to Israel, what the true nature of the journey is. *It is Marah.*

A Classic Study: The Danger of Prosperity



A Classic Study by William Bates (1635–1699)

[Here we continue a study by the eminent English Puritan William Bates, concerning the danger of prosperity.]—*Ed.*

The Danger of Prosperity, pt. 11

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (Prov. 1:32, AV).

In the last place, from hence we should be warned to be always circumspect to avoid the evils that usually attend prosperity, to improve it to our eternal advantage. Prosperity is not like an infected garment, that transmits a contagious malignity into everyone that wears it. A person that is rich and honorable, and in power, may not only be a saint, but the more a saint by his dedicating and employing the gifts of God to His glory and public good. It is a point of high and holy wisdom, and only taught in the school of heaven, how to manage the opposite states of the present life, so as not to be vain in swelling prosperity, nor broken and flagging in adversity, but to preserve an equanimity, a constant composed mind, the blessed imitation of the divine unchangeableness. Paul says, without vain arrogance, **“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound, everywhere, and in all things I instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”** (Phil. 4:12). It was a secret of the Spirit, not learned from men, but from the Holy Spirit of God. In some respects it is a more difficult exercise to manage prosperity than adversity. Many are like Hannibal, victorious in arms, while conflicting with adversity, and vanquished by enticing pleasures. It is observed of the lamps in some of the Roman tombs, that have burnt for many ages, and are bright while kept close, that as soon as they are opened to the air, a breath of wind extinguishes them: Thus the virtues of some shine in a low retired condition, when there are no temptations, no occasion of quenching them; but when brought forth into the open world, and should appear in conspicuous operations, their virtues are of so weak and consumptive a spirit, that the light expires and dies. Even the piety of David was chilled by prosperity. It is said, with an emphasis, concerning Jehosophat, that he walked in the first ways of his father David: intimating that his religion was

not so exact when he was in the throne, as in his banishment.

It is equally excellent as difficult. To be holy and heavenly in the midst of sensual tempting objects, is the clearest discovery of the truth and power of divine grace, of the piety, ingenuity, and generosity of the Christian Spirit. Humility and modesty in a low condition, are not so praiseworthy, as the absence of them is odious: but humility in a state of honor, is more illustrious than the splendor of external dignity. Temperance in a cottage, where are only supplies of hunger and thirst, seems rather the effect of necessity, than of wise choice: But to be temperate when abundance and variety tempt the sensual appetites, when the sparkling color and delicious relish of the purest wines tempt the fancy and the palate, is virtue in a height and excellence. To be pious and weaned from the world in afflictions, is no wonder; but in prosperity and power to be serious in religion, and despite the splendid vanities of the world, is a virtue of a superior order. What is observed of the perfuming gums of Arabia the Happy, is applicable in this matter: those that distill freely from the tree, excel in purity, in fragrancy, and value, what comes from it when the bark of it is cut. Thus obedience, which comes from the heart in love with God for His benefits, is more valuable and precious than what is the effect of compulsion, which comes from the heart wounded with terrors in adversity.

I shall add further, the using of prosperity aright is most comfortable. The love of God can sweeten afflictions, and make a dinner of green herbs as savory as if they grew in paradise: and it gives a quick and high taste to all our temporal blessings. When His love is conveyed and sealed to us by the gifts of His providence, we have the purest enjoyment of them. Now when prosperity is made subservient to His glory, when it endears obedience to us, we have an infallible testimony it is from His special favor to us.

The rules how to manage prosperity for our everlasting good, are,

1. Let us preserve a humble sense of our original coarseness, continual frailty, and sinful unworthiness in the midst of prosperity. Men are apt to be high-minded, and to cherish undue conceptions of their own worth when raised in the world: as if they were not as inferior to the majesty of God, and as liable to His impartial justice as others. They lose the knowledge of themselves in a mist of vanity. This provokes the High and Holy One that inhabits eternity, to blast them in their most flourishing and secure state, and convince them how deceitful and insufficient the grounds of their pride are. He puts them in fear, that they may know themselves to be but men. There are such great and just allays of the vain mind, such correctives of pride, that it is strange that any temporal prosperity should occasion swelling arrogance. The Psalmist considering the glory of God shining in the heavens, is in an ecstasy at His condescending goodness. What is Man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you

regard him? His original is from the earth, the lowest element; all that he possesses to supply his want and satisfy his desires, is from pure mercy; and the more eminent the advantage of some is above others in this world, the greater are their receipts and obligations. And who would be proud that he is in a mighty debt? Rich and poor, honorable and mean, are distinctions among men; but in respect to God all are equally mean and low. Neither do these things give any inherent worth, and make persons more acceptable to God. Poor Lazarus, who was a miserable spectacle. His body corroded with ulcers, yet had a precious soul under it. The glorious angels descended from heaven to receive it at the point of death, and convey it to the reviving presence of God; but the rich man was cast into hell. Besides, how uncertain are all the admired things of this world!

