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MARK THE PERFECT MAN

By Louis A. Bouck

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THE BALLAD OF JOB

One day the devil met the Lord
Among celestial kin.
He quickly looked him up and down
And asked him where he'd been.

"Oh, round about," the devil said,
"Among the crowds of earth,
Inspecting folk -- the common crowd
And those of noble birth."

"Did you behold," Jehovah asked,
"While trav'ling 'round the globe,
That upright fellow down in Uz,
My perfect servant, Job?"

"Sure, I saw him," the devil said,
"And he serves You well, no doubt,
But why, I ask You, shouldn't he?
You keep him hedged about.

You let me have him for a while,
I'll make him lose his grace.
I'll make him tear Your altar down
And curse You to Your face."

"Go, take him, then," replied the Lord,
And sink him, if you can.
Go, take his family, take his stuff.
We'll see if he's a man."

Well, you know what the devil did.
You've read it oft before.
He hit old Job like a hurricane
And left him sad and sore.

But, ripping up his mantle,
Job gave this parting word,
"The God Who gave may take away,
O, blessed be the Lord!"

The devil went to God again.
Said God, "Now where've you been?"
"Oh, round about," the devil said,
"Among the sons of men."

"Did you behold," Jehovah asked,
"While trav'ling 'round the globe
That upright fellow down in Uz,
My perfect servant, Job?"

"Sure, I saw him," said the devil,
"And I find his faith was bold,
But let me touch his form with pain.
I'll make him quit You cold."

"Go, touch him, then," replied the Lord,
"But when you've done your best,
This man of Mine will have his faith,
For Job can stand the test."

Then the devil left that holy place,
And went to Job again,
And with his coming brought to Job
A lot of boils and pain.

The patriarch was deeply stirred,
But though his face was grim,
He said, "Though God doth lay me low,
I'll still believe in Him."

Then Job's own wife looked in at him.
She said, "Curse God and die!"
Job raised his head just long enough
To look her in the eye.

"You're talking like a fool," said he,
"My heart within is stirred.
The God Who gave may take away.
Oh, blessed be the Lord!"

Then Eliphaz and Bildad came,
And Zophar came along,
They looked at Job a while and said,
"Well, Job, there's something wrong.

There's something hidden in your life,
No one can have a doubt,
And God hath brought you boils and pain
So you'll confess it out."

Then shouted Job, "When you're all dead,
Then wisdom, too, will die!
You are physicians of no worth,
For one as sick as I.

Oh, miserable old comforters,
For one beneath the rod,
Although I fail to pass your test,
I'll take my chance with God."

You know, of course, how Job came out.
God saw he'd had enough
Of pain and poverty and loss;
So He gave him back his stuff.

He prospered more than he ever had
Before he took the drop,
And proved that a man who trusts in God
At last comes out on top.

So, child of God, lift up your head,
Be brave in spite of pain!
Though fiends from hell may make you groan,
Still God Almighty reigns.

His eye is roving to and fro
Around about the globe,
And you'll be so glad when He brings you out,
As He did old Brother Job!

By Lon Woodrum

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Chapter 1 WIN BIG

"Lord, let us win, and win big!"

He was praying for a "dry" victory in a local option election.

"Let us win so overwhelmingly that the other side will not try again to bring the liquor back."

Victory by a wide margin is not likely to be contested. A tie or a narrow win leaves the issue undecided.

In case you are curious God answered prayer. We -- the dry s -- won, ten to one.

But it is another contest I am thinking of now -- a competition between God and Satan over a man named Job. The story is told in scripture.

"I can break him," the devil boasted.

"I can keep him," replied the Lord.

At once we get the feeling that this Job is a rather special fellow. The Lord brags on him and the devil seeks his downfall. Good character references, both.

But about that contest between the Lord and Lucifer? Who won? Who would be likely to win? Can God fail?

If God's man wilted under pressure, then God failed, too. Blasphemous! And discouraging! For if, with all God's power behind him, Job went down, how can I hope to succeed in the struggle against sin and Satan?

We can follow the contest. The Lord suggests that we do that. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:37).

"Perfect," "upright" -- the very words used in the Bible to describe Job, the kind of a man who would win big, if anybody could. Today we might call such a man a sanctified person, a saint.

Hold on! That word "perfect" is mistranslated.

Later we can put the word under the microscope. But whatever it may be found to mean, it does, on the authority of scripture, apply to Job.

"But no one is perfect but Christ!"

None but Christ has absolute perfection. But Christ Himself said in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." In both Old and New Testaments the words "perfect" and "perfection" are found -- often -- too often to be ignored or lightly dismissed.

What does it mean to be perfect in a scriptural sense? Apparently we have in Job an illustration. The Lord gives him the highest praise. "There is none like him in the earth." He must have enjoyed the best grace possible, for that day, at least.

"He doesn't always measure up to Christian standards."

Perhaps not. He lacked our gospel light. He seems to have known nothing about Christ. He had no Bible and no church fellowship. How could we expect him to live by our standards?

Not only uninformed about many things, this man was also under pressure. He was a suffering saint.

It is easy to criticize Job. But I have never lost everything in one dreadful stroke as he did. It has never been my lot to come down with a loathsome, incurable disease. Not once in my experience has everyone turned against me. I will not join the accuser, for I have never sat where Job sat, on the ash heap of desolation and despair.

In spite of his sufferings, Job stood steadfast under fire. Both in scripture and out of it the "patience of Job" has become famous. And that word "patience" means steadfastness.

Still he must have failed to win big, if he had not been sustained by divine grace. God could get to this man with instantaneous help in the crisis, at any time, because the supply lines were never cut by sin!

Because God's victory was what he really wanted, Job was satisfied at last. He got to the place where he didn't care what happened to him, so long as the perfect will of God were done. That is a wonderfully restful and blessed place for you and me, too.

Job's example is refreshing. A friend said, "When I can't find comfort anywhere else, I can find it in the book of Job."

God meant it to be that way, don't you think?

And if this man of long ago won big, without many of the helps available to me, then surely I, too, can come out on top! If, that is, I am will to pay the price.

As a car-loving teen-ager I bought an old auto for five dollars -- not a bargain. It was worth no more. It never won a race, that car, or even ran. It had no wheels. Junked and stripped, it was of no use.

Now, since then it has been my privilege to own cars that would run. How fast? I don't know. I don't race them. But they've gone as fast as the need demanded and the law allowed -- fast enough to make possible sometimes preaching appointments at a distance.

Once I had religion of the "junker" variety. It did me no good, got me nowhere. Like that five-dollar car, it was always a liability.

Full salvation -- the kind Job must have had -- is costly, too. But it makes the difference between defeat and victory. It changes failure to success. From always losing, I have found life transformed into triumph, decisive victory and constant overcoming, through the grace of God. Winning big!

Success did not come easily to Job. He went through a struggle.

Yes, like him, we can claim the rewards promised to overcomers, but before the final victory, conflict.

* * * * *

Chapter 2 THE CONFLICT

"I'd reach around two fellows and snap the ear of a boy three seats ahead." He was recalling some schoolboy mischief. "Then I'd sit back and look innocent. I'd laugh with inward glee while the lad I'd snapped got into a fuss with the fellow just behind him."

It is an old trick, almost as old as the human race. Who started the trouble in Eden? It was not a being with horns and hooves, pitchfork and tail. No devil figures in the Genesis record, just a serpent.

I never met a talking snake. But one spoke to Eve. And what it said led her to take of the forbidden fruit. Something, someone, was behind that subtle serpent, enabling it to speak beguiling words of temptation. Who or what?

It was a very slippery character -- one who starts wars which produce bloodshed, suffering and carnage. Then this character suggests to men, "How can a good God permit such things?"

