



...For God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me:

Job had many reasons to mourn and to be sad. He had lost all his children when a hurricane came and destroyed the house, they were all feasting in. All his flocks and herds had been stolen by marauding bandits, and as if that was not enough, he suffered a grievous disease whereby his whole body became covered with painful boils. It was enough to break anybody, but Job, despite being urged by his wife, refused to curse God. He remained resolute in accepting what God had sent upon him without feeling bitter. He said: *What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* (2:10)

His friends were amazed by the turn of events, and they were lost for words, sitting next to him for seven days, sharing his grief, but unable to offer any condolence or sympathy, so great was Job's misfortune, that they believed it was from God to punish their friend in some way for something he had done very wrong before God. They were right in one thing. – the events had been overseen and organised by God- as Job also recognised as he says in 19:21: *Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God has touched me.* Job

was in fact more affected and worn down by his friend's negative accusations and readiness to condemn him, than he was worn down by the terrible events themselves. He called his friends – 16:2: *I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all.* They were not very good support to Job, and took advantage of his vulnerable state of mind, to bully him into admitting some terrible sins which warranted such punishment from God. But Job could not invent sins just to make his friends happy and go away, instead he had to endure their judgemental attitude. As if he had not suffered enough!

Resisting reacting to the spiteful remarks of his three friends, and the younger man who was listening in on the outside of their circle- Elihu, Job maintained his uprightness, and found that speaking with his friends took his mind of his own personal loss, and instead led him to consider the Sovereignty of God. So even the event of his three friends sitting there with him, was overruled by God.

Job admits - ***For God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me:***

He was the first to see that God works in the lives of those who turn to Him, that all power belongs to Him. He accepted the outcome of events with humility. God knew what was best for him, so there was no reason to fret and be consumed with bitterness, anguish and despair. He rested upon the will of God, and let the future worry about itself. It reminds of Jesus' words: Matthew 6:33-34: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

In this 23rd chapter of Job, his attitude is summed up in verse 10: *But he knows the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

Gold is a very rare metal, and being so valuable is highly prized because it does not tarnish like other metals, it has a wonderful sheen

and lustre, and has a property whereby it is very easily shaped with a little heat. It has a soft feel to it, as it is a malleable metal, can be bent and formed to exactly what the gold smith has in mind. This metal is occasionally found as nuggets on the earth surface, but normally it is found within a rock called quartz, and appears in a thin vein. This rock has to be located, dug up, crushed and tipped into a furnace. The thin layers of gold melt and seep out into a crucible. This is collected, and heated at higher temperatures to enable the impurities to be extracted. The end product is fine gold that can be beaten so thin, it can be almost transparent and into a wire that can be hardly seen with the human eye.

This massive effort to obtain this most wonderful element, is a process that Job recognised was very similar to what was happening to him. He saw that God was overruling his life, he truly felt crushed, just as the house crushed his children to death. He felt the fire of the furnace, the heat of anger within him, as bandits plundered his wealth, the heat of indignation as his friends accused him of sins which he had stood against all his life. The extreme heat as he struggled not to allow them to provoke him. The whole process was spiritually, mentally exhausting. He believed with all his heart that it was a fiery trial - *when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

That is that the horrible things that had happened were in fact removing impurities from his character, as he was forced to see them rise to the surface, and identify them, so that he could be rid of them, and seek forgiveness from the Almighty. One of these is Pride. Pride is something which can also change shape and form and disguise itself very well. Almost invisible to the human eye at times, but God can see it, and through it. Intense heat exposes it. The words of Solomon are fitting: Proverbs 17:3: *The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD tries the hearts.*

Likewise the Apostle Peter: 1 Peter 1:7 *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be*

tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

It is a fact of human nature, that when events are going well, and we enjoy many blessings from God, and troubles seem very far away, that is when we are tempted and complacency creeps in, and the serpent nature starts leading our mind astray from God. We are satisfied, and the need for God can fade.

The quote from CS Lewis is useful: *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.* (C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Suffering)...

Job recognised this, and it is why he is pleased when he says *God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me:* He explains in the previous verse that he is afraid of God – not because God is a terrible angry God, but because He has all power, is Sovereign, is supreme.

The Hebrew word for *soft* is only used 8 times in the Old Testament It is *Rakak* and means “to be tender, weak or soft”. It is used in

Deuteronomy 20:3 *let not your hearts faint,*

2 Kings 22:19 *Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled*

2 Chronicles 34:27 *Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble...*

These are examples. The last two are interesting, as they show the description of the heart when it is repentant – tender – that is the mind is soft, and pliable, malleable – like gold. Not hard, and brittle with pride like a clay pot.

The Psalmist describes his feelings when under trial in Psalms 22:14 *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.* When something is soft, it is possible to make a powerful impression upon it. The rulers used to make their signature by stamping their ring as a seal on wax on a document. So it is that God’s word can be sealed upon a soft heart. For example: Song of Solomon 8:6: *Set me as a seal upon thine*

heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

John 6:27: Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

2 Corinthians 1:22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

This is the way we can be impressed and formed by God who is the great Goldsmith of our minds. To remain soft – *and serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Hebrew 12:28)

To show pity, compassion, and kindness to those in difficulties – unlike Job's friends who were hard hearted. To be understanding, merciful and not judgemental. To get rid of the impure thoughts which rise to the surface, and be transparent and pliable in God's hands.

Brother Terry