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→ SERMONS ←

SERVICE THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH.

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He gave some apostles; and some prophets and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.—EPHESIANS iv., 11, 12.

IT is a prevalent idea that a Church is a religious community whose chief end is the enjoyment of privilege; that each member is only as a child in a nursery, or a sick man in a hospital, whom those in official position are to care for and nurse, and is very ill-used when he fails to receive such compassionate ministries. Now, a half-truth is a heresy; and more than any which councils have condemned this has restrained Christian enterprise, and held men aloof from those works which were tasking the faith and devotion of others, and which need the conjoined efforts of all to carry on and complete. Means of grace are contemplated as ends. Christian fellowship is maintained for mere personal benefit. The Church is a coterie of privileged people, separated from others, and provided with moral and spiritual advantages which belong only to "the elect." And though this false, this ignoble idea of her office and privilege is giving way in this age, yet it has so dominated the life of the Church in the past that she has lingered in drowsy surfeit about her table whilst multitudes with pangs of hunger have vainly waited outside her door for the mere fragments of her feast. A different idea is presented in the text. It is clouded, however, by a wrong punctuation: and if a single comma

thrilled the heart and impressed us of their effect. There was the remembrance of those upon whose heads Christ had pressed His strong but tender hand of sympathy. It was our duty to seek to bring up our little ones to be under the impress of the hand of Jesus. It was the hand of

omnipotence, the source of safety, and a sense of consolation to us. We were graven upon the palm of Christ's hand. We were strong when made so by the strong hand of Christ. He took the sinner from the mire and raised him up and placed his hand in the hand of God.

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF JOB.

BY PROFESSOR DAVID STEELE, D.D. (REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN), PHILADELPHIA.

The book of Job is one of the grandest portions of Holy Scripture. It is to the Old Testament what Paul's Epistle to the Romans is to the New. Some have styled it the "Patriarchal Bible." In its prose parts it is so simple that a child may understand it; its poetic parts are marvellously deep and obscure. It has been studied as a masterpiece of poetry, and as a fountain from which some of the greatest poets have drawn their inspiration. Who the inspired writer of this book was, as well as the time of its composition or writing, is uncertain. Some ascribe it to Moses; and then the time of its composition would be towards the close of his life. Others, again, conceive that the period of its composition was during the reign of David or Solomon. The name Job signifies hated or persecuted. That he is a historic and not a fictitious character is proved by his being mentioned with Noah and Daniel, Ez. xiv., 14. From the age at which Job died, namely, when he was two hundred and ten years old, it might be inferred that he lived in the interval between Terah and Abraham. The place of Job's residence was the land of Uz, situated in the north of Arabia and south-east of Palestine.

The book consists of three general parts—an introduction or prologue, which is written in prose, and embraces the first two chapters. The second part consists of the controversy proper, and is in the form of dramatic poetry. This part of the composition exhibits the chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry, viz., parallelism. The third part is the conclusion, and is written in prose.

The subject of the book is "The Trial of Job"; its occasion, nature, endurance, and issue. The design of the book of Job is to show the reality of true religion, the nature and power of faith, to exhibit the blessedness of the righteous, however assailed by affliction; to make a display of the providence of God in its inscrutableness, justice and mercy, to present the consistency between the truths of revelation and the dealings of Providence; to afford an example of patience and trust in God under severe trial, to illustrate the facts of human depravity even in the best of men; to exhibit the final conquest of Satan and the triumph of righteousness in the earth, and to present Job as a type of Christ exposed to great sufferings for the sake of those who were to be ultimately glorified.

An analysis of the contents of the book presents to us an introduction or prologue written in prose, as already remarked, embracing the first two chapters. In this the character and prosperity of Job are first sketched. His estate is enumerated, and the number of his children and servants brought to view. His dignity, also arising from possessions and character, is particularly mentioned. His happiness in his children, his care for them and remembrance of them in his prayers and sacrifices, are recorded as illustrative of his habitual piety.

In the sixth verse of the first chapter is recorded a celestial council: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord." Here the veil separating the invisible from the visible, we may suppose, is drawn aside, and an assembly of God's angelic

ministers, with Himself among them, is revealed. The presence of Satan in this assembly is noted, and God's challenge regarding His servant Job is uttered—"Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth?" Then follow Satan's accusation and proposal, together with the permission granted to Satan to deal with Job according to his desire. Satan at once begins his work of devastation, and destroys the oxen and the asses of Job; his sheep are smitten with lightning, his camels are captured by the Chaldeans, and the trial of Job reaches its climax in the cutting off at one stroke of his children by an Eastern tornado or cyclone. In the closing verses of the first chapter Job expresses his grief, bows with submission to the divine will, and gains the victory by blessing God instead of cursing Him—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The second chapter begins with a record of the second celestial council. Here the god of this world appears restless in his malicious intentions. God gives renewed testimony to Job's steadfastness, and Satan repeats his accusation with fiendish intentions: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." This second proposed attack of Satan is upon the person of the bereaved man. Satan smites Job, by God's permission, from head to foot with sore disease. No part of Job is left untouched but his tongue, in order that he may be able to curse God when pain has reached its climax. In this the malice of Satan is conspicuous. It is probable this disease was elephantiasis, contagious through the mere breath, often hereditary, and, as a general rule, incurable. The conduct of Job's wife is mentioned (second chapter, verse 9) as adding to the severity of his trial. The holiest saints are liable to the most horrid and blasphemous temptations.

