

TRIED BY FIRE

A.W. Pink (1886-1952)

*“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me
I shall come forth as gold.”—Job 23:10*

JOB here *corrects himself*. In the beginning of the chapter, we find him saying, “Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning” (23:1-2). Poor Job felt that his lot was unbearable. But he recovers himself. He checks his hasty outburst and revises his impetuous¹ decision. How often we all have to correct ourselves! Only One has ever walked this earth Who never had occasion to do so.

Job here *comforts himself*. He could not fathom the mysteries of providence,² but God knew the way he took. Job had diligently sought the calming presence of God, but for a time in vain. “Behold, I go forward, 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” (23:8-9). But he consoled himself with this blessed fact: “Though I cannot see God, what is a thousand times better, He can see me.” “He knoweth” —[the] One above is neither unmindful nor indifferent to our lot. If He notices the fall of a sparrow, if He counts the hairs of our heads, of course, “He knows” the way that I take.

Job here enunciates *a noble view of life*. How splendidly optimistic he was! He did not allow his afflictions to turn him into a skeptic. He did not permit the sore trials and troubles through which he was passing to overwhelm him. He looked at the bright side of the dark cloud—God’s side, hidden from sense and reason. He took a long view of life. He looked beyond the immediate “fiery trials” and said that the outcome would be gold refined.

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” Three great truths are expressed here. Let us briefly consider each separately.

1. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE OF MY LIFE: “He knoweth the way that I take.” The omniscience³ of God is one of the wondrous attributes of Deity. “For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings” (Job 34:21). “The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro 15:3). Spurgeon⁴ said, “One of the greatest tests of experimental religion is, What is my relationship to God’s omniscience?” What is your relationship to it, dear reader? How does it affect you? Does it distress or comfort you? Do you shrink from the thought of God knowing all about your way—perhaps, a lying, selfish, hypocritical way? To the sinner, this is a terrible thought. He denies it, or if not, he seeks to forget it. But to the Christian, here is real comfort. How cheering to remember that my Father knows all about my trials, my difficulties, my sorrows, my efforts to glorify Him. Precious truth for those in Christ, harrowing⁵ thought for all out of Christ, that the way I am taking is fully known to and observed by God.

“*He knoweth the way that I take.*” Men did not know the way that Job took. He was grievously misunderstood, and for one with a sensitive temperament to be misunderstood is a sore trial. His very friends thought he was a hypocrite. They believed he was a great sinner and being punished by God. Job knew that he was an unworthy saint, but not a hypocrite. He appealed against their censorious⁶ verdict. “*He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.*” Here is instruction for us when [we are] like circumstanced. Fellow believers, your fellow men, yes, and your fellow Christians, may misunderstand you and misinterpret God’s dealing with you; but console yourself with the blessed fact that the omniscient One knoweth.

“*He knoweth the way that I take.*” In the fullest sense of the word, Job himself did not know the way that he took, nor do any of us. Life is profoundly mysterious, and the passing of the years offers no solution. Nor does philosophizing help us. Human volition⁷ is a strange enigma.⁸ Consciousness bears witness that we are more than automatons.⁹ We exercise the power of choice in every move we make. Yet it is plain that our freedom is not absolute. There are forces

¹ **impetuous** – acting without thought or care; acting in an impulsive manner.

² **providence** – “What are God’s works of providence? A: God’s works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions.” (Spurgeon’s Catechism, Q. 11)

³ **omniscience** – the state of possessing all knowledge.

⁴ **Charles H. Spurgeon** (1834-1892) – influential Baptist preacher.

⁵ **harrowing** – extremely distressing.

⁶ **censorious** – severely or harshly critical.

⁷ **volition** – the ability to make conscious choices or decisions.

⁸ **enigma** – something that is mysterious or difficult to understand.

⁹ **automatons** – robots that, without thinking, mechanically perform the will of another.

brought to bear upon us, both good and evil, which are beyond our power to resist. Both heredity and environment exercise powerful influences upon us. Our surroundings and circumstances are factors that cannot be ignored. And what of providence, which “shapes our destinies”? Ah, how little do we know the way that we “take.” Said the prophet, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). Here we enter the realm of mystery, and it is idle to deny it. Better far to acknowledge with the wise man, “Man’s goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Pro 20:24).

