

THE
AFFLICTIONS
OF
GOD'S PEOPLE,
COMPARED
TO THIS

*Finning
of
Gold
and
Silver.*

BY JOHN BAILEY.

SERMON

“The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts” Prov. xvii. 3.

GOD’S people are a tried people; and for that reason are compared to gold and silver: and the Lord declares that he “will bring the third part through the fire, and wilt refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them. I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, the Lord is my God.”

Now my text says, “the fining pot is for silver, and the furnace is for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.”—I shall endeavour to give you a few plain thoughts from this passage of scripture, as the Lord shall be pleased to help me, in the following order.

First—Shew why God’s elect people are compared to gold and silver.

Secondly—Shew the fining pot is used for silver, and the furnace for gold.

And thirdly—Shew it is in this way the Lord trieth the hearts of his people.

First—It is evident, God’s elect are compared to gold and silver in many parts of his word: and we find his people of old, crying out, “for thou, O God hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried; thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins; thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water, but then broughtest us out: into a wealthy place.” This was in consequence of being in the fining pot The Lord has a peculiar people, and they are to shew forth his praise; and he teaches them by terrible things in righteousness, and then in return God has their praise. And as soon as the Lord begins to separate them, and set them apart, the Word acts as a fire, and burns up a great deal of their hay, wood, and stubble; and the law operating upon their conscience, its work is to kill—“I was alive (says the apostle) without the law once; but when

the commandment came, sin revived;" it lift up its monstrous head, and appeared exceeding sinful, "and I died." He died away at the sight, seeing himself dead in sin, dead in law, and under sentence of death, which he now had within himself. All his former hopes, of eternal life by the deeds of the law died at once. Until this death takes place, the sinner flies to the law of Moses for life, and here he continues as long as he can; and nothing short of divine power and almighty grace, can bring him off from the law as a covenant of works.

In the world we have many mines of silver and gold; and as mines are covered with earth, so are all God's people; and this must be removed or cleared away, and then the gold and silver is obtained.

2. The people of God are compared to gold and silver, because of its excellence—it is superior to every other metal. So, my brethren, the people of God are superior to all others—a peculiar people, of high and heavenly birth; they are called the Excellent of the earth—the Lord's chosen people, in whom his soul delighteth—vessels, which are set apart for his own use—vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory—they are righteous, and the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

3. Gold and silver are valuable and precious; yes, my hearers; but God's people are of more value than gold which perisheth. This is very evident, or else Jesus Christ would never have undergone such sufferings, and at last die such an ignominious death, if they had not been valuable and precious in his sight—he always considered them as such.

Again, gold and silver is but dust, no more are God's people; but they are valuable dust—for "they are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from their vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot." They are redeemed by the blood of Christ. O invaluable blood! that cleanseth from all sin, and brings us nigh to God; for "we are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

4. They are compared to gold and silver, because of the scarcity of it. We all know gold is scarce in England, for we are under the necessity of substituting paper for it: and as it respects the Lord's people, they are scarce, very scarce, if compared with the great bulk of mankind; and very scarce, if compared with the great bulk of professors; so saith the scripture—"many are called, but few are chosen;" few chosen, so as to give evidence they are new creatures, made so in Christ Jesus; for the majority of those professors, who are called, when put in the fire of affliction, or persecution, give full proof they are not either silver or gold. To use another scripture figure, "the dog returns to his vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Again, "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Moreover, as in the parable of the sower, many hear the word with apparent joy for a while, they soon spring, up, and soon wither away; but the Lord's people hear the word, and keep it; and for this reason they are compared to gold and silver, because they are scarce.

I come, secondly, to shew how this spiritual gold and silver is found, and purified. We are told in the passage before us, "the fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts." I solemnly affirm, as in the presence of God, that as sure as the Lord made you, if you are a part of his family, into the fining pot you must go—into the furnace the refiner will put you; for he hath chosen his people in the furnace of affliction: and God declares, two parts shall be cut off, but the third part shall be brought through the fire. And in order to bring us into the fining pot, God will sometimes afflict in body, sometimes in mind, sometimes he will strip a man of all he has in the world, in order to bring him to his senses; and the poor soul will be in great distress in consequence thereof. So the Lord tried Job; he was once the richest man in all the east, but God made him poor in a little

time; then followed the great and sore afflictions of his body and mind; and it was the Lord's design, in all this, to try Job's heart, as he declares—"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. But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job xxiii. 8, 9, 10. "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts." And, my brethren, when God puts us into this fining pot, it appears to us as if a fourfold fire was lit under us. May the Lord grant you may be able to follow me through the whole of them.

