

The Purpose of Trials

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"I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." ~ II Corinthians 7:4

"I glory... in mine infirmities." ~ II Corinthians 12:5

"...We glory in tribulations also ..." ~ Romans 5:3

Paul said, "*We glory in tribulation also.*" How is it possible to have such an experience?

Every true Christian knows something of being resigned in tribulations. It is thought to be a great triumph of grace if, in the midst of troubles, distress and persecutions one is uncomplaining, submissive and patient.

But to "*glory in tribulations,*" "*to take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses*" (II Corinthians 12:10), to actually take pleasure in such things, this is an experience that very few know anything about; indeed to most it seems an impossible experience; it seems moreover utterly unreasonable to expect any such thing.

How can a person take pleasure in that which is unpleasant and painful? The thing is contrary to nature, and indeed seems contrary to common sense; and yet what shall we do with the numerous Scriptures that plainly set forth this experience, like those I have quoted above, and many others to the same effect?

Such an experience must be possible, for Paul and Peter and the other apostles and early Christians had it, and speak of it in the Bible as a thing within.

I apprehend that the reason why so few understand this experience is because they read the Word so carelessly, and understand so little about God's way of life. "*Made perfect through suffering*" (Hebrews 2:10), and "*through death to life*" (Romans 4:25), is God's way, and the one secret of "*glorying in tribulations,*" is to understand **the purpose of trials.**

KEEPING ONE'S EYES ON THE RESULT

He who has his eye on the result, when that result is grand and glorious beyond all expression or comparison, will reckon little of the means, especially if he realizes that they are the *only* possible means, and at the same time the absolutely *certain* means to reach the desired end.

Herein lies the whole secret of this wonderful experience; a worldly person might glory in the severest trials and sufferings if they were absolutely sure that they would thereby reach some lofty position of honor, power and wealth; he would not glory in the sufferings for their own sake, but for the sake of the final outcome.

So the Christian can “*glory in tribulations,*” and “*take pleasure in distresses,*” if he knows that thereby he is drawing nearer and nearer to the life of God; and this is just what the Scriptures teach; we will look at a few passages.

Paul says,

*“We glory in tribulations, **knowing** that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:3-5).

The whole point in this passage depends on seeing the force of the word “*knowing.*” We glory in tribulations, “*knowing that tribulation worketh patience,*” etc.

Do you know this? Do you know that our troubles and sorrows and distresses refine and sanctify us, and make us “*meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?*” (Colossians 1:12).

Do you know that this is the *only* way whereby we may be made thus meet? Do you desire a seat with Christ on His throne? A share in His reign?

Our trials are the means whereby we are fitted for the place God has for us in His kingdom. They give us the necessary training for our office in that kingdom; hence they are the price we have to pay for a government position under the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the knowledge of this fact, viz. that every trial properly borne brings us nearer perfection and the reward, that enables the believer not only to bear them with patience and resignation, but even to rejoice in them, since we know that though

“For the present they are not joyous but grievous, yet afterward they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

Our God is a reasonable Being. He says, “*Come now let us reason together*” (Isaiah 1:18). He deals with us on common sense principles. God’s ways, when rightly understood, will

commend themselves to our own judgment; His requirements and precepts *are just what we should choose ourselves had we the same knowledge*; hence when we come to understand His ways, we readily conform to them because we see that they are best, that this is our “*reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1).

Now then, in regard to trials, if we can only see and understand that they are needful for our training to fit us for a glorious and blessed future, then although we could not rejoice in the trial for its own sake, we could rejoice in it, yea, we could take pleasure in it, for the sake of the benefit we were to derive therefrom in the end.

Men of the world act upon this principle. The Athlete submits to the most rigid training and to great self denial for months together, in order that he may gain the prize in the walking, rowing, or sparring match, or in some other contest of muscle and brawn. “*Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible*” (I Corinthians 9:19-27).

