

CHAPTER 29

After that excellent discourse concerning wisdom in the foregoing chapter Job sat down and paused awhile, not because he had talked himself out of breath, but because he would not, without the leave of the company, engross the talk to himself, but would give room for his friends, if they pleased, to make their remarks on what he had said; but they had nothing to say, and therefore, after he had recollected himself a little, he went on with his discourse concerning his own affairs, as recorded in this and the two following chapters, in which,

- I.** He describes the height of the prosperity from which he had fallen. And,
- II.** The depth of the adversity into which he had fallen; and this he does to move the pity of his friends, and to justify, or at least excuse, his own complaints. But then,
- III.** To obviate his friends' censures of him, he makes a very ample and particular protestation of his own integrity notwithstanding. In this chapter he looks back to the days of his prosperity, and shows,
 - 1.** What comfort and satisfaction he had in his house and family (v. 1-6).
 - 2.** What a great deal of honour and power he had in his country, and what respect was paid him by all sorts of people (v. 7-10).
 - 3.** What abundance of good he did in his place, as a magistrate (v. 11-17).
 - 4.** What a just prospect he had of the continuance of his comfort at home (v. 18-20) and of his interest abroad (v. 21-25). All this he enlarges upon, to aggravate his present calamities; like Naomi, "I went out full," but am brought "home again empty."

FORMER PROSPERITY OF JOB

Losers may have leave to speak, and there is nothing they speak of more feelingly than of the comforts they are stripped of. Their former prosperity is one of the most pleasing subjects of their thoughts and talk. It was so to Job, who begins here with a wish (v. 2): *O that I were as in months past!* so he brings in this account of his prosperity. His wish is,

1. “O that I were in as good a state as I was in then, that I had as much wealth, honour, and pleasure, as I had then!” This he wishes, from a concern he had, not so much for his ease, as for his reputation and the glory of his God, which he thought were eclipsed by his present sufferings. “O that I might be restored to my prosperity, and then the censures and reproaches of my friends would be effectually silenced, even upon their own principles, and for ever rolled away!” If this be our end in desiring life, health, and prosperity, that God may be glorified, and the credit of our holy profession rescued, preserved, and advanced, the desire is not only natural, but spiritual.

2. “O that I were in as good a frame of spirit as I was in then!” That which Job complained most of now was a load upon his spirits, through God's withdrawing from him; and therefore he wishes he now had his spirit as much enlarged and encouraged in the service of God as he had then and that he had as much freedom and fellowship with him as then thought himself happy in. This was *in the days of his youth* (v. 4), when he was in the prime of his time for the enjoyment of those things and could relish them with the highest gust. Note, Those that prosper in the days of their youth know not what black and cloudy days they are yet reserved for. Two things made the months past pleasant to Job: —

I. That he had comfort in his God. This was the chief thing he rejoiced in, in his prosperity, as the spring of it and the sweetness of it, that he had the favour of God and the tokens of that favour. He did not attribute his prosperity to a happy turn of fortune, nor to his own might, nor to the power of his own hand, but makes the same acknowledgment that David does. ▶Psalm 30:7, *Thou, by thy favour, hast made my mountain stand*

strong. A gracious soul delights in God's smiles, not in the smiles of this world. Four things were then very pleasant to holy Job: —

1. The confidence he had in the divine protection. They were *the days when God preserved me*, v. 2. Even then he saw himself exposed, and did not make *his wealth his strong city* nor *trust in the abundance of his riches*, but *the name of the Lord was his strong tower*; in that only he thought himself safe, and to that he ascribed it that he was then safe and that his comforts were preserved to him. The devil saw a hedge about him of God's making (³⁸¹⁰Job 1:10), and Job saw it himself, and owned it was *God's visitation that preserved his spirit*, ³⁸¹²Job 10:12. Those only whom God protects are safe and may be easy; and therefore those who have ever so much of this world must not think themselves safe unless God preserve them.

