THE REPENTANCE OF JOB

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Any discussion of the book of Job must come to grips with the main purpose of the author. One senses rather soon in reading the book that a problem of great magnitude has taken hold of the writer. However, when one is pressed to define that problem, difficulties and uncertainties are at hand. Scholars are not agreed as to the central theme of the book. Some affirm that we are here given an explanation for the apparently undeserved affliction of the godly. Others assert that the problem of theodicy is raised and that the book seeks to "justify the ways of God to man." Still others find something of an interweaving of purposes in that the problem of man's existence is considered in the presence of God as known and revealed through the Old Testament. This results in an interpretation of life through an interpretation of affliction which J. Hempel has aptly given as: Lebenserklärung ist Leidenserklärung.¹

Much as these problems are discussed within the book of Job, yet we find no explicit formal statement by our author that he intends to solve one or the other. However, we would expect that the author's basic purpose should come to expression in his conclusion. In this we are not disappointed, for we sense rather soon that there is a conclusion toward which the author is moving. He is like a guide who is conducting us through a magnificent medieval castle. He leads us through many corridors and labyrinths, sometimes in large spacious rooms where we might suppose we shall remain, or he, approaches exits that could be the end of our tour, but these are bypassed until finally he opens the one door that leads to a majestic panorama of mountains mirroring their snow-covered peaks in a silver lake. Thus it is in Job. And well may we ask, What is that one door which opens to our author's high experience? This should express

¹ "Das theologische Problem des Hiob" in Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie, vol. 6 (1928), p. 621.
his basic purpose. That purpose is declared in one important passage in our book. It is found in chapter 42:5, 6:

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees thee;
Therefore I reject my words,
And repent in dust and ashes.

This passage indicates something of past experience and thinking which produced unsatisfactory results for Job, and it further describes a new understanding of God which is of such glorious blessedness that Job abandons all his previous hopes and demands for the unspeakable peace and joy of “now my eye sees thee.” This, in brief, is the denouncement of the poem by which our author under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit declares how he was delivered from the problems that greatly vexed the minds of God’s ancient people.

If these last words of the dialogue with the Lord are Job’s final answer to the queries and misgivings that brought him to the brink of despair, then we should spare no diligence to grasp their full meaning. Our task is a difficult one. The context offers little help. The passage is brief, concise, freighted with intensity of feeling and overflowing with an ecstasy such as St. Paul learned of a man caught up into the third heaven who heard unspeakable words (II Cor. 12:2-4). So it is here. However, let us not glory in our difficulties but rather in our opportunity to examine and comprehend something of this author’s profound insight which shall surely be beneficial to our faith and to our ministry.

I propose to pursue this study as follows: In the language of these words we ought to learn what is meant by “the hearing of the ear,” for this is put in contrast to the new understanding which Job has reached. Our second task is to grasp the sense of Job’s repentance as it is given in verse 6, “Therefore I reject my words and repent in dust and ashes.” And finally we want to understand as clearly as we can what Job through the eyes of faith saw as he declares, “but now my eye sees thee.”

THE HEARING OF THE EAR

In Old Testament times the chief medium of communication was by way of report through the spoken word. Writing although fully developed and rather extensively used in the keeping of records and preserving of important messages and laws was a poor second to oral tradition by which each generation transmitted to its posterity its history, its laws and customs and its faith. The psalmist says, “We have heard with our ears, O’ God, our fathers have told us, what deeds thou didst perform in their days, in the days of old” (44:1). “We have heard” therefore is the equivalent of tradition that had become fixed and accepted as the proper understanding of history and the unchallenged articles of faith. This “hearing
of the ear” or tradition is the background of the dialogue portion of the book of Job, which has as its major tenet that God blesses the righteous but sends affliction upon the wicked. Or one may state it differently that prosperity is a mark of God’s pleasure and that calamity a proof of God’s displeasure and a proof of the wickedness of the sufferer. We shall call this the traditional retribution and reward theology, which, put succinctly, is: The righteous prosper but the wicked are in adversity. This is the background on which the dialogue is projected. It serves as the common basis for the discussion of both the friends and Job. The difference is that the friends are set for the defense of this retribution doctrine, while Job constantly assails it or, to put it more correctly, Job sets the necessity before God to repair this doctrine which has apparently broken down.