Is he truly rich whose whole estate lies in a ship abroad, that is to pass through seas exposed to tempests, and infested with pirates, and runs a double hazard of being robbed or cast away? And the consideration thereof, is a proper argument to cause us to keep a low mind in high condition. It is the apostle's counsel, "**Let the rich and the great in the world, rejoice in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away**" (James 1:10). When the florid beauty is displayed, it presently withers. How many survive their estates and dignities, and by unforeseen revolutions become poor and low. Many that were overflowing in riches and pleasures, are as dry and desolate as the desert. And is it not a disparagement to our reason to admire shadows, and be proud of transient vanities? But suppose they continue with men here, can they preserve the body from diseases and death, or the soul from oppressing sorrows? And is it not miserable folly to pride themselves in secular greatness, that is so insufficient to prevent the worst evils? But especially the consideration how man is vilified by sin, should make him be abased and low in his own eyes. As that blessed martyr, Bishop Hooper says, "Lord, I am hell, Thou art heaven; I am a sink of sin, Thou art the fountain of holiness." And the more gracious and bountiful God is to men, the more sinful should they appear to themselves. Humility discovers our native poverty, in the midst of rich abundance; our true vileness in the midst of glittering honors, that nothing is ours but sin and misery; and make us say, with the spirit of that humble saint, "We are less than the least of all God's mercies." Now the more of humility, the more heaven is in the soul: it is that disposition that prepares it to receive the graces and comforts of the Spirit in an excellent degree. God resists the proud; the self-conceited and aspiring He is at defiance with, and abhors them; He justly deprives them of Spiritual treasures, who value themselves and bear it high for the abundance of this world. But He gives grace to the humble. The due sense of our wants and unworthiness makes us fit to partake of divine blessings.

2. A meek temper and deportment is an excellent preservative form

the evil of prosperity. Humility and meekness are always in conjunction, and most amiable in the eyes of God and men. **“A meek and quiet Spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”** (1 Pet. 3:4). They are the brightest jewels that adorn humanity, and shined so gloriously in our blessed Savior, the supreme pattern of perfection, and are propounded as signally imitable by us. Learn of me for I am meek and lowly. When He came in His regal office, He is thus described, **“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion: Behold thy king, come unto thee: He is just and having salvation, lowly”** (Zach. 9:9). The Church is excited to rejoice in His mild monarchy. And Christians, who in profession are His disciples are commanded to be gentle, and to show meekness to all men. This especially concerns those who are in a superior order: for prosperity is apt to make men insolent and intolerable, and to treat with an haughty roughness those that are below them. But there is nothing more becoming men in prosperity and power, than a sweetness of Spirit, not easily provoked by injuries, and easily pardoning them; a gracious condescension expressed in words and actions, even to all inferiors. And especially meekness is necessary in a submissive receiving reproofs for sin, whether by the ministry of the word, or by a faithful friend. Prosperity is never more dangerous, than when sin takes sanctuary in it, than when men think riches and power to be a privilege to free them from sound and searching reproof, and so damn themselves with less contradiction. And a humble submission, with respect to the authority of God and an ingenious tractableness, with respect to the sincere affection of those who are faithful in their counsels for our souls, is an eminent instance of meekness, and preserves from the danger of prosperity.

3. Solemn and affectionate thanksgiving to God for His mercies, sanctifies prosperity.

This is the certain consequence of a humble disposition of soul. Pride smothers the receipts of God's favors: Thankfulness is the homage of humility. This is infinitely due to God, who renews our lives as often as we breathe, and renews His mercies every moment; yet so unjust and ungrateful are men, especially in prosperity, that they strangely neglect it. From hence are those divine warnings so solemnly repeated to the Israelites, **“When you shall have eaten, and are full, then beware lest you forget the Lord”** (Deut. 6:11-12). And, **“lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, then you hear: be lifted up, and you forget the Lord thy God”** (Deut 8:12). This was the wicked effect of their prosperity: **“According to their pasture so were they filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me”** (Hosea 13:6). There is a great backwardness in a carnal heart to thanksgiving for mercies. Prayer, in our distress, is a work of necessity, but thankful praise is an act of duty; carnal love is the cause of the one, divine love of the other. Even David, how ardently does he excite his soul to the performing this duty; **“Bless the**

Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Ps. 103:1-2). The earnest and repeated address to make a lively and fervent impression upon his soul, is a tacit intimation of the drowsy negligence he found in himself. This duty is spiritual, and to be performed by the soul (which is our noble part), and capable to understand our obligations to the divine goodness. Indeed, it is often expressed in the vocal praises of God, for there is a natural correspondence between the tongue and heart, as between the hand of a clock, and the motion of the wheels within. But the chief part is performed in the soul, and is only of value and acceptance with God, who is the maker, the searcher and the judge of our hearts. Therefore the Holy Psalmist calls upon his soul, and all that is within him; every faculty to unite in the praises of God: The understanding, to consider the several arguments of praise and thankfulness, to esteem and to admire the divine goodness, to ascribe the glory that is due to God for His mercies; the memory, to register His benefits; the will and affections, to love Him for His mercies, and above them.

