

*Job's Thoughts Concerning
An Absent God*

William Jay

*Job's Thoughts Concerning
An Absent God*

Compliments of:
Agape Chapel Ministries
P.O. Box 59084
Norwalk, CA 90650
USA

E-mail: acm@sounddoctrine.net
Web-site: www.sounddoctrine.net

William Jay

Compliments of:
Agape Chapel Ministries
P.O. Box 59084
Norwalk, CA 90650
USA

E-mail: acm@sounddoctrine.net
Web-site: www.sounddoctrine.net

at all to us. As a Christian's justification depends upon the Saviour's righteousness, so his sanctification depends upon the Saviour's support; and as he will not, when he appears before God, make mention of his own righteousness *then*, so he will not go forth in his own righteousness *now*, but will say with David, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of His righteousness, even of His only."

Now I return for a moment to the thought I have left, and with which I conclude. Oh! how dreadful must it be for God to "plead against" a man "with His great power!" "Dost thou provoke the Lord to jealousy?" says Paul—"Art thou stronger than He?" "Hast thou an arm like God?" says Job; "or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him?" He pleaded with "His great power" against the mighty angels, who sinned; the least of whom could wield these elements, and lay creation, if allowed, waste in a moment. He "pleaded against" the old world with his "great power," and drowned it with a flood. He "pleaded against" Pharaoh with his "great power," and he sunk with his hosts like lead in the mighty waters. And what will become of *you*, if *you* oppose Him and provoke Him? Why, He need not put forth indeed His "great power" to crush *you*: as I have often told persons, when I have found them quaking in a storm of thunder and lightning. I have said, 'If God wished to destroy you, He would not have raised a storm; He could have done it easily enough.' Thy breath is in thy nostrils; thou art crushed with the moth. Yea, says Job, "Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not." A look annihilates; one glance by and bye, and "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall burn with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." Yet a little while and—

"At His call the dead awaken,

Rise to life from earth and sea;

All the powers of nature, shaken,

At His look prepare to flee.

Careless sinner! careless sinner!

What will then become of thee?"

JOB'S THOUGHTS CONCERNING AN ABSENT GOD.

REV. W. JAY.

PREACHED AT ARGYLE CHAPEL, BATH, ON SUNDAY MORNING,
MAY 12, 1839.

"Then Job answered and said, *Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me.*"—Job xxiii. 1—6.

WHETHER there ever was such a being as a *speculative* Atheist, it may not be easy to determine; but there are two classes of Atheists, which are very easily found. There are some, who are Atheists by *disposition*. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." You see, it is the language of his *desire*, rather than his *conviction*. And (would you believe it?) there are persons who would travel to the ends of the earth, if they could be assured there was no Deity to govern them, or to call them to His bar. There are also *practical* Atheists; that is, persons who live precisely as they would do, if they could persuade themselves that His being was a cunningly-devised fable: insensible to all His compassion, regardless of His glory, careless of His grace, they lie down, they rise up, they go forth, they return, they begin, they finish their enterprises, and "God is not in all their thoughts."

Now is not this a dreadful state to be in? And is not this a proof of the depravity of human nature (if men were not so blind as to refuse to see it), that creatures should become thus disaffected to their Maker, to their Benefactor, in whom they live and move and have their being? that they should consider every approach of His, as an intrusion upon them; and that they should perpetually say unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us?" Yet "none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?"—that is, none *comparatively*; that is, none *naturally*. So "there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God."

But, my brethren, conviction of sin breaks up this indifference towards the blessed God. Real religion commences in our return to Him, and consists in what the Scripture calls *godliness*; or what—

if I may be allowed the expression—*imbues a man with God*. We shall see something more of this, as we review and improve the words which I have read; and in lecturing on which this morning, we shall notice four things.

I. Job's condition. "Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning."

II. His desire. "Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!"

III. His resolution. "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me."

IV. His confidence and expectation. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me."

I. His condition. "Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning."

This is not always the case: in common, I fear, our "groaning" is much "heavier" than our "stroke." This often induces God to employ severe measures, and to resemble, in His dealings with us, the father of a proud child, who, when He finds him crying for nothing, sometimes makes him smart, and says, "You shall now cry for *something*." What says Job, in an earlier chapter? "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder?" No; these creatures then are satisfied with the supplies which are afforded them. But we, more brutish than they, though we have all things given us richly to enjoy, are ever murmuring and repining: and if a trial befalls us, however common to man, or however alleviated, we become all uneasiness in ourselves, and we disturb and distress all those around us by our sighs and our lamentations.