Before we set our minds to follow the course of the debate in the dialogue, we ought to pause to look back in the prologue, chapters 1-2. The dialogue may well be encompassed by the descriptive title “The hearing of the ear.” The prologue, however, does not come within this “hearing of the ear.” Certainly Job knows nothing about the issue that arises between God and Satan, as given in the prologue. Job knows not that he is become the supreme object of careful scrutiny in the moral and spiritual world, for the issue is to show that in mankind, frail and sinful though it may be, there is pure goodness and disinterested piety. The satanic slur is pointedly given in “Does Job fear God for naught?” This is cynicism in its raw and crass form. It pours scorn and contempt on “virtue for virtue’s sake” or “piety for God’s sake.” The moral and spiritual order of God’s world cannot exist unless supported by rewards of some kind. The Lord God, however, maintains that Job as God’s servant and as a representative of his kingdom can and will put the lie on what Satan alleges to be the truth. The test is allowed, and the beloved of God is placed in the crucible of bitter affliction to demonstrate that a man will serve God for naught. In dramatic succession Job is deprived of all worldly possessions—his wealth flows from him like waters into the desert sand, his family is gone, his health abandons him to the horrors of pain and misery and finally all human affection and personal esteem are lost as his wife mocks him and as he becomes the object of shame and contempt as the once mighty and revered sheik of the East takes his place on the rubbish heap of the community. What will a man do or say when he is dropped to such low levels? Will he curse God and die? We strain our ear together with all the spirits of heaven and hell to catch what words will cross Job’s lips. Our author gives us his words. After the first volley of afflictions Job arose and rent his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped, and he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return; The Lord gave and the Lord has taken taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:20, 21).
Again Job speaks after being afflicted with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head and after his wife urged him to curse God and die. "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). And then the author gives his comments lest the reader miss the point of this part of the story. "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong . . . . In all this Job did not sin with his lips." (1:22; 2:10).

This is the prologue with its objective realized: the godly do serve God for naught, rewards are not essential for virtue and piety. This teaching of the prologue is, as we noted above, not a part of the tradition, the "hearing of the ear," which is the background of the dialogue. Job nor his friends are made aware of the behind-the-scene encounter, and the author does not introduce anything of the contest of the prologue into the debate. Yet the prologue does serve to set the stage in informing us of the affliction of our hero and the coming of his friends.

We are now obliged to follow the course of debate in the dialogue and we shall observe that our author presses into every nook and corner of traditional theology for a solution to this baffling problem of the apparent undeserved suffering of the godly. Job opens the dialogue with a bitter lament in which he curses the day of his birth. It were better not to have been born than to endure the agonies that have come upon him. The three friends and finally Elihu make their defense for the traditional position that God knows the righteous and will surely honor them in life. Within this framework our author pursues certain trains of thought that might possibly settle the matter. These we shall examine briefly.

Eliphaz appeals to revelation. During the night he had experienced a vision of dread and awe in which a voice was heard, "Can mortal man be righteous before God? can a man be pure before his Maker?" (4:17). The import of this appeal to revelation is that mortal impure man never has a right to challenge the ways of his Creator. Job replies to this that he too has that same revelation of God and that he too knows that mortal man is weak and that God is pure and righteous, but instead of giving him peace, this revelation aggravates his problem. For if God will not countenance fraility or impurity in his creatures then all human existence is in jeopardy. The appeal to revelation does not solve the problem.

Eliphaz proposes another solution in that suffering and affliction are serving a disciplinary purpose. "Behold happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty. For he wounds but he binds up; he smites, but his hands heal" (5:17, 18). This line of thought is elaborated by Elihu in chapter 36. Much can be said for this explanation of affliction. It finds expression in various parts of Scripture. In fact, in our book suffering is the medium of instruction.
that brings a profound insight to Job which he would never have attained if he had remained in the full flush of prosperity. However much one may allow for the disciplinary factor of affliction, our author does not put it in the mouth of Job, thereby giving it a degree of acceptability, nor does he attack it. This is but to indicate that the disciplinary aspect of affliction, although worthy of consideration, is not the solution where our author wishes to end his quest.

Bildad invites Job to witness the events of past generations and to observe that God establishes righteousness and brings the wicked to naught. Job makes short work of that argument by declaring that only by an arbitrary reading of history one sees the justice of God. "It is all one [Job says]; therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covers the faces of its judges—if it is not he, who then is it?" (9:22-24). History has no clear testimony for the justice of God.

Within the scope of traditional doctrine there was the concept of children participating in the righteousness or guilt of the parents. This is alluded to by Eliphaz (5:4) and by Zophar (20:10) in that the children of the wicked will experience the calamities due their fathers. This relieves the necessity of finding some immediate reward or retribution for either righteousness or wickedness.

