

CHAPTER 21

This is Job's reply to Zophar's discourse, in which he complains less of his own miseries than he had done in his former discourses (finding that his friends were not moved by his complaints to pity him in the least), and comes closer to the general question that was in dispute between him and them, Whether outward prosperity, and the continuance of it, were a mark of the true church and the true members of it, so that the ruin of a man's prosperity is sufficient to prove him a hypocrite, though no other evidence appear against him: this they asserted, but Job denied.

I. His preface here is designed for the moving of their affections, that he might gain their attention (v. 1-6).

II. His discourse is designed for the convincing of their judgments and the rectifying of their mistakes. He owns that God does sometimes hang up a wicked man as it were in chains, *in terrorem* — as a terror to others, by some visible remarkable judgment in this life, but denies that he always does so; nay, he maintains that commonly he does otherwise, suffering even the worst of sinners to live all their days in prosperity and to go out of the world without any visible mark of his wrath upon them.

- 1.** He describes the great prosperity of wicked people (v. 7-13).
- 2.** He shows their great impiety, in which they are hardened by their prosperity (v. 14-16).
- 3.** He foretels their ruin at length, but after a long reprieve (v. 17-21).
- 4.** He observes a very great variety in the ways of God's providence towards men, even towards bad men (v. 22-26).
- 5.** He overthrows the ground of their severe censures of him, by showing that the destruction of the wicked is reserved for the other world, and that they often escape to the last in this world (v. 27, to the end), and in this Job was clearly in the right.

~~820~~ JOB 21:1-6

THE REPLY OF JOB TO ZOPHAR

Job here recommends himself, both his case and his discourse, both what he suffered and what he said, to the compassionate consideration of his friends.

1. That which he entreats of them is very fair, that they would suffer him to speak (v. 3) and not break in upon him, as Zophar had done, in the midst of his discourse. Losers, of all men, may have leave to speak; and, if those that are accused and censured are not allowed to speak for themselves, they are wronged without remedy, and have no way to come at their right. He entreats that they would hear diligently his speech (v. 2) as those that were willing to understand him, and, if they were under a mistake, to have it rectified; and that they would *mark him* (v. 5), for we may as well not hear as not heed and observe what we hear.

2. That which he urges for this is very reasonable.

(1.) They came to comfort him. “No,” says he, “*let this be your consolations* (v. 2); if you have no other comforts to administer to me, yet deny me not this; be so kind, so just, as to give me a patient hearing, and that shall pass for your consolations of me.” Nay, they could not know how to comfort him if they would not give him leave to open his case and tell his own story. Or, “It will be a consolation to yourselves, in reflection, to have dealt tenderly with your afflicted friend, and not harshly.”

(2.) He would hear them speak when it came to their turn. “After I have spoken you may go on with what you have to say, and I will not hinder you, no, though you go on to mock me.” Those that engage in controversy must reckon upon having hard words given them, and resolve to bear reproach patiently; for, generally, those that mock will mock on, whatever is said to them.

(3.) He hoped to convince them. “If you will but give me a fair hearing, mock on if you can, but I believe I shall say that which will change your note and make you pity me rather than mock me.”

(4.) They were not his judges (v. 4): “*Is my complaint to man?* No, if it were I see it would be to little purpose to complain. But my complaint is to

God, and to him do I appeal. Let him be Judge between you and me. Before him we stand upon even terms, and therefore I have the privilege of being heard as well as you. If my complaint were to men, my spirit would be troubled, for they would not regard me, nor rightly understand me; but my complaint is to God, who will suffer me to speak, though you will not." It would be sad if God should deal as unkindly with us as our friends sometimes do.

(5.) There was that in his case which was very surprising and astonishing, and therefore both needed and deserved their most serious consideration. It was not a common case, but a very extraordinary one.

[1.] He himself was amazed at it, at the troubles God had laid upon him and the censures of his friends concerning him (v. 6): "*When I remember that terrible day in which I was on a sudden stripped of all my comforts, that day in which I was stricken with sore boils, — when I remember all the hard speeches with which you have grieved me, — I confess I am afraid, and trembling takes hold of my flesh, especially when I compare this with the prosperous condition of many wicked people, and the applauses of their neighbours, with which they pass through the world.*" Note, The providences of God, in the government of the world, are sometimes very astonishing even to wise and good men, and bring them to their wits' end.

