

God Shall Save the Humble
Job 22:21-29
Laetare Sunday, March 15, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....Living in this world of sin, it is very easy for us to lose our way. Because of the weakness of our flesh it is both good and necessary, to sharpen our knowledge of God's Word daily. For example, when I was a teenager, not long after confirmation, Pastor Twenge sharpened our knowledge of the Scriptures through a book called "A Summary of Christian Doctrine" by Edward Koehler. It is still a favorite book of mine, as it was even back then, for it opened up to me a greater knowledge of the Lord. Edward Koehler was a gifted teacher who didn't speak above my head, but he spoke in a way I understood. Still today when there are subjects with which I struggle, I find this good teacher helps me greatly. Repentance is one of those difficult subjects, because we can't make ourselves repent, but only those who repent will be saved. Impenitent sinners cannot be saved, unless they repent. Repentance is complicated in that only the Holy Spirit can operate and work upon our heart in such a way so our heart is no longer a cold and stubborn stone inside, but we have been broken in the knowledge of sin, fearing God's wrath. Through repentance a change is made in the heart, so that now we confess our sins and seek God's mercy in Jesus Christ. The penitent believing heart then is one who knows the death of sin, but the life of Christ, our life through Christ as the Bible says "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ." May God grant all of us such daily repentance, for "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and [God] shall save the humble person."

If you look at Kretzmann's Popular Commentary, on this section of Scripture, you find the title, "An Admonition to Repent". Likewise in my "Biblical Texts" book by Paul Nesper, this reading is entitled God "Shall Save the Humble". Both titles or headings work for this reading. As for the man who spoke the words of our text, his name was Eliphaz, pronounced el-ee-faz'. The name Eliphaz means God of Gold. In any case Eliphaz was a friend of Job, but not a real good counselor. While the words of our text are true regarding repentance, admonition, humility, and God's blessing or curse, we must remember regarding Job's friends wrongly judged that Job had done some secret or terrible sin, and that was why God had afflicted Job so severely. They did not weep with them that weep, and they were not charitable in their judgment. Outwardly Job had lived a righteous life, and there was no secret sin within which Job was hiding. Even when God greatly tested Job so that he lost everything in a day, even all his children, Job said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Looking now at the words of Eliphaz, he says, “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart.” This sounds very similar to the words God spoke to Cain, when Cain was angry because God did not accept his sacrifice. The Lord said, “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” As sinners who daily sin much, we have no right to be angry with God when we are chastened, nor should we accuse God of evil when things do not go our way. Moreover, if we do good and obey God’s commandments, there is a blessing for us through Christ, but if we do evil, shouldn’t we expect God to do us evil in return? Therefore when God in the Bible warns us about evil and giving ourselves over to evil, as Cain did, let us hear God’s voice and turn away from the evil. Let us receive God’s Words from God’s mouth and obey His law, for only good comes from God’s mouth, and every word should be treasured and secured in our hearts. But if we do otherwise, God has no choice but to chasten us, and that is because God is good and we are evil, yet God doesn’t want us to perish in our sins. We need to accept His judgments and not be bitter, knowing “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose”. Every good shepherd must use the rod on occasion, but never to break our back. “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

Eliphaz now says, “If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles.” These are words of repentance for the believer who confesses their sins to God, seeking God’s mercy. Thus let us briefly review repentance, for repentance is ongoing in the Christian life, and the Christian who refuses to repent is a Christian no more. What is repentance? There is a repentance in the narrow sense and also a broad sense. Repentance in the NARROW sense is sorrow over sin which takes place in the heart. It is not just an outward confession of sin, nor is it some kind of ritual of going through the motions, but rather repentance is a change of mind. Repentance in the narrow sense is sorrow or contrition over sin. When God commands us to be holy, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love Him with all our heart, our conscience is awakened and we feel the guilt of our sin. We also become afraid of God’s wrath. Repentance in the narrow sense then is contrition, “that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin.” (Augsburg Confession, Art. XII).