This concept of children sharing in the weal or woe of their fathers stems out of the view that the family or even the community was regarded as a unit. This is commonly known as the solidarity concept. If a father had lived a godly exemplary life, his family would receive the benefits of that father’s righteousness as in the case of David or Abraham. And in contrast, the wickedness of a father would realize its punishment in the lives of the children. So deeply had this taken root that we hear the lament of the exiles: "The fathers have eaten the sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2).

In the speeches Job has caught this argument of the friends that the wicked may prosper and if he does not experience the wrath of God then surely that wrath will descend upon his children. In chapter 21 Job goes at length to describe how the wicked enjoy prosperity and health.

Have you not asked those who travel the roads, and do you not accept their testimony that the wicked man is spared in the day of calamity, that he is rescued in the day of wrath? Who declares his way to his face, and who requites him for what he has done? When he is borne to the grave, watch is kept over his tomb.
The cloths of the valley are sweet to him;  
and those who go before him are innumerable (21:29-33).

This is in modern language: The wicked die old and have nice funerals. And more than having prosperity, their children are happy and prosperous. But suppose the argument is granted that the children will reap the evil that missed their wicked father, does that solve the problem? Hardly!

You say [Job continues] 'God stores up their iniquity for their sons.'  
Let him recompense to themselves, that they may know it.  
Let their own eyes see their destruction,  
and let them drink the wrath of the Almighty.  
For what do they care for their houses after them,  
when the number of their months is cut off? (21:19-21).

No, punishment or affliction for children will not solve the inequities of the present. Let justice be meted out in the here and now!

In the course of debate Job has maintained his integrity; he has insisted that vindication must surely be his. He is certain that if he could but place his cause before God, the God whom he knew in times past would then come to vindicate Job. But alas! if only Job knew where he might find God. The God of past mercies and sure justice can no longer be apprehended, for the God of the present appears in sharp contrast to the Almighty of Job's blessed years. If then God cannot be found, and if then there will be no vindication from heaven for

He [God] has kindled his wrath against me,  
and counts me as his adversary.  
His troops come on together:  
they have cast up seige works against me,  
and camped round about my tent (19:11, 12),

then can Job look for vindication from his friends or his family? Alas, these also have cast him off. In utter loneliness without recourse to either God or man a flash of hope appears. He, Job, will appeal to the generations to come. He will write his words in a book, rather with an iron pen he will engrave them on a rock, so that they will remain as silent witness to the integrity of one whom friends and God had abandoned (19:23, 24).

In the context of this musing, our hero abandons any present or earthly vindication and with the leap of faith he goes beyond the temporal sphere into the life beyond the grave. A detailed exegesis of the famous "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (19:25f) is not necessary here. Only simple and broad conclusions can be given. Here Job expects his vindication to be granted him by this Redeemer who at the last shall speak the final word. This Redeemer is none other than the God whom Job in all his longing cannot find. Therefore he abandons the illusive hopes of justice in the here and now. That which he had so much wanted in this present life must then be realized in the life beyond. Then he will see God and he will see that this God is on his side; this is the God his eyes shall see, and not
another. Then vindication is his and Job will then be fully justified before all moral spirits.

This surely is one of the peaks of faith on which many Christians have stood. And I dare say that since these words were written many a child of God in circumstances of agony and affliction has eased a raging tumult within him as in the strength of God his faith took wings to look beyond this vale of sorrow and suffering to the bliss where there shall be no more pain nor sorrow nor crying. Consequently we are rather surprised, not to say disappointed, that the author does not bring the debate to a close at this high point, for so the author regards this hope of future vindication by placing it in the mouth of Job and not in the speeches of the friends. Yet with all that can be said for this lofty declaration of faith, the author carries on the debate and dialogue with no reference to this famous Redeemer passage. The reason seems obvious, this is not to be the solution of the problem. Perhaps we may remark by way of negative anticipation, our author is not intending to have the motif of vindication in the grand and final denouement, for vindication and retribution are of the same cloth that make up the fabric of the traditional doctrine, that was a vital part of "the hearing of the ear."