In the narrower sense of the term, Job *did know* the way that he took. What that “way” was he tells us in the next two verses. “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary *food*” (Job 23:11-12). The way Job chose was the best way, the scriptural way, God’s way—“*his way*.”

What do you think of that way, dear reader? Was it not a grand selection? Ah, not only “patient,” but *wise* Job! Have you made a similar choice? Can you say, “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined” (23:11)? If you can, praise Him for His enabling grace. If you cannot, confess with shame your failure to appropriate His all-sufficient grace. Get down on your knees at once, and unbosom¹⁰ yourself to God. Hide and keep back nothing. Remember it is written, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). Does not verse 12 explain your failure, my failure, dear reader? Is it not because we have not trembled before God’s commandments and because we have so lightly esteemed His Word that we have “declined” from His way? Then let us, even now and daily, seek grace from on high to heed His commandments and hide His Word in our hearts.

“*He knoweth the way that I take.*” Which way are you taking—the *narrow way* that leadeth unto life or the *broad road* that leadeth to destruction? Make certain on this point, dear friend. Scripture declares, “So every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). But you need not be deceived or uncertain. The Lord declared, “I am *the way*” (Joh 14:6).

2. DIVINE TESTING: “When he hath tried me.” “The fining pot *is* for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts” (Pro 17:3). This was God’s way with Israel of old, and it is His way with Christians now. Just before Israel entered Canaan, as Moses reviewed their history since leaving Egypt, he said, “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deu 8:2). In the same way, God tries, tests, proves, humbles us.

“*When he hath tried me.*” If we realized this more, we should bear up better in the hour of affliction and be more patient under suffering. The daily irritations of life, the things that annoy so much—what is their meaning? Why are they permitted? Here is the answer: God is “trying” you! That is the explanation (in part, at least) of that disappointment, that crushing of your earthly hopes, that great loss—God was, is, *testing you*. God is trying your temper, your courage, your faith, your patience, your love, your fidelity.¹¹

“*When he hath tried me.*” How frequently God’s saints see only Satan as the cause of their troubles. They regard the great enemy as responsible for much of their sufferings. But there is no comfort for the heart in this. We do not deny that the devil does bring about much that harasses us. But above Satan is the Lord Almighty! The devil cannot touch a hair of our heads without God’s permission; and when he is allowed to disturb and distract us, even then it is only God using him to “try” us. Let us learn then, to look beyond all secondary causes and instruments to that One Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). This is what Job did.

In the opening chapter of the book that bears [Job’s] name, we find Satan obtaining permission to afflict God’s servant. He used the Sabeans to destroy Job’s herds (Job 1:15); he sent the Chaldeans to slay his servants (1:17); he caused a great wind to kill his children (1:19). And what was Job’s response? This: he exclaimed, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21). Job looked beyond the human agents, beyond Satan who employed them, to the Lord Who controlleth all. He realized that it was the Lord trying him. We get the same thing in the New Testament. To the suffering saints at Smyrna John wrote, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried” (Rev 2:10). Their being cast into prison was simply God “trying” them.

¹⁰ **unbosom** – bring out from the heart; give vent to; reveal one’s thoughts or secrets.

¹¹ **fidelity** – faithfulness.

How much we lose by forgetting this! What a stay for the trouble-tossed heart to know that no matter what form the testing may take, no matter what the agent that annoys, it is God Who is “trying” His children. What a perfect example the Savior sets us! When He was approached in the garden, and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the Savior said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). Men were about to vent their awful rage upon Him, the serpent would bruise His heel, but He looks above and beyond them. Dear reader, no matter how bitter its contents (infinitely less than that which the Savior drained), let us accept the cup as from the Father’s hand.

In some moods, we are apt to question the wisdom and right of God to try us. So often we murmur at His dispensations.¹² Why should God lay such an intolerable burden upon me? Why should others be spared their loved ones, and mine taken? Why should health and strength, perhaps the gift of sight, be denied me? The first answer to all such questions is, “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom 9:20)! It is wicked insubordination for any creature to call into question the dealings of the great Creator. “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20). How earnestly each of us needs to cry unto God that His grace may silence our rebellious lips and still the tempest within our desperately wicked hearts!