[2.] He would have them wonder at it (v. 5): "*Mark me, and be astonished.* Instead of expounding my troubles, you should awfully adore the unsearchable mysteries of Providence in afflicting one thus of whom you know no evil; you should therefore *lay your hand upon your mouth*, silently wait the issue, and judge nothing before the time. *God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters.* When we cannot account for what he does, in suffering the wicked to prosper and the godly to be afflicted, nor fathom the depth of those proceedings, it becomes us to sit down and admire them. *Upright men shall be astonished at this,* ^{<K178>} Job 17:8. Be you so."

<217> JOB 21:7-16

PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED

All Job's three friends, in their last discourses, had been very copious in describing the miserable condition of a wicked man in this world. "It is true," says Job, "remarkable judgments are sometimes brought upon notorious sinners, but not always; for we have many instances of the great and long prosperity of those that are openly and avowedly wicked; though they are hardened in their wickedness by their prosperity, yet they are still suffered to prosper."

I. He here describes their prosperity in the height, and breadth, and length of it. "If this be true, as you say, pray tell me *wherefore do the wicked live?*" v. 7.

1. The matter of fact is taken for granted, for we see instances of it every day.

(1.) They live, and are not suddenly cut off by the strokes of divine vengeance. Those yet speak who have set their mouths against the heavens. Those yet act who have stretched out their hands against God. Not only they live (that is, they are reprieved), but they *live in prosperity*, <216> 1 Samuel 25:6. Nay,

(2.) They *become old*; they have the honour, satisfaction, and advantage of living long, long enough to raise their families and estates. We read of a *sinner a hundred years old*, <215> Isaiah 65:20. But this is not all.

(3.) They are *mighty in power*, are preferred to places of authority and trust, and not only make a great figure, but bear a great sway. *Vivit imo, et in senatum venit* — *He not only lives, but appears in the senate*. Now wherefore is it so? Note, It is worth while to enquire into the reasons of the outward prosperity of wicked people. It is not because God has forsaken the earth, because he does not see, or does not hate, or cannot punish their wickedness; but it is because the measure of their iniquities is not full. This is the day of God's patience, and, in some way or other, he makes use of them and their prosperity to serve his own counsels, while it ripens them for ruin; but the chief reason is because he will make it to

appear there is another world which is the world of retribution, and not this.

2. The prosperity of the wicked is here described to be,

(1.) Complete and consummate.

[1.] They are multiplied, and their family is built up, and they have the satisfaction of seeing it (v. 8): *Their seed is established in their sight*. This is put first, as that which gives both a pleasant enjoyment and a pleasing prospect.

[2.] They are easy and quiet, v. 9. Whereas Zophar had spoken of their continual frights and terrors, Job says, *Their houses are safe* both from danger and from the fear of it (v. 9), and so far are they from the killing wounds of God's sword or arrows that they do not feel the smart of so much as *the rod of God upon them*.

[3.] They are rich and thrive in their estates. Of this he gives only one instance, v. 10. Their cattle increase, and they meet with no disappointment in them; not so much as a cow casts her calf, and then their much must needs grow more. This is promised, ^{<0236>}Exodus 23:26; ^{<0714>}Deuteronomy 7:14.

[4.] They are merry and live a jovial life (v. 11, 12): *They send forth their little ones* abroad among their neighbours, *like a flock*, in great numbers, to sport themselves. They have their balls and music-meetings, at which *their children dance*; and dancing is fittest for children, who know not better how to spend their time and whose innocency guards them against the mischiefs that commonly attend it. Though the parents are not so very youthful and frolicsome as to dance themselves, yet *they take the timbrel and harp*; they pipe, and their children dance after their pipe, and they know no grief to put their instruments out of tune or to withhold their hearts from any joy. Some observe that this is an instance of their vanity, as well as of their prosperity. Here is none of that care taken of their children which Abraham took of his, to *teach them the way of the Lord*, ^{<0189>}Genesis 18:19. Their children do not pray, or say their catechism, but dance, and sing, and *rejoice at the sound of the organ*. Sensual pleasures are all the delights of carnal people, and as men are themselves so they breed their children.