2. The complacency he had in the divine favour (v. 3): *God's candle shone upon his head*, that is, God lifted up the light of his countenance upon him, gave him the assurances and sweet relishes of his love. The best of the communications of the divine favour to the saints in this world is but the candle-light, compared with what is reserved for them in the future state. But such abundant satisfaction did Job take in the divine favour that, by the light of that, he walked through darkness; that guided him in his doubts, comforted him in his griefs, bore him up under his burdens, and helped him through all his difficulties. Those that have the brightest sunshine of outward prosperity must yet expect some moments of darkness. They are sometimes crossed, sometimes at a loss, sometimes melancholy. But those that are interested in the favour of God, and know how to value it, can, by the light of that, walk cheerfully and comfortably through all the darkness of this vale of tears. That puts gladness into the heart enough to counterbalance all the grievances of this present time.

3. The communion he had with the divine word (v. 4): *The secret of God was upon my tabernacle*, that is, God conversed freely with him, as one bosom-friend with another. He knew God's mind, and was not in the dark about it, as, of late, he had been. *The secret of the Lord is said to be with those that fear him*, for *he shows them that in his covenant* which others see not, ³⁸⁵⁴Psalms 25:14. God communicates his favour and grace to his people, and receives the return of their devotion in a way secret to the world. Some read it, *When the society of God was in my tabernacle*, which Rabbi Solomon understands of an assembly of God's people that used to

meet at Job's house for religious worship, in which he presided; this he took a great deal of pleasure in, and the scattering of it was a trouble to him. Or it may be understood of the angels of God pitching their tents about his habitation.

4. The assurance he had of the divine presence (v. 5): *The Almighty was yet with me*. Now he thought God had departed from him, but in those days he was *with him*, and that was all in all to him. God's presence with a man in his house, though it be but a cottage, makes it both a castle and a palace.

II. That he had comfort in his family. Every thing was agreeable there: he had both mouths for his meat and meat for his mouths; the want of either is a great affliction.

1. He had a numerous offspring to enjoy his estate: *My children were about me*. He had many children, enough to compass him round, and they were observant of him and obsequious to him; they were about him, to know what he would have and wherein they might serve him. It is a comfort to tender parents to see their children about them. Job speaks very feelingly of this comfort now that he was deprived of it. He thought it an instance of God's being with him that his children were about him; and yet reckon amiss if, when we have lost our children, we cannot comfort ourselves with this, that we have not lost our God.

2. He had a plentiful estate for the support of this numerous family, v. 6. His dairy abounded to such a degree that he might, if he pleased, *wash his steps with butter*; and his olive-yards were so fruitful, beyond expectation, that it seemed as if the *rock poured him out rivers of oil*. He reckons his wealth, not by his silver and gold, which were for hoarding, but by his butter and oil, which were for use; for what is an estate good for unless we take the good of it ourselves and do good with it to others?

~~297~~ JOB 29:7-17

FORMER PROSPERITY OF JOB

We have here Job in a post of honour and power. Though he had comfort enough in his own house, yet he did not confine himself to that. We are

not born for ourselves, but for the public. When any business was to be done in the gate, the place of judgment, Job *went out to it through the city* (v. 7), not in an affectation of pomp, but in an affection to justice. Observe, Judgment was administered in the gate, in the street, in the places of concourse, to which every man might have a free access, that every one who would might be a witness to all that was said and done, and that when judgment was given against the guilty others might hear and fear. Job being a prince, a judge, a magistrate, a man in authority, among the children of the east, we are here told,

I. What a profound respect was paid to him by all sorts of people, not only for the dignity of his place, but for his personal merit, his eminent prudence, integrity, and good management.

1. The people honoured him and stood in awe of him, v. 8. The gravity and majesty of his looks and mien, and his known strictness in animadverting upon every thing that was evil and indecent, commanded all about him into due decorum. *The young men*, who could not keep their countenances, or, it may be, were conscious to themselves of something amiss, *hid themselves*, and got out of his way; *and the aged*, though they kept their ground, yet would not keep their seats: they *arose and stood up* to do homage to him; those who expected honour from others gave honour to him. Virtue and piety challenge respect from all, and usually have it; but those that not only *are* good, but *do* good, are worthy of double honour. Modesty becomes those that are young and in subjection as much as majesty becomes those that are aged and in power. Honour and fear are due to magistrates, and must be rendered to them, ~~see~~ Romans 13:7. But, if a great and good man was thus revered, how is the great and good God to be feared!

