

CHAPTER 3

“You have heard of the patience of Job,” says the apostle, ~~<89B>~~James 5:11. So we have, and of his impatience too. We wondered that a man should be so patient as he was (Job 1 and 2), but we wonder also that a good man should be so impatient as he is in this chapter, where we find him cursing his day, and, in passion,

- I. Complaining that he was born (v. 1-10).
- II. Complaining that he did not die as soon as he was born (v. 11-19).
- III. Complaining that his life was now continued when he was in misery (v. 20-26). In this it must be owned that Job sinned with his lips, and it is written, not for our imitation, but our admonition, that he who things he stands may take heed lest he fall.

~~<89B>~~JOB 3:1-10

JOB CURSES HIS DAY

Long was Job's heart hot within him; and, while he was musing, the fire burned, and the more for being stifled and suppressed. At length he spoke with his tongue, but not such a good word as David spoke after a long pause: *Lord, make me to know my end*, ~~<49B>~~Psalm 39:3, 4. Seven days the prophet Ezekiel sat down astonished with the captives, and then (probably on the sabbath day) *the word of the Lord came to him*, ~~<26B>~~Ezekiel 3:15, 16. So long Job and his friends sat thinking, but said nothing; *they were afraid of speaking what they thought, lest they should grieve him, and he durst not give vent to his thoughts, lest he should offend them. They came to comfort him, but, finding his afflictions very extraordinary, they began to think comfort did not belong to him, suspecting him to be a hypocrite, and therefore they said nothing. But losers think they may have leave to speak, and therefore Job first gives vent to his thoughts. Unless they had been better, it would however have been well if he had kept them to himself. In short, he cursed his day, the day of his birth, wished he had never been*

born, could not think or speak of his own birth without regret and vexation. Whereas men usually observe the annual return of their birth-day with rejoicing, he looked upon it as the unhappiest day of the year, because the unhappiest of his life, being the inlet into all his woe. Now,

I. This was bad enough. The extremity of his trouble and the discomposure of his spirits may excuse it in part, but he can by no means be justified in it. Now he has forgotten the good he was born to, the lean kine have eaten up the fat ones, and he is filled with thoughts of the evil only, and wishes he had never been born. The prophet Jeremiah himself expressed his painful sense of his calamities in language not much unlike this: *Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me!* ^{<245D>}Jeremiah 15:10. *Cursed be the day wherein I was born,* ^{<2014>}Jeremiah 20:14, etc. We may suppose that Job in his prosperity had many a time blessed God for the day of his birth, and reckoned it a happy day; yet now he brands it with all possible marks of infamy. When we consider the iniquity in which we were conceived and born we have reason enough to reflect with sorrow and shame upon the day of our birth, and to say that the *day of our death*, by which we are *freed from sin* (^{<416E>}Romans 6:7), is far *better*.

^{<200E>}Ecclesiastes 7:1. But to curse the day of our birth because then we entered upon the calamitous scene of life is to quarrel with the God of nature, to despise the dignity of our being, and to indulge a passion which our own calm and sober thoughts will make us ashamed of. Certainly there is no condition of life a man can be in in this world but he may in it (if it be not his own fault) so honour God, and work out his own salvation, and make sure a happiness for himself in a better world, that he will have no reason at all to wish he had never been born, but a great deal of reason to say that he had his being to good purpose. Yet it must be owned, if there were not another life after this, and divine consolations to support us in the prospect of it, so many are the sorrows and troubles of this that we might sometimes be tempted to say that we were *made in vain* (^{<189F>}Psalm 89:47), and to wish we had never been. There are those in hell who with good reason wish they had never been born, as Judas, ^{<4124>}Matthew 26:24. But, on this side hell, there can be no reason for so vain and ungrateful a wish. It was Job's folly and weakness to curse his day. We must say of it, This was his infirmity; but good men have sometimes failed in the exercise of those graces which they have been most eminent for, that we may understand that when they are said to be *perfect* it is meant that they were upright, not that they were sinless. *Lastly*, Let us observe it, to the honour

of the spiritual life above the natural, that though many have cursed the day of their first birth, never any cursed the day of their new-birth, nor wished they never had had grace, and the Spirit of grace, given them. Those are the most excellent gifts, above life and being itself, and which will never be a burden.

