

The Sorrowful Man's Question

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound question of why God allows suffering and continued life to those whose paths are hidden and who are surrounded by sorrow, urging believers to trust in God's wisdom and love despite unanswered questions.

Scripture: Job 3:23, Job 1:1, Job 2:7, Romans 9:21, Job 38:2, Matthew 26:39

Topics: "Suffering", "Divine Providence", "Faith and Trust"

Description

In 'The Sorrowful Man's Question,' C.H. Spurgeon compassionately addresses the profound anguish of those suffering without clear reasons, drawing from the example of Job. He encourages believers to trust in God's sovereign wisdom and love, even when life's path is hidden and the heart is heavy. Spurgeon warns against questioning God's purposes and calls for humble submission, offering hope and comfort to those in deep sorrow.

Transcript

"Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?" Job 3:23.

I AM very thankful that so many of you are glad and happy. There is none too much joy in the world and the more that any of us can create, the better. It should be a part of our happiness and a main part of it, to try to make other people glad. "Comfort you, comfort you My people," is a commission which many of us ought to feel is entrusted to us. If your own cup of joy is full, let it run over to others who have a more trying experience. If you, yourself, are privileged to have flashing eyes and elastic steps, and a bounding heart, be mindful to speak words of good cheer to such as are in bonds! Feel as if you were bound with them and try to revive their drooping spirits. That is what I am going to aim at, tonight, so you will excuse me if I bid, "good-bye," for a while to you joyous ones! I want to seek after those who have no such delight as you now possess—those who are, on the contrary, suffering from extreme depression of spirit. Sometimes, we must single out the wounded ones of the flock. That is what I am about to do, yet I feel sure that while some few will be distinctly sought after, there will be something that may be of use to the many who are in a less sorrowful condition. The 99 shall get their full portion although the shepherd goes especially after the lost one.

The question of our text was put by Job when he first opened his mouth in the extreme bitterness of his anguish. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?" His case was so sad and so trying that life itself became irksome to him. I suppose that by, "light," here, he means the

power to see the Light of God, the life which lives in the light. "Why," he asked in his agony, "is that continued to a man when God has filled him with sorrow upon sorrow?" The verses preceding our text are to the same effect—"Therefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul which long for death, but it comes not; and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; which rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave."

The Patriarch was weary of living and, perhaps, we shall not wonder so much at his pitiful lamentation if we remember the extreme distress into which he had been brought. He had lost all his property. Stroke by stroke all his wealth had been taken away from him. He might have borne that if it had been his only loss, but close upon the heels of it had come sore bereavement. His happy children, for whom he daily cared and whom he had tenderly loved, were all destroyed in a moment—while they were feasting in the house of one of their brothers. The calamity seemed all the greater because it came in the very midst of their joys. Then, as if that was not trial enough, Job was, himself, smitten from head to foot with boils. If you have ever seen a person in that condition, I am sure that you must pity him. There is a dear friend of ours, now with God, whom I visited when he was in much the same state as that. Perhaps he had not to endure quite all that Job suffered, but something exceedingly like it had befallen him. The irritation, the pain and the depression of spirit that come with that particular form of disease all tend to make us treat very gently the petulant expressions of Job.

We may not excuse them, but only he among us that is without fault may take up the first stone to cast at him. I will warrant that if we had suffered as he did, been brought to poverty, left childless, and then been tortured as he was, from head to foot—and even his wife rendering him no comfort, but, on the contrary, adding to his grief and woe—we might have said even worse things than Job did! For remember, dear Friends, that he said nothing against God in the time of his deepest sorrow. He cursed most vehemently the day of his birth and wished that he had never existed, or that he might

speedily pass away to sleep with the generations that are dead. He used unwise and foolish expressions—but any of us might have used far worse words if we had been in his case, so we will not condemn him, but we will see what lessons we can learn from his experience.

I think that Job's experience teaches us the very small value of temporal things. To have spiritual blessings and to enjoy them, is one thing, but to have earthly things, and to enjoy them, is quite another. You may have an abundance of them and yet they may be utterly tasteless to you, or they may even be bitter as gall to you—and you may curse the day that gave them to you. I am sure that it is so, because Job speaks thus concerning life, which is the chief of all earthly things. It is true, although Satan said it, "All that a man has will he give for his life," yet we may be brought into such a condition that we may wish that we had never been born! Life itself may become so wearisome to us that we may even wish to escape from it, that we may be at rest, as we hope.