In this too hasty survey we have followed our author’s purpose as the dialogue progresses. Like a composer of a symphony, he has introduced themes which, although well-established in Old Testament thought, yet in the course of the debate play a secondary part. He has built upon the fundamental premise of the Old Testament that God blesses the righteous and sends afflictions upon the wicked. He has amplified this in an attempt to account for the apparent breakdowns of this premise by introducing the disciplinary role of suffering, by considering the solidarity of the family, by appeals to revelation and by the hope of a final vindication beyond the grave. The dialogue with the friends and the musings of Job come to something of a disappointing end. Even the speech of Elihu is nothing more than a review of matters that have already been given in the dialogue. However, when Elihu is done, our expectations are aroused as the author introduces the answer of the Lord to Job from the whirlwind. Surely it is here that we shall hear the word that shall resolve our problem and bring rest to our minds.

What does the Lord say from the whirlwind? Briefly, he confronts Job with the wonders of the world—the marvel and power of creation, the mysteries of nature, the unexplainable behavior of animals. All this produces a sense of awe in Job. This world in which he lives is a mystery beyond his comprehension. However, the basic purpose of this part of the book is to declare that even as in nature man confronts phenomena beyond understanding, so also in the moral world mysteries abound beyond
the reach of man's mind. Let me quote from the dialogue between God and Job:

    And the Lord said to Job:
    "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
    He who argues with God, let him answer it."
    "Gird up your loins like a man;
    And I will question you, and you declare to me.
    Will you even put me in the wrong?
    Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (40:1,2,7,8).

To this Job makes the following reply:

    Behold I am of small account;
    What shall I answer thee?
    I lay my hand on my mouth.
    I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
    Twice, but I will proceed no further (40:3-5).
    Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
    Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. (42:3bc).

To paraphrase the words of Jesus to Nicodemus it would be: If you cannot understand the natural world with its complexity, how can you understand the moral world. The net result, therefore, appears to be that the problem of Job is a mystery beyond his comprehension.

THE REPENTANCE OF JOB

We have now come to examine the repentance of Job in the perspective of the material we have covered. Let us note again what Job says:

    I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
    but now my eye sees thee;
    therefore I retract my words,
    and repent in dust and ashes (42:5,6).

You will observe that the "hearing of the ear" is set in unfavorable contrast to "now my eye sees thee." Job here is apprised that his reliance on the traditional dogma was his folly and error. Now as though a sudden flash of light lit up his dark night, Job sensed the tragic limitation of conventional theology for solving his vexing problem. It was tragic, for Job, although assailing the friends' defence of retributive theology, was nonetheless pressing God for an answer within the framework of that same theology. The debate clearly demonstrated that the traditional orthodoxy of the friends did not explain the injustices and inequities of life. However, Job himself stands on that same orthodoxy, presents his complaint and awaits God's answer within that context. This now Job realizes is his folly, his sin for which he repents.

To enhance this interpretation of Job's repentance I would suggest a translation different from the Revised Standard Version's translation, "Therefore I despise myself." The change would be, "Therefore I reject my words." The text has only two words, 'AL KEN "therefore" and the verb MA'ASTI which allows two meanings, either "I despise, abhor" or
"I reject, retract." There is no object given, it is to be supplied according to the sense. In the nine other occurrences of this verb within this book I have found that "reject" is generally appropriate. The translation prevalent in English versions may be a carry over from the LXX and the Vulgate both of which have "Wherefore I abhor, disparage myself." However, we may well allow "Therefore I reject my words," supplying "my words" from the context which says "therefore I have uttered what I did not understand." This then indicates that Job has abandoned his argument, his demand for the answer from God. Consequently he repents of encompassing God and shutting him up within a limited theological framework. Suddenly he awoke from his dogmatic slumber for, as Arthur Weiser says in his Introduction of the Old Testament, job learned that the God of the whirlwind was greater than the God of dogma.

A study of the usage of the verb ma'as, which appears in this passage, reveals that in its nine appearances in our book, it yields a proper sense by the word "reject" or "refuse." The meaning of "despise, abhor," for the above verb is also allowed by various scholars for its translation in other parts of the Old Testament. However, for our purpose, we shall test the suitability of "reject" for this verb in our book.

5:17. Eliphaz declares: "Behold blessed is the man whom God reproves, therefore do not reject (sim'as) the discipline of the Almighty."

7:16. Job here laments the agony of life in that there appears to be no purpose for living: "I reject (ma'asti) [my life], I shall not live for ever."

8:20. Here Bildad affirms: "Behold God will not reject (yim'as) a blameless man, nor will he strengthen the hand of evildoers."

9:21. Job sees no use in contending with God. However, he declares: "I am blameless, I regard not myself, I reject—perhaps refuse—('em'as) my life."