II. Yet it was not so bad as Satan promised himself. Job cursed his day, but he did not curse his God — was weary of his life, and would gladly have parted with that, but not weary of his religion; he resolutely cleaves to that, and will never let it go. The dispute between God and Satan concerning Job was not whether Job had his infirmities, and whether he was subject to like passions as we are (that was granted), but whether he was a hypocrite, who secretly hated God, and if he were provoked, would show his hatred; and, upon trial, it proved that he was no such man. Nay, all this may consist with his being a pattern of patience; for, though he did thus speak unadvisedly with his lips, yet both before and after he expressed great submission and resignation to the holy will of God and repented of his impatience; he condemned himself for it, and therefore God did not condemn him, nor must we, but watch the more carefully over ourselves, lest we sin after the similitude of this transgression.

1. The particular expressions which Job used in cursing his day are full of poetical fancy, flame, and rapture, and create as much difficulty to the critics as the thing itself does to the divines: we need not be particular in our observations upon them. When he would express his passionate wish that he had never been, he falls foul upon the day, and wishes,

(1.) That earth might forget it: *Let it perish* (v. 3); *let it not be joined to the days of the year*, v. 6. “Let it be not only not inserted in the calendar in red letters, as the day of the king's nativity useth to be” (and Job was a king, ~~Job~~ Job 29:25), “but let it be erased and blotted out, and buried in oblivion. Let not the world know that ever such a man as I was born into it, and lived in it, who am made such a spectacle of misery.”

(2.) That Heaven might frown upon it: *Let not God regard it from above*, v. 4. “Every thing is indeed as it is with God; that day is honourable on which he puts honour, and which he distinguishes and crowns with his favour and blessing, as he did the seventh day of the week; but let my birthday never be so honoured; let it be *nigro carbone notandus* — *marked as with a black coal* for an evil day by him that determines the times

before appointed. The father and fountain of light appointed the greater light to rule the day and the less lights to rule the night; but let that want the benefit of both.”

[1.] *Let that day be darkness* (v. 4); and, if the light of the day be darkness, *how great is that darkness!* how terrible! because then we look for light. Let the gloominess of the day represent Job's condition, whose sun went down at noon.

[2.] As for that night too, let it want the benefit of moon and stars, and *let darkness seize upon it*, thick darkness, darkness that may be felt, which will not befriend the repose of the night by its silence, but rather disturb it with its terrors.

[3.] That all joy might forsake it: “Let it be a melancholy night, solitary, and not a merry night of music and dancing. *Let no joyful voice come therein* (v. 7); let it be a long night, and not *see the eye-lids of the morning* (v. 9), which bring joy with them.”

[4.] That all curses might follow it (v. 8): “Let none ever desire to see it, or bid it welcome when it comes, but, on the contrary, *let those curse it that curse the day*. Whatever day any are tempted to curse, let them at the same time bestow one curse upon my birth-day, particularly those that make it their trade to raise up mourning at funerals with their ditties of lamentation. Let those that curse the day of the death of others in the same breath curse the day of my birth.” Or those who are so fierce and daring as to be ready to raise up the *Leviathan* (for that is the word here), who, being about to strike the whale or crocodile, curse it with the bitterest curse they can invent, hoping by their incantations to weaken it, and so to make themselves master of it. Probably some such custom might there be used, to which our divine poet alludes. “Let it be as odious as *the day wherein men bewail the greatest misfortune*, or the time *wherein they see the most dreadful apparition*,” so bishop Patrick, I suppose taking the Leviathan here to signify the devil, as others do, who understand it of the curses used by conjurors and magicians in raising the devil, or when they have raised a devil that they cannot lay.

