

Calvin Speaks



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BLESSING AND AFFLICTION* (Part 2)

**Title not in the original*

Sermon 154.11 March 1556. Deuteronomy 28:2-8.

Summary of the First Part

*If men would serve God, their lives would prosper. The source of all misery is sin, and the foundation of all blessing is righteousness. God does, of course, visit the righteous with punishments. Even the righteous are still sinners, and deserve far worse chastisements than they receive. God's **design** with His own peep/e, however, is always more than this, for He punishes them to correct their faults, or to prevent future **sins**. Earthly blessings are not an end in themselves, as if the whole goal of man were to **wallow** in pleasure. Rather, earth/y blessings are designed to/cad men to consider the joys of the future **life with** God.*

The Example of David

And indeed, we see how all the faithful have lived in this regard. It is certain, as we have said, that David was in various kinds of tribulation. No man was afflicted more. But did he in all that time murmur against God? No. It is true that he uttered his griefs and passions, but that was with all meekness. And he did not omit to say that the anger of God lasted but a little while (Ps. 30:5), and that when he afflicted His people, He merely did it in the turning of His hand, while His goodness lasted along time, and continued lifelong.

Lifelong? Well then, let us look at the life of David to see what we find therein. In his infancy he was brought up as a shepherd's son, in the country, and God says that He took him from the flocks, as he was among his sheep. When he came to the court of Saul, it is certain that he was advanced, to be the son-in-law of the king, beyond all expectation and the opinion of the whole world. It might have been better for him to have remained a shepherd in the field than to have been in such travail and misery for the length of time we see he was in it. They sought his

death by all means, and his life was not only hanging by a mere thread, it was also subject to reproach. So much so, that they counted him the most wicked villain in the world, a traitor to his prince, a man disloyal to his king. You can see, then, that David was, as it were, abominable to everybody.

And when God finally gave him peace [in that matter], then was he vexed with foreign wars, insomuch that he had no sooner finished with one people, than he was required to turn around and fight another. And to fill up the measure, his own natural son chased him out of his kingdom, intending no less than to cut his throat; and we see what other conspiracies he suffered, such as the conspiracy of Sheba.

Yet David always confessed without pretense that all chastisements, miseries, and afflictions that God sent him were nothing to him, and that they lasted but the turning of a hand, or for a minute of an hour, whereas His blessings endure forever. How so? Because David did not have the kind of unthankful heart that we have. We embrace God's gracious dealings and make no account of them, but of every little harm we make a great mountain. When God chastises us we shrink down our shoulders, making great complaints and outcries. But let us learn better to esteem God's goodness toward us, in such a way that we are not found ungrateful for His grace. This is the reason, I say, why we do not conceive the value of the blessings that are contained here [in this passage]. Why? Because if God sends us any vexation, we shut our hearts against it, so that there is not one of us who does not fret against Him. And though we may not murmur in speech, yet we do not fail to have some bitterness lurking in our hearts. There only needs to come one affliction into our life, and the grace of God is quite removed from our taste. And when He has done us all the good that can be devised, yet does it ever run in our remembrance? Rather, what we remember

is "I have sustained such and such a harm," and our minds are never off of it.

Thus are God's benefits unsavory to us, so that we pass them over or let them slip. When things happen contrary to us, therefore, and our Lord afflicts us, let us receive the comforts that He gives us to moderate our affliction, and then we shall continue to wait on our way. And although we are called to endure many things, and even though by reason of our frailty and feebleness we are not able to overcome all temptations at the first blow, yet notwithstanding, through the grace of God we may get the upper hand. And when we are thus oppressed with our miseries, then we will esteem God's grace in such away that even in the midst of darkness we will perceive what light God gives to us, so that we will always feel Him to be our Father, for there is no doubt but that He will bless us sufficiently, to the extent that is fitting for our salvation. Thus you see what we have to do and to practise, if we want rightly to understand what God has said, that He will bless His people, if they hearken to His voice.

God the Giver of All Blessing

Moreover, we are hereby warned not to seek anything we desire except from the hand of God. This is a very profitable admonition. For we see how men err when they desire to be at their ease. It is the natural inclination of all men to covet to be this and that, and what course do they hold in the pursuit of it? There can be no doubt about it: they turn their backs on God, and kick against Him. He that intends to become rich will use robbery and cruelty, deceit and wicked practices. He that desires to attain to credit and authority will practise treason, indirect wiles, and other sleights-of-hand. To be short about it, ambition rules such a man altogether. Finally, he that would give vent to any other of his lusts, cannot but provoke the anger of God. See at what point we are! And in this way our faithlessness uncovers itself in every way, as I have mentioned here before.

Therefore, we have need to be mindful of this lesson, which is that if we wish to prosper, even in this present life, there is no other means for it than to put ourselves under the guidance of God, Who has all goods in His power to bestow on whomever He pleases. We may also hope that He will not be niggardly in distributing His gracious gifts unto us, at least if we hearken to His voice. For as I have been saying, since we are His children, can we think that He takes pleasure in vexing us? Moreover, it costs Him nothing. No matter how liberal He is toward us, yet He is not afraid of having less for Himself as a result, or that He will feel any lack. For His is a fountain that can never be drawn dry.

