

The Voice of Job

Second Series – Sermon Twenty-Two

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Here in the sermon, "The Voice of Job," MacDonald, as he did with "Fear," takes on the difficult subject of suffering. There are no easy answers to understanding the created pathway to becoming actual participants in the joy and beauty of the Divine Life we are to share. So, "If God is good, why is there so much human suffering?" God, however, does not answer Job's questions or ours directly in the story, but indirectly. So, MacDonald gives us some helpful perspectives on the subject of suffering. First, God has an obligation to His creatures by the way He made us. Secondly, there is a larger context through which to view circumstances other than the pain of the moment.

Our design is with needs, thousands of necessities, for which They alone are the supply. For the most part, we are unaware of this as we move through our lives, recognizing only our wants. What we call life is in disharmony with our design. Therefore, our right to claim our inheritance, our birthright as children of God, goes unclaimed. This awareness and awakening will seem anything but good as they use life's circumstances to move us from wants to needs. They will, for our good, use life's sufferings as the means to bring us to claim our fundamental rights and relationship from Them!

Therefore, we have a right to claim suffering as a means to the end. The end of living in The Divine Life for which we are to live!

Outline

Human Struggle - If God is good, why is there so much human suffering?

Childlikeness of Job - Job, however, remained childlike in his trust, trusting in God's goodness.

Rights of a Child - God owes Himself to His creatures He has made in His image and likeness.

Rights by Origin - God is the origin of everything, both need, and supply.

Prayer of Truth - We must reject all teaching and doctrines that exclude Their obligation to Their children as unjust and cling to our other-centered and self-giving God!

Rights, not Merits - They are our rights by the Divine Seed given to us as Their Children in creation.

God's Answer to Job - He aroused trust in Job by comparing the Creator and His greatness to the created and our perplexities.

Seeing God - He needs nothing but the assurance of His presence to put everything in perspective.

Final Prosperity - God is offering us the one thing we cannot live without, HIMSELF!

Job 14:13-15 NAS

"Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, That You would conceal me until Your wrath returns to You, That You would set a limit for me and remember me!"

If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my struggle I will wait Until my relief comes.

You will call, and I will answer You; You will long for the work of Your hands."

Human Struggle

The book of Job seems to me to be the most daring of poems.

This poem flows from some of the worst possible events in human life. Ones that assault the very fortresses of an ideal life. Its hero is now seated in ashes, covered in boils and scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery. A man who is broken in body, mind, heart, and spirit. One who is a poster child for the depth of human misery, who has all of life's adversities rolling over his soul.

This story is about humanity, not in the abstract, but the concrete world of reality. Job is a human being at the center of assaults of pain, invasions of fear, and tragic loss. These conditions, in some form or another, threaten all of us. These events reveal our slavery to circumstances over which we have no control or escape. Ones in which we cannot rejoice in the freedom of our soul.

Here he is seated in the center of his despair, crying aloud to the unseen and unknown One he regards as the God of his life.

He cannot, will not, believe God is a tyrant while he cries out against His presumed dealings with him. He is desperately holding onto God as love and looking to Him as the source of his life and joy. Job does not believe his Heavenly Father to be unjust, nor does Job think he has done anything wrong to deserve such treatment from His hands. Therefore, he is profoundly perplexed as to how to reconcile these conflicts.

He had not yet entertained the idea that what would be unfair as punishment might be given him as honor. Honor given by Supreme Love as a blessing above what he could have asked or dared asked if he had understood their giving. Benefits once known and understood, he would willingly endure again. Therefore, he is wholly conflicted in himself. While he must not think God has mistreated him, his reality forces itself against his mind and heart in every way. He knew he had not changed his commitment to a godly life, yet his very God had seemingly lifted His hand against him as severely as rarely seen against any transgressor!

And this is not just against himself alone but in the loss of his children. The loss of his riches by fire, wind, and the hand of his enemies! He is as poor as the poorest, as diseased as the sickest, and mourning his children, which were his pride and joy! His worst fears were upon him, and death denied him. His prayer was as he had come into the world naked that he might not return to his source unheard. He had been left in self-pity, agonizing with the thought that his God had cast him off!

Job does not deny that he has done wrong, but he does deny that he is wicked, not a doer of what he knew to be evil and deceitful.

Childlikeness of Job

If Job had been a Calvinist or a Lutheran, the book would have been very different. His question would have been, *how could God, being just, require of him more than he could do and then punish him as if his sins were done by a perfect being who willfully chose the evil, fully understanding its enormity.*

For me, I will not call anyone Master but Jesus. From Jesus' view, I see the problem with us is obedience, not doing the good we know to do. Our not coming to Him that we may have life. Perhaps our understanding would be clearer if we saw it was not our past sins, but our present failure to act, that is the problem!