Job had once enjoyed every comfort that heart could desire and he still had this blessing of life left to him. But even that had become curdled and soured—the last thing to which a man usually clings had become distasteful and disgusting to him—so that he set no store by it, but longed to get rid of it. O Beloved, seek eternal treasures, for there is no moth that can eat them, no rust can mar them, no fermentation or corruption can injure them. But, as for the things of time and sense, if you do possess them, use them as though you had them not and never make them your gods, for they are but as a shadow that passes away in a moment. They come, and they are gone. And if you make idols of them, the Lord may permit you to retain them, but take away from you all power to enjoy them. You may have abundance and yet not be

able to relish even the bread you eat, or the drink that refreshes you! You may have a loss of health, or a loss of all power to be happy, though everything that men think to be the cause of happiness may be laid abundantly at your feet.

With this as a preface, I now come to my text and ask you to notice, first, the case which raises the question. Secondly, the question itself. And, thirdly, answers which may be given to the question—"Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?"

I. First, notice THE CASE WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?"

That is to say, "Why does God permit men to live when their souls are under deep depression and gloom? Why does He not let them die at once? When their days are spent in weariness and their nights yield them neither rest nor refreshment—when they look upward and see nothing to give them hope, or onward, and behold nothing but that which is even more dreadful than the present—why is it that God continues life to those who are in such sad circumstances?" Well, dear Friends, if life were not continued to any but those who are bright of eye, fleet of foot and joyous of heart, how few would live! And if the first time that darkness fell upon a man's pathway, he were to be permitted to die, well, then, the whole population of the globe would soon be swept away! If our murmuring and petulance demanded that we should die rather than suffer, then we should soon pass away and be gone. And that is the case which is supposed in Job's question—If a man finds himself entirely in the dark, if God's Presence is completely hidden from him and he can find no joy in anything whatever, and his spirit is tossed to and fro with worries and perplexities, the question is—"Why does he continue to live"

Yet, further, the man here described is in such trouble that he can see no reason for the trouble. His "way is hidden." Job could not perceive, in his case, any cause for the distress into which he had been plunged. As far as he knew, he had walked uprightly. He had not sinned so as to be now suffering the result of his sin. He had not committed a crime, otherwise he would have understood the punishment when it came upon him. He looked back upon all that he had done and he could not, at first glance, see in himself any cause for his affliction. Nor, indeed, dear Brothers and Sisters, was there any cause why all these things should have happened to Job by way of punishment, for the Inspired record concerning him is that he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil."

Even the devil, himself, who kept a sharp lookout with his malicious eyes, could not find any fault whatever with which he could charge Job. He deserved the character which God had given to him, though Satan did insinuate that he had acted from interested motives. He asked, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" That question has always seemed to me to be a very crafty one, yet very foolish, for if it could have been proved that Job had feared or served God for nothing, then the devil would have said at once that God was a bad Master and that there was no reward for those who served Him. But now that he finds God putting a hedge of roses round about Job, and sheltering him on every side, he declares

that Job was only pious because he found it profitable! He could find no other fault with him—and even that accusation was not true.

Job, on his part, remembered how he had fed the widows and succored the fatherless—how he had acted justly towards his fellow creatures in the midst of an unjust generation and how, amidst a mass of idolaters, he had worshipped God and God alone. He had never kissed his hand in adoration to the moon, as she walked along her shining way in all her queenly brightness, nor had he ever bowed himself down to

the host of heaven, as nearly all around him had done. He stood alone, or almost alone, in that age, as a true and faithful servant of Jehovah—yet his sorrows and trials were multiplied. And so, his way was hidden, he was hedged in by God, and he could not make it out. You know, dear Friends, that it is often a great aggravation of our troubles when we do not know why they come. A man, when he is ill, usually wants to know what is the nature of his disease and how he came to be attacked by it. When we see a person suffering, we generally ask "Where did you catch that cold?" or, "What was it that brought on that congestion?" We always like to know the cause of the complaint—and Job, too, wanted to ascertain the reason for his trouble, but he could not find out—and this rendered it all the more mysteriously grievous to him. And therefore he enquired, "Why do I continue to live, when I have come into such darkness as this?"

It was equally trying to Job that he did not now what to do. There seemed to be nothing that he could do. He was stripped of all his earthly possessions. Those ashes where he sat formed his uncomfortable couch. And the only property that remained to him was a potsherd, with which, in his desperation, he began to scrape himself because of his boils. What could he do in such a case as that? There was no physician there to cure him of his sad complaint.

True, there were his three friends, but all that they could do, or, at least, the best thing they did, was to sit still and say nothing. When they opened their mouths, it was only to pour vinegar into his wounds and to increase his agony tenfold! What could poor Job do under such circumstances? His very helplessness tended to increase his wretchedness.

Am I addressing anyone who is in that kind of perplexity? I think I hear someone moaning, "I don't know which way to turn. I have done everything I can think of and I cannot tell what is to come next. I sit in darkness and can see no light. Why I am brought to this pass, I cannot tell. Or what is the reason for it, I cannot make out. If I could light upon some great and grievous fault which had brought me where I am, I could understand it. But as it is, I am in thick Egyptian night about it all and I know not what to do. Why does a man continue to live when his way is thus hidden, or hedged up." If that is the way you talk, you are in very much the same sort of plight that the Patriarch was in when he uttered the mournful question which forms our text.