Thankfulness implies a solemn recognition of the mercies of God, with all the circumstances that add a luster to them, to affect us in as vigorous a manner in our praises for the blessings we enjoy, as we are in our prayers for what we need. Not only signal mercies, but common and ordinary should be continually acknowledged by us. And since our memories are so slippery as to the retaining of favors (injuries are inscribed in marble; benefits written in dust), we should every day review the mercies we enjoy, to quicken our praises for them, and to make impressions not soon defaced. Thankfulness implies a due valuation of God’s benefits. This will be raised, by considering the author, the great God: the meanest mercy from His hand is a high favor. As the guilt of sin arises from the greatness of the object (though some sins are comparatively small, yet none is in its intrinsic nature a small evil), so though of mercies, some are in comparison eminent, and some are ordinary, yet every mercy is great with respect to the author from whence it comes. And the thankful esteem of mercies, will rise in proportion to the sense of our unworthiness. A constant poverty of Spirit in reflecting upon our own vileness, that there is not merely a want of desert in us, with respect to God’s blessings, but a desert of his heavy judgments, will heighten our esteem of them. For this end it is very useful, that the prosperous would consider those below them, how many better than themselves are under oppressing wants, tormenting pains, and breaking sorrows, whom you may trace by their tears every day; and what free and rich mercy is it, that they enjoy the affluence of all things. This distinguishing goodness should be acknowledged with a warm rapture of affection to the divine benefactor. To compare ourselves with those that excel us in grace, will make us humble, and with those who are below us in outward blessings, will make us thankful.

The prosperous have special obligations to be most conversant in this celestial duty. There are various graces and duties that are only useful in this imperfect state, and shall expire with us (as repentance, faith, hope, patience, etc; the reward of them will be eternal, but the exercise is limited to present life), but love and praise remain in heaven. The saints eternally admire, love, and bless God for His mercies. And the sincere and constant performance of this duty is most pleasing to God, and profitable to us, for thankfulness to our blessed benefactor, engages His heart, and opens treasures of His bounty more liberally to us. The way to obtain new benefits is not to suffer former favors to be lost in ungrateful oblivion. In short, it is the best and surest evidence of our thankfulness to God, when His mercies are effectual motives to please Him. We cannot always make an actual commemoration of His benefits, but a habitual remembrance should ever be in our hearts, and influential in our lives. **“Thy loving kindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth”** (Ps. 26), that is, unfeignedly respected all Thy commandments.

4. The fear of God, and a vigilant care to avoid the sins that so easily encompass us, is necessary in prosperity. The secure assist Satan in his war against the soul; but watchfulness disarms the tempter. Circumspection is never more a duty, than when pleasures without and passions within, conspire to betray us. It is useful to reflect upon the great numbers who have been corrupted and ruined by prosperity: That the vices of the dead may secure the virtues of the living. The fear of God is clean, effectually, as it preserves from sin. It is Solomon’s advice to young men, that enjoy the world in its flower, and in the season of their sinning, that they would remember that God for all their vanities will bring them to judgment. This consideration will be powerful to prevent the rising of the corrupt affections, or to suppress their growth, and hinder their accomplishment. But with the excellently tempered soul, ingenious fear from the consideration of God’s mercies, is an effectual restraint from sin. It is said, they shall fear the Lord and His goodness: Fear to affect and grieve and lose His goodness. This fear does not infringe the comfort of the soul, but preserve and improve it. Servile fear, when the soul is afraid to burn, not to sin, is a judicial forward impression, the character of a slave; but an ingenuous grateful fear, that springs from the sense of the divine goodness, is a voluntary affection becoming a child of God, and cherished by Him. The fear of the Lord is His treasure. This watchfulness must be universal against all temptation to which we are incident by prosperity: otherwise we shall be guilty of a like folly with those that shut and fortify one gate, and leave the other open to the enemy. And it must be as continual as our temptations. Blessed is the man that fears always.