2. The princes and nobles paid great deference to him, v. 9, 10. Some think that these were inferior magistrates under him, and that the respect they paid him was due to his place, as their sovereign and supreme. It should rather seem that they were his equals in place, and joined in commission with him, and that the peculiar honour they gave him was gained by his extraordinary abilities and services. It was agreed that he excelled them all in quickness of apprehension, soundness of judgment, closeness of application, clearness and copiousness of expression; and therefore he was among his fellows an oracle of law, and counsel, and justice, and what he said all attended to and acquiesced in. When he came

into court, especially when he stood up to speak to any business, *the princes refrained talking, the nobles held their peace*, that they might the more diligently hearken to what he said and might be sure to understand his meaning. Those that had been forward to speak their own thoughts, loved to hear themselves talk, and cared not much what any body else said, yet, when it came to Job's turn to speak, were as desirous to know his thoughts as ever they had been to vent their own. Those that suspected their own judgment were satisfied in his, and admired with what dexterity he split the hair and untied the knots which puzzled them and which they knew not what to make of. When the princes and nobles wrangled among themselves all agreed to refer the matters in dispute to Job and to abide by his judgment. Happy the men that are blessed with such eminent gifts as these; they have great opportunities of honouring God and doing good, but have great need to watch against pride. Happy the people that are blessed with such eminent men; it is a token for good to them.

II. What a great deal of good he did in his place. He was very serviceable to his country with the power he had; and here we shall see what it was which Job valued himself by in the day of his prosperity. It is natural to men to have some value for themselves, and we may judge something of our own character by observing what that is upon which we value ourselves. Job valued himself, not by the honour of his family, the great estate he had, his large income, his full table, the many servants he had at his command, the ensigns of his dignity, his equipage and retinue, the splendid entertainments he gave, and the court that was made to him, but by his usefulness. Goodness is God's glory, and it will be ours; if we are merciful as God is, we are perfect as he is.

1. He valued himself by the interest he had in the esteem, affections, and prayers, of sober people; not by the studied panegyrics of the wits and poets, but the unconstrained praises of all about him. All that heard what he said, and saw what he did, how he laid out himself for the public good with all the authority and tender affection of a father to his country, blessed him, and gave witness to him, v. 11. Many a good word they said of him, and many a good prayer they put up for him. He did not think it an honour to make every body fear him (*Oderint dum metuant — Let them hate, provided they also fear*) nor to be arbitrary, and to have his own will and way, not caring what people said of him; but, like Mordecai, to be *accepted of the multitude of his brethren*, ^{<TM>} Esther 10:3. He did not so much value the applauses of those at a distance as the attestations of those

that were the witnesses of his conduct, that constantly attended him, saw him, and heard him, and could speak of their own knowledge, especially theirs who had themselves been the better for him and could speak by their own experience: such was the blessing of him who was ready to perish (v. 13) and who by Job's means was rescued from perishing. Let great men, and men of estates, thus do good, and they shall have praise of the same; and let those who have good done to them look upon it as a just debt they owe to their protectors and benefactors to bless them and give witness to them, to use their interest on earth for their honour and in heaven for their comfort, to praise them and pray for them. Those are ungrateful indeed who grudge these small returns.

2. He valued himself by the care he took of those that were least able to help themselves, the poor and the needy, the widows and fatherless, the blind and the lame, who could not be supposed either to merit his favour or ever to be in a capacity to recompense it.