Job's childlike view of his Father was never spoiled and perverted, to dishonoring his great heavenly Father by disfiguring His Face with many of our current popular theologies. These theologies are current explanations of God's character by those who do not understand Him. They are acceptable to those who do not care to know Him intimately as Father, Brother, and Friend. Those content to view

Them from a distance as one who watches a storm, seeing its lightning and hearing its thunder, but not wanting to enter the cloud and experience its glory. The conflict between Job's concept of God's justice and what was happening to him taunted him. This conflict about God's character and nature is far greater than his temporary difficulties and not based on the hopelessness of hell as currently accepted and more frightening than his difficulties themselves. Let the world's monsters offer their riddles; they can harm no one who waits on his redeemer for help. Job refused the explanations of his friends, for he knew they were false, no different from us today accepting much of what we are offered about our Father and being at once devoured by the same monster. **Job holds onto the goodness of God, continues to storm His door with questions, ever seeking the one trustworthy source of answers and reconciliation. No thoughts of others will do, but those that only God can give His child. Because who but his Father can explain His ways to His child!**

From this state of conscious conflict, we do not look for logic. Misery is rarely logical, for it is by nature disharmony. However, it would be logical for Job to feel wronged by God, pressing in to be face-to-face so he could confront Him. He was convinced or at least hoped that if he could state his case, lay it out before Him, God would understand and explain it to him and give him peace. He would know that the foundations of the world were secure. That God had not closed his eyes or ceased to be just! Thereby, he would present his case and hear what God would say. Indeed, the Just One would set the mind of his creature at rest!

His friends were good religious men but of the pharisaical type. That is that they would rather just consider God's views instead of coming to Him as His children. Men with traditional theories that had not served them well, ideas that only satisfied their feeble intellectual demands. Theories they think others should accept or perish. These are men anxious to appease God rather than trust Him. Those who would rather receive salvation from God than the God of their salvation. These friends wanted to persuade Job to confess he was a hypocrite. They were insisting that these things had happened because of wickedness, and since they knew of none, it must be some secret sin. They get angry with him when he refuses to agree with them against his knowledge of himself. They insist on his hypocrisy, he on his righteousness.

Nor should we forget that the beginning of the poem prepares us for its proper context when God says to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1: 8 NAS). Here God puts Job in Satan's hands without fear of the result, and in the end, He approves of what Job says about Him. However, the very appearance of God is enough to make him turn against himself. Job's part was to trust God entirely, despite every appearance, despite every reality! In the end, he learns to justify himself no more. He sees that even though God was not punishing him, he is far from what he ought to be and become. "Behold, I am insignificant, what can I say in response to you? I put my hand on my mouth." (Job 40:4 NAS). So, let's look closer at Job's way of thinking and speaking about God. His approach is so different from the Pharisees of his day and ours.

He is angry with the implication that his nature required such treatment. "You know that I am not wicked," he says to God. And to his friends, he cries, "Will you speak what is unjust for God, and speak what is deceitful for Him? Do you not know me at all?"

Such bold words are pleasing to his Father. God is not one to accept flattery which declares Him above obligation to His children, a God to demand of them a debt different from His own. He is a God who

deals generously with His poverty-stricken children and does not make severe demands on His little ones! Job is confident of receiving justice.

There are strange and conflicting feelings in Job. His faith is profound, but he is always complaining. However, it is just the form his faith takes in his troubles. Even as he complains about the hardness and unfairness of his situation, he is confident that all he needs is access to the presence of his Father. Being heard by his Father will be justice enough for him.

If used by us, his language would horrify the religious of our day and would reflect poorly on the lack of truth in them, just as it horrified his three friends. These honest Pharisees of his time held to a religion of doctrine and rebuke. Job's Father speaks not a word of rebuke for the freedom of his speech, for He has always sought those such as Job to worship Him.

Only those who know the outsides of religion think and speak of God as the Almighty or Providence. These will say of those who draw close to God as their Father from their created nature, "they are irreverent." To cry Abba from the depth of our emotions is to such people blasphemy. These show deference to God but do not love Him. They treat God as one far away, instead of the Ones whose heart is their only Home!

Rights of a Child

The poem's beauty is that Job pleads his case before God against all the protests of religious authority. He recognizes no one but his Father and to be justified by Him alone. **And the most beautiful of all of his pleadings is that he implies that God owes something to His creatures even though he does not say it directly. This insight is the beginning of the most significant discovery of all: God owes Himself to the creatures He has made. The children He has created in His image because He has made us incapable of living without Him.** This claim is our highest and most significant gift from Them. Because in the fulfillment of this claim, He sent His only Son, that He the Father of Him and us would follow Him into our hearts!

Perhaps the worst omission in modern theology, constructed out of a stingy religious view and not supported from the deeds, words, or being of Jesus, is the impression it conveys throughout that the Divine acknowledges no such obligation. Are we not the clay and He the potter? How can clay claim anything from the potter? However, we are not just clay, but His clay, spiritual clay, live clay worth the Son of God dying for, that we might learn to consent to be formed into a vessel of honor.