One of Satan's major triumphs has been to convince intellectuals that he does not really exist, except in the minds of ignorant, superstitious people. The old verse says:

And so the devil has had to go.
We've voted him out and he's done,

But simple people would like to know
Who carries his business on.

His business is definitely being carried on by someone who fits perfectly the Bible picture of Satan -- a liar, a deceiver, an accuser of the brethren, as best suits his purpose either a roaring lion or an angel of light, a fiery dragon, an old serpent. He is the very embodiment of wickedness in every form, a hater of God and of His people -- too terrible an adversary for you or me to fight. We can never even win an argument with him. He is a past master in reading men's minds and playing on their weakest points. Experienced for centuries in the fiendish art of tempting men to sin, he is a specialist in taking us by surprise. Whenever possible he works through others, sometimes our closest and best friends.

Like Peter saying to Jesus, when the Master had foretold the cross, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."

Do you remember Jesus' reply?

"Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me." Satan, involving Peter, a chief apostle, used the old schoolboy trick.

Another example is Job's wife saying to her suffering husband, "Curse God and die. I'd rather see you dead than in such agony.

Those three "friends" added to Job's torment by accusing him of hidden sin.

They probably meant well, all of them. They just did not realize that they were tools of Satan. Job apparently did not know it, either. In fact, he says nothing at all about the devil. Perhaps he did not even know that the fiend existed as an evil angel. And because he did not know, Job was a perfect target for the enemy's suggestions -- suggestions that God was tormenting him.

Satan throws distorted pictures on the screen of our imagination. He strives to gain our attention to these miserable caricatures, which contain just enough truth to make them plausible.

"I can sit right by this window," said a friend to me, "and see all the movies I please."

His rented house was on a hill overlooking a drive-in theater.

"See this speaker on the wall? It's connected to the sound track down there. The man who used to live here put it in, but it's still live. I can just flick a switch and hear as well as see."

My friend, a holiness preacher, does not make use of his "privilege" of seeing and hearing free movies. He has no taste for such polluting entertainment. But it is there, right below his window, bidding for his attention.

The pictures which he cannot completely escape are like those Satan throws, against my will, on the screen of my imagination. But I can choose to ignore them if I recognize them as coming from him.

Job apparently did not recognize some of the devil's propaganda as falsehoods.

Until he learned better he was influenced by the wretched misrepresentations of God that Satan drew -- that the Lord was a cruel tyrant Who had let Job prosper at first only to make him suffer more when his wealth was gone -- that the Lord held Job guilty of sin, but would not tell him what the sin was. (Job had no knowledge of any such sin.) That his sufferings must in time crush out his life and close his career in shame and disgrace.

"Well," you say, "that's not the God I serve."

No, we are not ignorant of Satan's devices. Job was. We have the Word of God to assure us that "if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Job had no Bible at all.

"But," someone says, "how could a man of God pay any attention to such horrible falsehoods?"

Geoffrey Bull could tell you. This missionary to the Orient spent three years in a Communist prison. His Bible was taken away, of course. He was not permitted to pray or to speak to others about the Lord.

Prisoners were not allowed to move or to do or to say anything without permission from the guard. They were required to make repeated "confessions" in Communist terminology of their "offenses" against "the people." The atmosphere was so horrible, so unbearable, that the prisoners longed for something -- anything -- to take their minds off their wretchedness.

Then the Communists brought in the writings of Karl Marx. The captives read even this to forget their misery.

Do you say you would not have read them? One question: Have you ever been in a Communist prison?

Some become bitter against God over losing just one child. Job lost ten, all at once and the circumstances looked like a stroke of divine judgment. He had lost everything else, too, except his health. Next Satan snatched that away, too.

Bible students say his disease was probably elephantiasis or a form of leprosy. With the sickness came the shrouding of the mind with dark and menacing delusions.

Do you think you would just shrug off all this and shout the victory?

A powerful holiness preacher testified that after a serious illness he could not for a time sense the witness of the Spirit to his sonship with God. He had to cancel all his meetings. He would tell callers, "I do not even know if I am saved."

In time health improved and the uncertainty vanished. Once more this great man, now liberated, traveled the evangelistic circuit.

For a time no help was found for Job. The devil was just too strong for him. What hope had he, or any of us, then, of deliverance and victory?

The Bible Job did not have gives us the answer: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalm 43:5).

Yes, the devil is mighty, but God is almighty. Satan can go no further than the Lord allows.

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it', (I Corinthians 10:3).

Satan said, in effect, "That's not so. I can make God's servant fail. Job will curse God to His face."

The contest between God and the devil was hidden from Job. Otherwise there could have been no problem. But that contest in the spirit world is the real plot background of the book.

As we might expect, the Lord is victorious and the wicked one is defeated.

Job, at the end, is twice as prosperous as before, basking in the smile of the God Who had brought him through his trials more than conqueror.

The application is exciting. You and I, too, can have the grace that Job enjoyed and conquer as he did. Of course, we must face tests, too. Purified, not by trials but by the blood of Christ, we shall overcome by that blood and by the word of our testimony.

But what about Job's unsolved questions? And what of the unsolved mysteries of God's providence with you and me?

The Lord may answer us as He did Job, "Never mind, little man. You just can't understand enough for Me to explain things to you. Just trust and obey Me and I will take you through."

He will take you and me through in spite of the enemy's wrath and his wiles. He will pull us through if we will stand the pull.

But to be sustained in suffering a man must be pure in heart. In our day we might use the word "sanctified." And he has to be steadfast.

How did Job measure up in these qualities? In chapter three we examine Job's recommendations.

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Chapter 3

JOB'S RECOMMENDATIONS

"She says she's sanctified!"

The scornful, sneering tone implied, "She's a hypocrite and a fanatic!"

Sanctified? I was too young to know what that meant. To find out I watched the "sanctified" one thus called to my attention by criticism.

The lady was patient, friendly, even radiant, with no false front or holier-than-thou attitude.

"Mark the perfect man," says the scripture, "and behold the upright."

That's what I was doing -- marking, observing, watching -- a professedly sanctified person. I didn't let on, of course. Probably she did not know she was being evaluated by a little Sunday School boy.

Do you claim sanctification? At once you are a city set on a hill. You are watched, maybe ridiculed, even persecuted. But you are in a wonderful place to witness. That is, we have to say, if you're not a sham. Sad, but true, not everyone can be taken at face value. We really must ask for recommendations.

Brother Job, we understand that you claim to live above sin. This is a high standard, indeed. Have you any references who can speak in your behalf?

Thank you. This certainly is an excellent recommendation. It is from the Lord Himself. It says: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." Since this is from the Holy Scriptures we are bound to accept it.

"Perfect and upright" -- does that mean sanctified? In this case, at least, yes, for Job was much concerned with seeing others sanctified. He "sanctified" his sons. He did this with animal sacrifices -- the only way he knew, the only way revealed in his day, a way pointing forward to the cleansing blood of Christ.

His children were fun-loving party-goers. Whenever anyone in the family had a birthday, they all got together to celebrate. There is no harm in that, so long as the fun is clean.

But Job knew how easy it would be to get carried away and put pleasure ahead of God. His children must keep right at any cost. Dad wanted to be sure that nothing came between them and God -- not even in their hearts.

It is reasonable to suppose, don't you think, that he had the same standard for himself? Sanctification -- his relationship to the Lord enabled him to put the Almighty first in everything -- a heart right with God, and kept so.

Yes, this man seems to have had something real.

But that word "perfect," now. It is a very strong expression -- Job, or any other man, perfect? Well, really!

Some translators, we may note, do not render the Hebrew word "perfect." One makes it "blameless" -- another, "wholehearted" -- a third, "true." These expressions are so meaningful that they do not weaken the word "perfect," as our King James Version puts it. Rather, they shed added light on what it means.

Scholars agree that Job was perfect in sincerity and in heart. That is saying a great deal.

But perfect?

"You've got to be kidding. Nobody can be perfect in this life." That is common comment.