(1.) If the poor were injured or oppressed, they might cry to Job, and, if he found the allegations of their petitions true, they had not only his ear and his bowels, but his hand too: He *delivered the poor that cried* (v. 12) and would not suffer them to be trampled upon and run down. Nay (v. 16), he was *a father to the poor*, not only a judge to protect them and to see that they were not wronged, but a father to provide for them and to see that they did not want, to counsel and direct them, and to appear and act for them upon all occasions. It is no disparagement to the son of a prince to be a father to the poor.

(2.) The fatherless that had none to help them found Job ready to help them, and, if they were in straits, to deliver them. He helped them to make the best of what little they had, helped them to pay what they owed and to get in what was owing to them, helped them out into the world, helped them into business, helped them to it, and helped them in it; thus should the fatherless be helped.

(3.) Those that were ready to perish he saved from perishing, relieving those that were hungry and ready to perish for want, taking care of those that were sick, that were outcasts, that were falsely accused, or in danger of being turned out of their estates unjustly, or, upon any other account, were ready to perish. The extremity of the peril, as it quickened Job to appear the more vigorously for them, so it made his seasonable kindness

the more affecting and the more obliging, and brought their blessings the more abundantly upon him.

(4.) The widows that were sighing for grief, and trembling for fear, he made to sing for joy, so carefully did he protect them and provide for them, and so heartily did he espouse their interest. It is a pleasure to a good man, and should be so to a great man, to give those occasion to rejoice that are most acquainted with grief.

(5.) Those that were upon any account at a loss Job gave suitable and seasonable relief to (v. 15): *I was eyes to the blind*, counselling and advising those for the best that knew not what to do, and *feet to the lame*, assisting those with money and friends that knew what they should do, but knew not how to compass it. Those we best help whom we help out in that very thing wherein they are defective and most need help. We may come to be blind or lame ourselves, and therefore should pity and succour those that are so, ^{<283>}Isaiah 35:3, 4; ^{<283>}Hebrews 12:13.

3. He valued himself by the conscience he made of justice and equity in all his proceedings. His friends had unjustly censured him as an oppressor. “So far from that,” says he, “I always made it my business to maintain and support right.”

(1.) He devoted himself to the administration of justice (v. 14): *I put on righteousness and it clothed me*, that is, he had an habitual disposition to execute justice and put on a fixed resolution to do it. It was *the girdle of his lions*, ^{<216>}Isaiah 11:5. It kept him tight and steady in all his motions. He always appeared in it, as in his clothing, and never without it. Righteousness will clothe those that put it on; it will keep them warm, and be comfortable to them; it will keep them safe, and fence them against the injuries of the season; it will adorn them, and recommend them to the favour both of God and man.

(2.) He took pleasure in it, and, as I may say, a holy delight. He looked upon it as his greatest glory to do justice to all and injury to none: *My judgment was as a robe and a diadem*. Perhaps he did not himself wear a robe and a diadem; he was very indifferent to those ensigns of honour; those were most fond of them who had least intrinsic worth to recommend them. But the settled principles of justice, by which he was governed and did govern, were to him instead of all those ornaments. If a magistrate do the duty of his place, that is an honour to him far beyond his gold or

purple, and should be, accordingly, his delight; and truly if he do not make conscience of his duty, and in some measure answer the end of his elevation, his robe and diadem, his gown and cap, his sword and mace, are but a reproach, like the purple robe and crown of thorns with which the Jews studied to ridicule our Saviour; for, as clothes on a dead man will never make him warm, so robes on a base man will never make him honourable.

(3.) He took pains in the business of his place (v. 16): *The cause which I knew not I searched out.* He diligently enquired into the matters of fact, patiently and impartially heard both sides, set every thing in its true light, and cleared it from false colours; he laid all circumstances together, that he might find out the truth and the merits of every cause, and then, and not until then, gave judgment upon it. He never answered a matter before he heard it, nor did he judge a man to be righteous, however he seemed, for his being *first in his own cause*, ^{<187>}Proverbs 18:17.

