

CHAPTER 17

In this chapter,

I. Job reflects upon the harsh censures which his friends had passed upon him, and looking upon himself as a dying man (v. 1), he appeals to God, and begs of him speedily to appear for him, and right him, because they had wronged him, and he knew not how to right himself (v. 2-7). But he hopes that, though it should be a surprise, it will be no stumbling-block, to good people, to see him thus abused (v. 8, 9).

II. He reflects upon the vain hopes they had fed him with, that he should yet see good days, showing that his days were just at an end, and with his body all his hopes would be buried in the dust (v. 10-16). His friends becoming strange to him, which greatly grieved him, he makes death and the grave familiar to him, which yielded him some comfort.

⌘ JOB 17:1-9

DEPLORABLE CONDITION OF JOB

Job's discourse is here somewhat broken and interrupted, and he passes suddenly from one thing to another, as is usual with men in trouble; but we may reduce what is here said to three heads: —

I. The deplorable condition which poor Job was now in, which he describes, to aggravate the great unkindness of his friends to him and to justify his own complaints. Let us see what his case was.

1. He was a dying man, v. 1. He had said (~~⌘~~ Job 16:22), “*When a few years have come, I shall go that long journey.*” But here he corrects himself. “Why do I talk of years to come? Alas! I am just setting out on that journey, am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. *My breath is already corrupt*, or broken off; my spirits are spent; I am a gone man.” It is good for every one of us thus to look upon ourselves as dying, and especially to think of it when we are sick. We are dying, that is,

(1.) Our life is going; for the breath of life is going. It is continually *going forth; it is in our nostrils* (^{<2122>}Isaiah 2:22), the door at which it entered (^{<007>}Genesis 2:7); there it is upon the threshold, ready to depart. Perhaps Job's distemper obstructed his breathing, and short breath will, after a while, be no breath. Let *the Anointed of the Lord be the breath of our nostrils*, and let us get spiritual life breathed into us, and that breath will never be corrupted.

(2.) Our time is ending: *My days are extinct, are put out*, as a candle which, from the first lighting, is continually wasting and burning down, and will by degrees burn out of itself, but may by a thousand accidents be extinguished. Such is life. It concerns us therefore carefully to redeem the days of time, and to spend them in getting ready for the days of eternity, which will never be extinct.

(3.) We are expected in our long home: *The graves are ready for me*. But would not one grave serve? Yes, but he speaks of the *sepulchres of his fathers*, to which he must be gathered: “The graves where they are laid are ready for me also,” graves in consort, the congregation of the dead. Wherever we go there is but a step between us and the grave. Whatever is unready, that is ready; it is a bed soon made. If the graves be ready for us, it concerns us to be ready for the graves. *The graves for me* (so it runs), denoting not only his expectation of death, but his desire of it. “I have done with the world, and have nothing now to wish for but a grave.”

2. He was a despised man (v. 6): “*He*” (that is, Eliphaz, so some, or rather God, whom he all along acknowledges to be the author of his calamities) “*has made me a byword of the people*, the talk of the country, a laughing-stock to many, a gazing-stock to all; and *aforetime* (or to men's faces, publicly) *I was as a tabret*, that whoever chose might play upon.” They made ballads of him; his name became a proverb; it is so still, *As poor as Job*. “*He has now made me a byword*,” a reproach of men, whereas, *aforetime*, in my prosperity, I was as a tabret, *deliciae humani generis* — *the darling of the human race*, whom they were all pleased with. It is common for those who were honoured in their wealth to be despised in their poverty.

3. He was a man of sorrows, v. 7. He wept so much that he had almost lost his sight: *My eye is dim by reason of sorrow*, ^{<896>}Job 16:16. The sorrow of the world thus works darkness and death. He grieved so much that he had fretted all the flesh away and become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin

and bones: “*All my members are as a shadow. I have become so poor and thin that I am not to be called a man, but the shadow of a man.*”

II. The ill use which his friends made of his miseries. They trampled upon him, and insulted over him, and condemned him as a hypocrite, because he was thus grievously afflicted. Hard usage! Now observe,

1. How Job describes it, and what construction he puts upon their discourses with him. He looks upon himself as basely abused by them.

(1.) They abused him with their foul censures, condemning him as a bad man, justly reduced thus and exposed to contempt, v. 2. “They are *mockers*, who deride my calamities, and insult over me, because I am thus brought low. They are *so with me*, abusing me to my face, pretending friendship in their visit, but intending mischief. I cannot get clear of them; they are continually tearing me, and they will not be wrought upon, either by reason or pity, to let fall the prosecution.”