(2.) Continuing and constant (v. 13): *They spend their days*, all their days, *in wealth*, and never know what it is to want — in mirth, and never know what sadness means; and at last, without any previous alarms to frighten them, without any anguish or agony, *in a moment they go down to the grave*, and there are no bands in their death. If there were not another life after this, it were most desirable to die by the quickest shortest strokes of death. Since we must *go down to the grave*, if that were the furthest of our journey, we should wish to *go down in a moment*, to swallow the bitter pill, and not chew it.

II. He shows how they abuse their prosperity and are confirmed and hardened by it in their impiety, v. 14, 15.

1. Their gold and silver serve to steel them, to make them more insolent, and more impudent, in their wickedness. Now he mentions this either,

(1.) To increase the difficulty. It is strange that any wicked people should prosper thus, but especially that those should prosper who have arrived at such a pitch of wickedness as openly to bid defiance to God himself, and tell him to his face that they care not for him; nay, and that their prosperity should be continued, though they bear up themselves upon that, in their opposition to God; with that weapon they fight against him, and yet are not disarmed. Or,

(2.) To lessen the difficulty. God suffers them to prosper; but let us not wonder at it, for *the prosperity of fools destroys them*, by hardening them in sin, ⁴⁰¹³Proverbs 1:32; ⁴⁰¹⁷Psalms 73:7-9.

2. See how light these prospering sinners make of God and religion, as if because they have so much of this world they had no need to look after another.

(1.) See how ill affected they are to God and religion; they abandon them, and cast off the thoughts of them.

[1.] They dread the presence of God; they *say unto him*, “*Depart from us*”; let us never be troubled with the apprehension of our being under God's eye nor be restrained by the fear of him.” Or they bid him depart as one they do not need, nor have any occasion to make use of. The world is the portion they have chosen, and take up with, and think themselves happy in; while they have that they can live without God. Justly will God say

Depart (^{425b}Matthew 25:41) to those who have bidden him depart; and justly does he now take them at their word.

[2.] They dread the knowledge of God, and of his will, and of their duty to him: *We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* Those that are resolved not to walk in God's ways desire not to know them, because their knowledge will be a continual reproach to their disobedience, (^{488b}John 3:19).

(2.) See how they argue against God and religion (v. 15): *What is the Almighty?* Strange that ever creatures should speak so insolently, that ever reasonable creatures should speak so absurdly and unreasonably. The two great bonds by which we are drawn and held to religion are those of duty and interest; now they here endeavour to break both these bonds asunder.

[1.] They will not believe it is their duty to be religious: *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* Like Pharaoh (^{487b}Exodus 5:2), *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* Observe, *First*, How slightly they speak of God: *What is the Almighty?* As if he were a mere name, a mere cipher, or one they have nothing to do with and that has nothing to do with them. *Secondly*, How hardly they speak of religion. They call it a *service*, and mean a hard service. Is it not enough, they think, to keep up a fair correspondence with the Almighty, but they must serve him, which they look upon as a task and drudgery. *Thirdly*, How highly they speak of themselves: *“That we should serve him; we who are rich and mighty in power, shall we be subject and accountable to him? No, we are lords,”* (^{402b}Jeremiah 2:31).

[2.] They will not believe it is their interest to be religious: *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* All the world are for what they can get, and *therefore* wisdom's merchandise is neglected, because they think there is nothing to be got by it. *It is vain to serve God,* (^{483b}Malachi 3:13, 14). Praying will not pay debts nor portion children; nay, perhaps serious godliness may hinder a man's preferment and expose him to losses; and what then? Is nothing to be called gain but the wealth and honour of this world? If we obtain the favour of God, and spiritual and eternal blessings, we have no reason to complain of losing by our religion. But, if we have not profit by prayer, it is our own fault (^{428b}Isaiah 58:3, 4), it is because we ask amiss, (^{404b}James 4:3). Religion itself is not a vain thing; if it be so to us, we may thank ourselves for resting in the outside of it, (^{402b}James 1:26).