At this point three friends of Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, make an appointment together to come to mourn with Job and to comfort him. Their

sympathy is expressed in the language of the second chapter, twelfth verse: "They lifted up their eyes afar off and knew him not." Not one of them spake a word to him, silence in the presence of deep distress being an expression of sympathy.

In the third chapter Job breaks the silence and utters his deep complaint. With this chapter commences the first great division of the poem. Job's desponding lament becomes the immediate occasion of controversy. This controversy includes three cycles or courses of dialogues. In the first course, which commences with the fourth chapter and ends with the fourteenth, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar speak in turn, and Job replies. The height of the controversy is reached in the third course, beginning with the twenty-second chapter and ending with the twenty-seventh. Once more Eliphaz and Bildad speak; Zophar seems to have withdrawn. Job, being now alone in the field, reasserts his innocence, and continues his speech in the twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh, and twenty-eighth chapters. The twenty-ninth, thirtieth, and thirty-first chapters are of the nature of a soliloquy, in which the afflicted man reverts with feeling and longing retrospect to former prosperity, mournfully describes his present condition, and solemnly protests his freedom from open and secret sins. The issue between Job and his friends was, that they maintained that the wicked only are exposed to suffering, while the righteous are prospered. According to their reasoning, Job's affliction was an evidence of his want of piety, notwithstanding his profession. Job, on the other hand, maintained that whatever might be his afflictions he was sincere in his profession of love to God. It is worthy of note that the nineteenth chapter forms the crowning part of the controversy. Both in form and in fact it is the centre of the whole book. Like the eighth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, it is the jewel in the ring. The faith of Job soars like an eagle through the clouds into the open heavens. With great clearness and emphasis he speaks of the resurrection. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the

latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." He afterwards descends into the arena, but with a more tranquillized spirit.

In the thirty-second chapter another *dramatis persona* appears upon the scene, by name Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite. This person owns himself as young and full of matter. He also expresses himself as displeased with the three friends in what they had said respecting Job. His speech reaches to the end of the thirty-seventh chapter. The burden of it is to show that Job's piety was sincere, but that he had spoken unadvisedly, and therefore his afflictions were continued. His address opens up the way for the subsequent appearance of Jehovah.

At this point God Himself interposes and addresses Job out of the whirlwind. The address of the Almighty covers from the thirty-eighth to the forty-first chapters inclusive. Its style is peculiarly grand, and it is marked throughout with startling and searching interrogatories. Its utterances glow with a majesty and sublimity, with a grandeur and vigor of poetic diction which mortal pen has never equalled. Its object is to show the littleness of the creature and the greatness of the Creator, as well as to subdue the pride of Job. These questions of Jehovah turn upon the phenomena of nature, the instincts and habits of the animal creation, and then wind up with a reference to "behemoth" and "leviathan," one the inhabitant of land and the other a denizen of the deep, as illustrative of the omnipotence of their Creator, and the folly of Job undertaking to enter the lists with a

being possessed of such almighty power. The address of Jehovah produces the desired effect, viz., the humbling of Job, and his acknowledgment of Jehovah's right to deal with him as He judged best. The afflicted man's genuine penitence is expressed in language at once terse and sincere: "Behold I am vile. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Here the poetic part of the book of Job ends. The closing verses are in prose. The Lord turns the captivity of His afflicted servant; rebukes his friends who had harassed him, instead of comforting him; owns Job as His servant, not less than four times within the compass of two verses; honors him as a priest in making supplication for his friends in connection with the offering of a burnt offering. His friends who had stood afar off, crowd around him; his possessions are doubled; his health is restored; he has the same number of children born to him that had been removed by death. The existence of his former children in a state of glory made his family double what it had been, just as his other possessions had been doubled. Job died in a good old age. As Eliphaz had said, "he came to his grave like a shock of corn fully ripe." In his experience was fulfilled the declaration "at evening time it shall be light." His triumphant close of life has been thought by some to be typical of millennial blessedness in the evening of the world. "A king and a priest on earth, Job died, like all believers, to exercise his royal and priestly office in a land never stained with tears and never defiled with sin."

SELF THE CENTRE OF POWER.

BY REV. J. M. DRIVER (METHODIST EPISCOPAL).

To have said that self should be the centre of every sermon would once have seriously injured the proposition—would have been proof positive of mental imbecility or demoniacal possession. Young ministers to-day are exhorted to "hide behind the Cross;" to pray that

the audience may see "Jesus only;" and to fervently sing:

"None of self and all of Thee."

But is it not possible that the wisdom of this exhortation is polar rather than equatorial? And that it has an antipode? That, in the reaction from the personal,