Let us therefore be persuaded that our lives shall always be accursed unless we return to this point whereto Moses leads us, namely to hearken to the voice of our God, to be thereby moved and continually confirmed in the fact that He cares for our salvation, and not only for the eternal salvation of our persons, but also for the maintenance of our state in this earthly life, to make us taste at present of His love and goodness in such a way as may content and suffice us, waiting till we may have our fill

thereof and behold the thing face to face, which we are now constrained to look upon as it were through a glass and in the dark (1 Cor. 13:12). That is one more thing we ought to remember from this text, where it is said that we shall be blessed if we hearken to the voice of the Lord our God.

Specific Blessings of God

This is to be applied to all parts of our lives. For example, when a man wishes to prosper in his own person, so that he desires to employ himself in the service of God, and to obtain some grace, to the end that he may not be unprofitable in this life, but that God maybe honored by him; let him think thus to himself, "Lord, I am Yours. Dispose of me as You will. Here I am, ready to obey You." This is the place at which we must begin if we desire God to guide us and create in us a disposition to serve Him, so that His blessing may appear and lighten upon us and upon our persons. So it is concerning every man's household.

When a man desires to live in peace and concord with his wife, or to have children in whom to rejoice, let him understand that all this is in the hand of God, and that it does not lie in our power or skill to order our households after our heart's desires. For they who think they can achieve it by their own power are very much deceiving themselves, and commit sacrilege in robbing God of the honor that He has reserved to Himself. It is said that the fruit of the womb is a special gift of God (Ps. 127:3), and so is everything else that pertains to the household. Accordingly it is said that it is vain for a man to build unless God also builds with him (Ps. 127:1). Those therefore who wish to possess a quiet state for themselves and their children, let them turn to God, and commit themselves wholly to Him and to His guidance, knowing that there is no other means to attain to the same than by His blessing.

The same thing is true concerning cattle, food, and all other things. For we see here [in this text] that nothing is forgotten. And God meant to make us to perceive His infinite goodness, in that He declares that He will deal with our smallest affairs, which one of our own equals would be loath to meddle with. If we have a friend, we should be very loath, indeed, and ashamed to use his help unless it were in a matter of great importance. But see here, that God goes into our sheepfolds and into the stalls of our cattle and oxen, and He goes into our fields, and He cares for all other things as well. Since we see Him abase Himself thus far, ought we not to be ravished to honor Him and to magnify His bounty?

Let us conclude, then, that when God says that He will bless us in the fruit of the earth, and that He will bless us in the fruit of our cattle, it is a most certain argument that He will not forget the principal thing. These things are lowly and of little count, and many times men despise them, and yet we see that God takes care of them, notwithstanding. Since this is so, will He forget our souls, which He has created after His own image, which also He has so dearly redeemed with the sacred blood of His Son? Surely not. First of all, therefore, let us acknowledge God's favor toward us, in abasing Himself so far as to direct and

govern every thing that belongs to our lives and sustenance. And from there let us rise up higher, and understand that He will not fail us in the things that surpass this present life, but rather that in the chief things that belong to our life, indeed even in this world, God will stretch forth His hand to furnish us always with all things that are needful.

Protection from Enemies

Then there is the second point, which is that we shall be upheld against our enemies. We have said that the first point is that God provides for us, so that we lack nothing that is requisite for the passing of our life in this world. But if our granaries were fuller than ever, and our cellars thoroughly supplied, and our purses stuffed tight so that we want nothing, yet if our enemies are still able to scratch our eyes out, and we are like a people set out for the spoil so that we are daily afflicted and have no defence, what shall our great abundance avail us? Therefore, it was God's will in a brief compass to show here that His blessings extend themselves so far and wide in all cases and in all respects that nothing should be missing from such as do Him honor and service. But let us mark that God has not exempted us completely from our enemies, nor did He exempt the people of olden time. Why? Because it is impossible for us to live in this world without some vexation at the hands of other men. It is true that as much as in us lies we ought to procure peace, for our part. But since the devil is prince of this world, he will not leave God's children in rest. And he has supporters enough to serve his designs; for all the despisers of God, all the wicked, and all hypocrites that are in this world, the number of whom is infinite in manner, are Satan's darts, swords, and arrows.

Seeing then that we must dwell among those who despise God, and among the wicked, let us reckon that we shall be troubled, and have enemies. Let us endeavor to appease them as much as we can, and let us give them no occasion of hatred. But in the meantime let us not be unprovided, however things go. Thus much concerning that one point. For God has not said, "I will utterly root out your enemies, so that you shall have the world by yourselves, wherein to lead a happy and quiet life, and to have all the felicity that can be wished." He has not said that. But He says, "Although you are compassed round about with your enemies, yet I will not permit them to have the upper hand over you."

