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The Undoing of a Righteous Man

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Behold, we call them blessed that endured; ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful" (James 5:11).

Turning to the book of Job, not to read any particular passages, but to have it before us and in mind, we want just to take note again of what it is exactly that is found taking place in the life of Job under the hand of the Lord through the instrumentality of the devil. There are several great features and aspects of this wonderful story. We shall not take time to even mention them, but just to put our finger upon one of them now. It is this.

A Righteous Man

Here we have the experience of a righteous man in learning deliverance from himself, a man attested by God Himself to be righteous, yet coming into such an experience as to mean his entire undoing - the undoing of a divinely attested righteous man - and it is as well that we should straightway recognise that there is such a thing. Let us write that down in our hearts and in our minds in precise language. As few words as we can will make it stand out without any confusion. We thought, imagined, or even attempted to believe that such a thing is altogether impossible. Of course, that is what Job's friends argued. Given that a man is righteous, then that man will never be undone. Well, this whole book, and more than this book of the Bible, shows to the contrary, but with an object, as we have said - deliverance from himself. And when we see the end of the Lord in this, we find that, although Job may have had a good deal at the beginning, when he had been undone

and delivered from himself, he had twice as much. That is the end of the Lord, and that means that until we have been delivered from ourselves, ourselves are the obstacle to the fulness which is possible, and that is exactly what God is dealing with.

It is quite clear as the story unfolds and as Job speaks his mind, that at the first he was very much resting upon what he was. Yes, as men went in his day and according to the old dispensation standards, he was righteous and he knew it. And it comes out quite clearly that he was largely resting upon what he was in that matter. He would set that over against others and make it something by which to judge other men. They were not as righteous as he, they were different.

Then Job also rested very largely upon what he had. He was a very rich man. He had cattle and houses, he had very much of wealth - had everything here in this life in abundance - and he was very largely resting upon what he had.

Then also he was very largely resting upon what he did. He tells of all that he did, what he did for the poor, the needy, for those round about him, and how everybody owed a good deal to him. He was a great benefactor in his day, and so his life was very greatly a matter of things - righteousness as a thing. By the standards of that dispensation, it was not righteousness by faith, it was righteousness by the things that you did and the wrong things which you did not do; the old legal standard of righteousness, and righteousness was a thing. The more good things you did, the more righteous you were. The fewer bad things you did, the more righteous you were. What he possessed were *things* here, and what he did was a matter of things done.

Transition from Earthly Fulness to Heavenly Fulness

The Lord saw the weakness in all that and (leaving the supernatural aspect of this out of our consideration for the moment: the great argument with Satan) the Lord saw quite clearly that this could never bring Job through to real heavenly fulness, for, if this story says one thing among others, it says this: that it was a great transition from earthly things to heavenly fulness. When at last Job had twice as much as before, that was given from heaven, that was a miracle, that was done by God in a far more direct way than in the first place. It says, "God gave..." Well, there is a true sense in which God gave at the first all that Job had, but there is another sense, a higher and extra sense, in which the last statement was made - "God gave to Job".

You might almost think that, seeing that at the beginning of the story Job's family was a grown-up family, when the story is ended that naturally that was out of the question, and it required something of God to come in there and give twice as much at the end. The point is that the end is heavenly fulness whereas the beginning was earthly fulness and God took His servant in hand to pass him through from the one to the other, but in the end it is not things, so far as Job is concerned. He has the things, if you like, but what is more to Job than all the things is that he has found the Lord in a way in which he did not know the Lord before. It is transition then, in the main, from things to the Lord, and that is always far greater fulness.

Now, what I want to emphasise is this: that when the Lord really does get hold of a life and that life may be attested by God Himself in Christ as righteous (leaving Job's original ground of righteousness by works, the same thing applies to those who are righteous by faith), that does not mean that that life is not going to be taken to pieces, undone, and emptied out. It may only be the beginning of such things for such a life. To come into practical knowledge and enjoyment of the greater fulnesses

which are in Christ - not the theoretical or doctrinal fulness that we have all things the moment we believe, but practical fulness, experimental fulness - does necessitate that you and I go through exactly the same thing as Job went through, that is an undoing and an emptying process in which the main thing, so far as we are concerned, is deliverance from ourselves.

Now, in that connection, there are two things Job did not recognise or realise that was happening. He did not know that this was taking place and you and I do. We have an advantage because his story has already been written. He did not know. Therefore his ignorance of the spiritual meaning of his experience became the very opportunity for Satan, and when Satan as God's instrument for emptying Job, had laid on with all his might upon his possessions, upon himself, upon every realm of his life, then a procession of people called 'friends' begins - the friends of Job. And the upshot of all this procession of friends is this, that Satan used those very men to take hold of the work of God to turn it against God Himself, and this is found when Job from time to time misinterprets his experience and gets very near to accusing God, blaming God, complaining against God, taking an attitude towards God which is one of a big question and a big revolt of heart. Satan has taken hold of a great work of God which is intended to lead to a glorious end, and uses the very work of God against God in the heart of His servant. These friends seek to bring him under accusation before God. There is no such accusation in reality, but they, instruments in Satan's hands, seek to bring him under accusation before God and make him turn in revolt upon God.