2. But what is the ground of Job's quarrel with the day and night of his birth? It is *because it shut not up the doors of his mother's womb*, v. 10. See the folly and madness of a passionate discontent, and how absurdly and extravagantly it talks when the reins are laid on the neck of it. Is this

Job, who was so much admired for his wisdom that *unto him men gave ear, and kept silence at his counsel, and after his words they spoke not again?* ~~<KJB>~~ Job 29:21, 11. Surely his wisdom failed him,

- (1.) When he took so much pains to express his desire that he had never been born, which, at the best was a vain wish, for it is impossible to make that which has been not to have been.
- (2.) When he was so liberal of his curses upon a day and a night that could not be hurt, or made any the worse for his curses.
- (3.) When he wished a thing so very barbarous to his own mother as that she had not brought him forth when her full time had come, which must inevitably have been her death, and a miserable death.
- (4.) When he despised the goodness of God to him in giving him a being (such a being, so noble and excellent a life, such a life, so far above that of any other creature in this lower world), and undervalued the gift, as not worth the acceptance, only because *transit cum onere* — *it was clogged with a proviso of trouble*, which now at length came upon him, after many years' enjoyment of its pleasures. What a foolish thing it was to wish that his eyes had never seen the light, that so they might not have seen sorrow, which yet he might hope to see through, and beyond which he might see joy! Did Job believe and hope that he should *in his flesh see God at the latter day* (~~<KJB>~~ Job 19:26), and yet would he wish he had never had a being capable of such a bliss, only because, for the present, he had sorrow in the flesh? God by his grace arm us against this foolish and hurtful lust of impatience.

~~<KJB>~~ JOB 3:11-19

JOB'S COMPLAINT OF LIFE

Job, perhaps reflecting upon himself for his folly in wishing he had never been born, follows it, and thinks to mend it, with another, little better, that he had died as soon as he was born, which he enlarges upon in these verses. When our Saviour would set forth a very calamitous state of things he seems to allow such a saying as this, *Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the paps which never gave suck* (~~<KJB>~~ Luke 23:29); but blessing the barren womb is one thing and cursing the fruitful

womb is another! It is good to make the best of afflictions, but it is not good to make the worst of mercies. Our rule is, *Bless, and curse not*. Life is often put for all good, and death for all evil; yet Job here very absurdly complains of life and its supports as a curse and plague to him, and covets death and the grave as the greatest and most desirable bliss. Surely Satan was deceived in Job when he applied that maxim to him, *All that a man hath will he give for his life*; for never any man valued life at a lower rate than he did.

I. He ungratefully quarrels with life, and is angry that it was not taken from him as soon as it was given him (v. 11, 12): *Why died not I from the womb?* See here, 1. What a weak and helpless creature man is when he comes into the world, and how slender the thread of life is when it is first drawn. We are ready to die from the womb, and to breathe our last as soon as we begin to breathe at all. We can do nothing for ourselves, as other creatures can, but should drop into the grave if the knees did not prevent us; and the lamp of life, when first lighted, would go out of itself if the breasts given us, that we should suck, did not supply it with fresh oil.

2. What a merciful and tender care divine Providence took of us at our entrance into the world. It was owing to this that we *died not from the womb* and did not *give up the ghost when we came out of the belly*. Why were we not cut off as soon as we were born? Not because we did not deserve it. Justly might such weeds have been plucked up as soon as they appeared; justly might such cockatrices have been crushed in the egg. Nor was it because we did, or could, take any care of ourselves and our own safety: no creature comes into the world so shiftless as man. It was not our might, or the power of our hand, that preserved us these beings, but God's power and providence upheld our frail lives, and his pity and patience spared our forfeited lives. It was owing to this that the knees prevented us. Natural affection is put into parents' hearts by the hand of the God of nature: and hence it was that the blessings of the breast attended those of the womb.