We can earn no merits, for obtaining merits is impossible for us, but God has given us rights. So, rights by merits we have none, but rights by creation, by origin, by relationship we have plenty overflowing in abundance from Him, but never, never rights claimed against Him! His whole desire and labor of love was to make us capable of claiming and provoke us to claim His graces whose rights He bestowed on us in creation. This claim is wildly unreasonable but wonderfully beneficial. It is a relationship created by our Creator, which is the basis for our claim on Him. The whole world would rightly condemn a father who will not provide for his children's hunger.

"Ah, but," says a religious defender of God, "the Almighty stands in a very different relationship than an earthly father; there is no parallel." I concede the point, there is no parallel. An earthly father did not "create" his child. He just participated in an impulse created in him. God as our "Creator" is infinitely

more bound to provide for His child than any man is to provide for his. Yes, the Divine relationship is infinitely closer. It is to God whom every hunger, every aspiration, every desire, every longing, of our nature is to be referred. He designed our every need, made us creatures with thousands of necessities, and we have no claims on Him? No, we have infinite claims, and His one claim on us is that we would obtain our rights from Him.

It is a terrible wrong to represent God as unrelated to our appeals to His fairness. How could He be righteous, that is fair, to us without owing us anything as our Maker? How could there be any fair judgment on the earth if He owed us nothing? Indeed He owes us nothing that He does not pay as the universe's Creator. It is like the devil to imagine a state of disgrace and imperfection that would neglect such an obligation. This neglect is so far from our Father's intentions that He purposely places Himself under obligation to His creatures. Oh, the glory that is His righteousness, goodness, and infinite unselfishness! When doubt and dread invade us and the voice of love in us is silent, nothing can please our Father more than to hear the prayers of His child, "Here I am, O God! You made me, give me what you have designed me to need."

His child's necessities, our weakness, our helplessness are the strongest of all our claims. If I am a whale, I can claim a sea. If I am a sea, my claim is to roll and break into waves after my own kind. If I am a lion, I seek my meat from God. However, I am your child, and this, above all other claims, I claim. That is, if any of my needs go unmet, it shall be by the love of my Father, who will let me see His Face and allow me to plead my case before Him. And this encounter is just as He desired. What could be greater but His children should claim their Father? What is the end of all His suffering with, for, and in us, than that we should receive our birthright? It is for the receiving of our birthright that we were created. For this gift of Himself, His Divine nature is why His energy was given and spent. We, as Their children, must have a claim on our Father, which is the joy of His heart to acknowledge. This created need is our actual claim.

Rights by Origin

God is the origin of need and supply, the Father of all necessities, and the abundant giver of all good things. Gloriously he provides the needs of His children! Jesus is the heart of His answer, not to our prayers, but our needs as He sends us out into His universe.

Unworthy of God is the thought that He could have been a perfect creator, doing anything less than this for His children! That anything less would be worthy of worship or that His Divine nature demanded more of Him than He has given! Or that His nature is not absolute love and devotion and could have created without these the highest of all splendors!

God is nearer to humanity than anything else He has made. What can be closer than the Maker and the made? That which is the origin and that which is because of that origin? The One who wills and that which answers to that will. The one owes its desires, abilities, and heart in response to that will. What other imaginable relationship could claim to compare with this one arising from this relationship? The Father loves His children that look up to Him with hungry eyes. Hungry for life, for acknowledgment, for justice, for living the Life which their Making Life has made for them to live.

Therefore, I protest against all teaching that originates and is fostered by the view of the human heart's faithlessness. Teachings that imply God's exceeding goodness towards man are not the natural and necessary expressions of His Being. The root of every heresy popular in the church today draws its

life simply and only from the soil of this unbelief. The idea that God would be God, gloriously Divine as He is, had They not taken upon Themselves the labor of Love in bringing home Their wayward children. Had They not given Themselves to seek and save the lost, is a lie from Hell! Lies about the nature of God could not exceed this one!

As if the idea of God confessed as less than absolute Love and entirely unselfish, less than perfect, less than the All-in-all, and less than revealed in Jesus Christ! As if the God revealed in the New Testament was not His own ideal expression of loving-kindness. But One who withheld His full expression, His nature, His love, by the very laws He created, thereby limiting what His creation needed Him to be! These theologians would have us believe that the Divine Being, unbound from His nature, deserves even greater homage! And so it might be if He were not by nature our Father! But to understand the living God not as Father, but as a condescending deity who has no obligation to the greatness of His nature, not bound by His goodness to do as He has done, would be to only will the slavish devotion of His creatures. It is to separate our Father from all we see in Jesus Christ.

These same theologians answer that we have fallen and therefore that freed God from any obligation to us, if there ever had been one. This supposed freedom is yet another lie, for no amount of wrong-doing by the child can ever free a parent from the necessity of doing all they can to deliver their child. This relational bond between them can never be broken. This concept of freedom that contains no obligation to others is a worldly and selfish one. This idea is not God's vision of freedom and liberty! To speak as one with a father's heart, the more essential the obligation of fatherhood he accepts, the more children he will have. And the more claims he has upon himself by his children, the freer he is as a father and giver of life. This freedom is the essence of the Divine. Making plenty of room for this self-giving love is freedom!