Suppose we focus on that word. What does perfect mean?

In English the term means complete, having no vital parts missing. It should be said that this definition does not carry the thought of absolute perfection.

Perfect is often used loosely. An apple may be perfect in shape and color. But it is not and cannot be a perfect peach or pear.

"That speech was just perfect," one said. I was there. The embarrassed speaker had delivered the address looking at the floor. But what he had said was good.

"She's perfect!" said a young man of his girl friend. But he married someone else.

Is there such a thing as a limited perfection? Yes, for instance, in the sense of having no lack of vital parts, my eight-year-old car qualifies. Don't laugh. So does yours, or it wouldn't pass inspection, and wouldn't be allowed on the roads.

If anything goes wrong with an essential part -- motor, lights, brakes, transmission -- we have it repaired right away. If we didn't we might kill ourselves or someone else.

But that "perfect" car of mine has some rust spots and dents. The clock does not keep time. The radio won't play. But the auto runs all right. It takes me where I want to go, in comparative comfort, with average gas mileage. That's all a car is supposed to do. Other features are extras.

Some things can reasonably be expected of a Christian. The Master expressed the standard like this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30).

That take in a good deal, doesn't it? In fact, no one can meet that standard without divine help.

I take it that Job, being perfect, had all that he needed of transforming, sustaining grace, to meet the Lord's requirement. The Spirit was in his heart, enabling this tested man to stand.

Not everyone would agree.

Some say of this man the Bible calls perfect and upright, "He was an unawakened sinner, a moral man, but unconverted."

We must shake our heads. It doesn't fit the Bible. The inspired record should settle the matter.

Again, others declare, "He was a sin-hiding hypocrite."

This is what the three critics said. (You recall Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, don't you?) Weaning the dark glasses of carnal prejudice, they were ready to shoot the white-souled Job for a crow. The three were convinced that Job had been robbing widows and orphans and was getting just what he had coming to him as punishment.

But God said that they, the three "friends," were the ones who needed to pray through.

Another view: "This man was a hot-house flower. He flourished until reverses came. Then he couldn't help himself. He was overwhelmed by strong temptation and fell into sin in spite of himself."

The thought alarms me. For if God was embarrassed, defeated, and Satan triumphant, in the contest over Job, then grace is proven too weak to keep any man under pressure. If the best man in the world of his day could not make it, what hope is there for ordinary folk like you and me?

Still another commentator -- and I am quoting the opinions of professed Bible scholars -- says, "Job did pretty well, though a sinner, as all men are sinners."

Let's come to a screeching halt and look at that statement. I'd want pretty positive proof, both of the premise, "All men are sinners," and of the conclusion, "Since Job was a man, he was therefore a sinner."

True, the Bible says, all have sinned. And we all have, before Christ changed our natures. Does a saved man continue in sin? The apostle held up his hands in horror at the thought. "God forbid!" he cried.

We are looking at a man who is perfect and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil. Can he be a common, ordinary sinner? Sin and perfection certainly cannot go together.

So we have a really big issue here. Was Job a sinner?

Perhaps we should look at the question further. In the next chapter, "The Imperfect Perfect Man."

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Chapter 4 THE IMPERFECT PERFECT MAN

"I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

"Sister," said holiness evangelist, C. W. Ruth, "if you're saved by grace, you're not a sinner any more."

Is this right?

Wrong, say some. We're all sinners -- even Christians -- the only difference is Christians believe in the Saviour.

Is this true or false?

We sing, "I have ceased from my wandering and going astray since Jesus came into my heart."

Is that fact or just wishful thinking? Are all men sinners? Has no one ever "kicked the habit" of sin?

Are Christians really saved from sin? Or is it just in sin? Is it possible to "live above sin?" These are vital questions for sin is a deadly thing.

If I live in sin the Bible says I must expect hell, not heaven. The soul that sinneth, it shall die, for the wages of sin is death.

The question is: "Can salvation really save? Save not only from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin? Not just from the guilt of the past but from the surrender to Satan in the present crisis?"

I think Job would have answered that question with a firm, "Yes!"

Many others would, of course, say, "No."

The two answers represent two differing theological viewpoints and probably two definitions of sin. We may talk about that difference in viewpoint later. But right now we are looking, not at theology, but at experience.

Is there someone who stood the test of temptation? Christ Himself stood the test, of course. But He was uniquely the Son of God. Can any mere man testify, "God has cleansed and kept me from conscious sin"?

The Bible mentions such a fellow. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright" (Psalm 37:37).

This scripture describes the perfect man, and implies that such a man may exist. But where is he? Can we find an example?

In the very words of this verse, scripture says of Job that he was "perfect and upright."

It doesn't say that he always had things easy. He was tested by severe temptation. How does the perfect man react under pressure?

He reacts perfect -- lacking nothing which a servant of God ought to have. One Bible scholar holds him up as a "world example."

If Job lacked nothing, was he possessed of, say, health, wealth, success, reputation, respect, authority? These are some things we commonly think needful to make a man successful. But Job didn't have them -- not now. He had enjoyed them at one time. But now they were all gone.

He was a most imperfect perfect man from the human standpoint, at least.

Let's switch on the scripture spotlight and take a good look at this man Job.

There, we have him in focus, sitting amid the ashes of his former beautiful home, scraping his unbearably itchy sores with a piece of broken crockery. His features are so disfigured that his friends at first do not recognize him.

Was he a perfect man?

He certainly was not perfect in freedom from trouble, but perfect in steadfastness. He refused to give up to his trials.

What do you and I do when the pressure is on? Sink into whining discouragement? Blame others? Or even curse God for letting the hard thing come? We do not if we enjoy the grace especially designed to hold us in the crisis -- a second grace after justification. One place in scripture which mentions this grace is Romans 5.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

That is the first work -- justification.

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). That is the second work -- the establishing grace of sanctification.

Just when or how Job received these blessings we are not told, but evidently he had that special grace which enabled him to stand.

"Ye have heard," the scripture says, "of the patience of Job" (James 5:11).

Patience does not mean serenity -- everything going along on an even keel; Job didn't have everything smooth -- but steadfastness. He got an "A" grade in that.

Let us get down to specifics now. Was Job absolutely perfect?

No, he was, as all men may be, an imperfect perfect man. He was very human, therefore subject to many infirmities. Only God has absolute perfection.

Was he perfect as the angels? Hardly, the scripture makes a point of saying that he was a man, not an angel. So in human frailty he argued with his friends when maybe he should have been praying for them.

How about Adamic perfection -- no lack in mind or body. That would be very pleasant. But Job didn't have it. He suffered bodily affliction, like the headache you had this morning, only much worse. And his mind was sometimes clouded by Satanic suggestions.

Was this man's perfection one of attitude and action? Again, the answer must be no, for in ignorance Job said hasty things and took less than ideal attitudes.

So do you and I, whatever our religious experience with far less excuse, sometimes, than poor Job.

Was he perfect? He turned around as soon as he saw his error.

Do I?

Wait, does a perfect man have occasion to admit, "I was wrong"? To make apology?

Yes, indeed, whenever he finds himself in the wrong.

What if he doesn't? He can't wear the "perfect" badge.

Certainly Job was not perfect in knowledge. Take that pitiful cry for a "daysman."

"Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (9:33)

Daysman means mediator. We do have a Mediator, Jesus Christ the God-man. But Job evidently didn't know about Him. After all, he had no Bible, no church, no fellowship.

But to come back to the essential question: "Was Job a sinner?"

Satan certainly took full advantage of this man's handicaps. The devil got him to think for a while that his afflictions were punishment for some unknown offense.

"My transgression is sealed up in a bag," he cried, "and thou sewest up mine iniquity" (14:17).

The troubled man prayed, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression?" (7:21) He even said, in our King James translation, at least, "I have sinned" (7:20). But an old Greek rendition (the Septuagint) puts it, "If I have sinned."