3. What a great deal of vanity and vexation of spirit attends human life. If we had not a God to serve in this world, and better things to hope for in another world, considering the faculties we are endued with and the troubles we are surrounded with, we should be strongly tempted to wish that we had *died from the womb*, which would have prevented a great deal both of sin and misery.

*He that is born to-day, and dies to-morrow,
Loses some hours of joy, but months of sorrow.*

4. The evil of impatience, fretfulness, and discontent. When they thus prevail they are unreasonable and absurd, impious and ungrateful. To indulge them is a slighting and undervaluing of God's favour. How much soever life is embittered, we must say, "It was of the Lord's mercies that we died not from the womb, that we were not consumed." Hatred of life is a contradiction to the common sense and sentiments of mankind, and to our own at any other time. Let discontented people declaim ever so much against life, they will be loth to part with it when it comes to the point. When the old man in the fable, being tired with his burden, threw it down with discontent and called for Death, and Death came to him and asked him what he would have with him, he then answered, "Nothing, but to help me up with my burden."

II. He passionately applauds death and the grave, and seems quite in love with them. To desire to die that we may be with Christ, that we may be free from sin, and that we may be *clothed upon with our house which is from heaven*, is the effect and evidence of grace; but to desire to die only that we may be quiet in the grave, and delivered from the troubles of this life, savours of corruption. Job's considerations here may be of good use to reconcile us to death when it comes, and to make us easy under the arrest of it; but they ought not to be made use of as a pretence to quarrel with life while it is continued, or to make us uneasy under the burdens of it. It is our wisdom and duty to make the best of that which is, be it living or dying, and so to *live to the Lord* and *die to the Lord*, and to be his in both,

⚔548 Romans 14:8. Job here frets himself with thinking that if he had but died as soon as he was born, and been carried from the womb to the grave,

1. His condition would have been as good as that of the best: I would have been (says he, v. 14) *with kings and counsellors of the earth*, whose pomp, power, and policy, cannot set them out of the reach of death, nor secure them from the grave, nor distinguish theirs from common dust in the grave. Even princes, who had gold in abundance, could not with it bribe Death to overlook them when he came with commission; and, though they filled their houses with silver, yet they were forced to leave it all behind them, no more to return to it. Some, by the *desolate places* which the kings and counsellors are here said *to build for themselves*, understand the sepulchres or monuments they prepared for themselves in their life-time;

as Shebna (²⁰⁷⁶Isaiah 22:16) *hewed himself out a sepulchre*; and by the gold which the princes had, and the silver with which they filled their houses, they understand the treasures which, they say, it was usual to deposit in the graves of great men. Such arts have been used to preserve their dignity, if possible, on the other side death, and to keep themselves from lying even with those of inferior rank; but it will not do: death is, and will be, an irresistible leveller. *Mors sceptrā ligonibus aequat* — *Death mingles sceptres with spades. Rich and poor meet together* in the grave; and there a *hidden untimely birth* (v. 16), a child that either never saw light or but just opened its eyes and peeped into the world, and, not liking it, closed them again and hastened out of it, lies as soft and easy, lies as high and safe, as kings and counsellors, and princes, that had gold. “And therefore,” says Job, “would I had lain there in the dust, rather than to lie here in the ashes!”

2. His condition would have been much better than now it was (v. 13): “*Then should I have lain still, and been quiet*, which now I cannot do, I cannot be, but am still tossing and unquiet; then *I should have slept*, whereas now sleep departeth from my eyes; *then had I been at rest*, whereas now I am restless.” Now that life and immortality are brought to a much clearer light by the gospel than before they were placed in good Christians can give a better account than this of the gain of death: “Then should I have been present with the Lord; then should I have seen his glory face to face, and no longer through a glass darkly.” But all that poor Job dreamed of was rest and quietness in the grave out of the fear of evil tidings and out of the feeling of sore boils. *Then should I have been quiet*; and had he kept his temper, his even easy temper still, which he was in as recorded in the two foregoing chapters, entirely resigned to the holy will of God and acquiescing in it, he might have been quiet now; his soul, at least, might have dwelt at ease, even when his body lay in pain, ^{495B}Psalm 25:13. Observe how finely he describes the repose of the grave, which (provided the soul also be at rest in God) may much assist our triumphs over it.

