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Deliverance in a Day of Judgment

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out my hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord. If I cause evil beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the beasts; though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only should be delivered, but the land should be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off from it man and beast; though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only should be delivered themselves. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, they should deliver neither son nor daughter; they should but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." (Ezekiel 14:12-20).

That is a very difficult and hard portion of Scripture; but you must remember that the people of God had gone very, very far away from God's mind and will, in the days when Ezekiel prophesied: so much so that the Lord took the attitude that their state was practically incurable. They had for many centuries had the knowledge of God's will, as it had been proclaimed to them by seers and prophets. They had in their possession the very oracles of God. God had, in numerous, almost countless ways, made it clear that He was for them, that He was ready to show His power and His love to them, and they had steadily set aside His word, turned away from Him, neglected His law, violated all that He had given them of the knowledge of His will; they had persistently hardened their hearts: so that the state had come when they were entirely without a sense of sin, when no appeal to them from God made any difference. His signs, all the things which spoke of Him, were in the

land, but they had no respect, they passed on their way, they were almost entirely without any sense of God's requirements in their lives. They had reached the place where a prophet might hold an open-air meeting and proclaim to them God's mind, God's will, God's requirements, and no one would stop to listen: they passed on their way indifferent. The places of meeting, the house of God, were neglected. And so it came to be like this: the Lord made this terrible declaration, that though Noah and Daniel and Job were in the land, it would make no difference, except to themselves. When God is so ignored, repudiated, left out of account, judgment is inevitable.

Of course, for a company of God's people that may have no message, when we leave it there. But there is a message for us. That state of things is not unlike the condition as found in our own country - the unheeding ear, the cold rejecting heart, the increasing difficulty to get men to attend to the things of God. We are moving fast toward such a place, and we can already see the dark clouds of judgment drawing very near; and it is not exaggerating, or saying too strong a thing, to say that, if the men who, in their day, did represent God in a very mighty way, were to be accumulated in our day, it would not make much difference. Here were three men who had mightily counted for God in different ages. In their own days, in different ways, they registered for God in this world, and now the Lord says, 'Though I were to gather them all together, in one day in one place, it would make no difference, people would not take any notice.' That is terrible. Their ear is so heavy and dull, their hearts are so cold and indifferent, that it does not matter what appeal you make.

But let us take this principle in reverse for ourselves. In a day of judgment which must be, which is inevitable - it is coming - who will be delivered? For there are those who will be delivered. "They should deliver... their own souls": that is, they would be delivered. While it says that many will not, it does say, if not in actual words, at least by implication, that there are those who will be delivered. God will be faithful to His faithful ones. Here are three representative men, representative of those who in the day of judgment will be delivered: Noah, Daniel, and Job. Note the order, because that is not the Biblical order. Noah, of course, does come first of the three - but where does Job come? He might have come before Noah or he might have come after; but certainly Daniel stands third: yet he is put second here. It is not a mistake, not an oversight, not a slip. No: as it is here in the inspired Word of God, it is right, it is spiritually right.

I cannot stay with the significance of these three men in any fulness. But I note one thing about them all. Noah, mentioned first, lived in a day when the whole course of human nature had moved away from God, when human nature had become altogether indifferent to God. It was a matter of the race. God looked in the days of Noah and saw that all men had gone astray. It was the course of man's evil nature: and Noah lived in that day and stood against the course of nature, against the way that humanity goes when it is left to itself, leaving God out and getting further and further away from Him. Daniel, coming second here, lived in a day and in a place where the world power was all against God, the day of Babylon, the world system, in the glorifying of man and the excluding and denying of God; and Daniel stood up against that, not only against the course of human nature, but against the whole world system. He stood up against that, and overcame it. Job is mentioned third, and the scene of Job's conflict was still deeper, still more remote. You know the story of Job - it was in the realm of spiritual forces, something more than human nature and this world system. It was in the realm of 'principalities and powers and world-rulers of this darkness'. Job's whole battle was against the devil himself.

And in these three realms these men triumphed. In the realm of evil human nature, Noah triumphed. In the realm of the world's glory in itself and rejection of God, Daniel triumphed - at great cost, but he triumphed. And in the realm of the very devil himself, Job triumphed. A threefold glorious triumph is represented by these men. It makes this statement of Ezekiel a very terrible one -

for three men like that to be brought together in one time, and yet for men to take no notice, to be unaffected.

However, these men bring their message to us. We are in this threefold realm. We know the course of nature, sinful nature; we know the conflict with this fallen humanity. But, blessed be God, we know the way of victory there. We know that it is in that very realm of sinful nature that the Apostle cries his great, exultant, triumphant cry - *"Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 7:24,25). That is victory over sin.

The world is a very potent force against God and what is of God. This whole system makes it very difficult for Christians; it is altogether opposed to the living of a godly life. You know it, most of you - you young people know it very well - and you have got a real conflict here in the realm of this world system - God-neglecting, God-rejecting, God-spurning, God-ignoring; you are right up against it. But the same Apostle cries, *"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14). Here is victory over the world.

And Job - well, we know something about conflict with the spiritual forces of evil: we know that there is a real drama being fought out there. Job did not know. I think one of the helpful things about Job is that he complained and grumbled so much. I am very glad that he did! Why? Because, in the light of what God said about him later, it shows that God knew that the complaints and grumbles were just the mental perplexities of Job, that they were not true of his spirit. His spirit was steadfast with God, his spirit was true, his heart was really for the Lord. Although he was perplexed and could not understand what was going on or what was the meaning of things, and sometimes felt that God was not doing the right thing by him, and said so, God knew Job better. We do not understand God, and we sometimes have a quarrel with God; but He knows us and knows that we love Him - that we want nothing beside Him. What we want in our hearts is the Lord and only the Lord. This other sort of thing is only our mental state for the time being. The Lord knows better than that. Your grumble is just your inability to understand, but He knows your heart. Job went through in his heart. God was able to say of him - and He never says anything just for the sake of paying compliments - that Job had 'spoken of Him the thing that is right' (Job 42:7). Here is that righteousness which is of faith, that is a triumph over the very power of the enemy.

How much ought to be said on these things! But here is a threefold triumph, in spirit, in heart; over flesh, over sin; over the world and its power; over Satan and his hatred of that and those who belong to God; and there is triumph in Christ. These are the ones who will be preserved by God, who will deliver themselves, who will be saved in the day of judgment. These are the ones who go through.

And, what is more, God *must have* such people in the earth. Even though others spurn them, do not heed them, pass on their way - even though it be like that, God must have them here as a testimony. He must have such people as that in the earth. He must be able to point to them and say, 'Have you considered my servant Job?' If there should be an enquiring one - 'There you are: there is where you will get help'. He must have us here like that until the end comes; He needs us.