4. He valued himself by the check he gave to the violence of proud and evil men (v. 17): *I broke the jaws of the wicked.* He does not say that he broke their necks. He did not take away their lives, but he broke their jaws, he took away their power of doing mischief; he humbled them, mortified them, and curbed their insolence, and so plucked the spoil out of their teeth, delivered the persons and estates of honest men from being made a prey of by them. When they had got the spoil between their teeth, and were greedily swallowing it down, he bravely rescued it, as David did the lamb out of the mouth of the lion, not fearing, though they roared and raged like a lion disappointed of his prey. Good magistrates must thus be a terror and restraint to evil-doers and a protection to the innocent, and, in order to this, they have need to arm themselves with zeal, and resolution, and an undaunted courage. A judge upon the bench has as much need to be bold and brave as a commander in the field.

<188> JOB 29:18-25

FORMER PROSPERITY OF JOB

That which crowned Job's prosperity was the pleasing prospect he had of the continuance of it. Though he knew, in general, that he was liable to trouble, and therefore was not secure (^{<189>}Job 3:26, *I was not in safety*,

neither had I rest), yet he had no particular occasion for fear, but as much reason as ever any man had to count upon the lengthening out of his tranquility.

I. See here what his thoughts were in his prosperity (v. 18): *Then I said, I shall die in my nest*. Having made himself a warm and easy nest, he hoped nothing would disturb him in it, nor remove him out of it, till death removed him. He knew he had never stolen any coal from the altar which might fire his nest; he saw no storm arising to shake down his nest; and therefore concluded, *To morrow shall be as this day*; as David (^{<1816>}Psalm 30:6), *My mountain stands strong, and shall not be moved*. Observe,

1. In the midst of his prosperity he thought of dying, and the thought was not uneasy to him. He knew that, though his nest was high, it did not set him out of the reach of the darts of death.

2. Yet he flattered himself with vain hopes,

(1.) That he should live long, should *multiply his days as the sand*. He means as the sand on the sea-shore; whereas we should rather reckon our days by the sand in the hourglass, which will have run out in a little time. See how apt even good people are to think of death as a thing at a distance, and to put far from them that evil day, which will really be to them a good day.

(2.) That he should die in the same prosperous state in which he had lived. If such an expectation as this arise from a lively faith in the providence and promise of God, it is well, but if from a conceit of our own wisdom, and the stability of these earthly things, it is ill-grounded and turns into sin. We hope Job's confidence was like David's (^{<1201>}Psalm 27:1, *Whom shall I fear?*), not like the rich fool's (^{<1219>}Luke 12:19), *Soul, take thy ease*.

II. See what was the ground of these thoughts.

1. If he looked at home, he found he had a good foundation. His stock was all his own, and none of all his neighbours had any demand upon him. He found no bodily distemper growing upon him; his estate did not lie under any incumbrance; nor was he sensible of any worm at the root of it. He was getting forward in his affairs, and not going behind-hand; he lost no reputation, but gained rather; he knew no rival that threatened either to eclipse his honour or abridge his power. See how he describes this, v. 19, 20. He was like a tree whose root is not only spread out, which fixes it and

keeps it firm, so that it is in no danger of being overturned, but *spread out by the waters*, which feed it, and make it fruitful and flourishing, so that it is in no danger of withering. And, as he thought himself blessed with the fatness of the earth, so also with the kind influences of heaven too; for the *dew lay all night upon his branch*. Providence favoured him, and made all his enjoyments comfortable and all his enterprises successful. Let none think to support their prosperity with what they draw from this earth without that blessing which is derived from above. God's favour being continued to Job, in the virtue of that his glory was still fresh in him. Those about him had still something new to say in his praise, and needed not to repeat the old stories: and it is only by constant goodness that men's glory is thus preserved fresh and kept from withering and growing stale. His *bow also was renewed in his hand*, that is, his power to protect himself and annoy those that assailed him still increased, so that he thought he had as little reason as any man to fear the insults of the Sabeans and Chaldeans.

2. If he looked abroad, he found he had a good interest and well confirmed. As he had no reason to dread the power of his enemies, so neither had he any reason to distrust the fidelity of his friends. To the last moment of his prosperity they continued their respect to him and their dependence on him. What had he to fear who so gave counsel as in effect to give law to all his neighbours? Nothing surely could be done against him when really nothing was done without him.