(1.) Those that now are troubled will there be out of the reach of trouble (v. 17): *There the wicked cease from troubling*. When persecutors die they can no longer persecute; their *hatred and envy* will then *perish*. Herod had vexed the church, but, when he became a prey for worms, he ceased from troubling. When the persecuted die they are out of the danger of being any further troubled. Had Job been at rest in his grave, he would have had no

disturbance from the Sabeans and Chaldeans, none of all his enemies would have created him any trouble.

(2.) Those that are now toiled will there see the period of their toils. *There the weary are at rest.* Heaven is more than a rest to the souls of the saints, but the grave is a rest to their bodies. Their pilgrimage is a weary pilgrimage; sin and the world they are weary of; their services, sufferings, and expectations, they are wearied with; but in the grave they *rest from all their labours*, ^{<6413>}Revelation 14:13; ^{<2510>}Isaiah 57:23. They are easy there, and make no complaints; there believers sleep in Jesus.

(3.) Those that were here enslaved are there at liberty. Death is the prisoner's discharge, the relief of the oppressed, and the servant's manumission (v. 18): *There the prisoners*, though they walk not at large, yet they *rest together*, and are not put to work, to grind in that prison-house. They are no more insulted and trampled upon, menaced and terrified, by their cruel task-masters: *They hear not the voice of the oppressor.* Those that were here doomed to perpetual servitude, that could call nothing their own, no, not their own bodies, are there no longer under command or control: *There the servant is free from his master*, which is a good reason why those that have power should use it moderately, and those that are in subjection should bear it patiently, yet a little while.

(4.) Those that were at a vast distance from others are there upon a level (v. 19): *The small and great are there*, there the same, there all one, all alike free among the dead. The tedious pomp and state which attend the great are at an end there. All the inconveniences of a poor and low condition are likewise over; death and the grave know no difference.

*Levelled by death, the conqueror and the slave,
The wise and foolish, cowards and the brave,
Lie mixed and undistinguished in the grave.*
— Sir R. Blackmore

^{<NBD>}JOB 3:20-26

JOB'S COMPLAINT OF LIFE

Job, finding it to no purpose to wish either that he had not been born or had died as soon as he was born, here complains that his life was now

continued and not cut off. When men are set on quarrelling there is no end of it; the corrupt heart will carry on the humour. Having cursed the day of his birth, here he courts the day of his death. The beginning of this strife and impatience is as the letting forth of water.

I. He thinks it hard, in general, that miserable lives should be prolonged (v. 20-22): *Wherefore is light in life given to those that are bitter in soul?* Bitterness of soul, through spiritual grievances, makes life itself bitter. *Why doth he give light?* (so it is in the original): he means *God*, yet does not name him, though the devil had said, “He will curse thee to thy face;” but he tacitly reflects on the divine Providence as unjust and unkind in continuing life when the comforts of life are removed. Life is called *light*, because pleasant and serviceable for walking and working. It is candle-light; the longer it burns the shorter it is, and the nearer to the socket. This light is said to be given us; for, if it were not daily renewed to us by a fresh gift, it would be lost. But Job reckons that to those who are in misery it is *doron adoron* — *gift and no gift*, a gift that they had better be without, while the light only serves them to see their own misery by. Such is the vanity of human life that it sometimes becomes a vexation of spirit; and so alterable is the property of death that, though dreadful to nature, it may become desirable even to nature itself. He here speaks of those, 1. Who long for death, when they have out-lived their comforts and usefulness, are burdened with age and infirmities, with pain or sickness, poverty or disgrace, and yet it comes not; while, at the same time, it comes to many who dread it and would put it far from them. The continuance and period of life must be according to God's will, not according to ours. It is not fit that we should be consulted how long we would live and when we would die; our times are in a better hand than our own.

