

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE INNER LIFE

TEXT: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself." (Job 42:5, 6).

SOMEONE has called the Book of Job "The Epic of the Inner Life." It is most felicitous. We all know that there is an inner life; that within the barriers of our being, behind all activities and externalities, we ourselves live. We all know that there is transacted the real life. We all know that there we are solitary, that there every man is a hermit.

And while this, past all controversy, is true, in another sense this strange inner life is immensely populous. Passions, desires, temptations, lurid and demoniacal thoughts, angelic thoughts, prayers, adorations, mean selfishnesses, wrestle and plead, and it is into this chaos that faith brings the nature of God, and the life of the risen Christ, and the immense peace and power and joy of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. And we all know that when we have received eternal life we have written but the first chapter in the new history of the inner life.

New conflicts, new victories, alas! new defeats, too.

The most commonplace Christian whom you know is transacting in the recesses of his being an epic.

And we know that this inner life is, finally, the source and spring of the outer life. It is, of course, possible to keep these dissimilar for years, but soon or late the inner life becomes determinative of the external life. It is with this life, therefore, that God most concerns Himself. It is the distinctive characteristic of the gospel dispensation.

"Now is the ax laid to the root of the tree," says the forerunner, John. **"Make the tree good, and his fruit good,"** is almost the opening word of Christ. It was always so, indeed. **"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts."** **"The Lord pondereth the heart."**

I cannot, I think, do better than to take the last chapter of the Book of Job for my point of departure, verses 5 and 6:

“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.”

It is

THE CRISIS OF THE TROUBLED PATRIARCH

The thing itself is very simple. **“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear.”** There was a testimony concerning God which had come to Job, and upon which he had based a true faith and a good life. Ordinarily, Christian experience has just that history. There is a record concerning Christ, His person and work. It is God’s testimony, and we receive it and set to our seal that God is true. We are saved. It is a very real faith, though a faith based wholly upon testimony, the hearing of the ear. That was the faith of Job down to the very last chapter.

Here was a godly man whose outward life was so blameless that God could challenge the malice of Satan himself to find a flaw in it. Nor was he but negatively good. He was a good man in the positive sense. His life counted on the right and helpful side of things.

Then began that strange dealing of God, that permitted chastening, which has been the mystery in so many other lives. How strange a thing that the best man of his time should be the most troubled; should be the man upon whom, as it seemed, the hand of God lay most heavily. And the fact, as you know, called out various interpretations.

The opinion of Satan concerning this man’s goodness and usefulness was that he was a mere hireling. **“Hast not thou made an hedge about him?”** You have given him unusual prosperity, and in a certain sense you have bribed him. That was Satan’s opinion. That was a lie. And God permitted Satan to demonstrate the falsity of his theory of this man’s life.

God said, in effect, “Take away the hedge”; and then you know what happened: his property went, his children went, and yet the integrity of the man remained. He did not curse God.

And then Satan fell back upon another theory which was just as false as the other. He said: **“Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.”** You have left the man his health. **“Put forth now thine hand, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.”**

And so that was permitted. His health went, grievous pains fell upon him. Bereft of property, bereft of family, bereft of health, and yet this man, with a faith which was founded upon a hearing about God, maintained his integrity.

And then came the theories of his friends. They agreed in the belief that there must be in his life some secret sin, although he had succeeded in covering it from human vision. They were very sure that the only explanation of the sorrows which were falling so heavily upon him was, that he was a hypocrite; was not as good as he seemed to be, and upon that belief they argued the question with him. But Job knew that also to be false, and he made good his contention that he was not a hypocrite.

A VISION OF GOD

And now we come to the real epic of his inner life.

God Himself took up the matter. And if you follow the closing chapters of this wonderful Book of Job, you will find the whole mechanics, so to speak, of the deeper dealing of God with the inner life of a saint whom He is about to make saintly.

There was, first of all, the unveiling of His power, His majesty, His greatness.

“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind . . . Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the cornerstone thereof, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? . . . Hast thou commanded the morning since the days, and caused the dayspring to know his place? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? . . . Wilt thou also disannul my judgment?”

Ah, poor Job! Thou wert able to maintain thy cause against Satan and against man, but what wilt thou answer to God? What, indeed, can Job say before this personal manifestation of God Himself but that which he did say:

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself.”

THE UTTER COLLAPSE OF SELF

Yes, fellow-man, thyself. Now the secret is out.