Jesus teaches us that truth, known by its obedience, will set us free. And this freedom lies in living in the reality of our relationship with God and man. For a man to be alone in the world would be a slave with unspeakable longing and loneliness. And God could no more be satisfied within himself without doing all He could do as God and Father to help the creatures He had made. That is without doing just what He has done, what He is doing, and will do to deliver His sons and daughters and bring them Home rejoicing.

The Father sent His only Son in human flesh as the full expression of Himself in answer to our human cry, "I want to see you, God, face-to-face". Having seen Him, now in His absence, we understand Him better. That we might know Him he came, that we may go to Him, He left. If we, like Job, pursue Him in our heart-felt trouble, the troubles of trying to love the misrepresentation of Him we are taught, we will find God pleased with His children's love of righteousness.

Prayer of Truth

We must reject these doctrines that exclude God's obligation to His children as unjust and cling to His other-centered and self-giving love. It is to this heart that our Father will pour out the riches of His Being that we cannot conceive. Lord, the religious tell me that I have so offended your laws as I am, that you cannot even look upon me, but can only threaten me with eternal banishment from your presence. But, if you will not look upon me, how can I ever be other than I am? Lord, remember I was born into a world of sin, so how can I see sin as you see it? Remember, Lord, that I have never known what it is to be clean, so how can I cleanse myself? You must take me as I am and cleanse me.

"Is it not impossible for me to see the final glory of goodness or the final wickedness of evil? How then can I choose and deserve eternal torment? Had I known good and evil as You see them and then turned from the good and chosen the evil, then I do not know what I would have deserved? But Lord, you know I saw something good in the evil that enticed my selfish heart, not just mine alone, but that of all humanity. You require us to forgive; surely You forgive freely! You are bound to destroy evil for our freedom, but are you bound to keep sinners alive so you can punish them if they are never freed?"

"Sin is not as deep as life, for you Lord are Life. Life with its sorrow and pain goes deeper than sin, for they reach to the divine in us because You can suffer, but you will not sin. To see others suffer might make us turn from evil, but it could never make us hate it. We might see through suffering that You hate sin, but we would not see that you love the sinner. Discipline us we ask, in loving kindness, and we will not faint. Yes, we have done wrong, and it is deep in us, but we are not evil, for we love righteousness. Are you not Father, in the person of Your Son, the sacrifice for our sins and the healer of our transgressions?"

"You made us vulnerable to pride, but you have acknowledged and taken your share of the consequences. Could we ever have come to understand good, as you know it, except by experiencing the seas of sin and the fire of cleansing? The religious tell me I must say for Christ's sake, or you will not forgive. Your rejection of me, as me, rips the very heart out of my weak and poor love by hearing that you will not forgive me except that I hide behind Christ's love for me. But I am thankful that the scriptural record of the Gospel nowhere says such a thing!

"Despite all our fears, weakness, and wrongs, you are faithful to yourself as a perfect Father, and to us beyond what our most loving childlike heart could imagine! You have taken our sins upon yourself and given us Your Life instead to live. You bear our griefs, carry away our sorrows, and empower us to pay every debt we owe to others one day! You are to us an other-centered and self-giving Father! Our hearts can be joyful because You are infinitely beyond all we could ever imagine. You will, for our sakes, humble us and raise us up. You have given us yourself that your presence in us will be eternally alive with your Life. We will live within what the religious call "your wrath" and find ourselves in the embrace of your love!"

Rights, not Merits

You must understand that when I say rights, I do not mean merits of any kind. We deserve nothing from God at all. We can earn no rights that come from ourselves. All of our rights are from God's riches of love given to us freely for our blessing and shared for the sole purpose of providing to us Life in abundance. These rights are so delicate, high, and abundant that we cannot receive them until we desire them with our whole hearts.

The giver of these rights came to us, lived with us, and died by our hands, that we might possess these gifts in abundance. There was no more the Divine could have done on Their part. However, They continue to give Themselves in every moment, in every hour, for every one of us individually. These rights are gifts from God and with God at the very heart of them. He could recall His gifts if He pleased, but only at the cost of removing us into non-being. While we live at Their pleasure and life, They are ours. If They could not transfer our rights to us because we will not accept them then it seems non-being

would be Their only option. **But as to deserving them, that is absurd. They had to die to get our attention that we would be open to receiving. ". . . so you too, when you do all the things which were commanded you (your duty), say, we are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done." (Luke 17: 10 NAS).** This duty is something prepaid by Them for us. There are no claims on God that originate from us. They all arise from Them.

But, for the unchildlike souls who might in ignorance or arrogance, think they can stand before God in their rights and demand of Him this or that from the self-will of their flesh, I will put before you things to which you have rights. Yes, perhaps the root of all rights, given by God Himself, from the beginning, is the Divine seed that is in us. This seed is our divine claim to any want, pain, disappointment, or misery that would awaken us to ourselves like the fools that we are. We have a right to be punished and not spared a single painful emotion that would push us towards repentance. Yes, we have a right to be sent out into outer darkness, what we call hell or even worse, if nothing less will do. We have a right to be pushed into repentance. A right to be hedged in on every side, to have one after another of the hounds of heaven thwart our desires, disrupt our plans, and frustrate our hopes until we come to see in the end that nothing will ease the pain or make life worth living but the presence of God Himself! That nothing is good but the will of God, nothing noble enough for the desire of the heart but oneness with the Eternal. God must, for our good, make us yield our very being, that He can enter in and dwell with us!