He thought he must have sinned, to deserve such fearful judgments.

These were hasty words from a hard-pressed man. But Job was not admitting that he was guilty as charged by the three critics. For, as one Bible scholar remarks, if he had done that the book would have ended right there, and ended in defeat for Job and for God, and for you and me.

What does his confusion prove? It proves only that he was in heaviness through manifold temptations.

You and I can expect such pressures, too. Don't think it strange when they come, the apostle said.

Job had not sinned.

Can I prove that?

Read chapter 31. Job searched his heart thoroughly. He could not find a definite thing to trouble his conscience.

Now the vaguely accusing voice is always Satan's insinuation. The Holy Spirit does not operate in blurred, harsh accusations. Rather He puts His finger on the very trouble spot and says, "This is the point at which your will has rebelled against Mine."

Job felt no such condemnation as sin always brings. He could not confess sin, for he had none to confess. If Job had been a sinner, he would have been overwhelmed by his trials. That he was not thus crushed indicates that he was made of material trials could not destroy.

A science teacher, so the story goes, dropped a coin into an unidentified chemical on his desk, then demanded of his class:

"Was this liquid dissolve the coin?"

"No, sir.

"Give me your reason for saying that."

"If it would, you wouldn't have dropped it in."

The student had not proved his knowledge of chemistry but had showed his shrewdness. He knew that no one with good sense would destroy even a small piece of money.

If a man is careful to avoid loss of a quarter, will not God guard His own children from trials that would crush them? Yes!

The devil just cannot take captive at his will those by the grace of God fully recovered from Satan's snare. We are sanctified wholly that we may be preserved blameless in body, soul, and spirit.

To say that the best of men -- even those cleansed and supported by the grace of God -- must sin in spite of themselves is to deny God's power to purify and keep. I do not want to take that attitude because I'd be in bad company. It was Satan who claimed, "All that a man hath will he give for his life. Job serves God for what he can get out of it. Let me have him, and I'll show you."

The Lord's reply: "We'll see. Do your worst. But no further than I permit."

Which was right, do you suppose, the Holy One or the Evil One?

For a while it looked pretty bad for Job. In the next chapter we'll see God's perfect (but in many ways imperfect) man, apparently deserted and destroyed. Title: The Broken Hedge.

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Chapter 5 THE BROKEN HEDGE

"The cows are in your garden!"

My beautiful garden! I had worked hard to make those things grow. I had hoped for a good crop. But now cows!

I took off for the garden. Sure enough, the hungry animals had pushed through the fence and had made themselves right at home. They had eaten much of the corn and were now lying in the ruined tomato rows.

It was a devastated garden -- disappointing, trying, unpleasant -- but just one of those things.

If we have good sense, we don't expect everything in this life to go our way. We may as well look for trials, burdens, losses, struggles, because they come to all of 'us.

Do they come to Christians? Yes, they come even to sanctified Christians.

But don't we sing, "All my night was turned to day, all my burdens rolled away, since the Comforter abides with me?"

We do, and it is true. Constant overcoming victory is normal to the sanctified -- no sin, no backsliding, no guilt or condemnation to mar our fellowship with God.

But do we have battles? Even God's perfect man had them.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

Do I catch a suggestion in that word "end" that before peace may come some problems, battles? What kind of battles? Look at Job's.

He had sorrow, bereavement, bankruptcy, sickness, Satanic suggestions, cruel critics, a mind clouded by the devil's black wing so that God seemed far away, and a sense of injustice, futility and despair.

And yet, thank God, through it all, he had a clear conscience, the upholding of the faithful Lord, glimpses of God-given insight that again and again lighted the darkness like a lightning flash, and peace and prosperity again at last.

So if you are having a battle, don't give up in despair. Don't think your case is peculiar. Just hold on as Job did.

The Lord still has available an abundant supply of spine-stiffening steadfastness for you and for me. Called the grace of entire sanctification, it is tailor-made to help us stand even when the cows get into the garden.

Now, naturally, I had a fence around that garden. It would have been foolish to expect hungry cows to stay out without a fence.

And, of course, God had a cordon of protection round about His perfect man. It seems only right to have it so. If a man lives right, he should be blessed and should prosper. Job did. While the divine hedge remained the devil could not touch him.

But questions are bound to come up so long as that hedge is there.

Do people who seem religious really serve God from selfish motives, just for what's in it for them? Satan said so.

If a man prospers, do his wealth and success prove him good?

If he is afflicted, does his suffering prove that he has been hiding sin? Job's "comforters" believed that.

Job struggled with that great question which has troubled men through the ages: "Why do the righteous suffer?" And he found no answer.

He was reminded that God is great. And he knew from experience that God is good. He learned, as we must learn, to leave puzzling providences with the Lord.

One reason for the afflictions of the perfect stands out. When all his trials were over, how this man was now qualified to understand and comfort others going through deep waters!

But in that hour when the hedge of divine protection was broken and Satan had gotten in to torture him, he could think of nothing but his agony. The worst of all was that Job supposed that it was God Who tormented him. The devil told him so -- as if I should suspect my best friend of tearing down the fence to let cows into my garden.

"God has taken a spite against you!" (The voice was that of Satan, but poor Job didn't know that.) "He is unjust, unmerciful, hateful!"

Satan made the heavens seem brass so that Job could feel no lift when he prayed. Yes, this man had many afflictions. But all the rest faded into insignificance compared to his terrible fear that somehow God was angry with him.

His "friends" did nothing to help him. Friends? They were hardly that. You remember them. Through the broken hedge solemnly marched three fellows with small-caliber notions and stereotyped ideas.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had a rigid rule. Righteousness brings God's blessings -- material blessing -- no exceptions, no struggles or delays.

They themselves had wealth in plenty. Therefore they were satisfied that they were proven righteous. Job had lost everything, so he must be a backslider.

Yes, they said some good things, those three -- some very inspiring things. But their whole approach to Job's problem was dead wrong and heartless.

If you found anyone in Job's condition, whoever he was, you would want at least to help him to a good doctor, and find him better housing than an ash heap.

These "friends" didn't. They could counsel Job on how to get "plenty of silver," so we may suppose that they themselves had plenty. But all they offered the sufferer was a liberal supply of harsh criticism.

"Well," someone says, "Job didn't always give a soft answer, either. He was sometimes mistaken, uninformed, hasty."

That is true, but remember, he was in agony.

Did you ever have your fingers shut in a car door? Then about that time did you have someone ask you a question, a perfectly proper, civil question? How did you reply? Did you reply with pleasant composure, as if nothing had happened?

You did not if you are like me. I would take time out to groan a little before I answered at all.

Shall we expect a suffering man to carry on a smooth flow of social conversation? Even a saint, when, like Job, afflicted, may be expected to speak strongly, and even hastily, at times.

A friend was helping to move a piano. Someone got tired and let down one corner on my friend's foot. He called out strongly, "Get that piano off my foot!"

I might shake my head and say, "Brother R. spoke too quickly, too sharply there. He needs more gentleness."

Yes, that would be very easy for me to say. You see, I don't have a piano on my toe.

I cannot find it in my heart to condemn Job. How could I? I have just never been through what he suffered, not even when the cows got in the garden.

A broken hedge was broken for a time and for a purpose God's time and God's purpose.

Job thought the hedge would never be mended, but it was. His trials were over by and by. Once more he rejoiced in health and happiness, and reveled in the conscious blessing of God. Trouble was only for a season.

"Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

Do you remember that scripture? Job would say, "Welcome to the fraternity."

For a season trouble comes "to pass." It will not last long. And the end is peace, to the perfect man -- peace supernal and peace eternal. Praise the Lord!