New Testament Study: Matthew 24:1-3



The Olivet Discourse - I

¹Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ²“Do you see all these things?” He asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

In this section begins the Olivet Discourse, which Jesus delivered to His disciples on the Mount of Olives (see vs. 3), concerning things future. In general, prophetic writings in the Bible can frustrate the reader. The reader would like that future events be laid out as in History Class: step-by-step; chronologically; with an accompanying time-line. This is not the way with prophetic writings in the Bible. Often, prophets in the Bible intertwine multiple, related events, such as when Isaiah spoke of both the first and second comings of Christ. Also, there are frequently multiple fulfillments of prophecies in the Bible. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus delivers prophecy in the style of the Old Testament prophets, using the devices that they used. To our dismay, He does not lay out His prophecies with an exact time-line. On the contrary, it is somewhat difficult to figure out which prophecies go with which events, or even if they apply to multiple events. Obviously, Jesus purposely prophesied in this way. It causes us to approach His words humbly, earnestly seeking guidance by the Holy Spirit for a proper interpretation. The absence of a time-line for events such as the second coming of Christ encourage us to always be ready for His coming, for He could appear at any time.

Specifically, in this discourse, Jesus, in response to questions by His disciples, prophesies about the then-future destruction of Jerusalem, and His own bodily return to earth. “We should not approach these chapters with the conviction that everything in them applies to only one of these judgments. The intermingling of prophecies referring to the events leading up to AD 70 with those applying to the end of all things makes this discourse particularly difficult to interpret” [Morris, 594]. “Our Lord appears to have purposely mingled the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and His own second coming, so that there should be nothing in His words to satisfy the idle curiosity, but everything to keep

His disciples always on the watch for His appearing” [Spurgeon, 350].

This prophetic discourse was prompted by the admiration of the disciples for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem: **“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings”** (vs. 1). First note the opening phrase: **“Jesus left the temple”**. There seems to be symbolism in this phrase. Here, Jesus left the temple for the last time, as if to abandon it. The Messiah would no longer teach there. Moreover, the temple sacrifices were soon to be rendered meaningless by Jesus’ sacrifice. The entire significance of the Jerusalem Temple as the house of God was nullified when Jesus left it. All that was left was the earthly materials that made up its construction. These, the disciples marveled at, **“calling [Jesus’] attention to its buildings.”** “Jesus had said, in the close of the foregoing chapter, **‘Your house is left to you desolate’** (Matt. 23:38); and here He made His words good, **‘Jesus left the temple’**. The manner of expression is observable; He not only went out of the Temple, but departed from it, took His final farewell of it; He departed from it, never to return to it anymore; and then immediately predicted its ruin” [Henry]

Jesus responded to the disciples’s marveling at the construction of the temple: **“Do you see all these things?’ He asked. ‘I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down’”** (vs. 2). “The disciples were doubtless moved by admiration for the magnificent building, and they probably expected some expression of appreciation from Jesus” [Morris, 595]. Rather than an expression of appreciation on the workmanship of the temple, Jesus gave the disciples a prediction of the destruction of the temple. The destruction of the temple was necessary to physically do away with the system of temple worship, which ceased to be valid when Jesus died on the cross, as the ultimate sacrificial Lamb. When the temple lost its spiritual significance, the beauty of its edifice became meaningless. Worse, the continued use of the temple for spiritual purposes would mislead the people into thinking that the temple rituals and sacrifices were still valid. “A believing foresight of the defacing of all worldly glory will help to take us off from admiring it, and overvaluing it. The most beautiful body will be shortly worms’ meat, and the most beautiful building a ruinous heap. And shall we then set our eyes upon that which so soon is not, and look upon that with so much admiration which ere long we shall certainly look upon with so much contempt?” [Henry]. “His supernatural vision enabled Him to see what could not have occurred to any human being, namely, that the overthrow of Temple worship was certain, and that the entire Jewish nation would find its future determined by its present relation to Himself” [Thomas, 345].

Jesus’ prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple induced some questions by the disciples: **“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?’”** (vs. 3). We can infer from their questions that the disciples assumed that the second coming of Christ, and the **“end of**

the age", would happen at about the same time that the destruction of Jerusalem occurred. The disciples lumped all these events together. The disciples thought that the chance that the temple would be destroyed was very remote; so much so, that they assumed that its destruction signified the end of the world. "We must note, since they had considered from childhood that the temple would stand to the end of time and had the idea deeply rooted in their minds, that they had not thought that the temple could fall down as long as the world's created order stood" [Calvin, 75].

Jesus, in His answer to the questions, does nothing to divest the disciples of their mistaken notion that those events would occur very close to each other. On the contrary, in answering, Jesus speaks of the three events, without giving a delineation of which one He is speaking. This has caused countless hours of frustration over the years for interpreters of the Bible. It is best to take humble view when it comes to prophecy in the Bible, and assume that we cannot exactly correlate to its fulfilling event each and every prophetic statement. In any case, though, the words of Jesus are clear enough so that we can get a general sense of what He is prophesying.