10:3. Here Job questions God thus: "Is it good to you that you oppress, that you reject (shim'as) the labor of your hands and favor the plan of the wicked?"

19:18. Job describes how thoroughly he has lost all social esteem and recognition: "Even children reject me (mdesanti)."

30:1. The ones who now mock Job are those "whose fathers I rejected—perhaps refused—(ma'asti) to set with the dogs of my flock."

31:13. Here Job declares his concern for social justice: "If I rejected (em'as) the justice of my servant and my maid."

36:5. Elishu defends God's conduct in dealing with the wicked and the righteous: "Behold God is strong and he will not reject (yim'as) [any]."

In 7:5 the verb (yimma'as) "it breaks out" is considered to be derived from another root although the radicals are the same.

From the above survey it appears proper to translate 42:6a: "Therefore I reject [my words]" (al ken ma'asti).

The Septuagint yields no consistent translation for this verb. Apopoieitaih "to put away, reject" appears the most often—three times; other verbs range in meaning from "reject" to "set at nought." The Vulgate outdoes the Greek version in having a different verb for every occurrence of the Hebrew verb. The Peshitta, however, uses one verb (selad) which embraces the same concepts, "reject, refuse, despise," as found in the Hebrew ma'as.

We ought to take note that Job’s repentance immediately follows the appearance of the Lord in the whirlwind. There must be something of special significance in this word of God that uncovered Job’s folly and error. One might suppose that the Almighty would arraign Job before heaven’s court to pronounce him a sinner. But this is not done. In fact one can sense a tacit acceptance of Job in that the accusations of the friends against him are not mentioned. It was not necessary for Job to be informed that he was a sinner, he had already admitted that in the debate.

A patent impression of the voice of God from the storm is the sense of awe and wonder. The world with all its vastness, its intricate design, its massive power and its gentle tenderness, all this combines to produce an unfathomable mystery. Thus the wonders of creation impressed many poets and prophets, and I dare say each of us. However, that is hardly the main purpose here for Job had already in his reflections considered the wonders of this world. Observe what he says:

He stretches out the north over the void,
and hangs the earth upon nothing.
He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not rent under them.

By his wind the heavens are made fair,
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways,
and how small a whisper we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand? (26:7,8,13,14).

Let me, if I can, declare what appears to be the fundamental significance of the theophany from the storm. The poet here intends that Job and every reader should sense that the approach to God through the natural order produces no satisfying results. This is the level of nature in which, to be sure, God is present but only dimly and faintly seen and understood.

How small a whisper do we hear of him
But the thunder of his power who can understand?
Nature is the low level in which man may search for God, but alas his search ends in a mystery that reveals to man his finite incompetence.

Of this Job becomes poignantly aware, but more. He now senses that his approach to God was in that same level. This was the natural moral level in which the factors of retribution and rewards are predominant. On this the friends built their case against Job and it was on this that Job also made his appeals to God. Our hero imprisoned himself within the framework of traditional retributive theology and it was his madness to imprison the Almighty within that same framework. And now with one fell swoop that framework collapses. It is totally inadequate, its limitations are now apparent. He now senses his folly, his sin in demanding that God should answer his complaint within the context of the natural moral order. For
that Job repents, for that he retracts his words and his argument and casts himself down in contrition.

**NOW MY EYE SEES THEE**

Here we find the hero of our book in repentance and self-abnegation. However repentance followed “Now mine eye sees thee,” Samuel Terrien has well said “Repentance comes with the vision of God. It does not precede the divine grace. It is produced by God’s self-offering.”4 It is well then that we ask what Job saw when he declares, “Now my eye sees thee.” What insight has God given him?

Certainly the most obvious lesson is that fellowship with God is not determined by possession of material or temporal goods. The essential “good” is not made up of worldly goods. That essential “good” or blessedness is to be realized in the fellowship with God. And this relationship with God defies all techniques of measurement. Here Job saw what he failed to see before, viz., that notwithstanding his complete nothingness in terms of wealth, health and prestige, God is his friend not his foe, his savior not his destroyer, his refuge not his attacker. Neither fortune nor misfortune prosperity nor adversity determine man’s essential good, for this essential good is known only through God’s gracious coming to man.

This first lesson of Job, this new insight of faith, comes to allay the haunting fears of the pious in Israel, and one may add, of the godly of all time. In deep pathos Job had cried,

> Oh that I knew where I might find him,  
> that I might come to his seat! (23:3)

Or in distressing agony of spirit he had lamented,

> He [God] breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,  
> and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.  
> He has kindled his wrath against me,  
> and counts me as his adversary (19:10,11).