But even while Job was going through the dark places, he was blessed, time and again, with momentary insights into God's truth, like flashes of lightning, that sustained and lifted him out of the general gloom. I find great encouragement in studying these God-given insights, as we do in the next chapter. It is titled: "In the Hollow of His Hand."

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Chapter 6 IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND

"The Lord said He'd hold me in the hollow of His hand," said Uncle Bud Robinson.

"It's dark in there. And sometimes I get a little uneasy. Then God opens His hand and looks in and says, 'Are you all right, Buddy?'

"And I say, 'Yes, Lord.'"

Of course everything is all right in the hollow of God's hand. There is no danger there, but darkness sometimes.

"I don't like darkness! I get all confused and troubled and distressed!"

Look at it this way: trials are really compliments. If God lets you go through the hard place, it is because He knows you can take it without breaking. Just don't panic in the tunnel and jump off the train. You're on display.

Yes, as a sanctified soul, you are being watched. God meant it to be that way.

"Mark the perfect man," He says, "and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

"Perfect," "upright," there is nothing between that soul and the Lord, so God can get help to His child in any crisis with no delay. It is only with the Lord's help that any of us can make it. And He does help us. But sometimes we are not conscious of His presence and assistance.

Even astronauts, nearly perfect physically, are tested because they are going on display to millions around the world. But in their testing time they are not alone.

In training, the space travelers are strapped into a little chair at the end of a long arm and spun around like a merry-go-round, faster and faster. They are asked to mark a paper now and then to show that they are still alert.

It all sounds very uncomfortable. But spins can happen in space flight, so the sky-men must know how to react.

During that spinning test a doctor is keeping careful watch behind the scenes. The astronauts can't see him but he's there, ready to stop the spin and give instant aid if needed.

It was like that with Job during his big test. He couldn't see the Lord. He thought God had gone off and left him to darkness and disaster.

Job was cornered. He could not run. He could not fight. And worst of all, he couldn't feel even that his prayers were getting through.

There was only one thing to do: surrender.

But if, like Job, you're all given to the Lord already, you can surrender, not to the enemy of your soul, but to the Father in heaven. And God takes over. The devil has no hold at all on Jehovah's trusting children.

Yes, God is right there -- invisible, of course, and intangible. You can't even feel His presence sometimes, so we moan and we groan in our imagined desolation. We think the Lord is letting things go to ruin.

Why the Scripture spotlight on such a scene of apparent defeat? Poor Job groped brokenheartedly after help from heaven. He was the picture of defeat and despair. His prayers brought no response.

Have you ever been to that place?

A spot like that is marked in my memory. Over on the hillside above the creek I went alone -- not just to pray -- to pray through. The pressure was unendurable.

Prayer changes things, doesn't it? Surely God would come in blessing.

He did not come. No assurance was given me that God had heard at all. No comfortable feeling came that He was doing anything or planning to do anything to help me.

Nevertheless He did hear. And He did work in a wonderful way that I could not foresee at all. We don't have to feel that God answers prayer. It is enough to know it.

Job learned that lesson -- later. But right then the suffering saint was in dense darkness. Oppressive, smothering, chilling gloom covered him. He got his eyes off the Lord and began to feel sorry for himself. (You and I never do that, of course.)

He was so down that he begged for sympathy. "Have pity on me, O ye my friends" (19:21).

When a man begs for pity he has about hit bottom, emotionally, at least.

Like Job, you will maybe have problems sometimes -- problems? Such as?

You will have problems such as losing the emotional thrill that you felt when your heart was first cleansed. You will feel especially bad because you don't know why you don't feel as

good as you used to, or as good as others say they do, or as good as you think a sanctified person ought to feel.

Is this familiar territory?

Then it is time to visit with Brother Job. He has been there. God let the account be recorded in scripture to help you and me when we are there.

I can see Job smile as he recalls, much later, "I couldn't feel any emotional lift whatever. I was bereaved, sick, bankrupt, deserted, scorned. Surely, I thought, folk ought to pity a fellow in such a condition. But they didn't. Nobody, not even my friends, or, apparently, my God, gave my sufferings any sympathy at all. I was at the end of myself."

At the end of self, "wit's-end-corner" some call that spot. The human extremity that is God's opportunity. Really, it is a good place to be because it is there that we lose all confidence in self and let God take over.

He did for Job.

One moment he was seeking pity from human friends. Then all at once the tortured man had a sudden and glorious burst of inspiration. And sobbing in an instant turned to shouting.

"I know that my redeemer liveth!" (19:25)

"What happened, Job? What changed you from sympathy-seeking to singing, all in a split second?"

"A little touch from God made the change. The darkness lifted. Gloom gave way to glory!"

"Are you all right, Job?" the wonderful Voice whispered, "there, in the hollow of my hand?"

"Yes, Lord, Oh, yes! I see You again. You are not gone away. And You are alive. I'm going to live with You forever!"

From that instant Job knew that his battle would end, not in defeat, but in victory. It was the turning point. The sufferer began to climb out of his despair from that moment. He never sank so low again.

To quote Uncle Bud Robinson again: "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in the end and hang on!"

But when everything and everyone fail you, what is left?

God is right beside you ready to help you, loving you, watching over you, lest the pressure grow too great. All of His infinite resources are available to you, only a prayer away.

Are you in darkness? Never mind. If you are in the hollow of God's hand, it may get dark there, but remember, it is absolutely safe, for no man can pluck you out of His hand. And the darkness is just a short cut to eternal sunshine.

You'll find Job up there, and you can take your time and talk it all over.

So don't take the burdens of the world on your shoulders. God is the only One capable of carrying that load. When you try it, you're seeking to play God. It never works. And you'll be neglecting some burdens fitted for you.

Job learned several things about misplaced burdens. That is the title of our next chapter: The Misplaced Burden.

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Chapter 7

THE MISPLACED BURDEN

"Why did God let you be deaf while others have normal hearing?"

A terrible, cruel question to put to a class of deaf children!

They knew the burden of being hard of hearing -- teased, the object of rough horseplay, sometimes considered retarded, shut off from activities that others enjoyed. This was all because they could not hear.

But one boy, so the story goes, went to the visitor who had written that appalling question on the blackboard. With tears the lad took the chalk and wrote, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

Not cruel, hard fate, but a kind, heavenly Father has made me what I am. It is the only answer -- the Christian answer.

But what if Christ is unknown? Then the burden is heavy, indeed. The question, "Why?" is baffling, tormenting.

Job did not know about the Saviour.

Suffering, he knew that. Burdens, they weighed him down. His very name has been translated "Weeping" or "He cries." Why his agony? He just did not know.

What can we do when we suffer without knowing why? We can "mark the perfect man, and behold the upright," and follow his example, "for the end of that man is peace."

"Though he slay me," cried God's perfect man, Job, "yet will I trust in him" (13:15). Like a compass needle to the pole, the heart of this steadfast man kept turning always to the Lord.

Why did God delay in coming to Job's help? I think He was waiting for Job and his friends to talk themselves out! Do we seek solutions in logic or human wisdom? Then the Lord has no chance to get a word in edgewise!

Why don't we listen instead of talking so much when God wants to speak?

What a thrill, what an answer to prayer, to hear the Lord's voice! For by and by God did come. He was right there with Job. Then what did problems matter? The presence of Jehovah can solve any human problem. He does not just have the answers. He Himself is the Answer. With Him all things are possible.

But don't get your hopes up too much, Job. The Almighty appears in the funnel cloud of a tornado! And His question sounds severe. It brings not the comfort you sought, but reproof: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2)

Reproof? For a sanctified man?

Yes, whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Doesn't He reprove you now and then?

The real question is, "How does a perfect man take correction?" Perfection should make a difference.

Job, we hope you can show a good spirit here for correction is one of the hardest things to take especially when we have done our best.

Job walks quickly in the light. He is a good example to you and me. For if we walk in the light, the blood cleanseth (continually) from all sin.

