

"It Takes Tribulation To Make A Man"

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22.

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." Romans 5:3-4.

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." II Corinthians 1:4.

"For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know." I Thessalonians 3:4.

This subject lies very close to life. With all the sunshine and joy and pleasure and song that are to be found in life, men are living under a dispensation of trial and tribulation. We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. This is why a sermon on tribulation will ever be a sermon from life. "It takes tribulation to make a man." It takes tribulation to make anything worth while.

Again and again the Saviour tried to show His disciples that in following Him they would incur hardship, danger, and perhaps death at the hands of an indifferent and hostile world. He pointed out to them that their ideas about His kingdom were not based on facts, but that they were the fruit of their imaginations. So their dreams of offices of prestige and power in His kingdom were not to be realized.

One of the outstanding problems of each generation is the question of adversities which befall us and the vast amount of suffering and misery in the world. Multitudes grapple with this problem each day as they face their own personal losses and troubles. One who is not touched by the anguish about him is lacking in vision or in feeling. Doubtless there are many who feel at times as one recently said, "There is so much trouble in life, I wonder if it is worth living." Our thought is that the adverse forces which bear upon us can only be resisted successfully by a stronger force within the soul.

All of life is a matter of attack and resistance. Our bodies are being attacked continually by hostile forces. Our hope is not in immunity from assault but in repulsing the attacks by a superior force. To be sure, we cannot expect to evade disease germs, but we can build up and maintain a resistance which will turn them back. This is also true of the soul. Our spiritual nature is a citadel surrounded by hostile forces. Sometimes it surrenders and throws open the gates to the enemies. But noble resistance and counter attacks will bring abiding victories. Christ promised His followers that He would fortify them against the storms of life.

I. The Fact of Tribulation.

Christ never promised His disciples freedom from trouble. Rather, He pointed out to them that they would be in the midst of adverse situations quite frequently. He said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Some deny the existence of trouble, sorrow, and suffering, but no one is ever helped by such denial.

There is the bitterness of bereavement. Then, there is the bitterness of bodily suffering. Sleepless nights and weary days of tossing on a bed of sickness tend to

take the sunshine out of life. And then there are those trifling ailments and bodily infirmities for which you get little sympathy, but which keep your body enfeebled and your mind depressed. Divine power is needed to bear a life of constant pain. No human strength could stand it without giving way to irritation or despondency.

There is also the bitterness of disappointment. Some cherished possession is taken away from you, some valuable property is lost, your earthly means of support take to themselves wings and fly away, some object on which you had set your heart is snatched away out of your reach, or some friend whom you had implicitly trusted suddenly proved unfaithful.

Tennyson reminds us that "Never morning wore to evening but some heart did break." A Spanish proverb declares that "There is no home in all the land but will sooner or later have its hush."

Those eleven men about the table in the upper room, who first heard Christ say, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," were facing the greatest upheaval of their lives. Just ahead of them was the darkness of doubt and despair. According to tradition, ten of these men died deaths of violence and cruelty. They suffered greatly and heroically for their faith. One of them, James, was beheaded. This was the beginning, but not the end, of suffering for the Master's sake. If the storms are beating upon you, whether they arise from unfavorable economic conditions, ill health, or personal problems, remember that a great company of earth's noblest and best men and women have trod that way before you.

David had that experience and said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." David's desire for relief from trouble is the common sigh of mankind. Meek, yet mighty, Moses, meeting the murmuring multitude and enduring their bitter complaints, came finally to feel that his strength was exhausted, and his patience had reached the breaking point. He said, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." All of us are familiar with the pathetic cry of Elijah, that courageous contender for the right, who after a long and bitter struggle felt that the tide had turned against him, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." With burdens growing heavier daily, Martin Luther exclaimed, "I am utterly weary of life. I pray the Lord will come forthwith and deliver me hence."

This recital of the discouraged cries of others is given for our encouragement. It enables us to see that we are not alone as we face our trials, but that we share them with the noblest lives of the race. And all of these who, in the moments of their dejection, felt that the outlook was hopeless have nevertheless triumphed over their troubles. From the teachings of the Bible and from experience, we know for a certainty that we shall not be exempt from the storms without.

II. The Fruits of Tribulation.

1. Tribulation reveals what is in a person.

We must know ourselves before we can make anything strong and worthwhile out of ourselves. The mariners speak of a ship "finding herself." The only way in which a ship can find herself is by launching out into the deep where it will encounter the storm and the gale. Likewise, man finds himself in

tribulation. Our true nature is often hidden, buried, or clamped down out of sight, but the touch of tribulation commands our true self to stand forth. This sudden epiphany of character may not always be pleasant or reassuring to ourselves or to others. But it can be useful and it ought to be. It teaches us where to build up our walls and to fortify our souls.

2. Tribulation strengthens a person.

The tendency of tribulation is to form strength of character. The tried man is the strong man, rather than the untried one. We need that which will train the powers of self-discovery and self-control. Easy lives and so-called good environment will not arouse the dormant powers. It usually takes the stress and strain of hard necessity to make us acquainted with our hidden selves, and to arouse the sleeping giants within us.

Men without tribulation, struggle, and trial are not strong men. It takes tribulation to make a man. It helps to make a great church. When we sit at ease in our comfortable churches, with a freedom to worship, which in far too many cases has been turned into a license to neglect worship, we do well to remember the generations of steadfastness and endurance and suffering that lie back of us; how other men have labored and we have entered into their labors.

3. Tribulation purifies a person.

When you walk along the shore of a beautiful lake, you note that the waters are as clear as crystal and the banks are thick with forests. The beach is strewn with rocks and boulders, but they are irregular and ugly. It is not the gentle lapping of the waves of the inland lake which grinds and polishes the boulders into white, round, and smooth pebbles. It takes grinding and tossing and the crushing of the ocean breakers to do that. So, it is by the side of the ocean that you find the fair and shapely stones.

We are not here in the world just to find an easy berth, to make money, to be decorated with honors, and to drift down the placid streams between flowering banks. Rather, we are here to grow in likeness to God. And the only way to do that is by way of tribulation.

Then take your thorn in the flesh, your smarting wound, your festering hurt, your grievous burden, your disappointment that never grows old, your cross, your thorny crown and look at it anew through the glass of this great and glorious truth. You will see that it is by tribulation that we become Christlike and Godlike.

"My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me;
I may but choose the colors --
He worketh steadily.
Full oft He worketh sorrow,
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the under side."

4. Tribulation creates sympathy.

There are many Christians to whom one cannot go for sympathy. They have not suffered. Tenderness comes through suffering. In order to comfort others effectively, we must first have experienced affliction ourselves.

5. Tribulation brings us closer to God.

A lady said, "My sufferings have brought me closer to God." Her words were spoken slowly, deliberately, and with an air of finality. It was the sure verdict of her mind and heart. Hard and weary as had been the days through which she had passed, they had brought her nearer to God. There was an accent, too, as if she meant to say that this was the great thing in life, not what we have, or think, or do, but that we should come close to God. Yes, nearer to God, whatever be the path, whatever the cost, is the great thing in life.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee."

6. Tribulation produces hope.

God's goodness to us under past trials leads us to hope for still greater revelations of His goodness yet to come. So, the Christian is ever looking forward. When he bears the cross, he is looking forward to the crown. When he is suffering for his Master's sake, he is looking forward to the time when he shall reign with Him in glory. A young lady, who was an invalid, and lived in Nova Scotia wrote these lines:--

"My life is a wearisome journey;
I am sick of the dust and the heat;
The rays of the sun beat upon me;
The briars are wounding my feet;
But the city to which I am going
Will more than my trials repay;
All the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way.

There are so many hills to climb upward,
I often am longing for rest;
But He Who appoints me my pathway
Knows just what is needful and best.
I know in His Word He has promised
That my strength shall be as my day;
And the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way.

He loves me too well to forsake me,
Or give me one trial too much:
All His people have dearly been purchased,
And Satan can never claim such.
By-and-by I shall see Him and praise Him
In the city of unending day;
And the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way.

Though now I am footsore and weary,
I shall rest when I'm safely at home;
I know I'll receive a glad welcome,
For the Saviour Himself has said, 'Come.'
So when I am weary in body,
And sinking in spirit, I say,
All the toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way.

Cooling fountains are there for the thirsty;
There are cordials for those who are faint;
There are robes that are whiter and purer
Than any that fancy can paint.
Then I'll try to press hopefully onward,
Thinking often through each weary day,
The toils of the road will seem nothing
When I get to the end of the way."

Christ explained to His disciples that the secret of an untroubled heart is not in the absence of sorrow, but in a genuine and growing trust in God the Father, and in Jesus the compassionate Saviour. "Believe in God, believe also in Me." How does this faith sustain us when we are in a situation of adversity, or when we come face to face with the troubles of life? Faith enables us to see a purpose in life.

Some years ago a ship on the Saint Lawrence River was wrapped in so dense a fog that even the lights could penetrate only a few feet from the vessel. Fear of disaster gripped the hearts of many of the passengers and they plead with the mate to speak to the captain whom they could not find, that he should stop the boat immediately. The officer replied: "The fog does not extend very far up; the captain is at the masthead, above the fog-line; he can see clearly, and it is he who is directing the ship." There are times in our lives, too, when the present is so dark that we cannot read any meaning in the experience through which we are passing, but nevertheless we believe that He who lives in light is directing our lives, and He makes no mistakes. To believe that there is a purpose, though hidden from our sight, in our sufferings and in our sorrows means that we have found the secret of a conquering life.

Such faith as Christ urged upon His disciples enables one to face his troubles and transform them into noble character. Faith is the philosopher's stone which transmutes the baser metals of adversity and sorrow into the refined gold of strong and beautiful lives. One has said, "When you and I have faced a personal calamity and have handled it well, we have always added a dimension to our character." We may seldom understand all our experiences in this life, but somewhere and sometime we will see that all of God's ways were right and best.