

WHEN TROUBLE COMES

Job 5:7; 14:1

This subject is one which 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 trouble and trial and tribulation. That is why a sermon on trouble will be a message from life.

I. The Reality of Trouble.

We had better take trouble for granted and accept life as essentially difficult. Life begins in painful birth and ends in painful death, and its fabric in between has dark threads running through it. Adversity is one of the constituent elements of human life. Regardless of how much we would like to strike the word "trouble" out of the vocabulary of our experience, trouble will continue until our Lord returns.

Trouble is an inescapable portion of human life. It arises in part from the complexities and conflicts in human nature. Many of us are troubled by the sins over which we have never gained the victory. We are troubled by our weaknesses which cause us to realize that we have failed to measure up to all that God expected of us. Trouble springs in part from the nature of the material world of which we are a part. It comes in larger part from the world to which our lives are related in multiplied forms. Trouble is an inescapable experience of every person.

And yet, despite the accumulated experience of the ages and the insight of the seers, many think of an untroubled life as the ideal one; and of trouble, therefore, as a wretched intruder to be resented, a miserable trespasser that has no business here, to be removed if possible, and, if not, to be endured.

To realize that trouble is as universal as human nature, all that one needs to do is to recall Job 5:7, which says, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Light a brush fire at the eventide and then watch the sparks as they fly upward. They are the inevitable result and accompaniment of the fire. Likewise, wherever the fire of life is lighted, wherever a man passes through the experiences of this world, upward fly the sparks of trouble. Everybody has trouble of some kind. Abraham had land trouble (Genesis 13:1-18). Jacob had business trouble (Genesis 31:36-42). Joseph had rationing trouble (Genesis 41:46-57). Moses had inferiority-complex trouble (Exodus 4:10-16). Samson had romantic trouble (Judges 16:4-31). David had "in-law" trouble (I Samuel 18:12-23). Solomon had marital trouble (Nehemiah 13:26). Hezekiah had physical trouble (II Kings 20:1-7). Job had satanic trouble (Job 1:6-22). Peter had overconfidence trouble (Mark 14:27-72). Trouble is no respecter of persons; it knocks at the door of millionaire and peasant, philosopher and illiterate, believer and unbeliever. After doing what he would and all that he could, man has not been able to save himself from life's besetting troubles.

Job 14:1 says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." Man's troubles begin when he is at a very tender age. No stage of life is exempt from them. They are experienced from the time of infancy to the period of grey hairs. There are all kinds of trouble--troubles of the body, troubles of the mind, troubles of the soul; the troubles we bring upon ourselves, and the troubles others bring upon us. Nobody is exempt from them, and in this warfare there is no discharge.

Sometimes those who seem to have the fewest troubles will have the most. Like the King of Samaria who wore his sackcloth of distress within, many who present to the world a fair, unruffled surface have deep trouble within. The sound of the marching feet of the army of the troubled never ceases. Morning, noon, evening, and midnight,

one can hear them marching by in an endless procession.

Trouble comes to us all. If we have been spared thus far, let us be thankful, but let us be prepared for trouble coming our way sooner or later. It is part of human experience in a world under a curse. It is part of Christian experience too. To become a Christian does not exempt one from trouble. To accept Christ does not mean that there will not be any rugged road to travel, or any dark clouds to obscure the sky. Christianity does not guarantee us that our troubles are over, but it does assure us that there is One Who is over our troubles. 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: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33. 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." We may as well accept the fact that some measure of trouble will be the portion of even the godly. Don't imagine that you will be an exception to the universal experience. It will be far better if you will expect and be prepared for what is part of the common lot of man.

II. The Reasons for Trouble.

In our study of this subject, it will be helpful to realize that trouble has been appointed or permitted by Almighty God. There are no accidents in His providential rule of our lives. He does not make any mistakes. There are not any errors in His eternal plan.

He selects the particular trouble which is best suited to us. When in any trouble, it is well to remember that of the thousands of different kinds of trouble, this is the one which God has selected for you. But, it is not necessary for us to know why. Once, when in deep distress, that old saint of Scotland, Samuel Rutherford, was tempted to murmur, and he almost gave up hope. But ere long he was given comfort and strength in his distress, and began to see the purpose of it. It was then that he wrote to the effect that we must never try to read God's messages through the envelope in which they come. He meant that it takes time for God's purpose to be made clear to us. He wrote, "Fool that I was not to know that the messages of God are not to be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed." Sometimes,

"Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned."

1. Trouble enriches our lives.

God intends for trouble to be a blessing to us. If one should go through this congregation inquiring in what kind of experience we have learned the most profound and meaningful lessons about life, how often it would turn out that trouble has been our teacher! It comes into our lives to make us wiser and better and more useful. Sometimes trouble comes in order that we might be more humble. Humility is one of the richest pearls in the Christian crown of graces. It is a quality that is recognized by men, admired by the angels, and appreciated by the Lord. Therefore, we should conduct ourselves in such a manner that trouble would not be necessary to keep us humble.

Many times trouble serves to deepen our lives. The untroubled life is often shallow and frivolous. Generally speaking, the deeper and richer lives are those that have had their troubles. An Armenian and an American were talking about the shallow tastes of so many Americans in literature and in music. When the American asked the Armenian why, in his judgment, the rank and file in this country do not relish the deeper and finer things, his reply was: "I don't think America has suffered enough."