(2.) They abused him too with their fair promises, for in them they did but banter him. He reckons them (v. 5) among those that speak flattery to their friends. They all came to mourn with him. Eliphaz began with a commendation of him, ^{<808>}Job 4:3. They had all promised him that he would be happy if he would take their advice. Now all this he looked upon as flattery, and as designed to vex him so much the more. All this he calls their *provocation*, v. 2. They did what they could to provoke him and then condemned him for his resentment of it; but he thinks himself excusable when his eye *continued* thus *in their provocation*: it never ceased, and he never could look off it. Note, The unkindness of those that trample upon their friends in affliction, that banter and abuse them then, is enough to try, if not to tire, the patience even of Job himself.

2. How he condemns it.

(1.) It was a sign that *God had hidden their heart from understanding* (v. 4), and that in this matter they were infatuated, and their wonted wisdom had departed from them. Wisdom is a gift of God, which he grants to some and withholds from others, grants at some times and withholds at other times. Those that are void of compassion are so far void of understanding. Where there is not the tenderness of a man one may question whether there be the understanding of a man.

(2.) It would be a lasting reproach and diminution to them: *Therefore shalt thou not exalt them.* Those are certainly kept back from honour whose hearts are hidden from understanding. When God infatuates men he will abase them. Surely those who discover so little acquaintance with the methods of Providence shall not have the honour of deciding this controversy! That is reserved for a man of better sense and better temper, such a one as Elihu afterwards appeared to be.

(3.) It would entail a curse upon their families. He that thus violates the sacred laws of friendship forfeits the benefit of it, not only for himself, but for his posterity: "*Even the eyes of his children shall fail,* and, when they look for succour and comfort from their own and their father's friends, they shall look in vain as I have done, and be as much disappointed as I am in you." Note, Those that wrong their neighbours may thereby, in the end, wrong their own children more than they are aware of.

3. How he appeals from them to God (v. 3): *Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee,* that is, "Let me be assured that God will take the hearing and determining of the cause into his own hands, and I desire no more. Let some one engage for God to bring on this matter." Thus those whose hearts condemn them not have confidence towards God, and can with humble and believing boldness beg of him to search and try them. Some make Job here to glance at the mediation of Christ, for he speaks of a surety with God, without whom he durst not appear before God, nor try his cause at his bar; for, though his friends' accusations of him were utterly false, yet he could not justify himself before God but in a mediator. Our English annotations give this reading of the verse: "*Appoint, I pray thee, my surety with thee,* namely, Christ who is with thee in heaven, and has undertaken to be my surety let him plead my cause, and stand up for me; and *who is he then that will strike upon my hand?*" that is, "Who dares then contend with me? Who shall lay any thing to my charge if Christ be an advocate for me?" ^{<8182>}Romans 8:32, 33. Christ is the surety of the better testament (^{<8172>}Hebrews 7:22), a surety of God's appointing; and, if he undertake for us, we need not fear what can be done against us.

III. The good use which the righteous should make of Job's afflictions from God, from his enemies, and from his friends, v. 8, 9. Observe here,

1. How the saints are described.

(1.) They are *upright men*, honest and sincere, and that act from a steady principle, with a single eye. This was Job's own character (^{<K00>}Job 1:1), and probably he speaks of such upright men especially as had been his intimates and associates.

(2.) They are *the innocent*, not perfectly so, but innocence is what they aim at and press towards. Sincerity is evangelical innocency, and those that are upright are said to be *innocent from the great transgression*, ^{<B06>}Psalm 19:13.

(3.) They are *the righteous*, who walk in the way of righteousness.

(4.) They have *clean hands*, kept clean from the gross pollutions of sin, and, when spotted with infirmities, *washed with innocency*, ^{<B06>}Psalm 26:6.

2. How they should be affected with the account of Job's troubles. Great enquiry, no doubt, would be made concerning him, and every one would speak of him and his case; and what use will good people make of it?

(1.) It will amaze them: *Upright men shall be astonished at this*; they will wonder to hear that so good a man as Job should be so grievously afflicted in body, name, and estate, that God should lay his hand so heavily upon him, and that his friends, who ought to have comforted him, should add to his grief, that such a remarkable saint should be such a remarkable sufferer, and so useful a man laid aside in the midst of his usefulness; what shall we say to these things? Upright men, though satisfied in general that God is wise and holy in all he does, yet cannot but be astonished at such dispensations of Providence, paradoxes which will not be unfolded till the mystery of God shall be finished.

