

## Let The Bible Speak Series

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### The Dark Mile

In Job 14:1 we read "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away. He flees like a shadow and does not continue." In Scotland there is a narrow and dangerous mountain road. There is no way around it, and thus many must travel it to reach their homes. So many have lost their lives on this treacherous passageway that the people call it "the dark mile." Between here and our eternal home, we must also travel the dark mile, perhaps many times. There will be no way around it, we will have to go through it to reach home. It is in this treacherous darkness that many souls become spiritual casualties on their journey to heaven. The world is filled with all kinds of trouble and disappointments. On every hand, we see pain, sickness, trouble, war, famine, starvation etc. Our own sense of justice leads us to believe that goodness should be accompanied by comfort and evil by discomfort and punishment. Yet everyday observation proves that is not the case, for we see many good people who suffer adversity. I would like to begin today by pointing out that Adversity Is Certain.

Experience teaches that no person is exempt from hardships. Trouble comes to the righteous and wicked, the young and old, the rich and poor. It is all around us. God has warned us to expect trouble. We should never be surprised when trials come. Job. 5:7 "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" Job. 14:1 "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." Some have thought that having God in their life would lift them above all trials. However, that very fact often brings one directly into conflict and struggles. This was repeatedly demonstrated in the life of Paul, who was a great man of God. On his missionary journey to Rome---he had one long fight, with persecuting Jews, venomous vipers, storms at sea, and a narrow escape from a watery grave. Moses fully understood this principle, but "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God..."

Heb.11:25. Christians are taught to expect hardships: 1Pet.2:20 "When ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." Phil.1:29 "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. 1Peter 3:14-17 "But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye...for better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." John 16:20-22 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice." 2Tim. 3:12 "Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It is impossible for the Christian to avoid heartaches. He will not only bear his own burdens, but will be grieved by the evil and suffering all about him. Christ wept over lost souls. Paul was so grieved over the lost state of his kinsmen that he said, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." Rom. 9:2

II. Tribulations Are Uncertain Trials are to come, yet they are most uncertain.

A. Uncertain As to Time. "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." Jas.4:14-15

Life can change in a hurry. It did for Job. Tomorrow's sun may find us enveloped in a heartache which we cannot now imagine. God in His goodness veils the future from us.

B. Uncertain as to kind. We know not what form of trial we may be called upon to bear.

C. Uncertain as to length. To a sufferer, time can be the most comforting friend, or the cruellest foe.

When one sees no end to a problem, it is then that hopelessness and despair set in. (Ex: we all can stand the dentists drill for a few minutes, but what is we had to endure it day and night for rest of our life?) We are commanded to "run with patience, the race before u." Heb. 12:1. This essentially means that we work on the tasks before us, even while enduring great sorrows. We cannot sit and wait for deliverance from the furnace of affliction. We must work while in the furnace. Paul had to learn to live with the "thorn in the flesh." This is running with patience. I have seen women care for an invalid child for years. I have seen others bury a beloved companion and then turn their hands to the exacting challenge of rearing fatherless or motherless children, all the time carrying in their hearts a sorrow never lifted. We have seen men go about daily tasks while carrying some heavy burden of physical disability, with never a word of complaint. this is running with patience..."

III. Trials Are Painful. We are human. Regardless of the reason, or the good that may come from trials, they are painful. Paul endured the severest bonds and afflictions, and said "None of these things move me." He did not say "None of these things hurt me, for they did. The hurt, however, did not move him away from the Father.

God understands our pain, both of body and spirit. He speaks of his children who are "in heaviness through manifold temptations" 1Pet. 1:6 "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous." Heb. 12:11 He did not rebuke Job for his despondency and anguished cries. He knew he was going through the refiner's fire, and being in the midst of the fire cannot at that time be pleasant. As Christ neared the cross, he "began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Mt. 26:37-38

IV. Tribulations are Temporary The Christian understands that hardships are fleeting and insignificant when compared with eternity. Those who hold to the "this world only" philosophy, cannot have the comfort that comes from a belief in a God who watches over his creation. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" Rom. 8:17-18. When the crown is won at last

Who will count the heartaches past? "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" 1Pet. 1:6

V. Trials are Beneficial---For our profit. Since hardships and heartaches are inevitable, it is only wise for us to learn to receive them with the right attitude. In so doing, we benefit ourselves. When the surgeon's knife is in a patient, it is easy to think the surgeon cruel, rough or unsympathetic; but the patient is not at that time in a proper state to judge correctly. If however he is convinced of the value of the surgery beforehand, he can endure tremendous pain it brings. To rail on the surgeon in indignation, bitterness or contempt, would indeed be a mark of folly, ignorance and ingratitude. In much the same way, the wrong attitude toward adversity is the thing which destroys, not the adversity itself. Just what is the wrong attitude: (1) to receive it with contempt and indignation, railing at God. (2) To emerge from it in impenitence or bitterness. The right attitude: an understanding that trials promote our spiritual growth and are thus "for our profit." "My Son despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Heb.12:5-10. We all understand the value and necessity of discipline in the proper training of a child. How much more is it necessary for our spiritual development? Godliness is not a gift, but an achievement. And usually one thorn of experience is worth more than a whole briar-patch of warning. Heb. 7:8 tells us that Christ learned through suffering. We are all still in the process of being made. As a sculptor works with marble, he must cut here and chisel there, or the stone remains rough, ugly and

unpolished. Our present distress may be but a tool in the Father's hand to chisel us for eternity; so do not despise it, but use its valuable help. Whatever our hardship, we must remember that God is neither helped by our righteousness, nor hurt by our sin, as pointed out by Elihu--Job 35:6-7 "If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him? If you are righteous what do you give Him,? What does He receive from your hand?" We are not doing him a big favor by remaining faithful through trials; he is doing us a favor by teaching us through trials how to be faithful. When a mother eagle decides that her young should learn to fly, she literally kicks one out of the nest high in the clefts of the rocks. The eaglet starts downward, frightened and struggling, flapping his little untrained wings while falling. The mother eagle soars above him and observes his efforts for a while. Then she flies underneath the weary eaglet and takes him upon her own wing and bears him again upward. God uses this very situation as a description of his watchful care over us: "As the eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead them" Deut. 32:11-12. To strengthen us and fit us for a glorious eternity, he allows us to struggle and try. All the while he is tenderly watching. When the burden seems greater than we can bear, when it seems that we must cease our struggle and fall completely, then He is there to bear us upward again. By this we grow. Soldiers are not made by fancy uniforms and colorful parades, but by marching long with heavy burdens, by fording streams, climbing mountains, and pitting themselves against heavy obstacles, both mental and physical. Each battle increases strength and ability for the next one. So it is with God's soldiers. We are told to rejoice in persecutions (Mt.5:11-12) Is that possible? H.G. Spafford was a business man in Chicago. A good man, and deeply religious. He had some serious financial reverses and during the time of readjustment, he lost his home. He sent his wife and four daughters to live with some friends in France until things improved. In mid-ocean the French steamer collided with another and sank in twelve minutes. Two hundred and thirty people lost their lives. The four daughters drowned, but his wife was rescued. She wired her husband from France "saved alone. What shall I do?" Mr. Spafford was almost overcome with grief. He had lost his property, his four precious daughters were buried beneath the dark waves of the sea, and his wife was prostrate with grief on the other side of the world. In that sad state, he wrote a song that has blessed and comforted thousands

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul."

Paul declared that he had learned to "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" 2Cor. 12:7-10. Paul took pleasure in his infirmities because of the good results they had on his morale. The greater his trials might be, the more he would realize the value of the Lord's help.