In some this may be considered as a natural infirmity; they seem to be constitutionally morbid and querulous. In others this is a moral infirmity, arising from pride and unbelief and discontent, against which it becomes us always carefully to guard. But there are some, whose "complaint" is indeed "bitter," and whose "stroke" is heavier than their groaning; real mourners, deep sufferers; who if they *mourn*, do not *murmur*. They can hardly be considered as "groaning;" if they open their mouth, it is only meekly to say, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." "Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort according to Thy Word unto Thy servant.

for what purpose? Can this be a question? Know you not, that you are altogether nothing without Him? He will therefore put strength in us for the performance of duty; and our work is enough to discourage us, for it looks fitter for an angel than for a feeble man, unless we look to Him whose strength can be made perfect in our weakness. He can put strength in us to enable us to suffer; and we shall never "in patience possess our souls," we shall never endure so as to "glorify God in the fires," so as to do honour to our religion and commend the Gospel to all around us by its influence, but as He stands by us. As was the case with Paul: he mentions a sad story to Timothy: when he had appealed to Cæsar, and had to appear before that arch-tyrant Nero, and his friends had come as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns, and greeted him, and escorted him into Rome, yet, says he, "At my first answer no man stood with me; I pray God it may not be laid to their charge." "But nevertheless," says he, "the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching of the Gospel might be fully known." Whoever withdraws from you, therefore, He will be with you; and a very present help, an all-sufficient help in the time of trouble. Paul therefore says, "There has no temptation befallen you but such as is common to men; but God is righteous, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, and will with the temptation make a way also for you to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Suppose a person was falling under a burden, and you could immediately without removing the burden from his shoulders increase his strength ten-fold; he would not feel it; he would go on his way with ease. So without removing your affliction, God can afford you an increasing supply of His Holy Spirit to render you adequate to your duty. He will "put strength in you" to make you equal to your enemies; numerous and mighty and subtle as they are, yet "greater is He that is with you than all they that are with the world." "If God be for you, who can be against you? He will "put strength in you" to enable you to persevere in your religious course, or you would immediately stop short, and "draw back to perdition." But "the righteous," says He, "shall hold on their way, and wax stronger and stronger."

Christian! you need not be afraid, therefore, to feel your weakness; when you are weak, then are you strong. You will be able to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." You have *both* in Him; you have *every* thing in Him. And carry away this with you this morning,—that unless Christ be all in all to us, He will be nothing

IV. We have here Job's CONFIDENCE and EXPECTATION. "Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me." Here seems to have been a trembling pause. "Will He plead against me with His great power?" Ah! had He done it! He might righteously do it; he deserved it. But no; no, He will not plead against me with His great power; "but He would put strength in me."

From hence we learn that the power of God is great; a thing of which you need not be informed, for where is the person but must say with David, "Once have I heard this, yea twice, that power becometh long to God?" You begin the creed called The Apostles' with this: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"—(much sooner *said than realized*). And He not only displayed His almightiness in *making* heaven and earth, but in the *manner* in which He did it. With what infinite ease! without any exertion; with His Word. "He *spoke*, and it was done; He *commanded*, and it stood fast." And how are all things uphelden? He "hangs the earth upon nothing;" it performs its annual and its diurnal course—why? "He upholds all things by the *Word of His power*." He made iron to swim; He made the flames refuse to scorch, or even to produce the smell of fire on the hosen of the three Hebrew children. Why then should any thing He has promised be deemed incredible? "Why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead?" He can raise the dead with infinitely greater ease than you can awake the most lively creature. What then must it be to "plead against" a man with this "great power!"

But I will adjourn this thought, and return to it again; in order to notice the *blessedness* of having this power employed for us. This is a most tremendous thought, if we view it abstractedly; but if we consider it as belonging to our Friend and our Father, as under the direction of His mercy and grace, oh! it is our most delightful resource to know that "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and that He will do all things for us. Oh! it is delightful to hold communion with the attributes of God; when I am in doubt and perplexity, to think of His wisdom and guidance; when I feel my unworthiness, to think of His mercy and grace to pardon me and renew me; when I think of my emptiness, to think of His all-sufficiency; and when I feel my weakness, to know that "the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," that He is continually saying to me, "Let him take hold of My strength;" let the ivy cling to the Tree and ascend.

"He will put strength in me." Strength in what way? and strength

See this good man before us: how well might he have said, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His mouth; He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light!" Behold him, one day in the possession of more than heart could wish, then suddenly despoiled of all; deprived of his substance, deprived of his servants, deprived of his children, bereaved of his health, covered with sore boils from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot; railed at by his wife, abandoned by his relations, misunderstood and condemned by his friends; sitting among the ashes, scraping himself with a potsherd, his head bare to the pitiless storm of adversity. Look at him, and never say again when you are afflicted, "Behold and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger." Ah! you would do well to compare yourselves with others; you who have lost *some* of your property, to compare yourselves with those who have lost *all*; those who have been bereaved of *one* child to compare themselves with those who have been bereaved of *five*; those who are walking on crutches, to compare themselves with the bedridden. Is there any situation in which you can be placed, that is incapable of being worse? Answer this question. Then let us proceed to observe,

II. Job's DESIRE—"Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" He does not express the *name* of God; his mind was full of it, and he supposed the minds of *others* were equally full, and that therefore it was needless. But here we see an *addition* to his distress; he was now in a state of *desertion*. God was absent from him. God can never be absent from His people, as to His *essential* presence, or even as to His *spiritual* presence; because He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." But He may be absent, as to what our divines call His *sensible* presence, or the manifestation of His favour and of the designs of His dealings with us.

Now this greatly enhances any external affliction. For the presence of God, which is always necessary, is never so sweet as it is in the day of trouble; and often have His people found, when creatures have withdrawn, that God has favoured them with peculiar communion with Himself—that the less they have had of the *world*, the more they have had of the *Word*—the less of *earthly*, the more of *heavenly*. But oh! to have tribulation in the world without feeling our peace in

Him ; to say with David, " My bones are vexed "—and to add, " My soul is also sore vexed, but Thou, O Lord, how long ? " Yet let none imagine that this is peculiar to them. " Who is among you," saith Isaiah, " that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and that hath no light ? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Why, says Isaiah, " He hideth himself from the house of Jacob." This was Job's case *here*. God had retired ; and though searching, he could not find Him. " I go forward," says he, " but He is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him ; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him ; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." Therefore, " oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ; that I might come even to His seat ! "

This language only suits one being in the universe, namely, a Christian mourning after an absent God. If you were to ascend up to heaven, you would hear nothing there like this—" Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ! " They *lare* found Him ; and " in His presence there is fulness of joy ; " they " beheld His face in righteousness, and are satisfied." And were you to descend down into hell, you would hear nothing like this—" Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ! " Nay, you would hear—" Oh ! that I knew a place where God was not, and that I could enter it ! " And if you go forth and examine the thousands of your fellow-creatures around you, you will find them minding their farms and their merchandize ; you will hear them often enough asking, " What shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed ? "—but do you ever hear from their lips—" Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ? " As for the child of God, who is now walking in the light of His countenance, though he desires the continuance and the increase of this, yet he properly does not use this language—" Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ! " No ; but he who, after having been favoured with intercourse with God, after having seen Him in His Word, after having enjoyed Him in His ordinances, now finds himself in darkness and alone, in order to conflict with his difficulties and dangers, saying with the church in the days of Jeremiah, " The Comforter, who shall relieve my soul, is removed far from me." " Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him ! "

My brethren, it is a sad thing to be without the presence of God ; but it is far worse, to be senseless of our need of it. I am sure this never will be the case, never *can* be the case, with those who are par-

receive, that your joy may be full." " Whatsoever ye ask in My name, believing, ye shall receive."

Thus it is we must come to God by Him at first, and thus it is that we must come to God ever afterwards. If we would have " boldness of access with confidence," it must be only " by the faith of Him." Then—

3. He says, " *I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me.*" In general a Christian wishes to know the Divine pleasure concerning him. " Speak, Lord," says he, " for Thy servant heareth." " I will hear what God the Lord will speak." " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " " How do I appear in His eyes ? It is a light thing for me to be judged of man's judgment ; He that judgeth me is the Lord. What does He think of me ? What does He say concerning me ? " But here, when Job says, " I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me," he means in answer to prayer, and shows us that he would not be satisfied with the mere performance of the duty, but would look after the result of it ; he would not depart without a reply, and would see whether it would be repulsive or favourable.

I fear there is very little of this to be found among us. I fear you are continually giving a proof how little importance you attach to prayer ; for this must be the case, if you are regardless of God's answer to it. What would you think of a husbandman, who, after having sown the seed, would never walk forth to look after it, to see " first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear ? " Or what would you think of a person, who, if he knocked at your door, would not wait, or even look back, to see even if the door were opened ? Would you not consider this a mere insult ? And is it not thus, with regard to many who pray, and God ? They mock Him by calling His attention, when they know they never mean to regard His voice or His influences. Moses said, " The Lord heard me that time also ; " and it shows us how he remarked, in looking back upon his history, places and seasons when God had heard His supplication. And if you remark these, this is the way to have your gratitude excited, and to have your confidence strengthened. See how God has answered you in such and such instances ; and say with David, " I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications ; because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live."

human language, for we have no other to speak in. And let the poor sinner not be discouraged. Let him remember that he need never be at a loss for one moment for arguments, with which to fill his mouth when he goes to the throne of grace; let him remember that there is not a circumstance belonging to his case, that there is not an attribute pertaining to the Divine nature, that there is not a promise or invitation in His Word, that there is not an example of His mercy and grace recorded there, but may furnish us with matter when we have to plead with Him.

If a beggar came to the door, you would know pretty well before hand what arguments he would make use of; that he is more to be pitied than to be blamed—that he has seen much better days—that he has never begged before—that it is only a little he wants now, and that he will not come again, and that he will not tell of your bounty so as to plague you by bringing others to call upon you. But the reverse of all this we must feel and plead, when we address the God of all grace and mercy; for, blessed be His name, "His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways; but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts higher than our thoughts, and His ways than our ways." The strongest and the sweetest argument we can ever employ must be drawn from the dear mediation of Him, who was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification," and who ascended into heaven, where He is now; and it is from Him we are to derive our most available plea when we go unto Him; to say, (for we expect all our blessings for His sake, and therefore for His sake we must plead)—to say, 'Why, Thou hast already not spared Thine own Son, but freely given Him up for us all; and wilt Thou not with Him freely give us all things? And is not every end that could be answered by my destruction equally and entirely answered by His precious death? And do I now come to Thee to ask Thee, in pardoning and saving me, to trample on Thy law, or to deny Thy Word and Thy righteousness? "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Here Thy law is ever magnified and made honourable; here sin is condemned while it is pardoned; and I therefore only plead for glory to Thyself in the highest, by the extension of good will on earth, and peace towards men.' Oh! the Saviour Himself has taught us thus to plead—"Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name," nothing compared with what you *ought* to have asked, and compared with what you *might* have asked; but now "ask and

takers of the grace of God in truth. Each of them will be able to say in such a condition as this, with David, "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled."

Their desire after God arises from three causes.

1. Their *new nature*. Persons will desire according to their conviction and their disposition. "That which is born of the flesh," says our Saviour, "is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And therefore, says the apostle, answering to this, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Being born of God, the believer naturally aspires towards Him; and passing by those creatures which attract and detain others, he says, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee."

2. From *experience* also. Now when they first sought after God, they felt their need of Him; but then they had never tasted that He was gracious. *Now* they have; and therefore now they can chide themselves, and say—

"Why should my foolish passions rove?

Where can such sweetness be

As I have tasted in Thy love,

As I have found in Thee?"

There is nothing they remember more vividly, when they look back, than places and seasons and exercises made sacred by their communion with their God; and during which they have said—

"While such a scene of sacred joys

Our raptur'd eyes and souls employs,

Here we could sit and gaze away

A long, an everlasting day."

3. A *consciousness of their entire dependence upon Him*. They feel that all their sufficiency is of God. They know that He does not stand in need of them; but they know that without Him they can do nothing; that they are nothing; that "in Him they live and move and have their being." I need His presence, therefore, (says the Christian,) every moment; I want continually the joy of His salvation, the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the upholding of His free Spirit. I cannot stand longer than He holds me; I cannot walk farther than He leads me; I cannot see farther than He enlightens me; I cannot act but as He strengthens me; I cannot live but as He enlivens me. He is "all and in all" to my soul. What wonder, there-

There is some difference always between private and public prayer ; there is more freedom in private devotion, than is consistent with the propriety of public devotion. But with regard to this, there is a way in which even praying in the closet may be carried on much better than it usually is. If now, for instance, a Christian for a few minutes only, before he kneels upon his knees, was just to say to himself 'What do I now most need? In what relation do I stand before God? What is my present condition? What is my office? What duties and dangers are lying before me, in the course of the day, requiring His assistance?'—were you to do this for a few moments (and it would take no more) you would then be much less embarrassed than you often are in prayer, and be furnished with more materials.

Here is another part of the "order" of which Job speaks, which Solomon mentions, and which you should not forget ; "Remember that God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few." Never imagine that you are to be heard for your "much speaking, and using vain repetitions as the heathens do." And there is another part of this order which our Saviour teaches us, when He says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." *Nature* may speak in prayer, but *grace* must speak *first*. Our Lord teaches us this in His own blessed prayer : He teaches us to say, "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," before He allows us to ask for "our daily bread." And you must never pray for other things, as you pray for spiritual blessings ; you cannot be too importunate with regard to the one, and you cannot be too cool and resigned, referring yourselves entirely to His wisdom and goodness, with regard to the other. I hope, whenever you go to God, however many burdens you feel, that you feel no burden like the burden of your sins ; and anxious as you are allowed to be for the recovery of your health, I hope this is not to be compared with the earnestness with which you inquire after the "balm in Gilead, and the Physician there," with regard to your souls.

2. He says, "*I would fill my mouth with arguments.*" Not that these are *necessary* to excite and move a Being, who is love itself, and who is always much more ready to hear than we are to pray ; but these are *proper* in order to affect and encourage us. The case is this : God speaks to us in a way the most agreeable to our state, and the most easy to our apprehension, and He leads us to speak to Him in the same way ; He must, if He addresses us, speak in human language, or He will never be understood ; and we must, in speaking to Him, speak in

fore, that he should exclaim—"Oh ! that I knew where I might find Him !"

But you must observe, also, the *earnestness* of his desire—"That I might come even to His seat !" Nearness to God in duty is a very distinguishable thing from the mere exercise itself. There is an expression which sometimes you make use of (and it is a very good one), 'That you may pray in prayer.' This may apply to *praise* ; and to *hearing* ; there is such a thing as praising in praise, and hearing in hearing. This should be your concern ; for in vain you draw near to God with your mouth, while your heart is far from Him. To enter into "the secret of His tabernacle," as David did ; to "enter into the holiest of all," as the apostle has it, "by the blood of Jesus ;" to get near His very seat, as Job has it here ; to get so near as almost to get away from feeling the influence of the world ; leaving it so far behind for the time, to draw so near to Him, as to see His beauty, and as to feel His influence ; so near as to have our hearts fixed, and filled too :—this is a possible thing, though many of us know what it is by the want of it rather than by the enjoyment ; but it is a possible thing, and this should be your aim in your public and in your private devotions ; and will be so, remember, in proportion as you are concerned to have the life of God advanced in your souls.

Let us therefore observe—

III. His resolution. "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments ; I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me." Three things, with some little distinction.

1. He says, "*I would order my cause before Him ;*" which shows that the Divine presence would not overpower him, so as not to leave sense, reason, and speech ; so that he would be able to state his case, and to state it properly, or with order. Very unlike the hysterics, and the convulsions, and the ravings, which have often been supposed to be the proofs of the revival of religion and the down-pouring of the Spirit of God ; as if the Spirit of God had any end to answer by depriving people of their senses, or as if anything really good could be carried on in the absence of reason and order. The service of God is always a "reasonable service."

Now this order does not so much regard words as things. Every thing should be "done decently and in order," says the apostle.