(2.) It will animate them. Instead of being deterred from and discouraged in the service of God, by the hard usage which this faithful servant of God met with, they shall be so much the more emboldened to proceed and persevere in it. That which was St. Paul's care (^{<B03>}1 Thessalonians 3:3) was Job's, that no good man should be moved, either from his holiness or his comfort, by these afflictions, that none should, for the sake hereof, think the worse of the ways or work of God. And that which was St. Paul's comfort was his too, that *the brethren in the Lord would wax confident by his bonds*, ^{<B04>}Philippians 1:14. They would hereby be animated,

[1.] To oppose sin and to confront the corrupt and pernicious inferences which evil men would draw from Job's sufferings, as that God has

forsaken the earth, that it is in vain to serve him, and the like: *The innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite*, will not bear to hear this (~~4012~~ Revelation 2:2), but will withstand him to his face, will stir up himself to search into the meaning of such providences and study these hard chapters, that he may read them readily, will stir up himself to maintain religion's just but injured cause against all its opposers. Note, The boldness of the attacks which profane people make upon religion should sharpen the courage and resolution of its friends and advocates. It is time to stir when proclamation is made in the gate of the camp, *Who is on the Lord's side?* When vice is daring it is no time for virtue, through fear, to hide itself.

[2.] To persevere in religion. *The righteous*, instead of drawing back, or so much as starting back, at this frightful spectacle, or standing still to deliberate whether he should proceed or no (allude to ~~4023~~ 2 Samuel 2:23), *shall* with so much the more constancy and resolution *hold on his way* and press forward. "Though in me he foresees that bonds and afflictions abide him, *yet none of these things shall move him*," ~~4024~~ Acts 20:24. Those who keep their eye upon heaven as their end will keep their feet in the paths of religion as their way, whatever difficulties and discouragements they meet with in it

[3.] In order thereunto to grow in grace. He will not only hold on his way notwithstanding, but will grow *stronger and stronger*. By the sight of other good men's trials, and the experience of his own, he will be made more vigorous and lively in his duty, more warm and affectionate, more resolute and undaunted; the worse others are the better he will be; that which dismays others emboldens him. The blustering wind makes the traveller gather his cloak the closer about him and gird it the faster. Those that are truly wise and good will be continually growing wiser and better. Proficiency in religion is a good sign of sincerity in it.

~~4870~~ JOB 17:10-16

JOB REPROVES HIS THREE FRIENDS

Job's friends had pretended to comfort him with the hopes of his return to a prosperous estate again; now he here shows,

I. That it was their folly to talk so (v. 10): “*Return, and come now*, be convinced that you are in an error, and let me persuade you to be of my mind; *for I cannot find one wise man among you*, that knows how to explain the difficulties of God's providence or how to apply the consolations of his promises.” Those do not go wisely about the work of comforting the afflicted who fetch their comforts from the possibility of their recovery and enlargement in this world; though that is not to be despaired of, it is at the best uncertain; and if it should fail, as perhaps it may, the comfort built upon it will fail too. It is therefore our wisdom to comfort ourselves, and others, in distress, with that which will not fail, the promise of God, his love and grace, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life.

II. That it would be much more his folly to heed them; for,

1. All his measures were already broken and he was full of confusion, v. 11, 12. He owns he had, in his prosperity, often pleased himself both with projects of what he should do and prospects of what he should enjoy; but now he looked upon his days as past, or drawing towards a period; all those purposes were broken off and those expectations dashed. He had had thoughts about enlarging his border, increasing his stock, and settling his children, and many pious thoughts, it is likely, of promoting religion in his country, redressing grievances, reforming the profane, relieving the poor, and raising funds perhaps for charitable uses; but he concluded that all these thoughts of his heart were now at an end, and that he should never have the satisfaction of seeing his designs effected. Note, The period of our days will be the period of all our contrivances and hopes for this world; but, if with full purpose of heart we cleave to the Lord, death will not break off that purpose. Job, being thus put upon new counsels, was under a constant uneasiness (v. 12): *The thoughts of his heart being broken, they changed the night into day and shortened the light*. Some, in their vanity and riot, turn night into day and day into night; but Job did so through trouble and anguish of spirit, which were a hindrance,

(1.) To the repose of the night, keeping his eyes waking, so that the night was as wearisome to him as the day, and the tossings of the night tired him as much as the toils of the day.