But God's words are not altogether scolding. He is pointing the way to relief for Job from his burdens. "Words without knowledge" -- there is no blame in that charge. Job was ignorant of a lot of things, but he couldn't help it. Neither can you or I be blamed for lacking knowledge we've had no chance to gain.

"Son," the Lord is saying, "you just don't have enough information to figure things out. Only Deity has the infinite perspective to see all in its true light. Your burden is misplaced. It is Mine, not yours. Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you."

A missionary couple in Africa visited the post office. They had hoped that the mail would bring them funds to carry on their work, but they were disappointed. Driving silently homeward they picked up an African burdened with a heavy load. To their amazement he kept the burden on his head even after he had climbed aboard their truck. Why?

"You are so good to give me a ride, I cannot ask you to carry my burden, too."

Smiling, the Ludwigs got the message from their heavenly Father, "I am able to carry you and your burdens, too."

"Job," God says, in substance, "your God is too small. That means you are too big. You take upon you loads you cannot handle, like that book you spoke of carrying on your shoulder."

Book? Job had said, "If I could just find God, I would march into His presence, bearing on my shoulder the record book of my blameless life. I would plead for justice. I have done nothing to deserve this agony."

Hold on, Job. Mortal men do not enter the presence of Almighty God like that.

"Son, why do you insist on maintaining your own goodness? Will you condemn Me that you may be righteous?"

Wait. Can we be perfect and still maintain our own ways as right?

No, we cannot, you and I. We have been brought up to know that the Lord is our Righteousness. "I nothing have, I nothing am, my trust is in the bleeding Lamb, both now and evermore."

But Job knew nothing of Calvary's Lamb, His atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness. He lacked some vital pieces of the puzzle he was trying to put together. Job was seeing things then as he had not seen them before.

"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" (42:5, 6).

Repent? A perfect saint?

Yes, he changes his whole attitude, completely and at once. That is what the word repent means. Thus Job qualifies as perfectly obedient.

But God has still another burden to lift from the sufferer's heart. Maybe we're all at fault here.

"Job, you have been self-centered. You have had excuse, if anyone ever did, for being concerned about yourself. But you have failed to help your friends. They need someone to pray them through."

A misplaced burden -- he battled over his circumstances when he could not change them. And he forgot or cast aside the load men are intended to bear and fitted to carry -- praying for others.

The pattern is repeated in every revival meeting. Satan gets the sanctified muddled. Troubled about themselves they groan desperately, with nothing to pray about. They nullify their usefulness in the battle.

Sanctified friend, why not stop taking your own pulse so often? Try praying for the lost. I think you will find that course a release from bondage.

Now Job might have said, "Me? Pray for those ugly fellows who were so mean to me? And I had hoped God would give me a little sympathy. I'm sick, poor, despised, lonely. And I haven't had a kind word, boo-hoo!"

He didn't say that because he had overheard some thrilling words God spoke to the critics: "Him will I accept" (42:8).

God would answer his, Job's prayers. God was not angry with him after all!

What did sickness, poverty and pain mean, after that?

"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight!" Nothing really matters if the Lord loves me, and He does!

It is an amazing picture: the sick praying for the well; a bankrupt pleading for the prosperous; a weak man interceding -- and prevailing -- for the strong.

It is the climax of the whole book. Job is back on course. He has cast off the misplaced burden of trying to understand God's providence; and he has taken on the lesser load meant for him prayer burden for the needy. He is still sick, penniless, friendless -- but what a delight he feels to know that God has not forgotten him. God is pleased with him. It is well with his soul.

You and I can enjoy that same blessing -- the witness of the Spirit that there is nothing between our souls and the Saviour. To enjoy that assurance brings heaven's joy, lift, and brightness into the soul. In fact, it is heaven here, to have fellowship with the Lord.

I am glad that God let Job have that blessed assurance while he was still afflicted, for now we know that we, too, can be blessed with days of heaven upon the earth, even though still subject to pain and temptation.

What a prayer it must have been! I am sure that Job's petitions were punctuated with chuckles of delight and shouts of praise. And there wasn't any question about the outcome. God had said He would accept Job's prayer, and reclaim his friends. And He did.

Those religious but apparently unconverted men got something real in their hearts. Then something else happened. Job began to realize that his darkness had lifted. His pain was gone. "The Lord turned again the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (42:10). That selfless prayer brought final victory.

And can we ask any better evidence that this man had a pure and perfect heart?

Yes, Job got back his wealth and power. But what if he had been crushed by his sorrows and sunk into the grave?

"In all these things," the New Testament tells us, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," through Christ.

Job, of course, knew nothing of Christ. But He is there, in the book of Job, filling a place no man could occupy, answering the questions of broken hearts.

We'll try to trace His presence by and by. But in fairness, first, we must discuss some controversial definitions and opinions.

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Chapter 8 CONTROVERSY

"Daddy, look! Come look at the house I built!"

Daddy pauses to glance at the shapeless structure of odd sticks crudely nailed together.

"Well, well, son! And you did this all by yourself? But, say, where did you get the hammer and saw?"

"Out of that big box. Over there!"

"Oh, oh. That's Daddy's tool box. And see, you've hit a nail with Daddy's saw. Now, look, son. Don't ever get into Daddy's tool box again, do you hear me? It's all right this time because you didn't know. But now Daddy's telling you. Stay out of that tool box. If you get into it again Daddy'll have to spank, see?"

A few days later Daddy comes home and finds that the boy has been into his tools again. And the little fellow isn't there to meet him as usual. He's hiding.

If you were Daddy, wouldn't your attitude be different this time?

"Yes, because this time the youngster knows better."

It wouldn't seem quite fair to accuse the lad of wrongdoing the first time, do you think?

I am talking about the difference between a sin and a mistake. Now perhaps we are ready for that unavoidable question: "What is sin?"

The definition must be agreed upon before we can turn to another question: "Is it possible for a man to live above sin?"

Job said he did live thus. His friends said he was a liar and a hypocrite. What Job professed was impossible. He must have done something terribly wrong, and didn't want to own it.

What is sin?

Sin is "the transgression of the law."

All right, the Bible does say that. But what law? And what transgression? Just any violation of God's perfect standard of absolute holiness? Whether we know better or not?

Then no man ever was or can be free from sin. But the Bible speaks of being made free from sin as a privilege of God's people.

Many, like Job, testify to this experience.

"They just don't know their hearts. A man's worst sins are those of which he is not conscious.

We may not know our own hearts. Certainly the unsanctified do not. But God does know all hearts, through and through. And when God witnesses to a man that through the blood of Christ, his heart is pure from sin, 'I count it as impossible that that man should be mistaken,' says John Wesley, "as that God should lie."

Call a mistake a sin and nobody can be perfect. But God says Job was perfect, and that many others were, too.

"But call a sin a mistake and you fall into deadly delusion."

True, but why take either of these courses? Why not just distinguish between a mistake and a sin? Then things fall into understandable order.

"But what about that scripture, 'Sin is the transgression of the law?' Would any man dare to claim that he never violates God's perfect law?"

Will you look with me at that verse a bit more closely? It's 1 John 3:4b. Our King James version puts it this way: "Sin is the transgression of the law." However the Greek says transgression of the law all in one word. And that word means rebellion.

Sin is rebellion. Rebellion is sin. We can all agree on that.

But what of failures that spring, not from rebellion, but from ignorance, weakness, infirmity, prejudice?

Is it not possible for one who loves God perfectly in his heart to make some terrible blunder without being guilty of sin?

Pardon me, that is too much theology and too much theory. Why don't we drop this discussion and just talk a little with the four main characters in the book of Job?

"Eliphaz, sir, you first, if you please. Some questions about your religious views, if you don't mind. Tell us, Brother Eliphaz, what school of religious thought you represent."

"Some call me a Supernaturalist."