That man should try to enforce these claims means nothing. For it is God who owes them to us! It is the exercise of His will for us that He is bound to give them. God has to answer to His own Love for us as His creation. He must meet the need of the human nature He created that we damaged.

The candle of His Life burns dimly in the human soul, but it must burn like the sun in our lives. In reality, this dim light is at the heart of our dissatisfaction and unrecognized hunger after our Father's righteousness.

The soul God made is hungering, through its conscience, selfish, and false self in vain to fill itself with the dry husks of grain from the barren fields of the earth. Even the most barren soul whose temple is filled with deified self cannot be filled with less than Divine Life.

There are only two types of souls. One that has looked on the face of God in Jesus Christ, even a little, and their heart is met with overflowing answering love. These see God standing with open hands, ready with abundant Love to give as They always intended. And those of His children hanging back, refusing to receive, doubting the heart their Father who knows Himself only as absolute truth and love.

God's Answer to Job.

It is not easy at first to see God's answer to Job. I cannot find where He offers the slightest explanation of why he was so afflicted. However, He justifies him with His words when He says Job has spoken rightly concerning Himself, but his friends have not. He then recalls one after another, the works of His hands. Like many of our Lord's answers, this response seems addressed to Job's true self, not his intellect. That is to the man's Godlike imagination, not to his logical mind at all.

His answer consists of rehearsing His power in creation, as seen in His handiwork, and revealing them to us. In the deeper meanings of nature and nature's mediation between God and us, we see natural truths far more profound than we can learn from scientific discovery.

The revelation of these things is what God cares about the most, for they are the face of far more profound truths than we are aware. The face of the unseen as seen through a glass darkly as from a distance. It is in their realization, not their analysis that we enter into their deeper meaning. The awe revealed in the childlike soul contains the most profound truths. To encounter the primrose is a higher knowledge than all the botany of it. Just as knowing Christ, experiencing Him face-to-face is infinitely higher than all our theology about Him, about His history, or His written record.

The argument implied, not expressed, in the poem, seems to be that Job, seeing the Divine so much more extraordinary in power than himself, and His works so far beyond his understanding, that they filled him with wonder and admiration. This wonder is displayed in the vast power of creation, in the seasons, heavens, and seas. Its greatness is seen in the animals, their generations and provision, their beauty and instincts. It is also seen in the strange and awful beasts excelling beyond the rest, the behemoth and leviathan, creatures perhaps now extinct.

Beholding these things, Job ought to have reasoned that this God who could work so magnificently beyond his understanding must use this same wisdom with things concerning himself, even though he could not see and understand them either. Did Job understand his own being, history, or destiny? Was it not reasonable that God's ways would also be beyond his understanding? Could he not trust God to be just with him? Could these matters of the rights of a soul be too much for him to understand? That the Creator of Job was so much greater than Job, that His ways with him might well be beyond his comprehension! God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, as the heavens are higher than the earth!

The true child, the righteous man, will trust absolutely, against all appearances to the contrary, the God who has created him to love righteousness and justice.

God does not tell Job why he was afflicted. Instead, he rouses his child-heart to trust! I imagine all the rest of Job's life would see the vanishing of his perplexities into fresh meditations concerning God and His ways. There would be new opportunities for trust, light, and knowledge of his God and Father.

Seeing God

"Though He slays me yet will I trust Him." Here Job expresses doubt in the chaos with the nature of God. This doubt has not yet moved into unbelief. To deny the existence of God, as contrary as this statement seems at first, involves less distrust than the smallest, yielding to doubt in His goodness. I use yielding, for one can be plagued with doubts, but the struggle against them develops faith. Doubts are the messengers of God to rouse the honest of heart. They are the invitation at our door to explore things that are not yet but have to be understood. These doubts generally arrive as unwelcome messengers of difficulties and distress. Doubt always precedes every greater insight. For doubt's uncertainties present the journey ahead into the unknown, unexplored, and unattained.

So, hidden in all Job's begging to see God is the desire for the assurance of His being and presence. Our acknowledgment of God is not the same as the assurance of God. One great lesson in the poem is that

just hearing the voice of God is enough. Even though He offers no answers, His voice alone is enough. In the voice, he now knows that God is and that He hears the cries of His creatures. Knowing that God is present and knows all about him and what has happened is enough. He needs no more than His presence to reconcile the seeming contradictions, and the outer issues become endurable. Even if Job could not understand God's response, God had settled everything for him when through the whirlwind, He answered that He had not forsaken him.