One might ask, why didn't Jesus make more clear the signs and times of what He was prophesying? It is a consistent theme in the New Testament that Christians are to live their lives in expectation that Jesus could return at any time (see Matt. 24:44; I Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 10:37; James 5:8; I John 2:28; et. al.). If Jesus had specified that His coming would be hundreds or thousands of years after the destruction of the temple, that would obviously have dampened the feeling of expectation for early Christians that He would return soon. "The main object of His answer was to establish His disciples in good hope, in case they should fail in courage at the ensuing chaos. For this reason He does not speak of His coming in simple terms but helps Himself to prophetic forms of speech, which the more men scrutinize, the harder they must struggle to understand the paradoxical character of events" [Calvin, 93]. "Christ wishes the day of His coming to be so hoped for and looked for that yet no one should dare to ask when it will come. He wants His disciples to walk in the light of faith and, without knowing times with certainty, to expect the revelation with patience. Beware then not to worry more than the Lord allows over details of time... It would be threefold, fourfold madness to grudge submission to the ignorance which even the Son of God refused to accept, for our sake" [Calvin, 98].

The great wisdom of Christ is demonstrated by the way He gave this prophecy. No Christian throughout the ages has been denied the feeling of expectation for His soon return. That is how God wants it. And certainly, this feeling of expectation is not wasted on anyone, even though Christ has not returned as we sit nearly two thousand years later. For though He has not bodily returned to earth in all these years, He could come individually for any of us, at any time. The fragile flame of our lives can be snuffed out at any time, and without any warning. So, the feeling of expectation of His soon coming is by no means wasted, for He may come at any time: either magnificently visible to all of the world as He ushers in the end of the age; or individually, as He calls us home at the end of our lives on earth.



A Topical Study: On Prayer

[As we continue our series on prayer, here we continue a study in which Richard Baxter answers questions about prayer.]

Some Questions About Prayer Answered, pt. 3 by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Question 19. May we pray absolutely for outward mercies, or only conditionally?

Answer. You must distinguish, 1. Between a condition spoken of the subject, when we are uncertain whether it be a mercy or not, and an extrinsic condition of the grant. 2. Between a condition of prayer, and a condition of expectation. 3. Between submission to God's will, and a conditional desire or prayer. And so I answer, (1.) It is necessary when we are uncertain whether the thing itself be good or not, that we pray with a subjective conditionality: Grant this if it be good; or, If it be not good I do not pray for it. (2.) But when we know the thing to be a mercy and good, we may pray for it absolutely. (3.) But we may not believe that we shall receive all with an absolute expectation, which we absolutely pray for. For prayer being the expression of desire, that which may be absolutely desired, though not absolutely promised, may be absolutely prayed for (as our increase or strength of grace, or the conversion of our relations, etc.). (4.) But yet all such must be asked with a submission to the will of God: but that makes it not properly a conditional form of praying; for when the nature of prayer is as it were to move the will of God, it is not so proper to say, 'Lord, do this if it be Thy will already'; or, 'Lord, be pleased to do this if it be Thy pleasure'; as if to say, 'Lord, grant this mercy; but if Thou deny it, it is my duty to submit.' So Christ mentioned both the subjective conditionality and the submission of His will. **"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt"** (Matt. 26:39). As if He had said, 'Nature requires me with a simple nollition to be unwilling of the suffering, and it is consistent with the desired ends of my mediatorship to be desirous to avoid it; but seeing that cannot be, my comparing will commands this simple with of self-preservation to submit to Thy most perfect will. But if any call this submission a condition, the matter is not great.

Question 20. May we pray for all that we may lawfully desire?

Answer. No: for prayer is not only an expression of desire, but also a means to attain the thing desired. And some things may be lawfully desired (at least with a simple velleity), which may not be sought, because they must not be hoped for, where God hath said that He will not grant them. For it is vain to seek that which you have no hope to find: as to desire to see the conversion of the whole world, or to pass to heaven as Enoch without dying, which are lawful (by a simple velleity); but all things compared, it is not lawful peremptorily to desire it, without submission. It is the expression of a comparate, determinate desire, which is properly called prayer, being the use of means for the obtaining of that desire; and whatsoever I may so desire, I may pray for; for if there be no hope of it, I may not so desire it. But the desire by way of simple velleity may not be put into a proper prayer, when there is no hope. I must have a simple desire (with submission) to attain a sinless perfection here, even this hour; but because there is no hope, I may not let it proceed to a determinate peremptory desire upon a comparing judgment, nor into a proper prayer. And yet these velleities may be expressed in prayer, though they have not the full nature of a prayer. *Objection.* But was not Christ's a prayer? (see Matt. 26:39). *Answer.* Either Christ as man was certain that the cup must not pass from Him, or uncertain. If you could prove Him uncertain, then it is a proper prayer (with submission to His Father's will); but if He was certain that it was not to pass from Him, then it was analogically only a prayer, it being but a representing of His velleity to His Father, and not of His determinate will, nor was any means to attain that end: and indeed such it was, as if He had said, 'Father, if it had stood with the ends of my office and Thy will, I would have asked this of Thee; but because it does not, I submit.' And this much we may do.