(2.) To the entertainments of the day. “The light of the morning is welcome, but, by reason of this inward darkness, the comfort of it is soon

gone, and the day is to me as dismal as the black and dark night,”

^{<K&K>}Deuteronomy 28:67. See what reason we have to be thankful for the health and ease which enable us to welcome both the shadows of the evening and the light of the morning.

2. All his expectations from this world would very shortly be buried in the grave with him; so that it was a jest for him to think of such mighty things as they had flattered him with the hopes of, ^{<K&K>}Job 5:19; 8:21; 11:17. “Alas! you do but make a fool of me.”

(1.) He saw himself just dropping into the grave. A convenient house, an easy bed, and agreeable relations, are some of those things in which we take satisfaction in this world: Job expected not any of these above ground; all he felt, and all he had in view, was displeasing and disagreeable, but under ground he expected them.

[1.] He counted upon no house but the grave (v. 13): “If I wait, if there be any place where I shall ever be easy again, it must be in the grave. I should deceive myself if I should count upon any out-let from my trouble but what death will give me. Nothing is so sure as that.” Note, In all our prosperity it is good to keep death in prospect. Whatever we expect, let us be sure to expect that; for that may prevent other things which we expect, but nothing will prevent that. But see how he endeavours not only to reconcile himself to the grave, but to recommend it to himself: “It is my house.” The grave is a house; to the wicked it is a prison-house (^{<K&K>}Job 24:19, 20); to the godly it is *Bethabara*, a *passage-house* in their way home. “It is my house, mine by descent, I am born to it; it is my father's house. It is mine by purchase. I have made myself obnoxious to it.” We must everyone of us shortly remove to this house, and it is our wisdom to provide accordingly; let us think of removing, and send before to our long home.

[2.] He counted upon no quiet bed but in the darkness: “There,” says he, “*I have made my bed*. It is made, for it is ready, and I am just going to it.” The grave is a bed, for we shall rest in it in the evening of our day on earth, and rise from it in the morning of our everlasting day, ^{<S&S>}Isaiah 57:2. Let this make good people willing to die; it is but going to bed; they are weary and sleepy, and it is time that they were in their beds. Why should they not go willingly, when their father calls? “Nay, *I have made my bed*, by preparation for it, have endeavoured to make it easy, by

keeping conscience pure, by seeing Christ lying in this bed, and so turning it into a bed of spices, and by looking beyond it to the resurrection.”

[3.] He counted upon no agreeable relations but what he had in the grave (v. 14): *I have cried to corruption* (that is, to the grave, where the body will corrupt), *Thou art my father* (for our bodies were formed out of the earth), and *to the worms* there, *You are my mother and my sister*, to whom I am allied (for *man is a worm*) and with whom I must be conversant, for the *worms shall cover us*, ^{<S275>}Job 21:26. Job complained that his kindred were estranged from him (^{<S283>}Job 19:13, 14); therefore here he claims acquaintance with other relations that would cleave to him when those disowned him. Note, *First*, We are all of us near akin to corruption and the worms. *Secondly*, It is therefore good to make ourselves familiar with them, by conversing much with them in our thoughts and meditations, which would very much help us above the inordinate love of life and fear of death.

(2.) He saw all his hopes from this world dropping into the grave with him (v. 15, 16): “Seeing I must shortly leave the world, *where is now my hope?* How can I expect to prosper who do not expect to live?” He is not hopeless, but his hope is not where they would have it be. *If in this life only* he had *hope*, he was *of all men most miserable*. “No, as for my hope, that hope which I comfort and support myself with, who shall see it? It is something out of sight that I hope for, not things that are seen, that are temporal, but things not seen, that are eternal.” What is his hope he will tell us (^{<S285>}Job 19:25), *Non est mortale quod opto, immortale peto* — *I seek not for that which perishes, but for that which abides for ever*. “But, as for the hopes you would buoy me up with, they shall go down with me to the bars of the pit. You are dying men, and cannot make good your promises. I am a dying man, and cannot enjoy the good you promise. Since, therefore, our rest will be together in the dust, let us all lay aside the thoughts of this world and set our hearts upon another.” We must shortly be in the dust, for dust we are, dust and ashes in the pit, under *the bars of the pit*, held fast there, never to loose the bands of death till the general resurrection. But we shall rest there; we shall rest together there. Job and his friends could not agree now, but they will both be quiet in the grave; the dust of that will shortly stop their mouths and put an end to the controversy. Let the foresight of this cool the heat of all contenders and moderate the disputers of this world.