III. He shows their folly herein, and utterly disclaims all concurrence with them (v. 19): *Lo, their good is not in their hand*, that is, they did not get it without God, and therefore they are very ungrateful to slight him thus. It was *not their might, nor the power of their hand*, that got them this wealth, and therefore they ought to remember God who gave it them. Nor can they keep it without God, and therefore they are very unwise to lose their interest in him and bid him to depart from them. Some give this sense of it: “Their good is in their barns and their bags, hoarded up there; it is not in their hand, to do good to others with it; and then what good does it do them?” “Therefore,” says Job, “*the counsel of the wicked is far from me*. Far be it from me that I should be of their mind, say as they say, do as they do, and take my measures from them. Their *posterity approve their sayings*, though *their way be their folly* (^{<3913>}Psalm 49:13); but I know better things than to walk in their counsel.”

<3217> JOB 21:17-26

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Job had largely described the prosperity of wicked people; now, in these verses,

I. He opposes this to what his friends had maintained concerning their certain ruin in this life. “Tell me *how often* do you see *the candle of the wicked put out*? Do you not as often see it burnt down to the socket, until it goes out of itself? v. 17. How often do you see *their destruction come upon them*, or *God distributing sorrows in his anger* among them? Do you not as often see their mirth and prosperity continuing to the last?” Perhaps there are as many instances of notorious sinners ending their days in pomp as ending them in misery, which observation is sufficient to invalidate their arguments against Job and to show that no certain judgment can be made of men's character by their outward condition.

II. He reconciles this to the holiness and justice of God. Though wicked people prosper thus all their days, yet we are not therefore to think that God will let their wickedness always go unpunished. No,

1. Even while they prosper thus they are *as stubble and chaff before the stormy wind*, v. 18. They are light and worthless, and of no account either

with God or with wise and good men. They are fitted to destruction, and continually lie exposed to it, and in the height of their pomp and power there is but a step between them and ruin.

2. Though they spend all their days in wealth God is *laying up their iniquity for their children* (v. 19), and he will visit it upon their posterity when they are gone. The oppressor lays up his goods for his children, to make them gentlemen, but God lays up his iniquity for them, to make them beggars. He keeps an exact account of the fathers' sins, *seals them up among his treasures* (⁴⁵²⁴Deuteronomy 32:34), and will justly punish the children, while the riches, to which the curse cleaves, are found as assets in their hands.

3. Though they prosper in this world, yet they shall be reckoned with in another world. God *rewards him* according to his deeds at last (v. 19), though the sentence passed against his evil works be not executed speedily. Perhaps he may not now be made to fear the wrath to come, but he may flatter himself with hopes that he shall have peace though he go on; but he shall be made to feel it in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. He shall know it (v. 20): *His eyes shall see his destruction* which he would not be persuaded to believe. *They will not see, but they shall see,* ²³⁴¹Isaiah 26:11. The eyes that have been wilfully shut against the grace of God shall be opened to see his destruction. *He shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty;* that shall be the portion of his cup. Compare ⁴¹¹⁶Psalms 11:6 with ⁴⁶⁴⁰Revelation 14:10. The misery of damned sinners is here set forth in a few words, but very terrible ones. They lie under the wrath of an Almighty God, who, in their destruction, both shows his wrath and makes known his power; and, if this will be his condition in the other world, what good will his prosperity in this world do him? *What pleasure has he in his house after him?* v. 21. Our Saviour has let us know how little pleasure the rich man in hell had in his house after him, when the remembrance of the good things he had received in his life-time would not cool his tongue, but added much to his misery, as did also the sorrow he was in lest his five brethren, whom he left in his house after him, should follow him to that place of torment, ⁴⁰⁶⁵Luke 16:25-28. So little will the gain of the world profit him that has lost his soul.

III. He resolves this difference which Providence makes between one wicked man and another into the wisdom and sovereignty of God (v. 22): *Shall any pretend to teach God knowledge?* Dare we arraign God's

proceedings or blame his conduct? Shall we take upon us to tell God how he should govern the world, what sinner he should spare and whom he should punish? He has both authority and ability to judge those that are high. Angels in heaven, princes and magistrates on earth, are accountable to God, and must receive their doom from him. He manages them, and makes what use he pleases of them. Shall he then be accountable to us, or receive advice from us? He is the Judge of all the earth, and therefore no doubt he will do right (^{◀1825}Genesis 18:25, ^{◀816}Romans 3:6), and those proceedings of his providence which seem to contradict one another he can make, not only mutually to agree, but jointly to serve his own purposes. The little difference there is between one wicked man's dying so in pain and misery, when both will at last meet in hell, he illustrates by the little difference there is between one man's dying suddenly and another's dying slowly, when they will both meet shortly in the grave. So vast is the disproportion between time and eternity that, if hell be the lot of every sinner at last, it makes little difference if one goes singing thither and another sighing. See,

1. How various the circumstances of people's dying are. There is one way into the world, we say, but many out; yet, as some are born by quick and easy labour, others by that which is hard and lingering, so dying is to some much more terrible than to others; and, since the death of the body is the birth of the soul into another world, death-bed agonies may not unfitly be compared to child-bed throes. Observe the difference.

(1.) One dies suddenly, *in his full strength*, not weakened by age or sickness (v. 23), *being wholly at ease and quiet*, under no apprehension at all of the approach of death, nor in any fear of it; but, on the contrary, because *his breasts are full of milk and his bones moistened with marrow* (v. 24), that is, he is healthful and vigorous, and of a good constitution (like a milch cow that is fat and in good liking), he counts upon nothing but to live many years in mirth and pleasure. Thus fair does he bid for life, and yet he is cut off in a moment by the stroke of death. Note, It is a common thing for persons to be taken away by death when they are in their full strength, in the highest degree of health, when they least expect death, and think themselves best armed against it, and are ready not only to set death at a distance, but to set it at defiance. Let us therefore never be secure; for we have known many well and dead in the same week, the same day, the same hour, nay, perhaps, the same minute. Let us therefore be always ready.

(2.) Another dies slowly, and with a great deal of previous pain and misery (v. 25), *in the betterness of his soul*, such as poor Job was himself now in, *and never eats with pleasure*, has no appetite to his food nor any relish of it, through sickness, or age, or sorrow of mind. What great reason have those to be thankful that are in health and always eat with pleasure! And what little reason have those to complain who sometimes do not eat thus, when they hear of many that never do!

2. How undiscernible this difference is in the grave. As rich and poor, so healthful and unhealthful, meet there (v. 26): *They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them*, and feed sweetly on them. Thus, if one wicked man die in a palace and another in a dungeon, they will meet in the congregation of the dead and damned, and the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched, will be the same to them, which makes those differences inconsiderable and not worth perplexing ourselves about.

~~1077~~ JOB 21:27-34

PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED

In these verses,

I. Job opposes the opinion of his friends, which he saw they still adhered to, that the wicked are sure to fall into such visible and remarkable ruin as Job had now fallen into, and none but the wicked, upon which principle they condemned Job as a wicked man. “*I know your thoughts*,” says Job (v. 27); “I know you will not agree with me; for your judgments are tinctured and biassed by your piques and prejudices against me, *and the devices which you wrongfully imagine against my comfort and honour*: and how can such men be convinced?” Job's friends were ready to say, in answer to his discourse concerning the prosperity of the wicked, “*Where is the house of the prince?* v. 28. Where is Job's house, or the house of his eldest son, in which his children were feasting? Enquire into the circumstances of Job's house and family, and then ask, *Where are the dwelling-places of the wicked?* and compare them together, and you will soon see that Job's house is in the same predicament with the houses of tyrants and oppressors, and may therefore conclude that doubtless he was such a one.”

II. He lays down his own judgment to the contrary, and, for proof of it, appeals to the sentiments and observations of all mankind. So confident is he that he is in the right that he is willing to refer the cause to the next man that comes by (v. 29): “*Have you not asked those that go by the way — any indifferent person, any that will answer you? I say not, as Eliphaz* (^{<381E>}Job 5:1), *to which of the saints, but to which of the children of men will you turn? Turn to which you will, and you will find them all of my mind, that the punishment of sinners is designed more for the other world than for this, according to the prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam,* ^{<381H>}Jude 1:14. *Do you not know the tokens of this truth, which all that have made any observations upon the providences of God concerning mankind in this world can furnish you with?”* Now,

1. What is it that Job here asserts? Two things: —

(1.) That impenitent sinners will certainly be punished in the other world, and, usually, their punishment is put off until then.