However, nothing but the continuing presence of God can indeed make life good for His children. This understanding of our origins in God's image and our destiny to manifest this reality as His children. And while this destiny is untrue of him, he is but an empty mask. Perhaps Job's lack of relationship and the limits of his knowledge of God were the reasons for the earthquake in his being that exposed his emptiness and at the same time reveal the glory of God that was in him.

To know our faith is weak is the first step towards strengthening it in us. To live in distrust is death. To know who you are and cry out for it is the beginning of life. To allow the removal of distrust so that God can have His way with us and never doubt is faith and life. Until doubt is impossible, we lack the actual childlike knowledge of God. If we are capable of distrust, we either know him imperfectly or not at all. Perhaps Job learned something of this, with the result being greater nearness to God. The lesson was faith in God's loving wisdom expressed in His power that proceeds from His goodness. In a profound sense, power and goodness are one. In deepest truth, they are one!

Job forgets all he wanted to say in seeing God. He forgets all his defenses, all his arguments to justify himself. His words are gone. He has nothing to say. How could you justify himself before the Righteous One? If God does not see him ultimately as righteous, he is not righteous and should hold his peace. If he is righteous, God knows this better than he does. All his evils and imperfections are usable in the presence of the pure and perfect one who has no selfishness in Him. "Behold, I am insignificant; what shall I say in response to you? I put my hand on my mouth." "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ears; Therefore, I retract and repent, sitting in dust and ashes."

Job got his desire, he saw the face of God, and he despised himself in dust and ashes. He sought justification and found disgust. Was this punishment? Absolutely not! It was quite the opposite. It was the best gift God could have given him. The gift of contrast- seeing himself as disgusting compared to the Living One in His visible glory.

Oh, the divine generosity that will allow us to be embarrassed and in self-condemnation before the Divine! The love of God that would allow us to compare ourselves with Him and receive true humility! God has come near to Job so that He could become real to him. He knows now that God is the One with whom he has to deal. He has allowed these troubles so that Job through them might see Him and know Him as He is!

Final Prosperity

The prosperity that follows reveals a great truth. Whatever the judgment, even hell itself, we need not fear. The one central good, the life and will of God, is where all growth comes! Yielding to Him is the only reason, the only means for the bud and blossom on the rose. One day none of this will matter, whether in this world or the next, if I know and experience my life as perfect joy. I will no longer have limitations, hindrances, pains, or sorrows that are greater than my peace and assurance can overcome.

I do not care if the book of Job is history or poem. It reveals wisdom through its story to those God has made wise in understanding His will and His ways.

This poem is difficult for many reasons, and its original style is mostly inaccessible, but regardless of these difficulties one cannot fail to hear two souls, the poet and Job, crying aloud with an agony of hope. Let life be what it may because truth and righteousness are at the heart of all things. The faith and hope of Job seemed at times on the point of giving way. He struggles like a drowning man with the waves crashing over him, but in the end, he raises his eyes, and his courage revives.

And we call ourselves Christians? Our faith should be even greater than Job's, for we have the words and life of Jesus, which is much greater than what Job heard out of the whirlwind! The Book of Job is a story of faith! Moses gave the law, but grace and truth has lived among us, yet where is our faith?

Friends, our cross may be heavy and our path difficult, but we have rights, claims on God. Yes, the right to cry to Him for help. God has spent and is spending Himself to give us our birthright, which is righteousness. Even though we are not condemned for our sins, we cannot be saved without leaving them. Though we are not condemned for our past, we will be condemned for our present love of darkness rather than light and our refusal to come to Him that we might live. God is offering us the one thing we cannot live without, Himself! We must make room for Him, cleanse our hearts so that He can enter. We must follow Jesus, for He knows His Father and His ways. We must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him.

CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

Human Struggle

I would not be supposed to use the word humanity either in the abstract, or of the mass concrete; I mean the humanity of the individual endlessly repeated: Job, I say, is the human being—a centre to the sickening assaults of pain, the ghastly invasions of fear: these, one time or another, I presume, threaten to overwhelm every man, reveal him to himself as enslaved to the external, and stir him up to find some way out into the infinite, where alone he can rejoice in the liberty that belongs to his nature.

The thought has not yet come to him that that which it would be unfair to lay upon him as punishment, may yet be laid upon him as favour—by a love supreme which would give him blessing beyond all possible prayer— blessing he would not dare to ask if he saw the means necessary to its giving, but blessing for which, once known and understood, he would be willing to endure yet again all that he had undergone. Therefore is he so sorely divided in himself.

Childlikeness of Job

Had Job been Calvinist or Lutheran, the book of Job would have been very different. His perplexity would then have been—how God being just, could require of a man more than he could do, and punish him as if his sin were that of a perfect being who chose to do the evil of which he knew all the enormity.