The Work of God in a Believer

What does this mean for us? Well, it just means this - that we have got to have a very clear cut between what is the work of Divine mercy in a believer and what is the work of Divine judgment upon an unbeliever. That is where we begin: the end of the Lord; He is very gracious and merciful! Oh, that is rather difficult to believe when the first messenger comes and tells of what has happened: disaster! And another one follows hard on him and tells of further disasters, and then another, narrowing the circle until Job in his very person is smitten. There is all the difference between the merciful and gracious works in the life of one of His own, and the judgments of God upon those who are not His. And Satan, through these friends, tried to wipe out that difference and bring Job onto the ground of being one who was being judged of God as a sinner, whereas in fact he was dealt with by God unto glorious ends. Beloved, let us seek to understand the difference between those two things, as wide as God has put it, and to keep that gap without any bridge at all and never allow Satan to wipe out that difference. We are done if Satan succeeds, and that is what he is trying to do all the time. He is the accuser of the brethren.

The Peril of Self-Occupation

In a word, it is this: not judgment, but capacity as the Lord's objective in His dealings with His own through suffering. Have you got that? - not judgment, but capacity, the enlargement of capacity for God, the things of God, for spiritual, Divine things. That is what God is working at in His people through suffering, delivering from that limitation which is always present when self in any form has a place. Oh, I do hope that you see this, that when the Lord takes one of His own redeemed and justified ones in hand with His own beneficent intention of bringing them through to enlarged capacity, the infinite peril which is always right near at hand is that Satan should make us more self-occupied by our sufferings than we were before. There is nothing more calculated, or as calculated, to make us self-occupied as suffering. It is a great thing to find a suffering saint not taken up with themselves.

Many years ago a servant of God (well-known all over the world) and I were speaking at a convention in Wales. He was a man who was regarded by everybody to be more than half dead. No one would have taken out an insurance policy on his life. His heart was supposed to be gone and I knew this. I met him on the way to the meeting and said to him, "How are you today?" "Oh", he said, quite brightly and cheerfully, "I don't matter at all!", and yet I knew exactly how he was and what an effort it was for him to get to that meeting. But here was a wonderful detachment from himself, "I don't matter at all!" - this impressed me, as you see; it was many years ago. This brother lived until last year, I believe carried on by a Life not his own.

But I am saying that the great peril under suffering and in trial, not necessarily physical, but any kind of suffering in the ways of God, is to be more self-occupied - and let us remember that that is exactly what Satan is after. Instead of being occupied with what the Lord is after, we become occupied, engrossed, with ourselves, because of what the Lord is doing with us and how He is doing it - the difficulty and the suffering, just living in our own little world which becomes a very miserable little world for ourselves and for everyone else. I know the difficulty here and I know the battle of this matter. But what I feel the Lord wants me to say to you and to myself is this: that you and I can never be delivered from Satan in this matter until we get focused upon what the Lord is after and not upon what we are going through or upon any suggestion of Satan that the Lord is dealing with us as He deals with ungodly people in judgment. No, not at all!

You see, there is this heavenly side. Satan is in this matter. Satan is making a terrific assault. What is the ground of Satan's strength? What, after all, proves to be the ground of Satan's strength in Job's life? Why, it is Job falling into the trap of self-justification, self-vindication. He fell into Satan's trap, and, poor fellow, he wallowed in that mire for a long time. He fell right in. Oh, may the Lord deliver us from that slough into which we can fall and wallow, Satan's trap for us that, when the Lord brings us into trial and suffering, whatever it may be, that it is because the Lord has a controversy with us and is against us, when all the time what the Lord is after is not lessening, narrowing and curtailing, but capacity. If you and I would take hold of our adversities and our afflictions and say before the Lord, "The Lord's intention in this is that I shall have enlarged spiritual capacity, the end of this is going to be greater usefulness and value to the Lord!" If we keep on that line, we shall be delivered from the devil. Satan's power over us would be so largely broken, for Satan's strength with Job was not in Satan's ability to afflict, but it was on the ground of Job's occupation with himself under discipline. Have you got the significance of this?

I am not saying that the Lord never does judge His own people. There are sins into which the people of God may fall such as the sinner in the Corinthian assembly, and God does judge in the matter of specific iniquity even His own children - not unto destruction, even so. "Delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved" (1 Cor. 5:5); not unto final destruction but unto salvation. But we are not speaking of the specific case of the Divine judgment of the child of God. We are speaking of the general case of so many of His people being brought into affliction and trial and being emptied out. What for? To be all the more filled. Keep your eye focused upon this. You have seen the end of the Lord - keep your eye on that, the end of the Lord, what the Lord is after - enlargement. That will certainly be the outcome of every Divine work in His own people along the line of suffering.

You can resolve this meditation into just this one thing - the end of the Lord is not destruction or judgment, but capacity, enlargement, fulness and of course, going with that, is being brought into a place where Satan's power can no longer operate.