

The Ministry of Sorrow

*“Out of the depths
have I cried unto
thee, O LORD.”*

*“When he giveth
quietness, who then
can make trouble?”*

—Psalm 130:1;

Job 34:29

THE LIFE OF EVERY HUMAN

being has its lights and shadows, its heights of joy and its depths of sorrow. These make up a large part of mankind's experience. The tapestry of character which flows from the active loom of life will be

fine and beautiful or coarse and homely, according to the skill and carefulness with which the individual weaves into it the threads of experience. In every life, in the present reign of sin and evil, the somber shades often predominate. To such an extent is this true that 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,” says the apostle. The children of God are no exception to this condition, for we also “groan within ourselves,” awaiting with expectation our deliverance.—Rom. 8:22,23

While we are waiting for our deliverance, however, the daily experiences of life have a most important

mission to us, and the manner in which we receive them should be a subject of deepest concern. According to the use we make of them, each day's prosperity or its adversity and trial bear to us a blessing or a setback. Those experiences which we are accustomed to regard as prosperous often have in them subtle dangers. If wealth increases, friends multiply, or a large measure of earthly joy comes to us, how almost imperceptibly the heart may find its satisfaction in the things of this earth! Yet when the keen edge of sorrow or disappointment is felt, when riches or health fail, when friends forsake, and enemies take up a reproach against us, the natural tendency can often be towards despondency and despair.

Here is a very important part of the great warfare of our life as a Christian. We must fight the tendencies of our old nature and must confidently claim and expect the victory, but only in the strength of the great Captain of our salvation. (Heb. 2:9-11) We must not yield to the alluring influences of favorable outward conditions, neither must we sink beneath the weight of trials and adversity. We must not permit any experience in life, however difficult and painful, to sour and harden us or make us bitter, morose or unloving. Nor may we allow pride or love of show, or self-righteousness, to feed upon the temporal blessings which the Lord in his loving providence has given us to prove our faithfulness as a steward.—I Cor. 4:2; I Pet. 4:10

DEPTHS OF SORROW LEAD TO HEIGHTS OF JOY

Sorrows and griefs may, and perhaps often will, come in like a flood, but the Heavenly Father will be our strength in every experience which he permits.

The soul that has never known the experience of distress and trouble has never yet learned the joy and inestimable value of the Lord's love and helpfulness. It is in seasons of overwhelming sorrow and grief that we draw nearest to God and he draws especially near to us. (James 4:8) So the psalmist found it, when in his deep affliction he cried to God, saying, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." (Ps. 130:1,2) Feeling his own weakness and shortcomings, longing for full deliverance from every imperfection, and prophesying of the bountiful provisions of God's plan of salvation through Christ, he adds, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities [imputing them to us], O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared [reverenced]."—vss. 3,4

How precious are such assurances when the soul is painfully conscious of its infirmities, of its utter inability to fully measure up to the perfect law of righteousness. How blessed it is to know that when our hearts are loyal and true, our God does not mark against us the unavoidable blemishes of our earthen vessel! If we come daily to him for cleansing, through the merits of our Redeemer, our failures are not imputed to us, but freely forgiven and washed away. (Rom. 4:6-8) The perfect righteousness of our Savior is our glorious dress, arrayed in which we may come to God with humble boldness, courage—even into the presence of the great Jehovah.—Ps. 132:9,16; Isa. 61:10

If thus God fully receives us and communes with us as his children, we should so regard one another.

We should not consider and charge against one another the infirmities of the flesh, which each humbly confesses, and which they, like us, are earnestly endeavoring to overcome by the grace of God to the best of their ability. To each one of the Lord's true children the words of the apostle apply: "If God is for us, who shall be against us? ... Who shall bring an accusation against the chosen ones of God? God, who declareth righteous? Who is he that condemneth? Christ Jesus who died?" (Rom. 8:31,33,34, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) The case is different, however, when the infirmities of the flesh are cultivated, indulged in without proper effort to correct them, and perhaps even justified in order that the faults may be continued. Then, indeed, they are charged against us. If we do not speedily "judge ourselves" and take decisive measures to correct them, the Lord will himself judge and chasten us. —I Cor. 11:31,32

In the midst of the cares, perplexities and difficulties that come to the children of God, we are to trust him fully, and to possess our souls in peace and patience. (Luke 21:19) How necessary is our patient waiting on the Lord and for his way to be revealed to us. The psalmist says, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." (Ps. 130:5,6) In every experience of sorrow and distress, and when the strain of vexations and wounds that make the heart faint threaten to overwhelm the spirit, let us remember that God knows, and loves, and cares. His ministering angels are ever near us, and no trial will be permitted to be too severe. (Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14;

I Cor. 10:13) Our dear Master also is standing by the crucible, and the furnace heat will never be permitted to grow so intense that the precious gold of our characters shall be destroyed, or even injured. He loves us too much to permit any needless sorrow or suffering.

THE REWARD OF PATIENT WAITING

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.” (Ps. 37:5-7) We must not be disappointed and allow our faith to falter when the test of patient endurance is applied, while the outward peace and quietness which we crave seems to tarry long. Our Father has not forgotten us when the answer to our prayers seems to be delayed. Outward peace and calm are not always the conditions best suited to our needs as Christians. Thus we would not desire conditions in which the precious fruits of the Spirit would not grow and develop in us. Therefore, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice.” (I Pet. 4:12,13) He who numbers the very hairs of our heads is never indifferent to the sufferings and needs of his weakest and humblest child. How sweet is the realization of such loving, abiding care! “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”—Matt. 10:29-31; Job 34:29

Faithful Christians have in every sorrow and grief a blessed consolation of which the world is wholly in ignorance. None but the child of God can know

it. What is this consolation? Those who have never enlisted under the banner of the cross of Christ; who have never put themselves wholly into the hands of the Lord to be molded and fashioned into his glorious likeness; who have never made an earnest effort to stem the tide of the tendencies of the fallen nature; who have never contended earnestly for truth and righteousness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; such cannot know of this divine consolation. It is the precious balm for wounded spirits on the battlefield of life. It is the stimulating, refreshing drink for fainting souls, hard pressed by the relentless foe. It is the soothing touch of a loving hand upon the fevered brow of the noble contender for truth and godliness. It is the gentle whisper of hope and love and courage when heart and flesh are almost failing. This is divine consolation, the only consolation that has in it any virtue of healing or refreshment. (II Cor. 1:3-7; II Thess. 2:16,17) It is reserved alone for those noble souls who are faithfully serving the King of kings, while those who drift with the current of the world and the downward tendencies of the fleshly nature can never have an intimation of its sweetness.

How loving and tender is our God, and how wise and strong! His promises have never failed those who have put their trust in him. We may feel that our efforts to live righteously and to do good are very unproductive, that the opposition around us is very strong. However, it is when we are weak, when we realize our own insufficiency, that we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. (Eph. 6:10) It is then that we may realize that his strength is made perfect in our weakness. (II Cor. 12:9,10)

The fact that we are weak and often fall short does not separate us from the love and power of our God. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. 103:14) Let us then more and more lay hold of this strength of the Lord, that we may courageously pursue our course in the narrow way of difficulty and trial. Valuable and precious indeed to the saint of God is the ministry of pain and sorrow.

THE PATIENCE OF JOB

The saints of every age have learned the blessing and value of afflictions. The psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Ps. 119:67,71) God's faithful servant Job suffered almost overwhelming troubles, but the Lord brought him to a much greater understanding when his trials had accomplished their designed effect. He was proven and strengthened by his sore experiences. Few if any of us could suffer more. He suffered the loss of all his property; then of all his children, whom he loved; then of the love and loyalty of his wife; and finally, he was smitten with sore disease from head to foot. To crown all this, three of his friends came to see him on hearing of his great trials. Instead of being true comforters, they added to his sorrows by insisting that his own sins must have been the cause of all these disasters; that his experiences must be punishments from the Lord because of unfaithfulness on his part. Surely Job was afflicted!—See Job, chapters 1,2,4,5,8,11

Did Job lose his faith in God? Hear him: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed

be the name of the LORD.” “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 1:21; 13:15) Job was indeed much cast down, but he maintained his integrity of character and his faith in the Lord through it all. He did not charge God with injustice, and God did not desert his faithful servant. He reproved his accusers and required them to offer sacrifice, and he instructed Job to pray for them, that their trespasses might be overlooked. In the end, he was blessed more abundantly than ever before. (Job 42:7-17) Job is a great illustration of the human family, of the troubles of their fallen condition and of their final restoration to all that was lost in Adam, with the blessings of added experiences to make them wise. How faithful is the Lord in all his dealings! Truly his children should never doubt his love.

PRECIOUS FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

It is when continued trust in the Lord and his many responsive providences in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in him. It is when prayer brings recognized answers of peace; when divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way; it is then that we can recognize the abiding presence with us of the Father and his dear Son. Thus we learn that however dark may be our way; however severe may be the storm that rages about us; the thought of divine protection is ever with us. As such, we are never in despair. Though cast down, we are not destroyed. Though persecuted, we are never forsaken. We know our Father's hand is ever at the helm, that his love and care are sure and unfailing.—II Cor. 4:8-10

Those who have come into full heart sympathy with God's will and way have learned to see him as the fountain of all goodness and truth and blessing. To them he is the one altogether lovely. His law is their delight. (Song of Sol. 5:16; Ps. 119:77,174) His friendship and love are their very life. When the heart has become thus centered in God, it is the most natural impulse to commit its way unto him. These can truly sing the words of the hymn:

“So on I go, not knowing, I would not if I might;
I'd rather walk in the dark with God, Than go
alone in the light;

I'd rather walk by the faith with Him, Than go
alone by sight.”

Surely these have the desires of their heart. No good thing shall be withheld from them, and their fervent prayers shall avail much. (Ps. 84:11; James 5:16) In the Lord's good time their righteousness, however much it may be misunderstood and misrepresented now, shall be brought forth as the light—clear, cloudless and made manifest. The justice and righteousness of their course and of their hearts shall shine as the noonday. (Ps. 37:6) Even while we remain here as aliens and foreigners in this present world, we shall be fed and nourished, temporally and spiritually, and shall rejoice in the “house of our pilgrimage.” (Ps. 119:54) Precious indeed are the promises of God, and to the praise of his abounding grace—his faithful ones of the past and the present all bearing ample testimony to their fulfillment. ■