It was not at all something Job had done, it was what Job was. Job himself was wrong. He had never judged self before God. He had not the sentence of death in himself. The interpretative chapter of Job is the twenty-ninth. The personal pronoun occurs forty-eight times in twenty-five verses.

He was a good man, but he was too much aware of it, and he was in deep darkness as to the real state of his soul, of his inner life before God. And nothing, not the depth of his affliction, nor the reproaches of his friends, nor his own self-communications ever brought him to see himself.

But when he passed from a knowledge about God to a personal acquaintance with God there was nothing to be said but the despairing:

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself.”

The revelation of God, bringing a real sense of personal unworthiness and demerit, is what I think essentially we have in this experience of Job.

It is not in exercises of self about self; not in any efforts of Job to discover the mystery of his inner life, that he comes to real self-consciousness; but it was the vision of God Himself which, flooding his inner being, brought the humbling, hateful vision of self.

A NEW AND HIGHER SERVICE

And then the most astonishing thing of all happened. God took up the vindication and restoration of the man who abhorred himself!

“The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.”

And then, as you know, God made of Job a priest through whom alone the three reproachful moralizers could approach His offended holiness.

“My servant Job shall pray for you, and him will I accept.”

You see, we have essentially four things here:

- First, the vision of God;
- Secondly, the utter collapse of self;
- Thirdly, a new and higher service;
- Lastly, a doubled fruitfulness.

“Also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

Now I believe we have here an order which is invariable, and I am very sure that we have here an experience which is not exceptional.

Oh, beloved, we too have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but we need to come to deeper things, closer things, with God.

We need to come to that personal and underived acquaintanceship with Him, so that we may say with the men of Samaria, **“Now we believe not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ,”** although the first effect of it will be this awful humbling, this utter collapse of self.

But oh, how blessed a place is that valley of humbling. No one falls there who does not rise to newness of life and service. But remember, it costs the sentence of death in self; the thorough reconstruction of the inner life.

NOT AN ISOLATED EXPERIENCE

It will help us in interpreting this experience to see that it came, not to Job alone, but to every man greatly used of God. The circumstances differ but the essence is the same—God is realized, self-strength is turned into helplessness, new power and blessing are given.

- Joshua fell at the feet of the Man with the drawn sword (Joshua 5:13-15);
- Isaiah must cry, “**Woe is me**” (Isaiah 6:5-8), only to be cleansed and re-commissioned;
- Jeremiah must learn that he “**cannot speak**” before the Lord will touch his mouth (Jeremiah 1:6-10);
- Ezekiel, prostrated by the glory, must fall on his face in the collapse of self before the Spirit can fill him, and the Lord can say, “**I send thee**” (Ezekiel 1:28; 2:1-10);
- Daniel must say, “**I saw . . . and my comeliness was turned in me into corruption**” (Daniel 10:5-12).
- Even John the Beloved, before the vision of the glorified Christ, must fall “**at his feet as one dead**” before the “**right hand**” can be laid upon him, and he can hear the “**fear not.**”

I wish now to gather up briefly what all this means. And first of all,

TWO THINGS WHICH IT IS NOT

It is neither the entire eradication of the flesh, the death, the extinction of self, nor is it sinless perfection. Self is abhorred, distrusted, detested, set at naught. But so uniform are the characteristics of this experience, whatever the age or dispensation, that it is not difficult to state both the result accomplished and the steps by which it is wrought.

1. We have, then, in this supreme experience, *the revelation of God Himself to the soul.*

It is not something about God; some new testimony concerning God, or some lesson of sorrow or trial. It is God’s own act, His self-revelation of something which testimony had never communicated to heart or conscience, so that there is a new and intense apprehension of himself.

2. The instances quoted from the Scriptures agree, too, in the effect of this unveiling of God.

Before that vision of God self is abhorred. So absolute is this effect that, as we have seen, it is constantly spoken of as the utter deprivation of strength. The self-life is not slain, but it is so seen in that glory as never again to be trusted, or in any way counted on in the things of God. As Paul said: “**We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead,**” in the God of the resurrection, in the God of the new, undying life.

3. In agreement, too, are the *biblical instances that this destruction of self-confidence is followed by the infilling with the strength of Him who was dead and is alive again.*

Not once is the man on his face before the awful, beautiful vision left prostrate. “**I received strength,**” is the unvarying testimony.

4. *And then comes the new and higher service.* This is the blessed consummation; this and the new fruitfulness.

Could I covet anything better for you than that you should see God face to face? Than that there should come to you this highest word in the epic of the inner life? May He grant it, for His name's sake.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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