"A Supernaturalist -- what are your main beliefs?"

"My religion, sir, is largely based on a vision I had one dark night. I was visited by a spirit. It both appeared and spoke to me. The experience was awesome."

"Certainly, it must have been. You say this spirit spoke. What did it say?"

"In brief, that men cannot be just with God" (4:17-19).

"And that statement underlies your beliefs. Did you try the spirit to see whether it were from God?"

"No, it would have seemed irreverent."

"What are your charges against Job?"

"He is a hypocrite. His sufferings must be punishment for some horrible crime. But he claims to live above sin (chapter 31). This is fanaticism."

"Thank you, Eliphaz. Now, Brother Bildad."

"I am, sir, a leader in a group known as Traditionalists."

"I see. And what, in brief, are your main doctrines?"

"We stress the wisdom of the race. Lessons from human experience have through the centuries been handed down by word of mouth in pithy little proverbs."

"Please quote one for us."

"Man is a worm (25:6). That is, man is a maggot, a feeble, disgusting creature, feeding on filth."

"A gloomy statement, Bildad. With what do you charge Job?"

"His claim to a clear conscience is by tradition impossible. And if he were innocent, God would make him prosperous" (8:16).

"Thank you. Ah, Brother Zophar, I see you did not wait to be called."

"I am a Dogmatist, sir. One of many. We feel that our beliefs are obvious to any sensible person, and need no proof."

"You expect folk to take your word for things. Is that it?"

"Let me illustrate. To be just, God must prosper the righteous and punish the wicked. Job himself admits that. But he will not confess that his affliction is given as punishment for sin."

"Then you concur with Eliphaz and Bildad that Job is a hypocrite?"

"I've never seen a man who lived above sin. Have you?"

"To answer that question might involve us in controversy. Thank you, Zophar. Now, you three are elderly men, respected leaders of religious thought. And you agree on your accusations against Job. Perhaps we can find and emphasize some points of agreement between you and Job himself. Brother Job, do you go along with any of the groups represented by your friends?"

"No, sir. I am what might be called a God-fearer. We are few in number. The Lord speaks to us and we obey Him."

"What evidence can you offer that you really hear from God?"

"A transformed life, sir, and a clear conscience."

"How do you explain the dreadful afflictions which you endure?"

"I cannot explain them. But I have no condemnation for sin, and therefore cannot believe that they are punishment for wrong doing."

"But your three friends take a stand against you. Can you call any witnesses to speak in your defense?"

"My witness is in heaven, and my record on high" (16:19). This is a perplexing case. We had hoped to find enough points of agreement to lessen the tension. But both Job and his friends seem firm in their opinions and are in complete disagreement. Now if -- "Excuse me, but if you'll pardon a young man for speaking, I'd like to point out some errors on both sides."

"Oh, pardon us, Elihu. You do give us several chapters in the book of Job, don't you? We certainly didn't mean to ignore you. But in fairness to your contributions, perhaps we'd better wait to hear from you until our next chapter. It is entitled, "Christ in the Book of Job."

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Chapter 9 CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF JOB

Our church was expecting a crowd for a special meeting. At mealtime all would gather for fellowship and food at a potluck supper. The parsonage family had agreed to supply two pies for the occasion.

As it happened, when the day drew near, the good wife was sick abed. Probably the ladies of the church would willingly have released us from our obligation if I had explained. Instead I decided to make those pies myself. No, I have never made a pie before nor have I ever tried it since.

Not anyone criticized those pies. Everyone was very polite. But no one complimented me on them, either. No one said anything at all for no one took so much as even one small piece. I brought those pies back home and ate them myself. Not even the Mrs. would taste them. She doesn't like mince pies.

The courteous but eloquent silence about my pies still reminds me at times not to volunteer in matters in which I am less than competent.

In a way, the experience of Elihu was like mine.

Elihu? The brilliant young fellow who listened to the discussion between Job and his friends. Job was triumphant but not helped. The three were silenced but not convinced. Elihu could see flaws on both sides of the argument. So he stepped in to set everybody straight.

His oratory was politely ignored. No one commented on his speech. No one argued or disagreed. When he paused and invited rebuttal no one spoke. All stayed politely quiet. Even the Lord, when He drew near and interrupted the perspiring preacher who had chosen to speak on a subject which only Omniscience could handle.

Elihu did have a great theme, "The Problem of Human Suffering."

It was really too big for even this clever and energetic speaker. For that matter, it had been too big for the three critics, and even for Job himself. For any man to try to solve the problem is like attempting to put together an intricate jigsaw puzzle with a number of key parts missing. Too many things that bear on the case we do not and cannot see.

Some things Elihu might have seen -- like Job's heaven-attested saintliness and his suffering. Elihu gives Job no credit for perfection, makes no allowance for his pain. Instead the young man outdoes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in condemning Job. "My desire is that Job may be tried to the end," says Elihu (34:36), "for his answers for wicked men."

A little kindness and tact would have improved the young man's usefulness, wouldn't you say?

A group of workmen were trying to loosen a door latch on a railroad freight car. One cried, "I'll make it move!" Without giving anyone a chance to get out of the way he struck that door a mighty blow with a sledge hammer.

He moved the door all right. But he also did serious damage to the fingers of one who couldn't jerk away fast enough.

Some think Elihu said nothing new. Others feel that he helped Job by approaching the problem from a fresh angle. He thought of Job's sufferings, we are told, as more correction than punishment -- correction for condemning God, because God had let him, Job, be afflicted, though innocent.

These are valuable insights, to be sure. But while giving the young, volunteer counselor due credit for the good advice he offered, we must regret his attitude in another matter.

Elihu tried to play mediator between God and man.

"Behold," he said to Job, "I am according to thy wish in God's stead" (33:6)

It sounds as if he were trying to fulfill Job's desire for a Daysman -- someone who could stand between man and God, and lay his hand upon both.

"I will be that one," announced Elihu.

"No, young man, tread softly here." For a mortal man to intrude into the sacred office of mediator is not becoming or reverent. There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

And there was no need for Elihu or anyone else to act as mediator. For Christ Himself was there all the time. Let me illustrate.

The late Lyle Prescott was something of an artist as well as a missionary and a musician. Sometimes he would entertain his friends by cutting their silhouettes from paper. His skillful scissors made those profiles striking likenesses of the faces he portrayed.

I noticed something else. In the paper a hole was made for each silhouette -- a hole that exactly matched the profile. Each empty hole looked as much like the person it represented as did the cut-out.

There is nothing in a hole, of course. Yet to fill and to fit its emptiness would take a face exactly the size and shape of that hole.

There is a Christ-shaped emptiness in the heart of every man.

Job, in voicing some deep, timeless human longings, was revealing an emptiness that Christ, and only Christ, exactly fits and fills.

No Christ in the book of Job? Yes, He is there. There in the unexplained sufferings of the good, sorrows which point forward to Calvary. He is there in the questions that only Christ can answer, there in the heart-hunger which only the God-man can satisfy, there in the emptiness which the loving Saviour alone can fill.

Human attempts to solve soul problems leave men still in the fog of their own inadequate reasoning. Only God can speak with authority in such matters. And He does speak. As Job had desired and prayed, the Lord Himself appeared on the scene.

Apparently the Almighty did not even wait for Elihu to finish his discourse. The young man seems to have been distracted by the awesome funnel cloud coming. "Clouds -- wind -- darkness --" he cried. He seems to retire from the stage in distress and disorder.

But what a welcome relief to hear, instead, the voice of God. To be sure, He speaks in reproof. But His voice is always clear, kind, authoritative, inspiring -- not like Satan with his vague accusations. The Lord at once puts His finger on Job's very problem.

He always does that when we get quiet enough to hear His voice. I am not at all sure that Job was ready for what Jehovah had to say. Certainly the others were not.