Such were the fears and misgivings of many, expressed and repeated by the poets of Israel.

> How long O Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever?  
> How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?  
> How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
> And have sorrow in my heart all the day? (Ps. 13:1,2).  
> Why dost thou hide thy face?  
> Why dost thou forget our affliction and oppression?  
> For our soul is bowed down to the dust,  
> our body cleaves to the ground (44:24,25).

Surely every Christian recalls the cry of our Lord from the cross taken from the burdened soul of Israel,

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My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why art thou so far from helping me
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer;
and by night, but find no rest (22:1,2).

These fears and agonies of soul ran their course through Job, but now they are allayed as he sees God as his friend and Savior.

Well may we as Christians observe that this struggle of soul reaches its consummate fulfillment in the God-Man, the true man, Jesus Christ our Lord. The cry of dereliction from the cross, noted above, takes up into itself all the depth of pathos and forsakeness we have found in Job. More than that; here the perfect man takes up the pathos of all Israel, indeed of all mankind as he comes to the end of his gracious ministry, not with the praises of Israel being sung in the temple, but under the scorn of Israel’s traditional faith, and with his friends far from him. In that moment of despair the haunting fear of being forsaken of God comes to consummate fulfillment in our Lord.

However, we must observe further that the cry of dereliction is followed by the words “Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.” This in substance is the word of Job “But now my eye sees thee.” Surely we can only ascertain in part the significance of what Job experienced by way of inner peace. So certainly we cannot know fully what Jesus experienced. However we may be well assured that, whatever Job or any Old Testament saint realized of God’s fellowship in the midst of affliction, here on the cross our Lord came to a perfect understanding of his Father’s presence amidst his agony and disgrace. Furthermore, whatever we may want to declare as the meaning of Christ’s suffering on the cross, this much must, it seems to me, be understood that the godly may now be assured of a fellowship with God which is a “good” not measured by this world goods.

Let us take a second look at “but now mine eye sees thee” to observe that Job now accepts the sufficiency of grace rather than to demand justice and vindication. The God who appeared to Job in the whirlwind was clothed with majesty and mystery, but more than that, this God enters into relationship with his people not in terms of justice and vindication but in terms of grace and unmerited favor. Our author has skillfully directed the course of the dialogue to point up one conclusion—and that crystal clear—vindication and retribution are not the essence of God’s approach to man. Rather God comes to man in grace.

Persistently and passionately Job had sought for an opportunity to plead his cause before God. If only God would listen to the merits in Job’s case, certainly God would vindicate him. But such opportunity is not afforded Job, rather such opportunity is no longer sought after Job senses that his fellowship with God can never be established by an honest appraisal of
his merit. How then does God meet Job? God establishes this fellowship by means of grace. Thus it was, when God established his covenant with Abraham, so it was when God delivered Israel from bondage, and so it was in every God-man covenant or fellowship. The terms of that fellowship can never be reward or vindication. Man even in the light of the O.T. would build on such terms. This was Job's fundamental error—now he sees aright. It is the sufficiency of grace that makes fellowship with God a reality and a blessedness.

Some centuries later an ardent son of Judaism found himself in circumstances not unlike those of Job. He was Saul of Tarsus. He had drunk deep at the springs of traditional Judaism. He refused to challenge the formulation of his ancestral faith so that unwittingly distortions of Old Testament teaching had set him in the same theology of Job and his friends. And with a madness much like the ancient patriarch he drove himself with relentless fury to the attaining of righteousness by the works of the law.

This man too was confronted by God, i.e., in Jesus Christ by which he learned that whatever gains he had made, he now reckons as loss. He sensed the utter folly of establishing a fellowship with God built on the foundation of reward and merit. This folly he saw when Jesus Christ confronted him as Savior and Lord. Let it be noted that Saul the foe of the Church knew Jesus Christ (as he affirms in II Cor. 5:16) from the human point of view, which is to say from the viewpoint of his merit-vindication theology. But Paul the apostle declares that he no longer regards Christ from the human point of view for in Christ everyone is a new creation, the old—the old framework of theology for Paul—the old has passed, behold the new has come. All this is from God. It is the triumph of grace. It is sola gratia.


I was not ever thus, nor pray that thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path, but now
Lead thou me on.
I loved the garish day and, spite of fears
Pride ruled my will, remember not past years.