Job's child-like judgment of God had never been vitiated and perverted, to the dishonouring of the great Father, by any taint of such low theories as, alas! we must call the popular: explanations of God's ways by such as did not understand Him, they are acceptable to such as do not care to know him, such as are content to stand afar off and stare at the cloud whence issue the thunders and the voices; but a burden threatening to sink them to Tophet, a burden grievous to be borne, to such as would arise and go to the Father. The contradiction between Job's idea of the justice of God and the things which had befallen him, is constantly haunting him; it has a sting in it far worse than all the other misery with which he is tormented; but it is not fixed in the hopelessness of hell by an accepted explanation more frightful than itself.

He simply holds on to the skirt of God's garment—besieges his door—keeps putting his question again and again, ever haunting the one source of true answer and reconciliation. No answer will do for him but the answer that God only can give; for who but God can justify God's ways to his creature?

His friends, good men, religious men, but of the pharisaic type—that is, men who would pay their court to God, instead of coming into his presence as children; men with traditional theories which have served their poor turn, satisfied their feeble intellectual demands, they think others therefore must accept or perish; men anxious to appease God rather than trust in him; men who would rather receive salvation from God, than God their salvation—these his friends would persuade Job to the confession that he was a hypocrite, insisting that such things could not have come upon him but because of wickedness, and as they knew of none open, it must be for some secret vileness. They grow angry with him when he refuses to be persuaded against his knowledge of himself. They insist on his hypocrisy, he on his righteousness.

Such words are pleasing in the ear of the father of spirits. He is not a God to accept the flattery which declares him above obligation to his creatures; a God to demand of them a righteousness different from his own; a God to deal ungenerously with his poverty-stricken children; a God to make severest demands upon his little ones! Job is confident of receiving justice.

It is those who know only and respect the outsides of religion, such as never speak or think of God but as the Almighty or Providence, who will say of the man who would go close up to God, and speak to him out of the deepest in the nature he has made, 'he is irreverent.' To utter the name of God in the drama—highest of human arts, is with such men blasphemy. They pay court to God, not love him; they treat him as one far away, not as the one whose bosom is the only home.

Rights of a Child

And the grandest of all is this, that he implies, if he does not actually say, that God owes something to his creature. This is the beginning of the greatest discovery of all—that God owes himself to the creature he has made in his image, for so he has made him incapable of living without him.

Perhaps the worst thing in a theology constructed out of man's dull possible, and not out of the being and deeds and words of Jesus Christ, is the impression it conveys throughout that God acknowledges no such obligation. Are not we the clay, and he the potter? how can the clay claim from the potter? We are

the clay, it is true, but his clay, but spiritual clay, live clay, with needs and desires—and rights; we are clay, but clay worth the Son of God's dying for, that it might learn to consent to be shaped unto honour.

Rights by Origin

God is the origin of both need and supply, the father of our necessities, the abundant giver of the good things. Right gloriously he meets the claims of his child! The story of Jesus is the heart of his answer, not primarily to the prayers, but to the divine necessities of the children he has sent out into his universe.

I protest, therefore, against all such teaching as, originating in and fostered by the faithlessness of the human heart, gives the impression that the exceeding goodness of God towards man is not the natural and necessary outcome of his being. The root of every heresy popular in the church draws its nourishment merely and only from the soil of unbelief. The idea that God would be God all the same, as glorious as he needed to be, had he not taken upon himself the divine toil of bringing home his wandered children, had he done nothing to seek and save the lost, is false as hell. Lying for God could go no farther.

Prayer of Truth

To the heart that will not call that righteousness which it feels to be unjust, but clings to the skirt of his garment, and lifts pleading eyes to his countenance—to that heart he will lay open the riches of his being—riches which it has not entered that heart to conceive. 'O Lord, they tell me I have so offended against thy law that, as I am, thou canst not look upon me, but threatenest me with eternal banishment from thy presence. But if thou look not upon me, how can I ever be other than I am? Lord, remember I was born in sin: how then can I see sin as thou seest it? Remember, Lord, that I have never known myself clean: how can I cleanse myself? Thou must needs take me as I am and cleanse me.

Is it not impossible that I should behold the final goodness of good, the final evilness of evil? how then can I deserve eternal torment? Had I known good and evil, seeing them as thou seest them, then chosen the evil, and turned away from the good, I know not what I should not deserve; but thou knowest it has ever been something good in the evil that has enticed my selfish heart—nor mine only, but that of all my kind. Thou requirest of us to forgive: surely thou forgivest freely! Bound thou mayest be to destroy evil, but art thou bound to keep the sinner alive that thou mayest punish him, even if it make him no better?

Sin cannot be deep as life, for thou art the life; and sorrow and pain go deeper than sin, for they reach to the divine in us: thou canst suffer, though thou wilt not sin. To see men suffer might make us shun evil, but it never could make us hate it. We might see thereby that thou hatest sin, but we never could see that thou lovest the sinner. Chastise us, we pray thee, in loving kindness, and we shall not faint. We have done much that is evil, yea, evil is very deep in us, but we are not all evil, for we love righteousness; and art not thou thyself, in thy Son, the sacrifice for our sins, the atonement of our breach?