The fiery law is the first that is put under the fining pot: and I will insist upon it, by the help of God, as long as I live, that the fiery law is always applied to the conscience, before a manifestation of pardoning love and mercy; for "by the law is the knowledge of sin"—it convinces and condemns for sin. And Moses, the man of God, when he blessed the people of Israel, said, "the Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousand of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people: all his saints are in thy hand, and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words." Deut. xxxiii. 2, 3.

If you read Abraham's experience, you will find he had this fire light up in his soul; and there is always a great deal of distress attending it, and horror and darkness fills the mind; as was the case also with Job, David, Hezekiah, and others. Hence their language is—"the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit. The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Oh that I might have my request, and that God would grant me the thing that I long for, even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would loose his hand and cut me off." Job vi. 4, 8, 9.—Again, "thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness

in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sins; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head, as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.” Psalm xxxviii. 2, 3, 4. “Like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward. O Lord! I am oppressed, undertake for me.” Isa. xxxviii. 14.

Thus it is evident their minds were filled with terror and dismay; so it always is when God is pleased to light up this fire in the souls of his people: then they see the commandment to be exceeding broad, and their own performances exceeding narrow. O could you see how this fire operates, you would think the poor creature would pull God from his throne, if he possibly could. The apostle explains my idea—“the law worketh wrath.” Again, “sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence;” that is, brought it to light: “for without the law, sin was dead;” meaning, while he was without the knowledge of the holiness and spirituality of the law, or before it came with light and power into his conscience, sin lay as though it was dead, and he thought he was perfectly righteous—“for I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Could you hear the poor condemned criminal in this state, you would find his language that of Jeremiah—“thou hast brought me into darkness, but not into light; surely against me is he turned: he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old, and hath broken my bones: he hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old; he hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone: he hath made my paths crooked. My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord: I am afflicted, and ready to die. While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted.”

I do not pretend to say every child of God must experience the same measure of law work, but they all must experience it more or less. Some preachers never go into the pulpit without a measure of extraordinary dimensions; and all who do not come up to that standard, in their opinion are no Christians. But in the scriptures I read of different descriptions of characters in the church of Christ.—First, there are babes; they cannot be expected to measure six feet—they “desire the sincere milk of the word:” then there are little children, “whose sins are forgiven:” then young men, “who have overcome the wicked one;” are strong, and the word of God abideth in them; and then fathers, “who know him that is from the beginning, have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things,” essential to salvation.

Every man must see himself lost, before he can be found; and dead, before he can be made alive; sick, before he will want health; he must feel his guilt, before he will, *cry* for pardon; feel his spiritual bondage, before he will sigh for liberty; and he must be divorced from Moses, before he can be married to Christ.

But many in our day, tell us they are good Christians—they were brought up so; they get into the church, and are called good members, though they cannot give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear. But sure I am, when the Lord gives a poor sinner to know the exceeding riches of his grace, he can tell something about it; he knows whereas he was once blind, he can now see—that whereas he was once an enemy to God by wicked works, he is now reconciled by the death of his Son, and is very desirous of bringing forth the fruits of righteousness—that whereas he was once an alien from the common-wealth of Israel, now he loves the people of God, and the church of Christ, for the truth’s sake. But if the truth was not in you, as the carnal mind is enmity against God, you would hate him, his people, and his ways, and that with a perfect hatred.

The next fire I shall notice, is called in scripture the fiery darts of the wicked one. For as soon as God takes a poor sinner, and marks him as his own, Satan's darts begin to fly at him in all directions. I will tell you how you may know when this fire is lit up; the mind will be greatly troubled about God, and eternal things; the enemy will try to make you believe there is no God, that all things come by chance; he will persuade you to pursue and enjoy the pleasures of this world, because when you die, you die like the beast. If he cannot succeed in making you doubt the existence of God, he will endeavour to make you call in question his power and ability to save you; to think hardly of him, and ask why he deals thus with you.

The devil lit this fire up in Job; and for a good while he could not move him. But at last he could forbear no longer, he wished darkness might cover the day in which he was born, &c. Job iii. 1, &c. I have heard some blame Job; but if they had the same fire light up in their consciences, as Job had, they would have possessed the same feelings; and yet, perhaps, have acted far worse. God knows this has been my case many times, to curse the day in which I was born; and wished it might be blotted out from the months of the year. And you will find the more this fire burns, the more miserable you will be: "the fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold." And God knows where there is no grain of pure gold, there are many ounces of dross. And as we are so drossy, we must feel the fire as long as we are this side the grave; "many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all?" I dare say there is not a child of God in this large assembly, when this fire was lit up in his soul, but what concluded he was a reprobate, and sentenced to eternal perdition.

The third fire I shall speak of, is the word: "is not my word a fire, saith the Lord?" yes; and if the word has never been a fire in you, your judgment is not settled.

I have met with some who could go their regular round in religious duties just like the hand of a clock; but when this fire was light up in them, it burnt up their false zeal, and natural affections; and they were brought to cry out, “search my heart, O God! try my reins, and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.” It is in the furnace we learn wisdom, and the fire of temptation burns up our false joys and delusive hopes.

I believe there are a great many professors, (and perhaps there are some here tonight) whose religion stands in their minister, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ; however, the fire of the word will try such. God’s people receive the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost; and in proportion as the Lord applies the word with power to the heart, the fire will attend it. Hence you hear David say, “let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, and it shall be an excellent oil;” for “all scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The next fire that all the Lord’s family are called to pass through, is persecution: for “if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution.”

Every believer naturally expects the fire of persecution from the world: but this fire never burns fiercer than when it comes from pretended friends, who appear to follow Christ in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. The hypocrite often takes up a form of religion to accomplish certain purposes; as David says, it was not an enemy that reproached and persecuted me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he who hated me that did magnify himself against me, then would I have hid myself from him; “but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.” It is the same among God’s people still. We often

find our supposed friends our greatest enemies; and many times, since I have known the Lord, I have had these fires in my soul; and I know there was a needs be for them.

But there is another fire I have not yet mentioned, and that will make amends for all; it is the fire of love. This fire takes away the dross that rises from the other fires. If you follow the refiner, you will find that he tries his gold, and purifies his silver by very great heat arising from strong fires; so the Lord trieth the hearts of his dear children, by opposing darkness to light—adversity against prosperity—bitter against sweet, &c. And “though no affliction is for the present joyous, but grievous, nevertheless it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.” The people who are thus tried, are separated and set apart for an holy use, and are of more value to Christ than all the world beside.

I will now endeavour to shew you how you may know whether God is trying you or not. If he is, you will find great searchings of heart, and your language will be as David’s was—“search my heart, O God! and try my reins; prove me, and know my thoughts.” This is the language of all whose hearts the Lord opens; and when they find access to God, they “glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

I will now make a few observations, and then close the subject.

1. I should never have known what was in my heart, if it had not been tried by the fire of the law: the tenor of the law runs thus—“thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength,” &c. But I am carnal, and have not ability to love and serve God; for “the law is weak through the flesh; but God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in

the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”

2. The fiery darts of the devil are to try my heart, and shew me what is hidden there. Satan never presents any temptation, but this wicked heart of mine is inclined to comply with; and the Lord suffers the devil to tempt his dear people thus every hour, more or less, and yet upholds, supports, and defends them; and should we fall by Satan’s gaining a partial victory over us, yet the Lord in mercy is pleased to restore us again to the joys of his salvation, and to heal all our backslidings, according to his gracious promise—“I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from them,”

Again, my brethren, you would never know the value of the word of truth, if it did not act as a fire to burn up your false joy, false happiness, and false dependence; while it is a fire to burn, it is also a two-edged sword, and cuts both ways at once: it is a hammer to break the rocky heart in pieces. In short, it is always suitable to every case: and when the Lord is pleased to apply a passage with power to the soul, how the affections rise to God. I have at such times said, with Israel of old, “it is enough.” It is by the fire of persecution that you know the value of true religion. I would not give a pin for that man’s religion, who can hold a profession of Christ, and the world, in one hand. In proportion as we are made honest, in proportion as truth is precious, it will lay near our hearts, and lead us to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and this will expose us to the fire of persecution, and oftentimes the fire will burn very hot.

Finally, we should not know but what we were reprobate silver, and rejected of the Lord, if it was not for the fire of love, which removes the dross. I doubt not but there are many of you in the furnace: well, remember the fire is no hotter than the refiner would have it. I remember once when I was in great distress of mind, body, and circumstances, I read the word with great attention, but the more I read, the farther I seemed

from comfort, because it all slipped from me, I could not lay hold of one promise; but at last, when ready to give it all up, these words came with power into my soul—"I will bring the third part through the fire." I had been long in the fire, and expected never to get out; but I hoped, then, I should get through at last. The Lord says, "he will try us as gold is tried, and refine us as silver is refined and then adds, "they shall call upon me, and I will help them; I will say, it is my people; and they shall say; the Lord is my God."

The Lord grant a blessing may attend the word delivered, for his mercy's sake. AMEN.

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