

WHAT TO DO ABOUT TRIBULATIONS

"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.

This subject, "What To Do About Tribulations," lies very close to life, and a sermon on it will be one from life.

I. The Fact Of Tribulations.

One cannot associate with people as I do, and be in the corridors and rooms of the hospital as much as I am, and observe so much sickness and suffering, without becoming intensely aware of the tribulations of mankind. In addition to the many who receive treatment in the hospitals, multitudes are sick in their homes, who never reach the hospitals. Perhaps even greater tribulation stalks among those who are mentally and spiritually sick.

Tribulation is a part of life. With all the sunshine, and joy, and song that are to be found in life, people are living under a dispensation in trial and tribulation. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). If tribulation has not come to you, it will in one form or another. Christ's statement, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," applies to all men. All are afflicted with sickness and pain, the monotony of hard and unwelcome toil, bitter disappointments, blighted hopes, and all the other ills to which the flesh is heir.

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 their troubles. One who is not touched by the anguish about him is lacking in vision or in feeling. Doubtless there are many whose attitude was expressed recently by the one who said, "There is so much trouble in life, I wonder if it is worth living."

Obviously our Lord is not speaking here about the troubles that befall men as men, nor about the chastisement that befalls them as sinners, nor about the evils which dog their steps because they are mortal, or because they are bad, but of the yet more mysterious sorrows which befall them because of their devotion to God.

Our Lord never promised His disciples that their paths would be smoother or wider because they had turned to Him. Imperfection lies at the heart of all human relationships. Because of this suffering and tribulation enter the homes of the righteous as well as those of sinners. Those of us who are Christians have to take our share of the strain in the rough and tumble of everyday life. Christians cannot expect to be immune from that kind of suffering which is the result of folly. Many people are suffering as a result of their own sins. Christianity is no insurance policy against the harvest of human folly.

So many experience the bitterness of disappointment. Sleepless nights and weary days of tossing on a bed of sickness take the sunshine out of life. Cherished and valuable possessions are taken from you, your means of earthly 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 trusted implicitly suddenly proves unfaithful. Tennyson wisely reminded 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."

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. Joseph was cast into prison, not because he was unrighteous, but because he refused to yield to temptation.

The furnace of Nebuchadnezzar was heated seven times hotter for the righteous Hebrews who refused to bow down. Daniel was cast into the lion's den, not because of any sin against God, but because he was praying unto God. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." There is no way to count it out. We are not alone in facing trials, but we share them with the noblest lives of the human race. We know that we shall not be exempt from the storms of life.

Frequently somebody makes the private confession, "My life is a hell on earth." In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred where life is like that, it is the result of sin, either their own or the sin of someone near to them. So often one suffers torture of mind and heart because of the sins of her husband or his wife. Multitudes of parents are suffering torture of mind and heart because of the waywardness of their children. If your unhappiness and anxiety are caused by someone else, you can pray, trust God to bring about the right solution, and live consistently for Him. If the hell on earth that you are experiencing is the result of your own sin and foolishness, then do what is necessary to be forgiven of your sin, get something to do for the Lord and others, stick to it, do your best at it, and joy will come pouring back to you.

II. The Facing Of Tribulations.

This is a day of troubled and frustrated minds. Hospitals cannot be built fast enough to provide adequate treatment for those who are mentally and emotionally ill and in need of institutional care. This is a day of aspirin tablets and tranquilizing drugs. It is a day of escapism, with people seeking to escape reality in one way or another. Many seek to escape by running from one thrill to another until there is no new thrill through which to escape. Many seek to escape through alcoholism or narcotic addiction or some other addiction. This is a day of corruption, crime, and violence, involving an ever-increasing number of people.

Since tribulation must at times be the lot of all of us, the question is, "How are we going to face it?" Let us not run away from it. To run away from one spot of trouble is to find yourself in another and perhaps a worse one. To run away from a difficult situation may often seem attractive, but it is always cowardly, and can never be successful in the end.

In facing life's tribulations, it is well to remember that Christ said: "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."