Question 21. How then can we pray for the salvation of all the world? Must it be for all men collectively? Or only for some, excluding no numerical denominate person?

Answer. Just as Christ prayed here in this text, we must express our simple velleity of it to God, as a thing that in itself is most desirable (as the passing of the cup was unto Christ): but we cannot express a determinate volition, by a full prayer, such as has any tendency as a means to attain that end; because we are certain that God's will is against it, or that it will not be.

Question 22. May we pray for the conversion of all the nations of the world to Christianity, with a hopeful prayer?

Answer. Yes: For we are not certain that every nation shall not be so converted, though it be improbable.

Question 23. May we pray in hope with a proper prayer (as a means to

obtain it) that a whole kingdom may be all truly converted and saved?

Answer. Yes: for God has no way told us that it shall not be; though it be a thing improbable, it is not impossible; and therefore being greatly desirable may be prayed for. Though Christ has told us that His flock is little, and few find the way of life, yet that may stand with the salvation of a kingdom.

Question 24. May we pray for the destruction of the enemies of Christ, or of the gospel, or of the king?

Answer. Not with respect to that which is called God's antecedent will, for so we ought first to pray for their conversion (and restraint till them): but with respect to that called His consequent will we may; that is, we must first pray that they may be restrained and converted, and secondly, that if not, they may be destroyed.

Question 25. What is to be thought of that which some call a particular faith in prayer? If I can firmly believe that a lawful prayer shall be granted in kind, may I not be sure by a divine faith that it shall be so?

Answer. Belief hath relation to a testimony or revelation. Prayer may be warranted as lawful, if the thing be desirable, and there be any possibility of obtaining it, though there be no certainty, or flat promise; but faith or expectation must be warranted by the promise. If God has promised you the thing prayed for, you may believe that you shall receive it: otherwise your particular faith is a fancy, or a believing of yourselves, and not a believing God that never promised you the thing. *Objection.* "**And all things whatsoever you ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive**" (Matt. 21:22). *Answer.* There are two sorts of faith: the one a belief that is ordinary, having respect to ordinary promises and mercies: the text can be understood of this in no other sense than this: All things which I have promised you, you shall receive, if you ask them believingly. But this is nothing to that which is not promised. The other faith was extraordinary, in order to the working of miracles: and this faith was a potent inward confidence, which was not in the power of the person when he pleased, but was given like an inspiration by the Spirit of God, when a miracle was to be wrought; and this seems to be it that is spoken of in the text. And this was built on this extraordinary promise, which was made not to all men in all ages, but to those times when the gospel was to be sealed and delivered by miracles; and especially to the apostles. So that in these times, there is neither such a promise of our working miracles as they had to believe, nor yet a power to exercise that sort of extraordinary faith. Therefore a strong conceit (though it come in a fervent prayer) that any thing shall come to pass, which we cannot prove by any promise or prophecy, is not to be called any act of divine faith at all, nor to be trusted to.

Question 26. But must we not believe that every lawful prayer is ac-

cepted and heard of God?

Answer. Yes: but not that it should be granted in the very thing, unless so promised: but you may believe that your prayer is not lost, and that it shall be a means of that which tends to your good (see Rom. 8:28; Isa. 45:19).

Question 27. With what faith must I pray for the souls or bodies of other men; for their conversion or their lives?

Answer. A godly man may pray for wicked relations or others, with more hope than they can pray for themselves, while they remain ungodly: but yet not with any certainty of prevailing for the thing he asks; for it is not peremptorily promised him. Otherwise Samuel had prevailed for Saul, and Isaac for Esau, and David for Absalom, and the good people for all the wicked; and then no godly parents would have their children lost; no, nor any in the world would perish, for godly persons pray for them all. But those prayers are not lost to him that puts them up.

Question 28. With what faith may we pray for the continuance of the church and gospel to any nation?

Answer. The former answer sees to this; our hope may be according to the degrees of probability: but we cannot believe it as a certainty by divine faith, because it is not promised by God.

Question 29. How may we know when our prayers are heard of God, and when not?

