

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, October 13, 2013.

I'm looking out upon a group of souls who are unique in all the earth. There is not one here who has not demonstrated the truth of our Savior's words:

"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses [*God's house!*], and brethren [*these brothers!*], and sisters [*these beloved sisters!*], and mothers [*these mothers in Israel!*], and children [*faithful children, raised up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!*], and lands [*beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mt. Zion ... the city of the great King!*], with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Mark 10:29-30

We have been drawn together here with cords of kindness by the putting forth by God of a glorious virtue or energy and calling each of these little ones into this fold. We have here a spiritual house, made up of living stones which are "fitly framed together [and] groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." Ephesians 2:21

And by many such thrilling metaphors this gathering of saints is described in the Word of God. We have every experience-based reason to trust in the verity of the written word, building up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Time and again, we learn that when we take ourselves to the written word -- with all the remedies and wisdom contained therein -- we right our course and enjoy a renewal of the favor and blessings poured out upon us from the throne.

So we come to consider what that written word has to say to us about the matter of deep affliction ... troubling affliction. As with all things that come upon every son and daughter of the Adamic race, they come directly from God. Specifically, as it pertains to this subject we read: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake". Philippians 1:29 Both saving faith and suffering in this life for the cause of God and truth are integral and necessary parts of your gifts of grace.

While we know "that the same afflictions are accomplished in [our] brethren that are in the world" 1 Peter 5:9, the wicked are not given the gracious blessing of

having these same afflictions -- in type or purpose -- during this life, causing them to rot like unfiltered wine fat, to wit:

"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath *settled on his lees*, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." Jeremiah 48:11

Because they are not poured out of one vessel, often times painfully into another -- as Jacob who had his wages changed ten times by the earth dwellers -- they have no understanding of God's true nature, to wit:

"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are *settled on their lees*: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil." Zephaniah 1:12

We know the end of these who are "lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot"; they are spewed out of the mouth of our Christ. Revelation 3:16

His Majesty the Devil petitions our Father perpetually to throw us into these afflictions ... with the vain expectation that our faith is grounded in our God-granted earthly comforts and protections. We should not see as isolated or unique to the patriarch, the events recorded in the first and second chapters of Job, to wit:

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. and the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Job 1:6-11

... and ...

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." Job 2:1-5

This is a real picture of what goes on between the accuser of the brethren and our God every day and all day! We also find this reality in the plain words of Christ to Peter on the night he was betrayed: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat". Luke 22:31 This is the continual posture of Satan, as it is said that he "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom [among the saints of God] he may devour". 1 Peter 5:8

This pouring forth from vessel to vessel, this necessary part of this pilgrimage, often comes in sharp afflictions, trials, severe testings of the heart and mind and spirit. And with these sharp afflictions comes a degree of confusion and at times even darkness.

In the midst of Job's affliction, and while he disputed with his three friends, part of his answer to Bildad the Shuhite included these words:

"If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity. If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. *I am full of confusion*; therefore see thou mine affliction; For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me." Job 10:14-16

Joseph Caryl says on this confusion: "Confusion notes a disorder, and an uncomposedness of spirit. When a man knows not what to do, or whose counsel

to follow. When a man cannot make up his thoughts, or bring them to any issue: When the mind is like a skein of raveled silk which will neither wind nor draw, then we are in confusion. And this I conceive was it, which Job chiefly intends, when he saith, "I am full of confusion". ... While we suffer much, we scarce know what to do. Trouble upon the sensitive part, troubles the understanding. Confusion upon our estates, makes a confusion in our minds; it is very hard to keep our spirits in order, while our houses and business are out of order; every affliction makes some confusion without us; and it is exceeding rare if affliction make not much confusion within us."

When our God takes his elect sheep through these times of affliction, times of great change, even times of transition, there is sometimes an associated condition even greater than confusion; one of darkness. Of obscurity where there was before clarity. Things that appeared in plain sight are now secreted away by the providential hand of God as certainly as the door of Lot's house was unfindable to those who fretted themselves to find it.