All were guilty of the fault with which God charges Job -- darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But only Job spoke up to acknowledge the fault. He moved quickly in obedience to the Lord's challenge. Such quick obedience brought God's fresh blessing. Then, when he himself was blessed, Job could be a blessing to others.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." We'll try to sketch Job's happy ending in the final chapter, "Mine Eye Seeth Thee."

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Chapter 10 MINE EYE SEETH THEE

Tense and troubled, Bill prayed silently as he lay sleepless at midnight. "Lord, are You going to let him get away with that? You know how disagreeable he was. He certainly ought to come to me with an apology."

This matter of getting along with others is a problem sometimes, isn't it?

"Lord," breathed Bill in his heart, "what shall I do?"

Then God spoke. "You go and apologize to him."

It wasn't at all the answer Bill expected or wanted. But he knew his Shepherd's voice, and obeyed it. He found that obedience the simple, right way out of the tension and turmoil. It prevented the threatened breakdown in communications between two neighbors.

God's way is always the right way even though it may mean humbling of self into the dust. And it is the good way. The sanctified delight in the will of God even when that will brings humiliation.

I think it lifted a great load from Job's heart to know that the Lord had come in answer to his prayer -- that God was speaking. The Almighty had come in person to bring him the solution to his problems. Even though when Jehovah spoke it was not in sympathy but in admonition.

"Gird up now thy loins like a man" (38:3a).

Job knew perfectly well what that meant. But maybe we do not. In Bible lands folk wore -- and still wear -- long flowing garments to protect them from heat. How can they work, or run, or, if need be, fight, in such entangling robes? They can't. Any strenuous activity calls for a girding oneself -- tucking the hem of the long robe into a broad belt or sash -- the girdle -- around the waist.

"That's what you need, Job. Prepare for action. Forget yourself and your complaints and listen to Me. You'll never get anywhere until you do."

But why doesn't the Lord speak more kindly to poor Job? I went to a doctor for help in what I thought a minor problem. He said bluntly, "You're going to have to have that cut out. At once. It's an emergency case."

It was the kindest thing he could have said. It saved my life.

"Get your eyes open," the Lord said to the man of Uz, "to My greatness, and in contrast, your own littleness."

Then He gave Job a marvelous revelation of His power, as He did to Moses when the leader of Israel begged to see God's glory.

This was wonderful, but it could have brought Job his supreme test. He might have said, "If even the God I have faithfully served is so stern with me, what's the use going on?"

And no doubt the fiend at his elbow hissed, "Curse God and die!"

I am glad that Job listened, not to the Evil One, but to the Holy One. He had made a life-long habit of listening to the Lord.

"What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10)

Yes, Job humbled himself. This is better testimony to a sanctified heart than anything else could be. And because it was God's will for him to stoop to the dust, Job was blessed in doing that. When we do the will of God we draw close to Him. And when a man takes one feeble, faltering step toward God, the Lord takes two great strides toward that man. The nearer we come to God the more encouragement and blessing and lift reach us and the better testimony we can give of His grace in our hearts.

There was in Job's attitude no rebellion whatever. As soon as he received light he walked in it, fully and gladly. This is the way to increasing fellowship, continual cleansing.

The Lord Himself gave approval to His obedient servant.

To the three critics the Almighty said, "Ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job" (42:8).

Job had spoken right.

Wouldn't it cause a stir if any modern theologian should be pronounced correct by no less an authority than Omnipotence Himself? For theology, though controversial sometimes, is real headline material.

God said Job was right.

There you have lead enough to start any alert reporter on his way to get a personal interview with the one so highly recommended.

* * *

"Mr. Job, I represent the news media. Would you consent to answer a few questions about your religious views?"

"I am always glad to talk about the Lord."

"You went through a period of great suffering and darkness. Did this bitter experience shake your faith in God?"

"On the contrary, I cannot recall a time when I grew in grace more, or learned more, than in that difficult season."

"To what do you attribute your steadfastness under pressure?"

"I was sustained by a power greater than my own for in and of myself I was absolutely helpless."

"Do you feel that the great trials turned you toward God for help, rather than away from Him?"

"Absolutely. My trouble knocked me flat. But I fell onto the promises of God and hung on."

"I understand that the agony of your distress and the accusations of your friends caused you some confusion, so that it was difficult for you to hear from heaven. Would you comment on that?"

"I was confused, true. But the darkness made me desperate for divine light and guidance. I was thus conditioned to hear from the Lord in spite of hindrances. And because He saw my need, God gave me some remarkable insights into His truth."

"Insights that you might not have received, except for the pressure of your trials? Will you share some of these with us?"

"That He is my Redeemer; that He is coming back to this world; that I myself shall see Him and live with Him forever; that even when I cannot sense His Presence in prayer, He is with me, anyhow; that He has all I need to make it through, and He is able to communicate His grace to me at any time."

"This you learned during your trials. Did the suffering itself teach you anything of value?"

"Yes, that earthly treasures are not really important, for God Himself is all I need; that I should not fear disaster as I once did; to pray for my friends and not so much for myself; that with nothing but God I am far better off than those who have everything else, but not the Lord."

"Mr. Job, you may be aware that the occasion for this interview is the Lord's pronouncement that your statements about Him were right. One question at this point: Do you feel that He referred to your words before and during the trials or to your corrected view after God's appearance and reproof?"

"In other words, was I mistaken about anything? Of course, I was, and no doubt still am, for only God Himself makes no mistakes."

"In what do you feel you were mistaken?"

"For one thing, I was convinced that there was no hope, that death was the only possible outcome of my disasters. But now it is all over like a bad dream. I have twice as much as before."

"On the main point of disagreement with your friends, do you still feel that you were right?"

"I do feel so, very strongly. That point was whether it is possible for a man by the grace of God to live a holy life. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar said it was out of the question. But I knew that God had purified my heart and was keeping me clean. This fact posed a great problem, however. Why did the Lord send terrible trouble upon me when I did not deserve it? And when I prayed, why did I seem to get no answer?"

You use the word seem. Do you now feel that God did actually hear your prayers and answer them?"

"He did! I supposed He was far away, but He was right there beside me, though invisible, all the time. He heard my very words, for later He quoted them back to me."

"You had a sense of injustice. Apparently God was treating you unfairly by sending disaster which you did not deserve. You yourself would not have treated anyone like that -- not even the lowliest servant. Did you feel that God owed you an explanation?"

"I did. But no explanation came. The Lord is not bound to explain to mortal men the reasons for His actions. And I could not comprehend it if He did. I see now as never before the Lord's greatness and His wonderful goodness."

"As you look back now can you see any reason for your sufferings?"

"One great reason, certainly, was to help my friends. They are religious leaders with wide influence. It would have been disastrous for them to keep on believing and teaching that it is impossible to live above sin."

"Do you feel that God sent you less than justice in those dark days? Or has your attitude changed?"

"I have come to believe that God did not send my agony at all. Rather it came from some dark, malignant force or personality. This personification of evil attacked me savagely and then suggested to my confused mind that God had done it, and that He was cruel and unjust to treat me so. This I still do not very well understand."

"You feel, then, that your grasp of the truth is still incomplete?" "I know almost nothing of the great wisdom of God."

"You feel limited in knowledge and admit that you are sometimes mistaken. Do you feel that you sinned against God by taking wrong attitudes and saying hasty things under pressure?"

"No, because at the time I knew no better."

"Mr. Job, you have often stated that your conscience was clear. Would you say now, that this was one of the points on which you were mistaken?"

"I have never felt more strongly that God can cleanse and keep, and that He did thus keep me, in spite of ignorance and mistake."

"Do you feel that the trials enriched your life?"

"Beyond measure. As never before I can now understand and sympathize with the suffering. That reminds me. My neighbor Zibeon is sick. If you will excuse me I must take time to visit him today."

"Thank you, Brother Job."

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THE END