Again, in 1 Peter 4:12-13, we are told, “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.” The same thoughts are expressed here as in the previous passage. There is a needs-be¹³ for our “trials,” and therefore we are to think them not strange—we should expect them. And, too, there is again the blessed outlook of being richly recompensed at Christ’s return. Then, there is the added word that not only should we meet these trials with faith’s fortitude, but we should rejoice in them also, inasmuch as we are permitted to have fellowship in “the sufferings of Christ” (2Co 1:5). He, too, suffered: sufficient then, “for the disciple [to] be as his master” (Mat 10:24-25).

“*When he hath tried me.*” Dear Christian reader, there are no exceptions. God had only one Son without sin, but never one without sorrow. Sooner or later, in one form or another, trial—sore and heavy—will be our lot. “And sent Timothy, our brother...to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1Th 3:2-3). Again, it is written, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22). It has been so in every age. Abram was “tried,” tried severely. So, too, were Joseph, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, the Apostles, etc.

3. THE ULTIMATE ISSUE: “I shall come forth as gold.” Observe the tense here. Job did not imagine that he was pure gold already. “I shall come forth *as gold*,” he declared. He knew full well that there was yet much dross¹⁴ in him. He did not boast that he was already perfect. Far from it. In the final chapter of his book, we find him saying, “I abhor myself” (42:6). And well he might; and well may we. As we discover that in our flesh there dwelleth “no good thing,” as we examine ourselves and our ways in the light of God’s Word and behold our innumerable failures, as we think of our countless sins, both of omission and commission—good reason have we for abhorring ourselves. Ah, Christian reader, there is much dross about us. But it will not ever be thus.

“*I shall come forth as gold.*” Job did not say, “When he hath tried me I *may* come forth as gold,” or “I *hope to* come forth as gold,” but with full confidence and positive assurance he declared, “*I shall* come forth as gold.” But how did he know this? How can *we* be sure of the happy issue? Because the divine purpose cannot fail. He that hath begun a good work in us “will finish it” (Phi 1:6). How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the divine promise is sure: “The LORD will perfect *that which* concerneth me” (Psa 138:8). Then, be of good cheer, tried and troubled one! The process may be unpleasant and painful, but the issue is charming and sure.

“*I shall come forth as gold.*” This was said by one who knew affliction and sorrow as few among the sons of men have known them. Yet despite his fiery trials, he was optimistic. Let, then, this triumphant language be ours. “I shall come forth as gold” is not the language of carnal boasting, but the confidence of one whose mind was stayed upon God. There will be no credit to our account—the glory will all belong to the divine Refiner (Jam 1:12).

For the present, there remain two things: *first*, love is the divine thermometer while we are in the crucible of testing—“And he shall sit [the patience of divine grace] as a refiner and purifier of silver...” (Mal 3:3). *Second*, the Lord Himself is with us in the fiery furnace, as He was with the three young Hebrews (Dan 3:25). For the future this is sure: the most wonderful thing in heaven will not be the golden street or the golden harps, but golden souls on which is

¹² **dispensations** – divine acts and dealings.

¹³ **needs-be** – a necessary cause; the cause behind a resulting effect.

¹⁴ **dross** – a scum formed from impurities on the surface of molten metal; thus, something worthless.

stamped the image of God—predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29)! Praise God for such a glorious prospect, such a victorious issue, such a marvelous goal!

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Christian! Your present afflictions are not great if compared with the afflictions and torments of many of the damned, who, when they were in this world, never sinned at so high a rate as you have done! There are many now in hell who never sinned against such clear light as you have done, nor against such special love as you have done, nor against such precious mercies as you have done! Certainly, there are many now a-roaring in everlasting burnings who never sinned as you have done!

Whose pains are without intermission of mitigation;¹⁵ who have weeping served for the first course, gnashing of teeth for the second course, the gnawing worm for the third course, and intolerable pain for the fourth course!

Yet the pain of the body is the least part of pain. The very soul of sorrow and pain is the soul’s sorrow and pain! The everlasting alienation and separation from God is served for the fifth course!

Ah, Christian! How can you seriously think on these things and not lay your hand upon your mouth,
 even when you are under the greatest temporal¹⁶ sufferings? Your sins have been far greater than
 many of those who are now in hell, and your “great” afflictions are *but a fleabite*
 compared to theirs! Therefore, hush your murmuring
 and be silent before the Lord!

—*Thomas Brooks*

¹⁵ **mitigation** – the action of making something milder.

¹⁶ **temporal** – of man’s present life in time as distinguished from a future eternal existence.