

Guidelines for the exercise of the Lord's day Prophesying Message Three: Job's Experience of God's Consuming and Stripping in the Old Testament Being Far Behind That of Paul in the New Testament

I. Overview:

Job was disturbed, perplexed, and entangled to the uttermost by his suffering of the disasters that befell his possessions and the plague on his body, in spite of his perfection, uprightness, and integrity. Job was dwelling on his excellent past and sighing over his miserable present; he held fast insistently to, and even boasted of, his uprightness and perfection. Job was self-righteous; he was darkened by the success and attainments of his natural being, contenting with what he had become, yet he was unaware of his miserable situation before God. Neither Job nor his friends knew the purpose of God's dealing with him, so Job was unhappily being consumed; Paul became the prisoner of God, experiencing of God's consuming and stripping. He was not constricted under the pressures on every side and did not perish despite his being cast down, rather he was filled with joy and rejoicing. If we would have vital groups today, we need to be warned by Job's friends' talks; the first thing we should do is to exercise our spirit to pray. We also need to exercise our spirit to rejoice in the midst of our killing environment; the Lord's sovereignty is operating to put us under the killing of Christ's death so that His life may be manifested in our body in the renewing of our inner man. We may enjoy the supply of salvation every day and live a heavenly life on earth.

II. Truth and Enlightenment:

Day 1 —

A. Expound why Job cursed the day of his birth.

Job was disturbed to the uttermost. He was a good man and he was trying to keep his perfection and integrity, but due to his vexation he could not contain himself, and he did not know what to do. No doubt, he expected to have a time to deal with God, but this was not something that he dared to initiate. Not wanting to lose his perfection, he released his vexation by cursing his birthday.

B. Explain Job's experience of God's consuming, stripping being far behind that of Paul.

God's consuming is to exhaust us, and God's stripping is to take away our riches from us. Since the day he was converted, Paul was a person under God's consuming and God's stripping. Paul was born destined to be crucified, and he was reborn crucified that it would be no longer he who lived but Christ who lived in him. When we were regenerated, we, like Paul, were reborn crucified.

Day 2 —

A. Explain what Job's speaking to his three friends exposed.

He exposed himself as being self-righteous and as a person full of reasons. Job was unaware of his miserable situation before God. He acknowledged God in name but not in reality. He had not been saturated by God and filled with God. He had not been mingled with God and had not become one with God.

B. Expound in his experience of God's consuming and stripping, Paul did not lose heart.

Job considered his suffering of affliction something very heavy, but Paul considered his affliction momentary and light. Instead of caring about our affliction, we need to care for the increase of the weight of glory. How much weight of glory we will have depends on how much we suffer in our present affliction for the Lord's sake. Paul knew that the more he suffered, the more weight of glory he would share in eternity.

Day 3 —

A. Explain what they did lack as Job's friends came to comfort him.

Job was suffering, and his three friends came to comfort him. However, these godly people did not pray for Job nor did they fellowship with one another by exercising their spirit. They talked about God, and they also referred to their spirit, but in all their debates there is no hint that they were exercising their spirit. Rather, they were exercising their mind, searching for words from every aspect to compose their poetry.

B. Expound if we would have vital groups, we need to be warned by these talks.

When we come together in the vital groups, the first thing we must do is to pray. The vital groups are groups of vital prayer. In the vital groups, learn not to pray old prayers with old terms according to your tradition. Learn always to pray new and fresh prayers. Thus, when you come to the vital groups, you should remain in your spirit and exercise your spirit.

Day 4 —

A. Expound the Lord's word in John 3:5 and its application.

The water refers to John's ministry, and the Spirit refers to the Lord's ministry. To be born of water, according to John's ministry, is for the termination of people of the old creation. When we are buried in the water of John's ministry, this indicates that we realize that we are good for nothing but death. When people came to John to repent, John threw them into the water to bury them, to end them, to terminate them.

B. Why do we say that we are regenerated crucified?

Paul tells us clearly in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 that in baptism we are buried together with Christ into His death. When we raise up a baptized one from the water, that indicates resurrection. In resurrection we are now in the Spirit. Thus, every regenerated person is regenerated crucified.

Day 5 —

A. Explain the meaning of putting to death of Jesus in our environment.

In 2 Corinthians 4:10-12 Paul says that he was bearing about in his body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his body. Second Corinthians 4:16 says, "Our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." As our outer man is being consumed by the killing work of death, our inner man is being renewed with the fresh supply of the resurrection life.

B. Expound that an environment works with the Spirit to kill our natural man.

Brother Nee referred to this kind of environment as the discipline of the Holy Spirit. In speaking about the application of Christ's death, Romans 8 refers to the indwelling Spirit, and 2 Corinthians 4 refers to the outward environment. The outward environment cooperates with the inward Spirit to carry out the killing of our natural man. Paul was bearing about in his body the killing of Jesus that the life of Jesus could be manifested in Him.

Day 6 —

A. Explain to forgive and forget others' mistakes being the conformation to the death of Christ.

We have the capacity within us to do this, and this capacity is the power of resurrection. We are like small seeds. The more we are put into death, the more we have the expression of the power of resurrection. This is why we like to forgive people and forget their mistakes. Through our sufferings, we have the opportunity to gain more of God. As long as we have more of God, this is what really matters.

B. Why does Paul charge us to rejoice while we are suffering?

While we are suffering and wiping away our tears, we should rejoice. In order to weep, we do not need any kind of encouragement. Paul does not charge us to weep in the Lord, but he does charge us to rejoice in the Lord. If we do not exercise our spirit to rejoice in the midst of our killing environment, we cannot have any joy.

III. Conclusion:

In the Old Testament Job's experience of God's consuming and stripping was far behind that of Paul in New Testament. Job cursed the day of his birth; Paul did not curse the day of his birth, rather he preferred to live for the saints' progress and joy of the faith. Job was dwelling on his excellent past and sighing over his miserable present; Paul, however, exercised to forget the things that were behind in the past in order to gain the present "today Christ" to the fullest extent. Neither Job nor his friends knew the purpose of God's dealing with him; what the affliction Paul suffered worked out for him an eternal weight of glory. Day by day and hour by hour, Job was unhappily being consumed, but God's consuming and stripping made Paul be a prisoner in the Lord, filling with joy and rejoicing in these experience. Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Him might be manifested in his mortal flesh.