This darkness is the perpetual habitation of the damned; a condition of heart, mind, and spirit utterly devoid of any but the corrupted light of nature. They have no peace from the "God of peace", so they war with each other continually. They have no comforts from the "God of all comfort", so they are "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Jude 1:13

They have no light from the Sun of Glory, so they "put darkness for light, and light for darkness" Isaiah 5:20, which they prefer over the light that is Christ, "because their deeds [are] evil." In this darkness, they live spiritually sick lives where "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Isaiah 1:6 They "feed on ashes", drink wine "from the vine of Sodom, and the fields of Gomorrah" and are condemned to live out their days in the earth restricted in their knowledge to those things "they know naturally, as brute beasts, [and] in those things they corrupt themselves" while raging against these higher things of God, Christ, and heaven of which they are given no knowledge!

When I think of how these damned of our generation react to the blessed light of truth we shine across this dark world, I'm put in mind the scene from the movie *I am Legend* where the day is coming to an end, with only slivers of light still breaking through between the tall buildings. It is this light that keeps at bay the venomous, tortured, demon creatures that consume all they find when the darkness falls. They fretfully push against those last rays of light that scorch and torment them.

In our deep afflictions, we are darkened in our hearts, our minds, our spirits. We visit that place where the reprobate daily dwell, and where they have hope that they may be given full license to consume us. Consume our bright, shining minds and spirits and reduce us to the grotesque condition that is their existence. They would willingly share with us their cruel venom of asps and grapes of gall, and have joy at the sight of our cursing the God of eternity to his face!

Thankfully, the elect of God are given a remedy to this certain state of trial and affliction. Indeed, it appears clear from Scripture that a distinguishing mark of the saints is the reliance upon that remedy, while others who professed to belief on Christ have no use for it.

"Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." Isaiah 50:10

"Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;" Proverbs 2:11-14

"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me." Micah 7:8

In addition to the irrefutable fact that every one of God's elect are going to go through periods of confusion and darkness during their earthly walk, there is another blessed thing to consider in these and similar passages.

The remedy provided in every such instance of being placed in confusion and darkness is found in this blessed book we have from which to know the will of

God! Indeed "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". 2 Timothy 3:16

When we are in darkness, Isaiah tells us that we must trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon our God! Unique to every affliction we face, there is a distinct "name" or title by which the LORD is made known to us in Scripture. If we cleave to that name in our darkness, we will be inclined to patiently wait until the light returns and we have peace again with our Father.

If we face an assaulting enemy from without, God is our faithful defender and avenger, the LORD of Hosts! If we face a fearful enemy within, God has given solemn warning to any "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace". Hebrews 10:29. If our darkness be due to an afflicting sin that buffets us beyond our present capacity and "our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." 1 John 3:20

In the same vein, the passage in Proverbs tells us that "discretion" and "understanding" is what preserves us from the darkness into which we have providentially fallen. That term "discretion" means that you have carefully examined purpose in your thoughts and actions. In context it reflects a proper understanding and application of God's attributes to your situational awareness, after having fully considered and examined them. If we will have a remedy to this darkness, we must have an understanding of the attributes of God and particularly with regard to His dealings with His people during their earthly pilgrimage.

And for what purpose do we find ourselves in these times of confusion and darkness, from which we have every scriptural expectation we will be delivered? Well, my friends, that is the most beautiful part of this message.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:16-17

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Psalm 84:7

When we read these words from Holy Scripture, we are taught that there is an exercising of every elect member of God's church. From the days when we "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that [we] may grow thereby" 1 Peter 2:2, to the days when we "may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" 2 Timothy 3:17 we must grow from strength to strength, and must have our senses exercised through trials to have the true nature of "God revealed [to us] from faith to faith".

Having a proper perspective on both the means and the end of these trials and afflictions -- "though now for a season, if need be, [we] are in heaviness through manifold temptations" 1 Peter 1:6 -- provides us with the spiritual strength to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

"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, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 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. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."
Philippians 3:8-16

We have but a few days left to occupy this earth, and to finish the work of delivering the words of our King to the inhabitants. Let us seize upon the promises our Father has delivered to us in His word ... as confirmed through the exercises of our hearts through afflictions ... and press on.

I love all you who have been called to this blessed life.

Amen