

Letter 97

by James Bourne

The sermon explores how God's mysterious ways and the experience of affliction lead to spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of His mercy and salvation.

Scripture: Job 5:9, Psalm 84:11, Isaiah 35:1, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Sanctification", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

James Bourne preaches to Mr. W. Abbott about the unsearchable ways of the Lord, emphasizing the sanctifying power of mysterious dispensations and humbling circumstances that lead to blessings for those who walk uprightly. He shares his personal journey of being humbled by afflictions, disappointments, and crosses, leading to contrition, shame, and a deep realization of the destructive power of sin. Bourne encourages Abbott to trust in God's ability to turn desolate places into fruitful ones, reminding him of the greatness of God's salvation and the assurance of His provision and deliverance.

Transcript

[To Mr. W. Abbott, of Mayfield, Sussex.] London, 21 October 1835.

Dear Friend in the Lord and in the path of tribulation,

How unsearchable are the ways of the Lord! Job says, he "doeth great things past finding out, and wonders without number. Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?" You have long lain under these mysterious dispensations. If it should please the Lord to sanctify them, you will have to bless God to all eternity for all the means he has made use of to humble you to the uttermost, and under these humbling circumstances to make all his goodness pass before you; and you may be asked (as he asked the disciples of old), "When I sent you without purse, or scrip, or shoes, lacked ye anything?" and, like them, reply, Nothing, Lord. "No GOOD THING will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." I have found the rod, the furnace, affliction, disappointment, and crosses of all sorts, have been given to me as good things; and, moreover, I have been brought, in a measure, to see the beauty and safety of them, and the wisdom of God in them.

I have longed to make this world my rest, and have sought no small honour in it (I mean that honour which cometh from men), and to my shame be it spoken, through spiritual pride and vain conceit I would have been something in the church, as well as in the world; but it has pleased God, in great mercy, to put a worm to the root of this gourd, which has made it to wither, under no small terrors and apprehensions of

final separation from him. Under this fire much has been burnt up, and I found nothing left but an ear to learn discipline, and Peter's cry, "Lord, save or I perish." But the Lord being moved with compassion, set my feet upon the rock, and there showed me where my hope and strength must be. He also showed me the destructive power of the canker-worm and palmerworm, and all that great army (spoken of in Joel) that would destroy us root and branch if left under their influence.

While I write, my heart melts with contrition and shame at all the provocations with which I have provoked the Lord ever since I have known him, and especially at his kind condescension in not leaving me under the power and influence of these evils; and that he made me, contrary to my flesh, to cut off right hands, and to pluck out right eyes; and showed me eventually what a poor pitiful creature I was, as is described in Ezekiel, "polluted in thy blood," and neither washed nor supplied.

I once read all these things as if they meant nothing; but the Lord has shown me that they are what all, more or less, shall know by experience. Shall the Apostle say, "He hath delivered us from so great a death," and this mean little or nothing? It is not till we have been much immersed in the furnace of affliction that we are aware, in any measure, of the greatness of the salvation, or the extent of that death (in every branch of it) in which we are involved.

O my dear friend, long inured to this furnace, however desolate your case may appear in the eyes of the world, the Lord can make this desolate place to blossom as the rose; yes, he can make it fragrant to himself and fruitful, and cause you even here to see the glory of the Lord, and the excellent wisdom of our God. I am well aware you often feel, with me, much casting down, and are ready to say, "Can he prepare a table in the wilderness?" The entrance of such a thought has often made me to blush before him, and such words as these have stopped my rebellion - "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" I some-times think, Surely if he gives us himself, there can be nothing so great and valuable; why should we fear he will forget us in any of these things, which are so inconsiderable compared with himself? Then I say, "Fear not, behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence, he will come and save you." He will open blind eyes and deaf ears, the dumb shall sing, the lame shall leap, for in this wilderness heart of ours he will and does open streams, and the rivers break out [Isaiah xxxv. 1-7]; so that the whole glory of this great salvation shall be ascribed to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and not unto us.

Yours &c. J. B.

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