Robert Browning Hamilton wrote:

"I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow
Ane ne'er a word said she;
But, Oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!"

When you and I have faced a personal calamity and have handled it well, we have always added a new dimension to our characters.

2. Trouble protects us from certain dangers.

As someone has said, "Often our trials act as a thorn-hedge to keep us in the good pastures." Many lives would have remained hard, and sterile, and unfruitful had God not plowed and harrowed them with affliction and trouble. The Holy Spirit could not get full possession of them, and He could not work through them, until they were broken by trouble. Every now and then there is a tendency to yield to temptation, but some trouble takes our attention away from it.

3. Trouble makes us stronger.

Trouble often strengthens character. The tried man, rather than the untried, is the strong one. We need that which will cultivate and develop the powers of self-discovery and self-control. Easy lives will not arouse the dormant powers. It usually takes the stress and strain of hard necessity and trouble to acquaint us with our hidden selves, and to arouse the sleeping giants within us.

Men without trouble, trial, and tribulation are not strong. 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 worship, we do well to remember the generations of steadfastness and endurance and suffering that lie back of us; how others have labored and we have entered into their labors.

4. Trouble deepens our sympathy.

There is no teacher like experience. When we pass through trouble and suffering, we become more sympathetic with others. Paul said, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." II Corinthians 1:3-4. God comforts us in order that we may be comforters. We get comfort from God in our troubles in order that we may pass it on to others who need it also. In order to comfort others effectively, we must first have had trouble or affliction ourselves.

5. Trouble 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. And trouble has caused so many to draw closer to the Lord.

6. Trouble releases undreamed-of powers in us.

Trouble and tragedy have been the means of lifting many a life from idleness to serviceableness, and from mediocrity to genius. Much of the greatness of men has been produced by suffering. Tennyson's grief for his dead friend, Arthur Hallam, gave birth to his greatest poem, "IN MEMORIAM". John Bunyan probably would have lived and died an inconspicuous tinker except for twelve years in a dungeon in Bedford Jail, for it was there that he wrote his immortal "PIILGRIM'S PROGRESS."

Much as we hate trouble, without it our best never comes out--no hardship, no hardihood; no fight, no fortitude; no suffering, no sympathy; no pain, no patience. We may not like that kind of world but that is the kind of world in which we live. Behind every great virtue stands a corresponding trouble.

III. The Reactions to Trouble.

1. Undesirable reactions.

(1) Resentment.

Some are very resentful when trouble comes. They rebel against God because of it. Those who have an attitude of resentment become hard, calloused, and cynical. Job's wife was so resentful that she advocated that he "curse God and be done with the whole thing." Oftimes those who have trouble turn away from God. They cease church attendance and Christian activity. But how utterly foolish and futile! Bitterness and rebellion are poor panaceas for trouble. Never let trouble cause you to be resentful or drive you away from God. If you turn away from Him in bitterness, you will become miserable.

(2) Self-pity.

Some, who have troubles, focus all their attention upon their own wretchedness. They become sorry for themselves. They whine and bewail their hard lot. They let trouble plunge their lives into despair and wreck their faith on futility. They frankly declare that life has never dealt so harshly with any other. But, this attitude of self-pity has never helped any person in the least.

2. Desirable reactions.

(1) Earnest prayer.

In Psalm 50:15 God tells us what to do in case of trouble. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." What a blessed privilege! God is offering Himself to men in their day of trouble. It affords Him a great opportunity to prove that He is concerned about us and our needs.

When prayer is sincere and heartfelt, when men come humbly and penitently to God in their trouble, He responds with the promise, "I will deliver thee." Sometimes deliverance comes in the form asked, sometimes in another form according to the wisdom of God, but it comes. God does His work in answer to prayer. He delivers from trouble at the time He sees best, in the way He sees best, and by the means He sees best. God delivers us from our troubles when

we call upon Him, either by granting what we ask, or by doing something else for us in our need that is more for His glory and for our good.

A motherless little girl was asked, "What do you do without a mother to whom to tell your troubles?" She replied, "My mother told me before she died to go to the Lord Jesus. She said that He had always been her friend, and that if I would go to Him He would always be my friend." "But," said the questioner, "He is a great way off, and has so much to do; He cannot attend to you." "I don't know how much He has to do," said the child, "but He has said He would take care of me, and I believe He will." Would that all of us had the faith of that orphan child!

(2) Christlike resignation.

When we have troubles, let us pray for deliverance from them, if it is the Lord's will for us. But, above everything else, let us be willing for the Lord to have His way. This attitude will increase our faith in Him, our love for Him, and our devotion to Him. Christlike resignation will make us better people. When trouble comes, take it all to Christ and let Him solve it according to His perfect will.

(3) Greater usefulness.

After all, our chief concern with trouble is not to find an explanation, but a victory. It is not to elaborate a theory, but to lay hold upon a power; not to explain this thing, but to obtain grace and help to bear it and to be more useful because of it. The Christian answer to the mystery of trouble is not an explanation, but a reinforcing presence to stand beside you through the darkness. You may not be able to tell why God permits you to have trouble, but you will hardly insist on a full reply to that question when you are assured that He Himself comes right into your heart and life, and shares the pain that afflicts you. What more can you ask of Him than that? While we frequently take trouble as a curse and resent it, we need to remember that Christ took trouble as a trust and used it. He made it the most impressive spiritual force in human history. They handed Him the cross as a disgrace and He took it as an opportunity saying, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself."