

“The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. ... Evil shall slay the wicked; and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate (i.e., shall be guilty). The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.”
Psa. 34:17-22. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”
1 Pet. 4:12-14.

Bro. Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), in his monumental exposition of **Job**, said that the book of **Job** “teaches us, That God doth sometimes afflict His children out of mere prerogative” – (i.e., as at **Lk. 10:21**; to wit: “*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT.*”) – “that though there be no sin in them which he makes the occasion of afflicting them, (as was Job’s case), yet for exercise of His graces in them, for trial of their graces, or to set them up for patterns to the whole world, God may and doth afflict them. Though no man be without sin, yet the afflictions of many are not for their sins. God would also have us – and the whole world – learn another lesson from the History of Job; to wit: That no matter how great the earthly fortune, all could be swept away in the twinkling of the eye.” But, Beloved, there is another lesson for us from the History of Bro. Job, which may be the grandest of all; viz., to wit: “*the strength, even the UNMOVEABLENESS of FAITH; how UNCONQUERABLE, it is; what a kind of OMNIPOTENCE there is in the faith of God’s Elect.*”

“God would have all the world take notice of this in the **Book of Job**, that a godly person is in vain assaulted – by friends or enemies – by man or devils, by wants or wounds; Though he be even benighted” – (i.e., temporarily lost in moral darkness or ignorance) – “in his spirit, though God Himself take away the light of His countenance from him, yet God would have us learn and know, that over all these, a true believer is more than a conqueror. For here is one of the greatest battles ever fought; that ever was between man and man, between man and Hell, yea between God and man; yet Job went away with the victory; True Grace is often assaulted; but it never was – nor ever shall be – overthrown.”

Remember, these are they, “*Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a BETTER RESURRECTION*” – (i.e., a resurrection to eternal life is BETTER than a resurrection to eternal damnation in Hell) **Heb. 11:33-35**; to wit:

“Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”
(Jn. 5:28,29)

And, a RESURRECTION to EVERLASTING LIFE is BETTER than a resurrection to shame and everlasting contempt; to wit: *“And at that time shall Michael”* – (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ) – *“stand up, the Great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people;”* – (i.e., for God’s Elect) – *“and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, EVERY ONE THAT SHALL BE FOUND WRITTEN IN THE BOOK* (i.e., God’s Elect). *And many of them* (i.e., the multitudes of them) *that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some TO EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SOME TO SHAME AND EVERLASTING CONTEMPT. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;* (i.e., knowledge shall be increased on a massive, super-worldwide scale; miraculously, extraordinarily, etc.).” **Dan. 12:1-4.**

“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection,” because it is this faith in the sure and certain resurrection of the dead that is the topstone of the whole structure, system, and building in religion. For without it, as the apostle says, *“we are of all men most miserable.”* 1 Cor. 15:19. This, therefore, is that which their minds were fixed on under all their tortures, and wherewith they supported themselves, namely, that after all these afflictions and persecutions they should have a BLESSED RESURRECTION; to wit:

***“That I may know him, and the power of his RESURRECTION, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the RESURRECTION of the dead.”* (Phil. 3:10,11)**

O, Beloved. Is it not true with each of us? Let everything else go as *“DUNG”* (!)(!). *“IF BY ANY MEANS I MIGHT ATTAIN UNTO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.”* Phil. 3:11. Yes, I said *“DUNG.”* Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles said, *“DUNG.”* God the Holy Ghost said, *“DUNG;”* to wit:

***“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but DUNG, that I may win Christ. ... That I may know him, and THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION.”* (Phil. 3:8,10)**

Beloved, those who have suffered the loss of all things for the dear Lord Jesus, and who thereupon count them (*“all things”*) but dung – are indeed *“a glorious band, the chosen few on whom the Spirit came.”* (R. Heber) They are God’s Elect, further identified in the 10th chapter of Hebrews; to wit:

***“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and TOOK JOYFULLY THE SPOILING OF YOUR GOODS, KNOWING IN YOURSELVES THAT YE HAVE IN HEAVEN A BETTER AND AN ENDURING SUBSTANCE. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”* (Heb. 10:32-39)**

They are God’s Elect. It is not possible for them to draw back unto perdition (i.e., end up in Hell). They are further identified by the metaphorical language at **Heb. 12:1**; to wit:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Heb. 12:1,2)

We are here made to understand that all the saints from Adam to now, who have gone to Heaven and are looking on as WITNESSES to our ongoing performance on earth AT THIS TIME.

John Owen: *“So is it with us in our patient perseverance; all the saints of the Old Testament do as it were stand looking on us in our striving, encouraging us unto our duty, and ready to testify as to our successes with their applauses. They are all placed about us unto this end; we are compassed (i.e., surrounded) with them. And they are so in the Scripture; wherein they, being dead, yet see, and speak, and bear testimony. The Scripture hath encompassed us with them; so when we are in our trials, which way soever we look in it, we may behold the face of some or other of these worthies looking on us, and encouraging us. So the apostle charges young Timothy with his duty, not only ‘before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ,’ unto whom he was to give his account, but ‘before the elect angels’ also, who were to be witnesses of what he did therein;”* to wit: ***“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, AND THE ELECT ANGELS, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man*** (i.e., do not be hasty in ordaining persons to the work of the ministry or other officer of the Church), ***neither be partaker of other men’s sins; keep thyself pure.”*** 1 Tim. 5:21,22. And it is useful for us, in all our trials for the profession of the faith, to give serious recollection and consideration, that the eyes – as it were – of all that have gone before us in the same, or the like, or greater trials – I say, those blessed eyes are upon us, TO BEAR WITNESS HOW WE ACQUIT OURSELVES.

O, Beloved, let us then conduct ourselves while we are yet waging spiritual warfare in the church militant here below – in such a manner as will make our fellow soldiers – as well as our Great Commander in Chief – proud of us; to wit: ***“His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”*** Mat. 25:21. The other sense in which the term WITNESSES is used in the verse, ***“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of WITNESSES,”*** is in the sense that the witnesses have a valuable testimony from their personal experience to convey or bear witness to the pilgrims yet alive in the earth, and to whom the saints in glory have invaluable – first-hand – evidence.

They all jointly testify or BEAR WITNESS unto the following things; to wit: That it is best for us to believe and obey God, whatever may befall us in our so-doing; that faith, where it is true and sincere, will engage those – in whom it is – to venture on the greatest hazards, dangers, and miseries in the world, rather than to forego their profession; and that it will safely carry us through them all. Those that testify these things are important witnesses in this cause. For when, upon the approaches of danger and trouble, it may be death itself, we are brought to contest things in our own minds, and to dispute what it is best for us to do – wherein Satan will not be wanting to increase our fears and disorders by his fiery darts – it cannot but be an unspeakable advantage and encouragement to have all these holy and blessed persons stand about us, TESTIFYING UNTO THE FOLLY OF OUR FEARS, the FALSENESS of all suggestions of unbelief, and the FRAUD of Satan’s temptations; as also unto the excellency of the duties whereunto we are called; and the certainty of our success in them through believing.

All the golden promises of God – exceeding great and precious promises, and whereby we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through the unanimous lust of earth's doomed population – as in the days of Noah and Lot. See, 2nd Peter, chapter one; to wit:

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Pet. 1:4

Beloved, remember throughout the day and during the night hours when awake, it were a good thing to meditate often upon this GREAT CLOUD of friendly witnesses, even as we strive continually to lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and as we run with patience the race that has been prepared for us by a loving, sovereign God each step of the way; and all of which was prepared and laid out by the Captain of our salvation in eternal ages past.

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Psa. 19:14)

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God; depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psa. 139:17-24)

Study that passage carefully, Beloved. I submit that the material contained therein should and does set forth the kind of meditating God's Elect engage in – day and night. Not kissy-poo stuff that serves only to fill the coffers of Arminian heretics, sending folks to Hell. And, again:

“In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul; Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the Lord is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off.” (Psa. 94:19-23)

Beloved, let us lay aside every weight, and the (original indwelling) sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us:

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:1,2)

Like the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, we and each of us, Elect of God, has a beautiful obstacle course mapped out to run – from birth to death. Lest we grow weary and faint in our minds, we are exhorted to look steadfastly upon our dear Lord Jesus, who *“endured such a great contradiction of sinners against himself.”* Heb. 12:3. The word here translated CONTRADICTION means all manner of cruel infliction of pain and suffering, and so may include all the sufferings whatsoever of Christ – of body and mind – it being the case that “pain” and “shame” are the two constituent parts of all outward sufferings. No death more lingering, painful, and cruel; none so shameful in common reputation. Under these heads a confluence of all outward evils is contained.

I love you. Amen.