Two artists sought to paint a picture which would best illustrate the idea of peace. One of the artists painted a picture of a beautiful lake high in the mountains. It was a beautiful and peaceful sight. Not a ripple stirred the water. There was not a bird in the sky. Not a leaf drifted down in the breeze. There was no indication of movement in the picture. The other artist painted a picture of a roaring waterfall. Reaching far out over the waterfall was the limb of a mighty oak. Cradled on this limb was a little sparrow, sitting on her nest. There, surrounded by what seemed to be a terrible danger, in the midst of the roar of the waterfall and almost in the spray from the fall, the little sparrow sat upon her nest as though she had not a care in the world. Her nest was cradled on the limb of a mighty oak.

Surely the second artist had the higher conception of peace. And the peace which he pictured portrays well the peace which the Christian finds in Christ, for this peace is not for some far-away time or place, but it is for the here and now in the midst of all the troubles, trials, and tribulations of this life. In Christ there is

peace. We are told that no matter how hard the wind may blow nor how high the waves may roll on the surface of the sea, down in its depths it is always calm, quiet, and still. A young man in the service, who was assigned to submarine duty, said that many times they were caught in terrible storms at sea. He said that the surface craft had to weather the storms, but that those in the submarine service simply submerged and sat on the bottom of the sea until the storm had passed. He said, "Down in the depth of the sea it was calm and quiet and still; you could not even tell that the storm was raging above." It is something like that with the one who has come into possession of the peace about which Christ spoke. The storms of life may rage, but down in the depths of the heart this inner peace, this quiet contentment, and this repose of spirit are never disturbed.

III. The Fruits Of Tribulations.

1. Tribulations reveal what is in a person.

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 through tribulations. One's true nature is often hidden, buried, or clamped down out of sight, but tribulations command the true self to stand out.

2. Tribulations strengthen a person.

The tendency of tribulations is to strengthen character. The tried man is the strong man. We need that which will develop the powers of self-discovery and self-control. 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 struggles, trials, and tribulations are not strong. It takes tribulation to make a man. Tribulations help to make a great church also. When Americans sit at ease in their comfortable churches, with the 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 our forebears labored and we have entered upon their labors.

A Turkish officer once captured a Christian soldier. First threatening the man, then torturing him, and beating him until it appeared that he could not survive, the baffled Turk finally kicked him and said, "What can your Saviour do for you now?" The light in the soldier's eyes was clear as he replied, "He can help me to forgive you." That was strength of the highest sort.

3. Tribulations purify a person.

We have not been placed here just to make money, to be decorated with honors, and to drift with the tides of time, but we are here to grow in likeness to God. The only way to do that is by way of tribulation.

"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. Tribulations cause us to be sympathetic.

There are many Christians to whom people do not go for sympathy, because they have not suffered. Tenderness comes through suffering. In order to comfort others effectively, one must first have experienced affliction himself.

5. Tribulations bring 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. Adversity either makes or mars a person. Whether it is a foe or a friend is determined by whether it turns one from God or draws him closer to God. Nearer to God, whatever the path or the price, 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. Tribulations produce hope.

God's goodness to us through past trials leads us to hope for still greater revelations of His goodness yet to come. The Christian is ever looking forward. When he bears the cross, he is looking forward to the crown. When he is suffering for the sake of his Master, 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 the 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."

One night Dr. Charles Garrett was preaching on life's tribulations to an audience in a large hall in London. Down on the front seat listening intently was an old white-haired man who had been through about every trouble and defeat of life, but through it all Christ had been his companion. Dr. Garrett waxed eloquent in his sermon, dwelling long on the troubles of life. He said, "There is trouble on the left, on the right, behind, and in front of you." The old man couldn't stand it any longer, so he stood up and said, "Yes, brother, but it's always open at the top." How we need to learn this important lesson! Christian faith and hope enable the Christian to transmute the baser metals of adversity and tribulation into the refined gold of strong character and beautiful life. "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 not always understand all of our experiences, but somewhere and sometime we will see that all of God's ways were right and best.