



The First Sunday after The Epiphany.

The Collect.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

1 My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. 2 Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? 3 Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me? 4 For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them. 5 He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail. 6 He hath made me also a byword of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret. 7 Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow. 8 Upright men shall be astonied at this, and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite. 9 The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger. 10 But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you. 11 My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. 12 They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. 13 If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. 14 I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. 15 And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? 16 They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust. (Job 17:1-16)

In correspondence with a Korean minister in California recently, he asked for

prayers for a particular challenge which he faced. I told him that I would pray for his situation and assured him that God would provide. He responded, "Even if God does not provide, He is still God." At first glance, this would seem to be a wholesome statement of truth, but is it really? Is it not true that God will **ALWAYS** provide for His people? The fact that we have the breath to articulate our doubts, and faith, is evidence that He has provided. Perhaps He may not provide what we **ASK**, but He will certainly provide that which we **NEED** even when we are not aware of our great need. The thing we need the most is our Daily Bread, but are we ALWAYS aware of the need? Perhaps paying he light bill seems more urgent than speaking with the **Author of Light**.

The power of the Book of Job is its absolute application in the life of every earnest Christian. It comforts us to know that Job was a righteous man, yet he suffered the slings and arrows of life precisely because he was righteous. Hard times and many misfortunes are not evidence of the lost favor of God, but may, rather, be evidence of His greater and increasing favor. In allowing Satan, and Job's friends, to antagonize Job, God was not trying to teach the devil, or even Job, a lesson – He is teaching us a lesson on life through Job's suffering. When the death knell tolls, God is nearer to His Child than ever. One of the most terrifying experiences for a young child is learning how to swim, but the father's outstretched arms are more present with the child than ever. Do you expect our Heavenly Father to be different-minded? We watch as righteous Job is pained by disease and loss; we watch as he stumbles ever so slightly in faith; we watch as he rallies in faith from time to time; and we watch as in the latter end, Job is restored. To what purpose? To teach His people that wealth and ease of life is not evidence of righteousness. Some in our land eagerly anticipate a pre-tribulation rapture when they shall forego the tortures of the Beast and ascend to Heaven with a free pass! They do not believe that God will allow them to be persecuted, tortured, and beheaded. Really? What of those of Roman days who were fed to the wild beast; or those during the Great English Reformation who suffered the flames of fire? Or those in Muslim countries who suffer their daughters to be raped and kidnapped, their sons to be beheaded for their faith, and their churches burned to the ground? Is this not the same cruel persecution mentioned in many places in Scripture?

Job, like Elijah, feels that he alone is left. ***My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me?*** So is the breath of life which God has breathed into Job's nostrils corrupt? Has Job become, as the foolish poet of *Invictus*, Mr. Henley, claims in his faithless and proud work: "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul?" Does Job now determine the length of his days and the destiny of his existence? Yes, his mocking friends are with him, however, do those friends count more than the Friend of his Bosom? God is always present to "strike hands" with us in time of trouble. ***For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.*** (Psalms 27:5) and, ***But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. 40 And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*** (Psalms 37:39-40) For what reason shall God deliver us from the hand of the wicked? It is "***because they trust in him!***"

4 For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them. 5 He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail. 6 He hath made me also a byword of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret. If our souls rest not in Christ, then are defensive walls shattered, the parapets of truth and

watchfulness fallen down, and the gates to our hearts thrown ajar for every evil spirit and lie to enter therein! When we have rejected God, we have also rejected His provision and protection. He will give us over to a reprobate mind. *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thess 2:11-12) Do we not observe the damnable trend in our churches today – those who declare good to be evil, and evil to be good? We often provoke the wrath of wicked-hearted people who scandalize our names and accuse us of the very things we abhor. Job has become a by-word in his day whereas, in times past, he was full of life and jovial – as a tambourine, or tabret.

7 Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow. 8 Upright men shall be astonished at this, and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite. When our lives are overwhelmed with sorrows, all else – even those things that once made our hearts joyful – seem dark and lusterless. But those who are righteous and innocent will be appalled at the injustice they witness at the hand of the hypocrite. The righteous are, in fact, surrounded by a Great Cloud of Witnesses. Though the oppressed may see them not, they see well the oppressed and are moved to an astonished compassion.

Here follows a pearl in the story: *9 The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.* The mighty ships of the sea are equipped with great anchors for use in keeping them in safe harbor, or in weathering the storm. When the storm is passed, the anchor is weighed and the vessels move in smooth seas again. - the larger the vessel, the greater the anchor. Though we may be small vessels in the Seas of God, there can be no greater Anchor than that which we have in Christ. If we cast anchor in His Heart, we are, indeed, in safe harbor. If we venture forth on the seas of life and encounter the devil's storms, we furl our sails, cast our anchor, and face the storm head-on. If that Anchor is Christ, you may be certain that your Anchor shall hold:

In times like these, we need a Savior
In times like these, we need an anchor
Be very sure, be very sure
Your anchor holds, and grips the Solid Rock

The rock is Jesus, yes He's the One
This rock is Jesus, the only One
Be very sure, be very sure
Your anchor holds, and grips the Solid Rock

Ruth Caye Jones

Captain James Cook was a great English explorer of the seas. His ship was the *Resolution*, and the charted port to which he anchored at a time of great danger, he named 'Cape-Hold-with-Hope.' All of our greatest certainty of God is found in an indomitable faith in Him who is always able. We hold that faith in HOPE! *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* (Heb 11:1) What kept Peter afloat upon the sea? It was faith stayed on Christ. What caused Peter to sink into the angry waves? Again, it was a distraction of faith fixed on Christ. It is true that even a great ship, anchored on the rock with its bow into the wind, will doubtless be buffeted by the winds of the storm. It will toss about and twist in directions unintended; however, the Anchor holds, and will bring the great ship back to face the storm and

tempest until the gales subside. Do you have that Anchorage in Christ to face the storm head-on and weather its blasts and damp breath? 10 But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you. There are none wise whose hearts are not fixed on Christ, have you not known? *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.* (Isaiah 26:3)

11 My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. Poor JOB! Does any man own the day...or is this the province of God? God has numbered our days – not Job. It is a good thing in Job's, and our own, purposes are gone for the purpose of the Christian heart is one with God – our purpose is not our own, but His! Likewise, the thoughts of our hearts are only to evil unless the heart is ruled by the sovereign Maker of it.

Because Job has not cast his anchor into the Bedrock of God, he will be carried out to deeper and more troubled seas. Though his main-sail be tattered and weathered, the Anchor will hold when it strikes the Rock of his Salvation. The terror of the sea is a great teacher. One lesson learned is a lesson learned well. This is why God often allows the storm and tempest to boil up on a glassy sea. 12 They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. Job's nights are as day, and he is without rest owing to a restless mind. He has not availed himself to that great rest made available in God. Therefore, he has not presently that "*peace which passeth all understanding.*"

13 If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. Job's manner of speaking almost persuades me to side with his three friends. Where did Job invent the preposition 'if' in this sentence? He will certainly die, as do all mortals, in the process of God's time. My mother used to say, when I had made a mess of my projects, "You have made your own bed – now sleep in it!" I learned some wholesome lessons from my mother's restraint in helping me out of my every problem. The darkness to which Job refers is of his own creation. It is true for each of us.

Job's despondency follows on a failure of faith: 14 I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. 15 And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? Is corruption Job's father? Has he forgotten his true Father in heaven? Job's body was born in corruption from the dust of the ground; yet, his spirit is born of God. The spirit of man is of far greater importance than his dust-clad body. If Job cannot find hope, who lost it but Job?

Job's final statement in this chapter is a jewel of faithlessness: 16 They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust. He claims his final estate with the worms and with corruption – that is ALL! Does Job know that God has given him an immortal soul? We may be a bit understanding for Job's remissions of faith here. He cannot look back on any other man of righteousness who has so suffered – but we are able to do so in JOB. Thanks to Job, we have a basis of knowing that faith in God will overcome every oppression. Even Job's failures teach us that we may fail of faith in trying times, but our bow must be brought back into the winds of the storm.