Now He says further that if our enemies come forth by one way, they will free seven ways. By this He gives us to understand that our enemies may well conspire by great numbers, so that it may be likely that we should be swallowed up by them, but yet they shall be filled with fear. This will be shown more largely at another text, but here we have to mark that the sustaining and maintaining of our lives are in the hands of God, and that our rest and quietness depend also on Him. And although men do continually devise ways to hurt and annoy us, yet God is ever strong enough to disappoint them when He has once received us into His protection, and to hinder them so that they will be able to attempt nothing against us, but will be

overthrown. That is what we need to remember.

Now when God permits us to have enemies, He is calling us thereby to Himself, and we ought to be the more provoked to turn upon Him when we see ourselves driven thereto by necessity. For if this world should smile on us, and rejoice at us on all sides, it would seem to us that we had no more need of God's protection. But when we are beset with perils and dangers, and see that men lie in wait for us, seeking nothing else but to come in to vex us, it causes us to resort to God, to commit ourselves to His care, praying Him to be our shield and fortress, and our defender. Let us therefore mark that God, in permitting us to have enemies, does thereby draw us to Himself, that we should pray Him always to succor and defend us.

But to conclude, we must remember that God is mighty enough to maintain us. How so? Well, if our enemies came upon us with great fierceness, it would be enough to daunt us and to put us out of courage, but however we fare, even if He allows them to rise up against us and to be as ferocious as wild beasts, yet they shall not know what to do, but be astounded. And although they have tremendous advantage at the beginning, and be full of craft and wiles, yet God will blind their eyes so that they will cast themselves willfully into the snare and there be taken. Again, even when they are armed with malice and boldness to set upon us, God will in the end confound them, no man can tell how. He will destroy all their devices and attempts, and when they band themselves against us, and have great multitudes on their sides, yet will God scatter them. Just as when we see a cloud threatening rain, and it seems that all should be drowned, God scatters it and the tempest is gone — even so will He deal with our enemies. Thus you see in effect what we have to remember concerning this text, where it is said that we shall be defended against all such as set themselves against us, and that our God will make them free before our faces if we do Him the honor to acknowledge Him to be the Lord of hosts, and that His power is infinite, and that therefore the whole world can never prevail against Him in the least.

Conclusion

Finally, what have we now to do but submit ourselves to the obedience of God? Also, let us understand that all those who do not believe, and all those who despise God's majesty, although for a time their lives may seem happy, yet they are appointed to perdition, and all their goods shall become a curse to them, so that they will be in a forlorn condition. Just as Psalm 69:22 says, their very tables will be turned into snares and artifices wherewith to trap them, and all the benefits of God will become deadly poison to them. Here is what we must keep in mind.

Moreover, as often as we are afflicted, let us humble ourselves and acknowledge our sins, and bewail them before God. And in the meantime let us not omit to qualify our griefs, knowing that amidst the afflictions which He sends us, there always appears a certain testimony of His goodness, and that it is necessary that He should so hold us in awe. Yet notwithstanding, we must not be cast down nor be discouraged, when we are vexed and troubled, though we are encircled with never so many miseries.

And why? Because God never fails, for all that, to show Himself a Father towards us. That is the thing whereon we must altogether rest, so that all the afflictions of this world may quicken us up to aspire to the heavenly heritage. And when we have bewailed our sins, let us not doubt, but God of His mercy will bless us, even in Jesus Christ the Fountain of all goodness and blessedness, by Whom all curses are quite taken away. To prove that is it so: What may be the chief curse that is fallen upon mankind, if not death? And yet we see that the same has become an entrance into life. And how? In that the person of Jesus Christ is now made blessed. For this reason let us learn to rejoice, since we see that God has so provided for our salvation that although He makes us to feel our sins and would have us touched with some sorrow, thereby to bring us to repentance, yet He never ceases amidst all these to

show Himself a Father evermore, and by all means to advance our salvation.

Prayer

Now let us humble ourselves before the majesty of our good God, with acknowledgement of sins, praying Him to touch us to the quick mote and more, that we may hate them, and that acknowledging the evil which is in us, we may seek His mercy, not only to forgive us the sins that we have already committed, but also to mortify us, and by the power of His Spirit to give us grace so to forsake ourselves, that we may seek His righteousness, and more and more profit therein, until it be perfect in us, at such time as He shall have taken us out of this world. And so let us all say, Almighty God, heavenly Father, . . .

Tax Shelters

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I knew that would get your attention!

December is upon us. In addition to wishing you a Merry Christmas, we wanted to take this opportunity to remind you that now is your last chance to make a contribution to a non-profit institution and receive a deduction on your 1982 tax return. In looking back over the last twelve months, our contributions **from our** readers has increased considerably, but Calvin Speaks and The Geneva Papers are still far from paying for themselves. Please, seriously consider making an end-of-year donation to help us begin the new year on the right foot.

Lest you think us Scrooges, from all 1 of us to all 1 of you **MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR! !!!** May the Lord be with you as we celebrate the birth of our Lord.

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