2. Who *dig for it as for hidden treasures*, that is, would give any thing for a fair dismission out of this world, which supposes that *then* the thought of men's being their own executioners was not so much as entertained or suggested, else those who longed for it needed not take much pains for it, they might soon come at it (as Seneca tells them) if they are pleased.

3. Who bid it welcome, and *are glad* when they can find the grave and see themselves stepping into it. If the miseries of this life can prevail, contrary to nature, to make death itself desirable, shall not much more the hopes and prospects of a better life, to which death is our passage, make it so,

and set us quite above the fear of it? It may be a sin to long for death, but I am sure it is no sin to long for heaven.

II. He thinks himself, in particular, hardly dealt with, that he might not be eased of his pain and misery by death when he could not get ease in any other way. To be thus impatient of life for the sake of the troubles we meet with is not only unnatural in itself, but ungrateful to the giver of life, and argues a sinful indulgence of our own passion and a sinful inconsideration of our future state. Let it be our great and constant care to get ready for another world, and then let us leave it to God to order the circumstances of our removal thither as he thinks fit: “Lord, when and how thou pleasest;” and this with such an indifference that, if he should refer it to us, we would refer it to him again. Grace teaches us, in the midst of life's greatest comforts, to be willing to die, and, in the midst of its greatest crosses, to be willing to live. Job, to excuse himself in this earnest desire which he had to die, pleads the little comfort and satisfaction he had in life.

1. In his present afflicted state troubles were continually felt, and were likely to be so. He thought he had cause enough to be weary of living, for,

(1.) He had no comfort of his life: *My sighing comes before I eat*, v. 24. The sorrows of life prevented and anticipated the supports of life; nay, they took away his appetite for his necessary food. His griefs returned as duly as his meals, and affliction was his daily bread. Nay, so great was the extremity of his pain and anguish that he did not only sigh, but roar, and his *roarings were poured out like the waters* in a full and constant stream. Our Master was acquainted with grief, and we must expect to be so too.

(2.) He had no prospect of bettering his condition: *His way was hidden*, and God had *hedged him in*, v. 23. He saw no way open of deliverance, nor knew he what course to take; his way was *hedged up with thorns*, that he could not find his path. See ~~23:8~~ Job 23:8; ~~3:7~~ Lamentations 3:7.

2. Even in his former prosperous state troubles were continually feared; so that *then* he was never easy, v. 25, 26. He knew so much of the vanity of the world, and the troubles to which, of course, he was born, that he was *not in safety, neither had he rest* then. That which made his grief now the more grievous was that he was not conscious to himself of any great degree either of negligence or security in the day of his prosperity, which might provoke God thus to chastise him.

(1.) He had not been negligent and unmindful of his affairs, but kept up such a fear of trouble as was necessary to the maintaining of his guard. He was afraid for his children when they were feasting, lest they should offend God (~~3015~~Job 1:5), afraid for his servants lest they should offend his neighbours; he took all the care he could of his own health, and managed himself and his affairs with all possible precaution; yet all would not do.

(2.) He had not been secure, nor indulged himself in ease and softness, had not trusted in his wealth, nor flattered himself with the hopes of the perpetuity of his mirth; yet trouble came, to convince and remind him of the vanity of the world, which yet he had not forgotten when he lived at ease. Thus his way was hidden, for he knew not wherefore God contended with him. Now this consideration, instead of aggravating his grief, might rather serve to alleviate it. Nothing will make trouble easy so much as the testimony of our consciences for us, that, in some measure, we did our duty in a day of prosperity; and an expectation of trouble will make it sit the lighter when it comes. The less it is a surprise the less it is a terror.