

# The Heart Knoweth his Own Bitterness

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Someone has said, "When we cease to bleed, we cease to bless." To this might truthfully be added, that bleeding is by a two-fold process. There is the arduous and constant toil, until every faculty is strained to the utmost, and the very life is being laid out in the service of others. And there is that which is the result of endurance, when the heart has to bear some heavy burden of bereavement or disappointment or responsibility, and bleeds in silence, alone. And is not the blessing also of a double character? The blessing that comes from what we do, and that which comes through what we endure. He who labors to the extent of bleeding, for the benefit of others, whether it is for their temporal or eternal welfare, confers a blessing. But no less does the one who suffers, though no eye but God's sees his agony.

May it not be said that the Saviour of the world brought more blessing to mankind by what He suffered for them, than even by what He did? Though commonly, and often rightly, we speak of one as if it were the other. Still, if we distinguish, it would hardly be wrong to say that His sufferings were the greater both in kind and result. And perhaps when the whole account is made up, and all is seen in its true perspective and bearing, and in the light of the accomplished result, with regard to every one of God's children the balance will be on the same side; and it may be that the activity which received most recognition on earth, because it was before the public eye, will not be found to be more fruitful, or more valuable, than the suffering which claimed less attention.

## A Basic Principle of Life

However that may be, the saying we have quoted contains an elemental principle of all life: the bleeding and the blessing are correlated. It is surely good to remember that out of the pains and struggles, the tears and agonies of men and women of faith, a blessing flows, first of all to themselves, and next to others. The furnace does yield the golden ore, purified, and ready to enrich all who receive it. Or in other words, the rod which strikes the rock does bring forth the living water to renew and satisfy the thirsty ones around.

These words uttered by our Saviour in the garden, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," were the prelude to a story of love and achievement that have saved and gladdened countless multitudes since. Our salvation and joy would never have had birth apart from His anguish. And only because He was exceeding sorrowful can we "with joy . . . draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Everyone who has, to any extent, been able to impart spiritual help to his fellows has had to know something of the foregoing process, and in silence, it may be in darkness, certainly, in wrestling, and with strong crying and tears, has been disciplined and prepared. Elijah had two experiences of this kind ere he appeared on Mount Carmel before all Israel. He knew the solitude of Cherith, and the trial of his faith as he sat beside the diminishing waters of the brook; for that water failed like every other, and for the same reason, even though a prophet of the Lord sat beside it. And he knew another trial, in the house of the widow, when he had to cry out, "O Lord my God, hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" But the experience he had of God on these occasions prepared him to face the stupendous crisis of Carmel, and to overcome. He had to bleed in order that he might bless.

## The Hardest Part

But there are many called to suffer who may not be able to discern at the moment any blessing that will accrue either to themselves or others. They only know that they are bleeding. And perhaps one of the hardest parts of it is that the cause remains unknown to others, or, if known, no one else can measure the extent of the wound. So true is it, “The heart knoweth his own bitterness.” Yes, the bitterness! Others know the sorrow perhaps — the occasion or circumstances — but they do not know anything of the bitterness. Sometimes there are circumstances or occurrences which in themselves are trifling, but coming just as they do, and when they do, and from the quarter they do, add immeasurable poignancy to the grief. The wise king was surely never wiser than when in his prayer at the dedication of the temple he includes one petition, which, while being indefinite, is yet the most definite of all: “When everyone shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house; then hear Thou.” Many things are mentioned for prayer; things that everybody could know about and was more or less interested in — war, famine, drought, pestilence — but at last he comes home to every man’s own bosom, even to “his own sore and his own grief.”

And does not our experience tend to confirm Solomon’s wisdom, and to remind us of a higher wisdom and tenderness still that guided him? After all, the world and society are made up of individuals, and each individual, in a sense, stands alone, and his life is complete in itself. One glory of the Bible surely is that it is the book of the individual soul. It has something to say to me — something to offer me. I do not have to lose myself in the masses in order to hear its voice. It has a direct message for each who is willing to listen, I can hear it for myself, quite apart from anyone else.

## Our Own Grief

And has not each of us “his own sore and his own grief?” Others may have the same in kind, but this does not make ours less our own. Nor is it a question merely of degree. A child’s sorrow, though it may be only over a broken toy, or a smashed doll, is just as much its own, as is the heavier sorrow of a grown man or woman. No, it is our own sore and our own grief; that is the point. I am the one who suffers it, who smarts under it or who wishes it had never happened.

Both these references as to the heart knowing his own bitterness, and everyone knowing his own sore and grief, come to us from the same source. None other than king Solomon is their author, and it is not impossible that he knew their meaning, and that when he uttered these words he was conscious of how true they were in his own experience. Yes, in spite of his rank, and privileges, and wisdom, and riches, his heart may have known his own bitterness, and he may have been conscious of his own sore and own grief. It may be, indeed, that there is a bitterness peculiar to high station, intellectual gifts and overflowing possessions. In any case, they did not screen him from what was the common lot of all his subjects. Does not that oft repeated exclamation “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” tell us so?

## Carry It to God

There is the sore as well as the grief. There is that which irritates, frets, wounds — in addition to the sorrows and bereavements of life. Perhaps that which makes us sore is not always so palpable to others as that which makes us sad. But it may be for that reason even more difficult to bear. We should be thankful that Solomon included both. Does it not suggest that when anyone does know his own sore and his own grief he can carry it straight to God? This temple, which, with all its magnificence and greatness, was for Jehovah's praise and dwelling place, was also for His people's prayers, and within those hallowed walls many could tell their own sore and their own grief with no ear but God's to listen! What pitiful tales those walls were invited to hear and doubtless did hear. The temple was dedicated, amongst other things, to this purpose, and Solomon asked God to hear from heaven His "dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest; (for Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men)." For although God cannot sympathize with evil, He can with those who desire to be free from it. And although this temple no longer exists, the provision made for faith today is even more ample. We are invited to come with boldness to the very throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4). To that throne of grace, we can bring every complaint.

## Jacob's Bitterness and Faith

Jacob knew, probably, as well as anyone ever did; the heart's own bitterness. His early sin, his long service in Laban's employ, the troubles in connection with family, the death of Rachel, and last, but by no means least, the supposed death of Joseph, and his separation from him for twenty years — made his own sore and his own grief very real to him. What a tragic moment when his son's coat was brought to him. "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. . . . he refused to be comforted; and he said, 'For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.' Thus his father wept for him." How often his heart bled. Yet he knew also what it was to bless. And it is this act of faith that is recorded of him in Hebrews 11, "By faith Jacob when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff" He could forget his own sorrow and the past bitterness, as he spoke of the Angel which had redeemed him from all evil.

## Hannah's Grief and Relief

Hannah's case was totally different from that of Jacob, yet her sore and her grief were just as real. We read, "She was in bitterness of soul." Yes, she had her own sore and her own grief, exactly as someone reading these lines has his or her's. "Out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken," she declares when Eli remonstrates with her. And the cause of it was that "her adversary provoked her sore, for to make her fret . . . so she provoked her; therefore she wept: and did not eat." And this went on year after year without remedy. But at length relief came and it came through prayer. "In bitterness of soul" she "prayed unto the Lord." But what a change prayer worked! Even before the answer was actually given she realized the benefit of making her requests known unto God. For we are told, "the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

Hannah's heart bled, but the result was blessing. Samuel the prophet of the Lord was the

offspring of her travail and faith, and all Israel eventually rejoiced in his light. True as it is, “knoweth his own bitterness,” the remaining part of the verse is not less true, “and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.” Hannah’s prayer, which is left on record for our great enjoyment, and not less for our edification, tells us this. It opens in this triumphant strain, “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation.” Here is the secret of being able to endure the sore and the grief — God’s salvation is known. Our trials, our griefs — the anguish of spirit which some of God’s people are made to feel — are not beyond His touch. “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” He does not do the former without the latter.

## David’s Lament

Perhaps there are few more touching or bitter lamentations on record than that uttered by David at the death of Absalom. Truly it was his own sore and his own grief, for circumstances made it impossible for others even to share the grief, much less to feel as David felt. Many, perhaps, could hardly resist a secret satisfaction that the conspirator was dead. But with David, the father’s love overmastered every other consideration. “And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” The thought of that son, so dear to him, of his conduct, and of his tragic and untimely end, only added poignancy to his grief. Yet the king acted wisely in listening to the advice of Joab. “Then the king arose, and sat in the gate.” Unrestrained grief is useless. It is harmful to others, as well as to ourselves. It serves no good end. There is a temptation at times to muse over our own sore and our own grief in a selfish way, forgetting that others have their trials which are special and peculiar to themselves, and losing sight of God, and the claims of those around us. David was never more kingly and never more wise, than when he refused to gratify personal feelings, and responded to the call of his people.

## God’s Provision

But we must close. There are thousands today who have their own sore and their own grief, in whose case, “the heart knoweth his own bitterness.” It may be a consolation to them to be reminded how such were specially remembered before God in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple. And although the temple has vanished, yet the God, whose dwelling-place it was, remains, the same God, with the same concern about the sorrowing. Carry all your sorrow to Him. If there is sin along with it, there is provision also for that. A way is open for all to reach the very heart of God, through the death of His Son. He who came from God’s heart leads us back there by way of the Cross. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,” is the message. And if the heart knows bitterness it may know also the sweetness of a love that has spared nothing, but has given and suffered all. That which is your own sore and your own grief He is willing to share; while His joy and peace may become yours.

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*Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 138*