Now here let it be said people can be sorry for their sins for different reasons. When an unbeliever is sorry, they are sorry only because they fear God’s wrath and punishments for their sin. This is what we call the sorrow of the world. When Judas for example killed himself, he was very sorry for his sins, but he was only sorry because he feared God’s punishment. Judas did not take his sins in faith to Jesus. In other words, there was no faith coupled or joined to the repentance of Judas. He experienced despair ALONE because he did not believe he could be forgiven by God. So the Bible says “The sorrow of the world worketh death.”

But here’s a question, can a believer who has faith in Christ, experience that sorrow of the world, where we are sorry because we fear God’s wrath? Absolutely! And who among us has not experienced such sorrow for sin where one is afraid God may punish us

at any moment for our sin? Yet when there is faith also in such a heart, something else also happens: namely being grieved by your sins you go to God in prayer seeking His mercy and sincerely praying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." If you inwardly believe that in Jesus, by His blood, God has full pardon, forgiveness for all your sins, you are indeed a true believer who need not be ashamed. The Bible says "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of!" Godly sorrow then is God produced sorrow which can only happen if we have heard the Gospel of Jesus. To put it another way, Christians know where to go with their sins confessing their sins, we go to Jesus. And we are grieved also by our sins, because once again we have not honored Jesus in the way we have lived, though we very much want to. We are children who have disappointed our heavenly Father by such, and that hurts us within. Confessing our sins we are truly sorry because of love. Koehler therefore writes, "Godly sorrow" is pleasing to God, draws us closer to Him, and is a powerful means in suppressing the old Adam." (Pg. 136) Whatever your sins then may be, even if you have betrayed Jesus with 30 pieces of silver, understand Jesus has forgiveness for you and Jesus simply wants you to believe it. This is why the Lord says in Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Likewise adulterous David prayed, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." God doesn't want your sacrifices or good works, but if you come to Him broken, seeking forgiveness, God will gladly heal you and forgive.

When we thus speak of repentance in the BROAD sense, it is not just contrition or sorrow over sin, but also faith in Christ who has forgiven all our sins through the cross. Repentance in this broad sense is spoken of by Jesus in Luke 15:7, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." The angels don't rejoice simply if you are sorry, but they truly rejoice when you believe your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

How then does repentance takes place inwardly, so we have a change of heart or mind? By hearing Law and Gospel! Contrition or sorrow over sin can occur only by hearing God's law and wrath against sinners. God's law uncovers our sins, pulls back the covers of our pride, and God's Law declares "you are naked in God's sight, and God knows every wicked thing you have done, and God is surely going to punish you for it!" This is when we become afraid of hell itself and God's judgments for our sin, which is also called terrors of conscience. But when the Gospel is preached, we hear the good news of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel Jesus comes to us and He covers our nakedness with His own holiness and righteousness. Jesus promises us, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee." Is. 44. By the words return unto Me Jesus is saying, "Don't run away from me or fear me, because I have grace to cover your sins. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Knowing this, "we lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver."

This doesn't mean if we repent and believe in Christ we will be rich in gold. But it means the gold of this world becomes as worthless as dust in comparison to the riches we possess through Jesus, namely forgiveness of all sins and our heavenly home. How can any precious metal compare to this treasure who is higher than the heavens? "For by grace are ye saved!"

This is also why Christ is our defense. If the devil shoots his arrows at us so we despair like Judas on account of our sins, Jesus steps in-between us and the devil and He shields us with His arms saying "These children are mine and you cannot have them! Get the hence Satan", and so the devil must run and flee. So the Bible says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." No matter how afraid we then might be on account of our sins, they are but a spark easily quenched in the ocean of God's grace. So Micah 7:19 says that God "will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." "Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." This means God now hears your prayers and doesn't reject you because of your sins. Jesus sinners doeth receive. "Rejoice...because your names are written in heaven."

Finally, beloved of the Lord, it is written "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person." This means you can help the humble, the penitent and repentant sinners by speaking the Gospel, speaking of Jesus, and all His wonderful grace to cover their sins and yours. So the humble are surely "lifted up." "For Thy Son did suffer for me, Gave Himself to rescue me, Died to heal me and restore me, Reconciled me unto Thee. 'Tis alone His cross can vanquish, These dark fears and soothe this anguish." TLH#326 Amen.