(1.) He was the oracle of his country. He was consulted as an oracle, and his dictates were acquiesced in as oracles, v. 21. When others could not be heard all men *gave ear to him, and kept silence at his counsel*, knowing that, as nothing could be said against it, so nothing needed to be added to it. And therefore, *after his words, they spoke not again*, v. 22. Why should men meddle with a subject that has already been exhausted?

(2.) He was the darling of his country. All about him were well pleased with every thing he said and did, as David's people were with him, ¹⁰⁵2 Samuel 3:36. He had the hearts and affections of all his neighbours, all his servants, tenants, subjects; never was man so much admired nor so well beloved.

[1.] Those were thought happy to whom he spoke, and they thought themselves so. Never were the dews of heaven so acceptable to the parched ground as his wise discourses were to those that attended on them,

especially to those to whom they were particularly accommodated and directed. His speech dropped upon them, and they waited for it as for the rain (v. 22, 23), wondering at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, catching at them, laying hold on them, and treasuring them up as apophthegms. His servants that stood continually before him to hear his wisdom would not have envied Solomon's. Those are wise, or are likely to be so, that know how to value wise discourse, that wish for it, and wait for it, and drink it in as the earth does *the rain that comes often upon it*, ~~307~~ Hebrews 6:7. And those who have such an interest as Job had in the esteem of others whose *ipse dixit* — *bare assertion* goes so far, as they have a great opportunity of doing good, so they must take great care lest they do hurt, for a bad word out of their mouths is very infectious.

[2.] Much more happy were those thought on whom he smiled, and they thought themselves so, v. 24. “*If I laughed on them*, designing thereby to show myself pleased in them, or pleasant with them, it was such a favour that *they believed it not for joy*,” or because it was so rare a thing to see this grave man smile. *Many seek the ruler's favour*. Job was a ruler whose favour was courted and valued at a high rate. He to whom a great prince gave a kiss was envied by another to whom he only gave a golden cup. Familiarity often breeds contempt; but if Job at any time saw fit, for his own diversion, to make himself free with those about him, yet it did not in the least diminish the veneration they had for him: *The light of his countenance they cast not down*. So wisely did he dispense his favours as not to make them cheap, and so wisely did they receive them as not to make themselves unworthy of them another time.

(3.) He was the sovereign of his country, v. 25. He *chose out their way*, sat at the helm, and steered for them, all referring themselves to his conduct and submitting themselves to his command. To this perhaps, in many countries, monarchy owed its rise: such a man as Job, that so far excelled all his neighbours in wisdom and integrity, could not but sit chief, and the fool will, of course, be servant to the wise in heart: and, if the wisdom did but for a while run in the blood, the honour and power would certainly attend it and so by degrees become hereditary. Two things recommended Job to the sovereignty: —

[1.] That he had the authority of a commander or general. He *dwelt as a king in the army*, giving orders which were not to be disputed. Every one that has the spirit of wisdom has not the spirit of government, but Job had

both, and, when there was occasion, could assume state, as the king in the army does, and say, “Go,” “Come,” and “Do this,” ⁴¹⁸⁹Matthew 8:9.

[2.] That yet he had the tenderness of a comforter. He was as ready to succour those in distress as if it had been his office to comfort the mourners. Eliphaz himself owned he had been very good in that respect (⁴⁰⁴⁸Job 4:3): *Thou hast strengthened the weak hands*. And this he now reflected upon with pleasure, when he was himself a mourner. But we find it easier to comfort others with the comforts wherewith we ourselves have been formerly comforted than to comfort ourselves with those comforts wherewith we have formerly comforted others.

I know not but we may look upon Job as a type and figure of Christ in his power and prosperity. Our Lord Jesus is such a King as Job was, the poor man's King, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and upon whom the blessing of a world ready to perish comes; see ⁴¹⁷²Psalms 72:2, etc. To him therefore let us give ear, and let him sit chief in our hearts.