

Adversity: The Lord's Diamond Dust

***“They shall be
mine, saith the
LORD of hosts, in
that day when I
make up my
jewels.”
—Malachi 3:17***

SOME MACHINE SHOPS

have what is called a diamond wheel. This wheel is similar to an emery wheel used to sharpen ordinary tools. However, there are certain types of tools which are too hard for an ordinary emery wheel, so a special one is used, a diamond wheel. This wheel is made of diamond dust, the remains from the grinding of other diamonds. This refuse dust is worthless except to be compressed into a wheel form and used to shape, sharpen, and polish cutting tools which are too hard for the usual emery wheel.

Adversity, too, while seemingly worthless, in the divine economy is utilized to sharpen and polish Christian character. One might at first think that the child of God should be exempt from adversity. However, the facts are to the contrary. The Apostle

Paul recognized this, and wrote, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace.”—I Cor. 4:11

As noted in our theme text, the Christian is a special jewel in the sight of the Lord—a jewel in the rough as yet, a rare gem in the making. To such, adversity is as diamond dust by which they are being polished. Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”—Matt. 5:11,12

PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Master reveals the real purpose of the Christian life, saying in verses 13-16 of this same chapter, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

The Christian is the salt of the earth. In order for the divine purpose to be fulfilled in our lives as individuals, the salt must not lose its savor. The savor is the taste that gives salt value and purpose. By nature, we are all fallen and imperfect. We thus have no savor of our own, being part of a dying race. However, it is as New Creatures in Christ

Jesus that we have the Truth and its spirit, and thus we have savor. In these verses, Jesus implied that it is possible to lose this savor if we are not constantly on guard. The spirit of selfishness is ever present to draw us away from and lose the savor of truth. Thus, we would find ourselves without its spirit and power in our lives.

One of the virtues of salt is its power to season and preserve from decay. The number of true Christians throughout this Gospel Age has been small indeed. Nevertheless, these have exercised a preserving influence upon mankind within their limited sphere, and the world has been blessed by their presence. The next age will be even a greater period of fulfillment of this picture. Then, associated with Christ, the church will preserve and give everlasting life to all those who obey the laws of the kingdom.

Jesus also said, "Ye are the light of the world." This "light" of the Gospel message of truth is of value only when it is permitted to shine. Jesus admonishes us not to hide this light under a bushel. It is the only true light in the world today, and we are to make it shine as widely and as brightly as we possibly can. This light has not attracted very many because the "god of this world," Satan, has blinded the vast majority so as not to be able to recognize the light.—II Cor. 4:4

The light has, however, attracted a peculiar class that God desires. These are his "jewels." Through special experiences and polishing, they are being fitted for a place in the heavenly phase of Christ's kingdom. With Jesus, the church will shine as the sun, and the world shall ultimately be enlightened.

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Hab. 2:14

FROM WHENCE COMES ADVERSITY?

From whom, or by whom, do such adverse experiences come? In order properly to appraise our trials, and in them maintain the true Christian spirit, it is essential that we adopt the Master’s attitude respecting such experiences. He said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”—John 18:11

The Heavenly Father permitted Jesus’ suffering. This is corroborated by his experience before Pilate, as recorded in John 19:10,11: “Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

We must also recognize it to be so with the “cup” the Father is giving to us to drink. This does not mean that God is the author of evil. Indeed, he is not a participator in evil things. However, there are all manner of evil forces and evil influences surrounding us. These can all be traced to one of three sources. One of these sources is Satan and the fallen angels. Our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) Thus we see that Satan, together with his fallen angels, are ready and waiting to assault the children of God.

The world is also a source of evil, particularly the so-called religious world, from which much opposition comes to those who live godly in Christ Jesus. Satan again enters into the picture, for he has blinded the minds of the world by putting error for truth and darkness for light. He does this so that the way of righteousness and obedience to God might seem foolish and extreme.

The third source of evil is our own flesh. It is a constant, ever-present adversary, and is inclined to be in harmony with the spirit of the world and the sinful influence of Satan. Paul said, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."—Rom. 7:18

PERMITTED FOR GOOD

Let us always remember that if we live close to our Heavenly Father, he will not permit any evil influence to touch us, or do injury to us, as New Creatures in Christ. The true thought is not that God creates evil or adversity, rather that he permits it, knowing that by his overruling it will work for our good. In this, however, he will prevent any experience to come to us that would injure or harm us as New Creatures.—I Cor. 10:13

Satan knows that certain ones have the Truth, and he is determined to do anything within his power to take it from them, if it were possible. This prince of darkness will stop at nothing to accomplish his purpose. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Heb. 2:1) He will try to instill dissatisfaction and restlessness in our minds by ever hinting that we

should look at something new and put aside the things we have learned.

Such a course would eventually prove a delusion and a snare. To be able to hold our ground against all opposition means that we must possess the proper qualities of mind and heart. We need to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) Our adversities, in fact, should be crystallizing our determination to overcome.

The world and its spirit often become our adversary. “Do not take such an extreme view of things, and you will get along better,” the world suggests. “Do not spend so much time studying your Bible, or people will call you an extremist.” The ideal of many in the world is to do good, to work for social and civil reforms. In this, the world tries to influence us sympathetically.

A certain amount of opposition also comes from those who seemingly have our best interests at heart. For example, when our Lord announced that he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter said, “Be it far from thee.” Our master turned to Peter saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan [adversary].” (Matt. 16:22,23) For the time being, Peter was our Lord’s adversary, because his suggested course was in opposition to the one God had set for Jesus.

Then there is our own flesh and its natural tendencies, which often severely try us. Our flesh is prone to follow the path of least resistance. Our fallen habits seem so difficult to change, and it is easier to say, “What is the use? I can’t change now.” The flesh will say of our consecration vows, “Do not carry these things too far.” It is at these times that we need to say with Paul, “I keep under my

body, and bring it into subjection: lest, . . . when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.”—I Cor. 9:27

WHY PERMITTED

Why are evils permitted to come upon God’s people? It is by these that we are being polished as the Lord’s “jewels.” (Mal. 3:17) James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [trial]: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12

We must keep in mind that every trial, every test, every persecution, every difficulty which is permitted to come upon those who have made a covenant “by sacrifice” (Ps. 50:5), is designed to develop, prove, and test our love. They are allowed in order to demonstrate that our character is fixed and rooted in righteousness. When viewed in this way, all our painful experiences are seen in a new light, and they will greatly assist us in fighting the good fight of faith. It is by these trials and tribulations that we prove our love and devotion to the Lord. “The LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”—Deut. 13:3

The Word of God aptly describes the human family in their present condition as a groaning creation: “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Rom. 8:22) The Lord’s consecrated people are no exception to this. “We ourselves [also] groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption [deliverance] of our body.” (vs. 23) However, while we are waiting

for deliverance, the experiences of life have an important mission to accomplish in us. Therefore, the manner in which they are received should be of deepest concern. According to their use, each day's prosperity or adversity brings a blessing or a curse.

RESULTS

The results of our trials can be illustrated by the storms of winter and summer. How different is one from the other. In the winter, they rush over the earth with violence, and any remnants of foliage or flowers are swept away, leaving nothing but desolation in their wake. Long after the storms have ceased, the wind-driven cold remains as a token of what has been.

However, in the summer, when the clouds have poured forth their torrents and the winds have spent their fury, the sun comes forth in all its glory. Vegetation seems to rise with renewed loveliness, as after a refreshing bath. The flowers smell sweeter than before. The grass takes on a brighter shade of green. The young plants, which were barely in sight before, now take their place among their fellows, so quickly do they spring up after a summer shower. The air, too, which previously may have been oppressive, is now clear and fresh.

Likewise it is with the storms of adversity. To the unregenerate, the storms of life are apt to bring dreariness and a desolation which was not apparent before. Their gloom is not relieved by the prospect of a cheering ray to follow. There are no flowers or fruit to show its beneficence. To these, adversities, like the (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) storms, winds, snow, sleet, and rain of the winter time, still leave the heart barren and cold.

These same adversities which come upon the Christian should be like the storms, winds, and rain of the summer time. They should beautify our character and brighten our outlook on life, and strengthen the faith and hope which God has planted within us. The Apostle Paul wrote, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are [rightly] exercised thereby."—Heb. 12:11

As we look at the benefits which we derive from our experiences with the assurance that they are supervised by God, let us "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4) Peter wrote, "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."—I Pet. 1:7-9

How encouraging is Paul's description of the Christian life, as recorded in these verses: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but

not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” “As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:8,9; 6:9,10; 4:16,17

EXAMPLE OF JOB

Let us remember the example of Job. Very few, if any, have suffered the troubles that this man endured. He lost all of his property, and all of his children, whom he loved dearly. They perished in the home of his eldest son, which was struck by a great wind. Then Job lost, at least for a time, the love and loyalty of his wife. Finally, Job was smitten by a loathsome disease which caused his skin to erupt from head to foot with boils. To further cause him suffering, along came three of his best friends. Instead of comforting him, they added to his grief by insisting that these disasters were a result of his sins, and that he was being punished by the Lord because of his unfaithfulness to him.

The beautiful part of Job’s life story is that, like the rains and winds of summer, these experiences had a most beneficial effect upon his character and life. Through all of them Job did not lose faith in God. His testimony was, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21) In the end, we see that all of

Job's troubles passed away, and he was blessed more abundantly than before, with children, servants, and cattle. "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." (Job 42:12) We believe God used Job as an illustration of the human family. First was their prosperous, but short-lived, condition as experienced by Adam in his perfection. Then came mankind's many troubles and groanings as a result of Adam's fall. Finally, however, will come the restitution blessings which they will receive as a result of Christ's coming kingdom. Added to this will be the blessing of their valuable previous experience with evil which will make them wise. The Christian marks Job as an example of trust, faith, patience, and love for his Creator, as expressed in Job's immortalized testimony, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."—chap. 13:15

GOD'S FAVOR

There are still other benefits which the Christian realizes because of adversity. Strange as it might at first seem, adversity is an evidence of God's favor. In Hebrews 12:6-8, we read, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye [illegitimate children, *New International Version*], and not sons."

Each of God's children needs chastening from time to time. If we stray from the path of righteousness, chastisements are designed to bring us back.

However, we still need chastening even if we do not wander, for by it we learn obedience and discipline. The word chastisement ordinarily signifies correction for wrongdoing, but in the Bible it is also used to signify discipline, or instruction in righteousness. Of our Lord, we read in Hebrews 5:8, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

Let us appreciate more the privilege of being trained in the school of Christ. In this school, we learn some very valuable lessons through our experiences. We receive chastisements, and encounter all kinds of adversity which comes to us under the Heavenly Father's supervision. Surely we should desire to learn all of our lessons well. Paul wrote, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (chap. 12:2,3) Whoever does not appreciate the spiritual joys of things "set before him" can hardly be expected to endure with patience, and with cheerful endurance, the present period of training. One must see the glory that is to follow in order to appreciate the necessity and value of adversity.

How long will these adversities continue? When will they end? To the individual Christian it will be only as long as his life lasts on the earth. In short, the answer is given in Revelation 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The adversity of the rest of mankind will not last

forever either. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5) Soon the permission of evil will be over. While we are here, it is good to know that all things in God’s plan of salvation are working together not only for our good, but ultimately and most assuredly for the good of all. ■

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”—Philippians 1:6