Answer. Two ways: sometimes by experience, when the thing itself is actually given us; and always by the promise, when we ask for that which God commands us to ask, or promises to grant; for we are sure God's promises are all fulfilled. If we ask for the objects of sense (as food or raiment, or health, etc.) sense will tell us whether our prayers be granted in the same kind that we asked for; but if the questions be of the objects of faith, it is faith that must tell you that your prayers are granted; but yet faith and reason make use of evidences or signs. As if I pray for pardon of sin, and salvation, the promise assures me, that this prayer is granted, if I be a penitent, believing, regenerate person, otherwise not; therefore faith only assures me that such prayers are granted, supposing that I discern the evidence of my regeneration, repentance, and faith in Christ. So if the question be whether my prayer for others, or for temporal mercies, be answered in some other kind, and conduce to my good some other way, faith only must tell you this from the promise, by the help of evidences. There are millions of prayers that will all be found answered at death and judgment, which we knew not to be answered any way but by believing it.

Question 30. What should a Christian of weak parts do, that is dry and barren of matter, and can scarce tell what to say in prayer, but is ready to rise off his knees almost as soon as he hath begun?

Answer. 1. He must not be a stranger to himself, but study well his

heart and life: and then he will find such a multitude of inward corruptions to lament, and such a multitude of wants to be supplied, and weaknesses to be strengthened, and disorders to be rectified, and actual sins to be forgiven, that may find him work enough for confessions, complaints, and petitions many days together, if expression be but as ready as matter.

2. Let him study God, and get the knowledge of His nature, attributes, and works: and then he will find matter enough to aggravate his sin, and to furnish him with the holy praise of God from day to day. As he that is acquainted with all that is in any book, can copiously discourse of it, when he that knows not what is in it, has little to say of it; so he that knows God and His works (and himself, and his sins and wants) is acquainted with the best prayer book, and has always a full heap of matter before him, whenever he comes to speak to God.
3. Let him study the mystery of man's redemption, and the person, and office, and covenant, and grace of Christ; and he need not want matter for prayer or praise. A very child, if he sees but a peddler's pack opened, where there are abundance of things which he desires, will learn without book to say, 'O father, buy me this, and give me that' etc, so will the soul that sees the treasures and riches of Christ.
4. Let him know the extent of the law of God, and the meaning of the Ten Commandments: if he know but what sins are forbidden in each commandment, and what duties are required, he may find matter enough for confession and petition. So it will also to have a particular understanding of the creed and the Lord's prayer, which will furnish you with much matter.
5. Study well the temptations which you carry about you in your flesh, and meet with in the world, and are suggested by the tempter; and think of the many duties you have to do, and the many dangers and sufferings to undergo, and you will never be unfurnished for matter for your prayers.
6. Observe the daily passages of providence, to yourselves and others; mark how things go with your souls every day, and hearken how it goes with your neighbors, and sure you will find matter enough for prayer.
7. Think of the heavenly joys that you are going to, and the streets of the New Jerusalem will be large enough for faith to walk in.
8. For words, be acquainted with the phrase of Scripture, and you will find provisions for all occasions.
9. Keep up the heart in a reverent, serious, lively frame, and it will be a continual spring to furnish you with matter; when a dead and barren heart has a dry and sleepy tongue.
10. Join as often as you can with those that are full and copious in prayer; for example and use will be very great helps.
11. Quench not the Spirit of God that must assist you.
12. In case of necessity, use those books or forms which are more full than you can be yourselves till you come to ability to do better without them.

A Study in Wisdom: Job 1:3-5 (pt. 2)



[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl's study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]

Job 1:3-5 (part 2) - Job's Greatness, by Joseph Caryl

³His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred oxen, and five hundred donkeys, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all men in the East. ⁴And his sons went and feasted in their homes, everyone his day, and sent and called for their three sisters, to eat and drink with them. ⁵And 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.

We read: "...so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east" (vs. 3). He was the greatest in many ways: greatest in riches; greatest in power; greatest in honor; greatest in grace, which is the best greatness of all. He was greatest all these ways, but that which is here specially meant is the greatness of his honor and riches. He was the greatest man in outward estate of all the men of the east.

Of all the men of the East. In Genesis 25:6, Abraham "gave gifts unto his sons by the concubines, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward into the easy country." Doubtless the blessing of God followed these sons of Abraham his friend, and they waxed great, but among them all, Job was greatest. It had been much to say, he was a great man among the men of the east: for the men of the east were very great men, and very rich men. As to say, one is a rich man in the city of London where there are so many rich men; one that does for a rich man there, is a rich man indeed. But here is more in this, he was not only a rich man, or a great man amongst the men of the east, but he was the greatest, he was the richest of them: as to say that one is the richest in the whole city cries a man up the height of riches. The expression then heightens the sense of the text concerning Job's greatness. He was not only great among the men of

the east, but the greatest man of them; as if the Holy Ghost should have said, "I will not stay reckoning up particulars or telling you this and that Job had: you know the east was a large country and full of rich men, his estate was the largest and himself the richest of all the men of the east."

A question may here be raised: Why does the Holy Ghost spend so many words and is thus accurate in the setting forth of Job's outward estate? I shall touch three reasons for it:

1. He is described to be a man of a very great estate, to the end that the greatness of his affliction might appear afterward: the measure of a loss is taken by the greatness of a man's enjoyment. If a man have but little, his affliction cannot be great; but if a man have much, if he have abundance, then the affliction does abound. After great enjoyments, want is greatest: Emptiness presses those most, who once were full. **"I went out full"** (said Naomi, Ruth 1:21) **"and the Lord has brought me home empty therefore call me not Naomi"** (which is pleasant) **"but Marah"** (which is bitter) **"for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."**

2. The greatness of his estate is set forth, that the greatness of his patience might appear. For a man to be made poorer, that was but poor and mean before, it is no great matter though he bear it; for a man to have but little that never had much is no great trial of his patience: but for a man to have nothing at all, that had as it were all things, and to be patient under it, this shows the proof of patience. To a man that is born a slave, or a captive, captivity and bondage is no trouble, it does never exercise his patience, he is scarce sensible of the evil, because he never knew better. But for a king that is born free and has power over others, for a king that is in the height of freedom and liberty to become a slave and a captive, is such a one patience has a perfect work, if he bear it. So for Job, a man that once abounded in all manner of outward good things, to be ousted and emptied of all, that tried his patience to the full.

3. It was to give to all the world, a testimony that Job was a godly and holy man; that he was a man of extraordinary strength of grace. Why? Because he held his integrity, and kept up his spirit in the way of holiness, notwithstanding he was lifted up with abundance of outward blessing. To be very great and very good, shows that a man is good indeed. Great and good, rich and holy are happy conjunctions, and they are rare conjunctions. Usually, riches impoverish the fool, and the world eats out all care of heaven; therefore Job was one of a thousand, being at once thus great in riches and thus rich in goodness. He was rich in grace, that was so gracious in the midst of so much riches, the godliness of Job was enriched by his riches. It argued that Job's godliness was very great and very right,

because he continued right in the midst of all his greatness. How often do riches cause forgetfulness of God, yea, kicking against God? How often are they made bellows of pride, the swell of uncleanness, the instruments of revenge? How often do rich men condemn, despise and oppress their weak and poor brethren? But to make riches the swell of our graces, and the instruments of duty both to God and man: to have the house full of riches, and the heart full of holiness, these united are admirable. Extremes are very dangerous: to be extreme poor or extreme rich, is an extreme temptation. Therefore the wise man, Agur (Proverbs 30:8) prays, **“Give me neither poverty nor riches.”** Lord, said he, I would not be in any of the extremes. It is a sore temptation to be far on either hand, to be far on the hand of riches, or far on the hand of poverty. To be very poor and very holy is a rare thing; that man has great treasures and riches of grace who is so. I remember the speech of a poor woman, who having a child about eight or nine years of age, and being once in such a strait that hunger began to pinch them both, the child looking upon the Mother said, “Mother, do you think that God will starve us?” “No, child.” Answers the mother. The child replied, “If he does, yet we must love him and serve him.” Such language from the heart becomes and argues more than a child in grace, a grown Christian. They are filled with Christ who can starve and serve him. So likewise are they who bring full fed yet serve him; and temptations are greater upon the full than upon the empty, upon the rich than upon the poor. The reason of it is, because as riches do stir up lust, so they give fuel, and administer instruments for the obtaining and taking in of that which lust calls for: this poverty does not.

The poor, says Christ, receive the Gospel; the lame and the blind make most speed, and see their way clearest into the kingdom of heaven; but for the rich men, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 19:14). We see now the miracle in Job, the camel is got through the needle’s eye: Job, a rich man is got through the needle’s eye with three thousand camels. And the reason was, because all his camels, cattle, and riches, did not take up so much room in his heart; they were not so thick in his spirit, as one single thread. All his outward estate was kept without, not a shred, not a thread got into his Spirit. Take this for a third reason why the Holy Ghost does thus exactly set forth the estate of Job, that he might appear to be an exact holy man.

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Early Guidance of God

"God's providence towards His people dates not at the time of their being called to a knowledge of Himself, but long before. In the formation of their bodies, what goodness appears. No man has ever been able to suggest how the form or figure of the human frame could be improved. In this indeed the wicked share the same bounty of God. In their early infancy how amazing was God's care over them. Think too of the early and deep impressions which God often makes on the minds and hearts of His chosen, even years before their conversion. In a solitary wood among huge rocks, or hoary mountains, or by some gentle stream, or noble river, or vast expanse of waters, what conceptions of God has many a child had! In an escape from danger, what a sense of God's goodness has stolen over the hearts of His people, even before their conversion... Even where such impressions do not end in a speedy conversion, they are often very salutary in preserving the young from the worst forms of evil."

-- William Plumer (1802-1880)

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