Thou hast made us subject to vanity, but hast thyself taken thy godlike share of the consequences. Could we ever have come to know good as thou knowest it, save by passing through the sea of sin and the fire of cleansing? They tell me I must say for Christ's sake, or thou wilt not pardon: it takes the very heart out of my poor love to hear that thou wilt not pardon me except because Christ has loved me; but I give thee thanks that nowhere in the record of thy gospel, does one of thy servants say any such word.

In spite of all our fears and grovelling, our weakness, and our wrongs, thou wilt be to us what thou art—such a perfect Father as no most loving child-heart on earth could invent the thought of! Thou wilt take our sins on thyself, giving us thy life to live withal. Thou bearest our griefs and carriest our sorrows; and surely thou wilt one day enable us to pay every debt we owe to each other! Thou wilt be to us a right generous, abundant father! Then truly our hearts shall be jubilant, because thou art what thou art—infinitely beyond all we could imagine. Thou wilt humble and raise us up. Thou hast given thyself to us that, having thee, we may be eternally alive with thy life. We run within the circle of what men call thy wrath, and find ourselves clasped in the zone of thy love!

Rights, not Merits

But be it well understood that when I say rights, I do not mean merits—of any sort. We can deserve from him nothing at all, in the sense of any right proceeding from ourselves.

But as to deserving, that is absurd: he had to die in the endeavour to make us listen and receive. 'When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.' Duty is a thing prepaid: it can never have desert. There is no claim on God that springs from us: all is from him. But, lest it should be possible that any unchildlike soul might, in arrogance and ignorance, think to stand upon his rights against God, and demand of him this or that after the will of the flesh,

He has a claim on God, then, a divine claim, for any pain, want, disappointment, or misery, that would help to show him to himself as the fool he is; he has a claim to be punished to the last scorpion of the whip, to be spared not one pang that may urge him towards repentance; yea, he has a claim to be sent out into the outer darkness, whether what we call hell, or something speechlessly worse, if nothing less will do. He has a claim to be compelled to repent; to be hedged in on every side; to have one after another of the strong, sharp-toothed sheep-dogs of the great shepherd sent after him, to thwart him in any desire, foil him in any plan, frustrate him of any hope, until he come to see at length that nothing will ease his pain, nothing make life a thing worth having, but the presence of the living God within him; that nothing is good but the will of God; nothing noble enough for the desire of the heart of man but oneness with the eternal. For this God must make him yield his very being, that He may enter in and dwell with him.

That the man would enforce none of these claims, is nothing; for it is not a man who owes them to him, but the eternal God, who by his own will of right towards the creature he has made, is bound to discharge them. God has to answer to himself for his idea; he has to do with the need of the nature he made, not with the self-born choice of the self-ruined man.

God's Answer to Job

Beholding these things, ought to have reasoned that he who could work so grandly beyond his understanding, must certainly use wisdom in things that touched him nearer, though they came no nearer his understanding: Did he understand his own being, history, and destiny? Should not God's ways in these also be beyond his understanding? Might he not trust him to do him justice? In such high affairs as the rights of a live soul, might not matters be involved too high for Job? The maker of Job was so

much greater than Job, that his ways with him might well be beyond his comprehension! God's thoughts were higher than his thoughts, as the heavens were higher than the earth!

The true child, the righteous man, will trust absolutely, against all appearances, the God who has created in him the love of righteousness.

Seeing God

'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' there must in the chaos have mingled some element of doubt as to the existence of God. Let not such doubt be supposed a yet further stage in unbelief. To deny the existence of God may, paradoxical as the statement will at first seem to some, involve less unbelief than the smallest yielding to doubt of his goodness. I say yielding; for a man may be haunted with doubts, and only grow thereby in faith. Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to rouse the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood; and theirs in general is the inhospitable reception of angels that do not come in their own likeness. Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed.

To know that our faith is weak is the first step towards its strengthening; to be capable of distrusting is death; to know that we are, and cry out, is to begin to live—to begin to be made such that we cannot distrust—such that God may do anything with us and we shall never doubt him. Until doubt is impossible, we are lacking in the true, the childlike knowledge of God; for either God is such that one may distrust him, or he is such that to distrust him is the greatest injustice of which a man can be guilty. If then we are able to distrust him, either we know God imperfect, or we do not know him. Perhaps Job learned something like this; anyhow, the result of what he had had to endure was a greater nearness to God. But all that he was required to receive at the moment was the argument from God's loving wisdom in his power, to his loving wisdom in everything else. For power is a real and a good thing, giving an immediate impression that it proceeds from goodness. Nor, however long it may last after goodness is gone, was it ever born of anything but goodness. In a very deep sense, power and goodness are one. In the deepest fact they are one.

Final Prosperity

Friends, our cross may be heavy, and the via dolorosa rough; but we have claims on God, yea the right to cry to him for help. He has spent, and is spending himself to give us our birthright, which is righteousness. Though we shall not be condemned for our sins, we cannot be saved but by leaving them; though we shall not be condemned for the sins that are past, we shall be condemned if we love the darkness rather than the light, and refuse to come to him that we may have life. God is offering us the one thing we cannot live without—his own self: