

BREAD OF TEARS

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. (Psalm 80:5).

If you are in a place of sorrow, you are not alone. Sorrow is universal. Rich and poor alike experience sorrow. It is the lot of the educated and the uneducated. You may think if you were in a higher position or station of life, sorrow would not come, but sorrow plays no favorites.

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. (Job 14:1).

Blessings can come to others through our sorrows. Sorrow somehow unlocks potential in ourselves we never thought possible. George Matheson was to be married. He had a promising career before him. A doctor said, "You should see all your friends soon because you are going blind and will see them no more." Matheson went to his fiancée and told her the news. He gave her permission to break their engagement. The sorrow of losing the one he loved, as well as losing his sight, was almost more than Matheson could bear. But as a result of a broken heart and intense sorrow, Matheson wrote the words to one of the most beautiful hymns ever to pour from the pen of man.

O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee,
I give Thee back my life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be!

Nothing happens by accident. We live in a world of design. God has a purpose in the sorrow you are experiencing. Looking at this affliction from our point of view, it is meaningless and perhaps harmful; but from the vantage point of Heaven, God looks down and sees this day and all of our tomorrows. God works from and for eternal matters. Temporary experience has a view of eternal consequences. He allowed it for your good. Bread of tears is sustenance for the eternal soul of man.

The child plays at his mother's feet and can only see a disorganized, meaningless jumble of various colored threads. The needle punctures the piece of cloth here and there and then drawn back through the cloth, again and again. Puzzled, he sees no use of such things. Later, he sees a beautiful piece of clothing his mother made with her loving hands. So it is with God's care for us; we see no reason for

such matters from our position *under the layer of heaven*. But God works for us a beautiful and useful work for our good in the cloth of life's experiences. The sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in and for us.

Only God can answer the question you ask since this began. "Why?" This is the first thought that comes to us in sorrow. "Why did this happen?" I do not presume to know your particular case. However, God's word is clear as to reason for suffering. Prayerfully seek God's ways for bringing you to this point.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. (Deuteronomy 8:2).

I. This affliction may be the means of bringing you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are not saved, this could very well be the case. God uses a variety of means to open our eyes. The best gospel preacher is real sorrow. You thought it brought the most dreaded message but it turned, as you never expected. You were ready to throw away your life as finished but now there is a glimmer of hope. God has driven you to your knees in order that He might raise you up to sit with Him.

34 When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God.

35 And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. (Psalm 78:34-35).

Before you can be saved, you must come to the end of yourself. You must know that this life is but a wisp and you are lost. When all things went well, you never thought of God. Health, family, friends, and prosperity were around you; God, eternity, and Heaven meant nothing to you. Earthly things are now frail before your eyes and you see how short and uncertain this life really is.

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. (James 4:14)

The purpose of affliction to a lost man is to awaken him to the brevity of physical life and the vanity of self.

As a young man in his twenties, I had never gone to a funeral home. Death was a dreaded thought that never entered my mind very long. Anything associated with sickness and dying, I avoided. The first funeral I ever attended was after I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior; I was the officiating preacher. Lost, and proud of health, my mind was on material things. These temporal things can be swept away in a moment, leaving us nothing but despair. God removes all earthly support so that we will be driven to Him.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

Will you lay it to heart? Do not be like those that when confronted by the prophet about halting between two opinions, instead of deciding for God, they "answered him not a word." (1 Kings 18:21). To be silent in this matter is to decide against God.

God brought you to a crisis. This will either alarm you or you will ignore it and go on your way to Hell. Hell is enlarged with indifferent people. To wait is to gamble with your soul.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Joshua did not give the people any allowance of time. My friend, do not think you have plenty of time to settle this matter of salvation. Did not all your hope leave you in a moment? Why think that even your present life is so certain? You may try to convince yourself that you have plenty of time. God has promised you no more than the present beat of your heart. A rich man planned to build better and larger buildings. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

If God required your soul this night, the only Person who can save you from Hell is the Lord Jesus Christ. You have no righteousness of your own and cannot go into the presence of God based on your past. God is Holy and will not have fellowship with unrighteousness. You need the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. (Psalms 24:3-4).

My friend, you know you have no goodness and your past has been a wreck. God loves you and wants you to be saved. No matter what you have done or been, God will save you right now.

(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) (2 Corinthians 6:2).

An old man, life wrecked by sin, came to me. "Pastor, I've committed every thing the Bible says is wrong. Will God save a sinner like me?" I replied, "God came to save sinners just like you! The Bible says 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.' (Romans 5:20). How large is your field of sin? It makes no difference; God's grace abounds over it all!" The man was saved that day and served God faithfully until he went home to meet his Savior twenty years later.

God will save you right now if you will simply trust Jesus Christ as your sin substitute. Then, you can sing, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow."

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:22-23).

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

How wonderful are these statements! "While we were yet sinners..." God does not want you to come when you think you have no need; come to Him now. He did not come to save those who think they are righteous; He came to sinners. A sick man seeks out a doctor but a man who feels well has no need of one. All of us have sinned and we all need a Savior. Come now; He will forgive you and cleanse you.

The most awful event, if it brings you to Christ, is the greatest blessing ever bestowed. Has this sorrow brought you to the end of yourself? Trust Christ today. To know Him is peace and rest.

II. This affliction may be intended to show you that you are out of fellowship with God.

If you are saved, this time of trouble and sorrow may be a means of showing you that you are not living right. Your problem is not salvation, for that is eternal. Your problem may be broken fellowship. You left your first love. You listened not when He plead with you earnestly and tenderly. God is now speaking to you through suffering, "Repent, and do the first works."

A purpose of chastening for the child of God is to bring us back to total dependence upon God.

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. (Psalms 119:71-72).

At the beginning, when you were saved, you prayed about everything and worried about nothing. Remember those days when salvation was fresh and you rejoiced in the God of your salvation? But as time went on and problems came you began to look at them rather than God. You looked at others who were discouraged and *discouraging*. You took your eyes off Jesus and began to work out problems by yourself. The longer and harder you worked, there were no results. Like Peter who began right and walked on the water at the words of Jesus, so you did when you first trusted Him for salvation. But when the storm came and wind blew, like Peter you took your eyes off Jesus and saw the storm. Now you are slipping into a sea of despair.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:26-31).

Dear brother and sister, Jesus *always walks* on the waters of life's storms. Peter's cry, "Lord, save me" was not the cry of salvation from sin

and Hell. He was already one of Christ's sheep. Although he was a sheep, he was a wandering sheep, for he looked more at the sea than to Jesus. Peter took his eyes off the Lord and began to slide deeper and deeper into the water. Jesus did not take His eyes off Peter.

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. (Psalm 34:15).

You stopped reading your Bible. You no longer saw it as more necessary than food. Prayer was simply a ritual, not a time of fellowship with God. Business of this world crowded out God's work. You excused your lack of spiritual work by saying you were "providing for your family." You gave them material goods but starved their soul and yours.

The Corinthian Christians were still in church. They had an outward show of serving God but were backbiting and covetous. They met to eat and enjoy the thrill of alcohol rather than to observe God's ordinance, the Lord's Supper, in the right way.

20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.

21 For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

God had spoken to them in a gentle way. They had His word on the matter. But they persisted in this sin and got worse.

30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

There is a difference between a saved person and a lost person. God will not allow the Christian to continue in disobedience. If we will not hear His word, He resorts to whatever means necessary. Some of the Corinthian believers were weak; some were sick, and some had even died.

When Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, he did not address *lost people*; he addressed it to saints, *saved people*. Notice this verse:

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2).

As children of God, we are already saints. We are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" as the verse states. But we are also "called to be saints." God will not allow His child to continue in sin as this world does. He expects us to walk worthy of that high vocation He has given to us. Our father and mother desire that we behave ourselves and not bring shame upon our family. It is the same with our Heavenly Father. We are not only saints, but are also *called to be saints*.

Are you as the stubborn Corinthians? Nothing can separate us from the love of God and it is that very love that allowed this terrible sorrow to come upon you. When two of our sons, Stephen and David, were very young, they went with me, everywhere. One Saturday we worked on preparing the foundation for our new church building. The men of the church were digging and laying out the stakes for the footing. My boys were with us and like boys, they played all around the dirt and ditches. I stopped digging in the hard, red, Alabama clay to rest a moment and looked up to check on the boys. They were jumping back and forth over a ditch made by a downpour the day before. They would fall into it and climb back up, and try their short legs again. From where I stood, I saw something in the ditch that was hidden to them. A five to six foot rattlesnake was stretched in the bottom of the ditch. One slip and they would fall on it. I ran as fast as I could and knocked both boys away from the ditch. I was not gentle; I did not care if they got scratched; I did not say a word; my only thought was that my precious boys were in danger. One of the men was very surprised at my sudden action. My roughness appeared needless to just stop boys from playing. When we hacked that snake's head off, they understood. My love for my boys and the hate for that which could harm them made me react that way.

We have no ability to understand the depths of our Father's love and His hatred of sin. It must grieve Him to see His children love the very things that His Son died for. We may take our eyes off Him, play around with sin, but His eye is never away from us.

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. (Psalm 121:3-5).

III. This trouble and sorrow in your life will make you a stronger and more effective Christian.

There are many instances in the Bible and in life when God's people are allowed to suffer in order to draw them nearer to God. Sorrow can bring us to a moment by moment dependence upon our Heavenly Father.

1. We can learn to trust God.

Paul suffered so much trouble that he even despaired of his own life. But for Paul to be who he was, and do what he did, he had to learn not to trust in his own strength.

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

A veteran of the world war, decorated for bravery in many battles, said: "When I worried about dying, I did nothing. When I realized I was never going to get out of that war alive, fought as already dead, unusual things happened and I came home alive." It is when we reckon the old man to be dead to this world that we are alive to God's work.

I am convinced the reason missionaries of a century ago were more effective than today is that they had to trust God before they went. They boarded ships for a one way trip, never to return home again. Many had all their healthy teeth pulled and false ones fitted because they knew they would never see a dentist again. Some carried their caskets with them. In our air conditioned houses, and with cell phones and email (even on a foreign field) it is difficult to totally trust God. One night in a jungle hut in the Philippines, surrounded by NPA rebels who had threatened us the day before, I learned a little about trusting God.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Trouble can make us trust God more than we ever dreamed possible. If we are ever to do mighty things in God's work, we must trust Him and have faith that "all things work together for good to them that love Him."

2. Trouble can be the means of us learning to bear fruit.

Every Christian should bring forth other Christians. Not all of us are in the reaping but all of us can participate in bringing forth a harvest. Plowing is just as important as sowing. One may have a ministry of planting the seed, another that of watering it, and still another that of reaping. We can all do something. What is your ministry? If you are not certain, it may be that God allowed these things to come in order that you may be more effective in His work.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2).

3. Trouble can make us an instrument to teach and encourage others.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. (Genesis 42:21).

God does not allow these things just to "get even" with us. Joseph's brothers saw themselves for the first time after they had trouble. God always has a purpose in sorrow. If we search for it and take heed, what great blessings can come! Fanny Crosby, the blind hymnist, said she would never have written the great hymns with normal eyesight. Dr. Aubrey Martin, one of my seminary teachers, lost his eyesight as a boy. He memorized all of the New Testament by Braille and could quote entire books of the Bible. He was one of the most effective teachers I have ever known.

Joseph, after being mistreated by his brothers, did not see it as something bad. He did not become bitter and blame God. He saw through the sorrow and loss of family a greater purpose.

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:20).

God allowed this to bring you to even more effective service for him. Dr. and Mrs. Lee Roberson lost their baby daughter, Joy. Out of that sorrow, they saw the greater truth, God can use sorrow in our lives to bring blessing to others. Camp Joy was started and for over 40 years, thousands of young people have come to know the Lord. Look past the clouds and you will see the Sun.