

LESSONS FOR A QUARANTINED CHURCH - Part five

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WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY GOD DOESN'T DELIVER YOU FROM YOUR TRIAL (Part 2)

Psalm 119:71 - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."

In the first part of our study of this verse we noted that God can and does involve Himself in the afflictions of our lives. Many times He supernaturally **removes** them. Sometimes He doesn't. Sometimes He **uses** them to accomplish something new in our lives. And, if God either **causes** affliction, or **uses** affliction (whatever its source), the **result** of that affliction will always be **good**.

The result of that affliction may not be **comfortable** or **pleasant**. But it will be **good**. So the important point of understanding we laid down in the first part of this message was the need to **recognize the kind of good God is working towards**. He is out, more than anything else, to make me less **worldly** and more **holy**. By His Spirit He is out to make me like Jesus, whatever that process requires in this fallen world.

And it **is** very important for all of us to reckon the Fall into the way God deals with our lives, even as Christians. If the Fall had never taken place, if sin had not entered this world and our very natures, then all God would have to give us to shape our lives would be **information**. He would simply give us the informational data and we would listen, learn, and obey. But the Fall **did** take place. We **do** live on a fallen planet. Now we not only need **information**, we frequently need **correction**. We not only need **information**, we need **realigning**.

And in that correcting, realigning process God can frequently bring spiritual good into our dark hearts with the tool of affliction. That is what we covered in the first part of this message. Now we get to specifics. **How** can affliction accomplish good? What is affliction designed to **do**? And why can't God accomplish this goal of Christlikeness **without** the tool of personal affliction?

In today's life changing verse the Psalmist gives us one central piece of the answer about the value of afflictions properly received under the sovereignty of God. He tells us the primary value of afflictions for the Godly is in their **teaching power**:

Psalm 119:71 - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."

Afflictions (in all their varied forms) can teach God's statutes in a way pleasures can't. We can, **if we keep our hearts right**, learn a great deal about ourselves, God, and things spiritual that we didn't know **before** we were afflicted.

This is our subject tonight. How can spiritual profit come from painful situations? What can we *learn* from them? And why is this so important?

1) **ONLY TRIALS TEACH PERSEVERANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

You never have to learn to persevere through intense prosperity and comfort. You just coast through those things. It is impossible to learn perseverance through the experience of delight. But afflictions are different. They wear at your spiritual muscles. They gnaw at your faith. They sap your joy. They make you *hold on*.

Romans 5:3 - "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance..."

You can't do anything well in this world without perseverance. It is an essential ingredient to wholeness. This is true in everything worthwhile - the pursuit of education, the maintaining of a job, the protecting of your reputation, the building of a marriage, etc. But this is of even greater importance in the Christian walk. You certainly can't follow the Lord without perseverance. And you can't *learn* perseverance without the experience of affliction in some form.

The Apostle Peter talked a great deal about this very theme:

1 Peter 1:6-7 - "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, {7} so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ..."

Notice, *success* isn't what proves and purifies your faith. Nor does *peace*, or *pleasure*, or *wealth*. **Trials** result in the proving and purifying of your faith. James makes this point in even more striking words:

James 1:2-4 - "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, {3} knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. {4} And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

It's only because we *know* those words so well that they don't slap us awake like they should. Do you see what James is actually saying. It's almost unbelievable. He is saying that trials are the *funnel* through which God pours everything worth while into our lives. This is actually how God "*completes*" our lives.

This is how he makes us *“perfect.”*

2) **ONLY TRIALS TEACH US TO EXERCISE FAITH IN THE FUTURE GRACE OF GOD ON OUR BEHALF**

Trials force the exercise of faith because they remove the *appearance* of God's presence and help on our behalf. They cause us to walk, not by *sight*, but by *faith*. Affliction, in whatever form, removes the *visible supports* from our lives. All we *have* is the promise of God. The circumstances have gone sour. The external joys and pleasures have been stripped away. ***We are forced to decide whether we will continue to trust God or not.***

Perhaps this is the greatest value of afflictions. ***They force the issue of faith.*** They make us think about God. They make God the *main issue* like pleasure never can. They make us look at His Word. The very contradiction of our pain and loss makes us look again, perhaps much more closely, at the promises of God.

You never see the benefit of afflictions when you are *experiencing* them. They don't *feel* good when you're in them. You have to *exercise faith* that God will bring something much better out of them than you can presently see:

Hebrews 12:11 - ***“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”***

Note that phrase - ***“...it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*** All Christians *say* they want to be righteous. Think of all the songs we sing to the Lord, promising Him we long for the beauty of His holiness and righteousness in our lives.

But exactly ***how does righteousness come?*** Well, that depends on what *kind* of righteousness your talking about. The *imputed* righteousness of Jesus Christ comes on my behalf the instant I make Him Lord of my life. My life is *covered*, so to speak, in the righteousness of Jesus. This righteousness is a free gift.

But that's not the righteousness the writer of Hebrews is describing because the righteousness he describes doesn't come instantly like a *gift*, but grows gradually like a *fruit*. This is the actual, holy *practice* of righteousness in my daily habits.

So, the righteousness the writer of Hebrews describes is the righteousness of ***obedience and dedicated***

commitment. But there is something else he tells us about ***how this righteousness comes and grows in our lives.***

He says you don't see this ***harvest of righteousness arriving immediately or all at once*** when you are under the chastening hand of God. All you feel is affliction. You can't imagine anything worthwhile coming out of the process at all. There doesn't seem to be anything good in the picture. But the Word promises it's there if we continue to trust and obey God. Something good is being planted in seed form. Character is being grown. God hasn't stopped working. Holiness is in the making.

The promise is there. And the promise is all you have to go on. Affliction forces faith in the future grace of God.

3) **ONLY TRIALS TEACH US HOW FLEETING AND TRANSITORY THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD ARE**

Trials remove so many of the things we cherish and rely on. Perhaps it's our health. Perhaps a loved one. Perhaps financial security. But that's what affliction in all its forms does. Afflictions strip life of the comforts and trappings in this world.

1 John 2:17 - "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

We all **know** the world is passing away. Our clothes wear out. We've been to a cemetery. We know we're aging. So we know the world is passing away. But we **know it** and **don't know it** at the same time. For all our intellectual understanding that the things of this world don't satisfy, and don't last forever, we still frequently **live** like our lives will go on forever just like they are now. And we **value** earthly things like they really can provide permanent security, joy, and satisfaction.

But they don't. And the Psalmist said this is where afflictions can come and teach us. We learn truths we already know, but in a deeper, more living way. We **experience** the grit and power of truth we already know in times of affliction. We learn, not only that the **world** is passing away, but so also is our new car, or our wonderful job, or our clean bill of health, or last year's raise, or our best friend.

Only trials can teach our heart what our head already knows. We learn more deeply that these earthly things aren't worth the devotion we attach to them. We actually see how quickly they can disappear. Afflictions **loosen our roots** in this world. And, if we don't turn bitter, they drive us more deeply into God.

4) **TRIALS CAN AWAKEN A CARELESS HEART AND SOFTEN A STUBBORN WILL INTO REPENTANCE**

Because God is not willing that any should perish, He labors, by His Spirit to do as much correcting work in our lives now, **before** we come into permanent condemnation for our sins:

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 - "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. {29} For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. {30} For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. {31} But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. {32} But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world."

This is a powerful text. Paul tells us just how seriously God examines the attitude of our hearts toward our own sin and His gracious provision on the cross. People who just play games with sin and grace are in deep trouble because, like all of us, one day they will pass on into eternity and face final judgement. And you can't make any adjustments to your soul once you face final judgment.

So God does everything in His power to awaken people to their carelessness right here and now. These people who are afflicted in **verse 30** aren't being persecuted by demons or the Devil. Paul identifies the source of their affliction in **verse 32** - "**But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord...**"

Then, Paul also explains the **reason** for this stern action: **1 Corinthians 11:32** - "**But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.**"

God loves us so much He will go to any lengths whatsoever to keep us from being condemned along with the world. He loves us **more** than He loves our comfort. He will use affliction (not just physical affliction, as in this text, but affliction in countless forms) to wake us up to our own carelessness or stubbornness.

The Prodigal son is another classic example of this. The pig trough was a great teacher to this foolish, stubborn son. **He learned more there in a week than in a lifetime in the comfort of the father's house.** God can and does, at times, use affliction to help us to come to ourselves.

I have to wrap this up. Let me give you three pieces of advice on how **not to miss** the benefits of God's season of affliction when it comes:

5) THREE FINAL PRACTICAL ENCOURAGEMENTS

Here is how to *not miss the blessing* of seasons of trial:

- a) ***Don't murmur against God when trials come*** - Nothing reveals immaturity like a whiny son who throws a tantrum because his parents make him go to the dentist. Afflictions only bring growth to patient, meek hearts.
- b) ***Don't judge the whole of God's work in your life by just a part of that work*** - Perhaps this is the most important point. You usually don't see the value of afflictions while you are smarting under them. Notice carefully David's wording in our verse:

Psalm 119:71 - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."

He says he "**was**" afflicted. Past tense. Now he looks back and sees that it was good for him. Dollars to doughnuts he didn't think the afflictions were good when he was in the middle of them.

- c) ***Never sever the ties to God when you are afflicted*** - Resist and refuse the impulse to sulk, quit, or mope. There is good to come. Sow in tears and you will come again reaping with joy. But you mustn't quit sowing.

Never forget it: God is so loving, and so wise, and so powerful, there is absolutely nothing that He can't use to the benefit of those who steadfastly love and trust Him in all things.