(2.) That therefore we are not to think it strange if they prosper greatly in this world and fall under no visible token of God's wrath. *Therefore* they are spared now, because they are to be punished then; *therefore* the *workers of iniquity flourish, that they may be destroyed for ever,* ^{<381E>}Psalm 92:7. The sinner is here supposed,

[1.] To live in a great deal of power, so as to be not only *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living* (^{<382Z>}Ezekiel 32:27), but the terror of the wise and good too, whom he keeps in such awe that none dares *declare his way to his face*, v. 31. None will take the liberty to reprove him, to tell him of the wickedness of his way, and what will be in the end thereof; so that he sins securely, and is not made to know either shame or fear. *The prosperity of fools destroys them*, by setting them (in their own conceit) above reproofs, by which they might be brought to that repentance which alone will prevent their ruin. Those are marked for destruction that are let alone in sin, ^{<380I7>}Hosea 4:17. And, if none dares declare his way to his face, much less dare any repay him what he has done and make him refund what he has obtained by injustice. He is one of those great flies which break through the cobwebs of the law, that hold only the little ones. This emboldens sinners in their sinful ways that they can brow-beat justice and make it afraid to meddle with them. But there is a day coming when those shall be told of their faults who now would not bear to hear of them, those

shall have their sins set in order before them, and their way declared to their face, to their everlasting confusion, who would not have it done here, to their conviction, and those who would not repay the wrongs they had done shall have them repaid to them.

[2.] To die, and be buried in a great deal of pomp and magnificence, v. 32, 33. There is no remedy; he must die; that is the lot of all men; but every thing you can think of shall be done to take off the reproach of death.

First, He shall have a splendid funeral — a poor thing for any man to be proud of the prospect of; yet with some it passes for a mighty thing. Well, *he shall be brought to the grave* in state, surrounded with all the honours of the heralds' office and all the respect his friends can then pay to his remains. *The rich man died, and was buried*, but no mention is made of the poor man's burial, ~~and~~ Luke 16:22. *Secondly*, He shall have a stately monument erected over him. *He shall remain in the tomb* with a *Hic jacet* — *Here lies*, over him, and a large encomium. Perhaps it is meant of the embalming of his body to preserve it, which was a piece of honour anciently done by the Egyptians to their great men. He *shall watch in the tomb* (so the word is), shall abide solitary and quiet there, as a watchman in his tower. *Thirdly*, *The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him*; there shall be as much done as can be with rich odours to take off the noisomeness of the grave, as by lamps to set aside the darkness of it, which perhaps was referred to in the foregoing phrase of *watching in the tomb*. But it is all a jest; what is the light, or what the perfume, to a man that is dead? *Fourthly*, It shall be alleged, for the lessening of the disgrace of death, that it is the common lot: He has only yielded to fate, *and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him*. Note, Death is the way of all the earth: when we are to cross that darksome valley we must consider, 1. That there are innumerable before us; it is a tracked road, which may help to take off the terror of it. To die is *ire ad plures* — *to go to the great majority*.

2. That every man shall draw after us. As there is a plain track before, so there is a long train behind; we are neither the first nor the last that pass through that dark entry. Every one must go in his own order, the order appointed of God.

2. From all this Job infers the impertinency of their discourses, v. 34.

(1.) Their foundation is rotten, and they went upon a wrong hypothesis: *“In your answers there remains falsehood; what you have said stands not*

only unproved but disproved, and lies under such an imputation of falsehood as you cannot clear it from.”

(2.) Their building was therefore weak and tottering: “*You comfort me in vain.* All you have said gives me no relief; you tell me that I shall prosper again if I turn to God, but you go upon this presumption, that piety shall certainly be crowned with prosperity, which is false; and therefore how can your inference from it yield me any comfort?” Note, Where there is not truth there is little comfort to be expected.