If God has opened your eyes to see something of the glories of the coming kingdom, if the veil of sense has been removed that you have caught a glimpse of the things beyond, “*the unseen things,*” (II Corinthians 4:18) you will understand that the path to those glories lies through trial, suffering and affliction that you may reap the reward by and by.

The apostle says,

“Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment work out for us a far more exceeding, and eternal, weight of glory” (II Corinthians 4:17).

Most people stop here and so lose all the point of the passage; they say, “my afflictions are not light and momentary; they are heavy and continuous, far beyond that of other people, and I cannot see how they are of any benefit to me, nor how I can rejoice in them.” Read the next verse and you will understand how to obtain the experience set forth.

“Our light afflictions which are but for a moment work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, WHILE WE look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal but the things that are not seen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:17-18).

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

Afflicted brother or sister, what are you looking at? Are you looking at yourself and your trials? Are you looking with envious eyes at your neighbors and friends whom you think have an easier time than you? Are you looking with longing eyes at the pleasures and enjoyments, the apparent peace and comfort of others? Wishing that you might possess the same, and comparing your hard circumstances with their apparently pleasant ones?

While you look at such things as these you will not find your afflictions light and momentary,

neither will they work out for you the wonderful glory that Paul speaks of; it is only WHILE you look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen, not seen by the natural eye but apprehended by the eye of faith, (Hebrews 11:13-16) that your afflictions become easily bearable and work out for you the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; your afflictions become light and momentary by comparison with the exceeding glory of the unseen and eternal things; as the apostle says again,

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

NOT WORTHY

Our present sufferings are oft times great in themselves, and sometimes they seem overwhelming while we are looking at them, or compare them with the apparently pleasant circumstances of others, but they *“are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*

So Paul thought when he counted

“all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; ... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:8, 10-11).

The ancient worthies were actuated by the same intense desire, *“not accepting deliverance”* from their cruel persecutions, *“that they might obtain a better resurrection”* (Hebrews 11:35).

Moses *“chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward”* (Hebrews 11:25).

Jesus Christ Himself *“endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him”* (Hebrew 12:2). So, also Jesus taught, listen! *“Blessed are ye when men shall hate you.”*

What! Blessed are ye when men shall hate you! (Luke 6:22-23). Is that the way it reads? Yes, that's the way its reads; but hear the rest.

“Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in like manner did they unto the prophets.”

Well, well, that's a strange *“blessed.”* Blessed when we are hated; we are to rejoice and leap for joy when we are reproached, and slandered, and cast out; that's too much for *human nature.*

Yes, it is too much for human nature, but it is not too much for the *divine nature*, of which we are made “*partakers,*” by the “*exceeding great and precious promises*” (I Peter 4:4).

These promises are God’s notes of hand, and are good for their full face value, and more, yea, “*much more*” (Romans 5:17), because the Great Promisor is “*able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think*” (Ephesians 3:20). But let two things be remembered in regard to the above quoted words of Jesus, “*and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for the Son of man’s sake*” (Matthew 5:11).

If you are spoken against falsely, and for Christ’s sake, then this “Blessed” is yours, and you may rejoice in it. But,

“What glory is it if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps” (I Peter 2:20-21).

We sometimes hear persons say when they are suffering from the ill will or unkindness of others, “If I had done anything to merit such treatment I would not say anything; but to be accused falsely, and be ill treated when you are not to blame, is more than I can bear.” It is not more than Christ bore, and He “*did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*” (I Peter 2:22) and “*if any man hath not the spirit of Christ He is none of His*” (Romans 8:9).

OUR CALLING

Sufferings, afflictions, trials, etc., are a part of the believer’s “*calling*” in this age.

Whatever calling, profession or occupation a man may choose, he would, of course, expect to pass through a certain process of study, discipline and training to fit him for that calling, and that preparatory process is a necessary part of the calling.

So it is in “*the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14).

The process, by which we are prepared for the high position, is of course, a part of the calling.

Therefore,

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, [rather take it as a matter of course, an expected part of your training] and rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy; if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you” (I Peter 4:12-14).

“If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him” (II Timothy 2:12).

Thus are we,

“Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17).

You desire to be glorified with Him by and by, but are you unwilling to walk with Him now in the suffering, humiliation and reproach, and thereby *“fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ”* (Colossians 1:24)?

It is only as we know now something of *“the fellowship of His sufferings”* (Philippians 3:10) that we shall know by and by, *“the power of His resurrection.”* And what a wonderful privilege it is thus to be permitted to share with Christ in His sufferings and His glory!

“Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1: 29).

If we *“see our calling”* (I Corinthians 1:26), we shall *“rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ”* (Acts 5: 41).

Therefore,

“My Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials], KNOWING THIS, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4).

ALL JOY

Here again the whole force of the passage depends on the word *“knowing.”* If you know the truth set forth in the latter part of the passage you will have no difficulty about the experience of the first part. You can count your trials *“all joy,”* if you only know that thereby you are being continually advanced toward that condition where you will be *“perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”*

If you do not know this great truth, the idea of counting trials *“all joy”* will seem impossible and even foolish to you; in other words if we understand the purpose of trials, we shall not only be resigned to them, but we can glory in them, yea *“take pleasure”* in them, *“in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses, for Christ’s sake, that the power of Christ may rest upon us”* (II Corinthians 12:9).

The hardest trials we have to bear are injustice, misrepresentation, slander, false accusation, but this is just what we need to perfect our patience, and fit us for a place in the coming kingdom. The Lord’s jewels need cutting, grinding and polishing, before they shall be fit to be set in His *“crown of rejoicing”* (I Thessalonians. 2:19).

The severer the process the more brilliant will be the finished gem, and the more perfectly will it be able to flash forth the reflection of the glories of the great Artificer. Hence the believer, fortified with this knowledge of the purpose of evil, can “smile at the storm,” knowing that – let it blow ever so hard and so angry, the gale can only “drive them nearer home.”

Perhaps someone is ready to ask at this point “Is not the believer ever to be sad and sorrowful? Should he always be full of joy and mirth no matter what comes?” Surely the child of God is sad and sorrowful oftentimes. Frequently, there is but very little mirth in his heart, and yet he may rejoice even while he weeps. Did you never read Paul’s Paradoxes?

“In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God ... by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things” (II Corinthians 6: 4-10).

Oh wonderful and blessed experience of life in death, joy in sorrow, riches in poverty, “*all things*” in “*nothing!*” Foolishness to the natural man, but luminous with glory to him that is spiritual! But alas, how few there are who know anything about this experience. Some “*love this present world*” (II Timothy 4:10) so well that they do not know enough even to be resigned in trials, much less to glory in them.

THE AUDACITY OF FAITH

“*When the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8). There is plenty of the spurious article, but where is the genuine? Oh that you and I, friend reader, may be among the few who shall possess that clearness of spiritual insight, and audacity of faith, that shall enable us to “*glory in tribulation,*” to “*take pleasure in infirmities,*” and to “*rejoice and leap for joy*” even on account of those things that the world would reckon among the worst calamities.

“*What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (Job 2:10). He is equally the Creator of both, and both shall equally “*work together for good to them that love God*” (Romans 8:28). Therefore, “*O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,*” (Isaiah. 54:11) triumph over your trials and afflictions by this knowledge of their purpose, for the Lord hath said, “*No I will never leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee*”(Hebrews 13:5).

In a fashionable gathering a young man who affected infidelity heard that a lady of note, then present, professed to believe the Bible. Finding her out in the company, he made bold to ask if it were true that she believed the Bible. “Yes, sir, I do most certainly,” replied the lady decidedly. “Why do you believe it?” still further queried the skeptic. “Because I am acquainted with the Author,” was the quick reply, that effectually put a stop to all further questioning.

“Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth in this, that he understandeth and knoweth ME, that I am the Lord who exerciseth loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 9: 23-24.)

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