What was still worse to Job was that he could not see any way out of his trouble. He said that God had hedged him in, not with a hedge of roses, but with a barrier of briars. Whatever he tried to do, he found himself obstructed in doing it. And there are now men in this world whose sorrows are the more grievous because everything they do to alleviate their distress seems only to increase it. Their efforts are all fruitless. They are like men who have become entangled in a bog—the more they struggle to get out, the deeper they descend. They strive to their very utmost, but it is all in vain. They rise up early, they sit up late, and they eat the bread of carefulness mingled with their tears, but there is a blight on all that they do. Nothing prospers with them. They are at their wits end. Then they begin to cry, "Oh, that we had never been born, rather than that we should have been born to such trouble as this! 'Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?'"

I have thus stated the case which gave rise to Job's question and I should not wonder if I have, at the same time, stated the case of some who are here. Do not think it has been a waste of time for any of you to hear this sorrowful description of a very sad condition of heart and mind. If I should only have been describing one such individual, let us all feel sympathy for him or for her—and let us unite in breathing the silent petition, "Lord, bring Your servant out of prison."

II. Now, secondly, we are to consider THE QUESTION ITSELF. "Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in?" In other words, Why is the light of life given to him who is in the darkness of misery?

Well, first, let me say that it is a very unsafe question for anyone to ask. Brothers and Sisters, we are sure to get into mischief as soon as we begin catechizing God and asking, "why?" Such questioning comes not well from our lips. He is the Potter and we are the clay in His hands. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dis-

honor?" God's eternal purposes are a great deep and when we try to fathom them, we utterly fail. Divine Sovereignty is an ocean without a bottom and without a shore—and all we can do is to set our sail and steer by the chart which He has given us and all the while believe that, as we sang just now—

"Even the hour that darkest seems,

Will His changeless goodness prove;

From the mist His brightness streams,

God is Wisdom, God is Love." Voyaging in that fashion, we shall be safe, indeed!

But to try to cross such a sea without rudder, or chart, or compass—this is a venture—some piece of sailing which we had better not undertake! I tremble whenever I have to think of the wondrous ways of God. I mean when I have to think of them after the manner of the reasoner and not after the style of the Believer! Well did Milton describe the fallen spirits sitting in little groups, discussing predestination and the counsels of the Eternal. You know how Paul answers the man who calls in question the dealings of God either in Providence or in Grace—"No but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Job received his answer when the Lord spoke to him out of the whirlwind and said, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" What God said to him was not so much a vindication of the ways of Providence, but a revelation of His matchless power as the Creator and the Ruler of the universe. And, though men may not like to hear it, yet there is, in the thunder of God's power, an answer which, though it may not always answer the skeptic, but ultimately overpower and silence him! As for God's child, he sits down in the shadow of that black cloud which is the canopy of Deity, and he is well content to be still in the Presence of the Lord of the whole earth! Imitate him, my Brothers and Sisters, and do not keep asking God the why and the wherefore of what He does. It is an unsafe thing to ask such questions!

Next, it reflects upon God. In this question of Job, there is really a reflection upon the wisdom of the Almighty. He has given the Light of Life to a man whose way is hidden and whom He has hedged in, yet Job asks, "Why did He do it?" I think that far too often we indulge our questionings of Divine Providence. Is God to stand and answer to you and me for what He does? Is He bound to tell us the reason why He does it? Job's friend, Elihu, said, "God is greater than man. Why do you strive against Him? For He gives not account of any of His matters." If there is His equal anywhere, let him meet Him in the field and they shall speak together. But to us worms of the dust, answers shall not be given if we haughtily put questions to Him of, "what?" and "why?" To accept the Lord's will with absolute submission is after the manner of the Son of God, Himself, for He prayed, in the hour of His greatest agony, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as You will." But to quibble and to question is after the manner of the prince of darkness who is always seeking to dispute the Sovereignty of God. Therefore,

Beloved, let no question of ours reflect upon the Lord's love, or the dispensations of His Providence.

Further, we may rest quite certain that there must be an answer to this question, a good answer, and an answer in harmony with the Character of God. If there are men and women to be found still sitting in the darkness of grief and sorrow and we ask why they are allowed to continue to live, there is a reply to that enquiry, and a reply consistent with boundless Grace and infinite compassion, but, mark you, that reply may never be given, or, if it is given, we may be incapable of understanding it! There is much that God does that cannot be understood, even by those great men of modern times who would gladly sit on the Throne of the Eternal and judge Him—

"Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod, Rejudge His judgments, be the god of God." I say that there are some answers which God might give if He pleased, but which even they could not comprehend with all their wit and wisdom! And you and I must often come to a point where we have to stop and say, "We cannot understand this." And we shall be still wiser if we add, "Nor do we wish to do so."

Brothers and Sisters, I, for one, have had enough of searching into reasons! I am perfectly satisfied to accept facts. I am ready to bow my reason before the Lord and to accept whatever He says. If I do not, how little shall I ever know! What is there that I really understand? I confess that I see profound mysteries about the most common phenomena around me. I cannot fully comprehend anything when I get right to the bottom of it. There is, on every hand, a deep which I cannot fathom. How, then, shall I understand the ways of God and measure Him with my finite mind, comparing so many inches with the Infinite, weighing so many ounces against the Omnipotent and reckoning so many seconds in

contrast with the Eternal? No, Brothers and Sisters, for such calculations you have nothing to measure with! You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, yes, bottomless! So, the less of such questions as Job's, any of us ask, the better, for, even if we had the answer to them, we might not be able to understand it.

Let me remind you, also, that however important this question may seem to be, it is not the most profitable question. I have heard of a farmer, whose boy said to him, "Father, the cows are in the corn; however did they get there? Boy," he replied, "never mind how they got there—our work is to get them out as soon as we can." That is our main business, also—to get the cows out of the corn! How they got there is a matter that can be thought of, by-and-by, when we have nothing else to do. The origin of evil is a point that puzzles a great many people, but I hope you will not worry your brain over that question. If you do, you will be very foolish. But if you are wise, you will not trouble yourself so much about the origin of evil, as about how to conquer it, in yourself, and in others! Get the cows out of the corn, and then find out how they got in, if you can, and, by so doing, prevent their getting in again.

There will be space enough and time enough, and better Light to discuss these questions when we get up yonder before the Throne of the Eternal. If their solution is of any real consequence to us, we shall get them solved, but, meanwhile, we are colorblind, or, if we are not, it is so dark and so misty here—and we have so many other more pressing matters to attend to—that we had better leave these whys and wherefores, and rely on the Infallible wisdom and the Infinite love of God. If He has done anything, it is quite certain that it is right and just! Yes, if it has come from His dear hands, it is also gracious and kind. There is more sublimity in being like a little child in the Presence of the Eternal than there is in trying to imitate the Deity, for that is but a mockery—a thing to be despised! No, more, it is the greatest insult we can offer to God and it is a pity and a shame that any of us should so live and act. Put aside everything of

the kind, I implore you, and in very truth submit yourselves unto God.

III. But now, in the last place, speaking to the sorrowful person, I want to mention SOME ANSWERS WHICH MAY BE GIVEN TO HIS QUESTIONS. "Why do I continue to live," he asks, "in such sorrow as this? Why does not God take from me the light of life when He does not permit me to enjoy the light of comfort?"

Supposing that you are a child of God, I will give you one answer which ought to satisfy you, though, perhaps, it will not if your spirit is rebellious. God wills it. If you are one of His true children, that is all the answer that you will require—and you will say, with those early Christians, "The will of the Lord be done." And with your Lord, Himself, "Not My will, but Yours be done." It was enough for Christ that His suffering was in accordance with the Father's will, so He bowed before Him in unquestioning submission. And shall not you, the disciple, be content to fare as your Master did? Will you not be perfectly satisfied with that which satisfied your Lord? It is the will of the Lord—then what need is there of any further question if you are His child?

But supposing that you are an unconverted person, and you say, "I cannot bear to live in such sorrow as this, why is my life prolonged?" The answer is, "Because of God's mercy to you." Where would you go to be better off than you are here? You who have no hope in Christ and yet who say, "I wish I were dead," you know not what you are wishing! You wish you were dead? But what would be your portion after death? What? Do you really wish to hear that dread sentence which must be passed upon you if you die unregenerate—"Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"? Do you really desire to feel the full weight of Divine Justice! Ah, I hope that you are not so foolish! You have spoken in petulance and do not mean what you have said. It may be hard for you to live, but it would be harder far for you to die—and then to live forever in a death that never dies! God grant that you may never know that awful doom!

Moreover, the answer to your question is that the Lord spares you because He would gladly save you. You are kept alive that you may hear again that voice of mercy which says, "Repent and be converted." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." God comes to you in this time of suffering, that He may stop you in your sin and make you think! Even to the most careless and giddy among you, during the poignancy of your grief, He says, "Now, My prodigal child, you have wasted your substance in riotous living, your belly is hungry and you have nothing with which to fill it. Arise and go unto your Father, for He will receive you." Come then, sorrowful one, it may be that your sorrows will end when your sins end. Certainly, when you come to Christ to be forgiven, you shall find Divine consolation, even if all your griefs do not at once disappear. Anyhow, it would be better to be whipped all the way to Heaven than to be carried down to Hell "on flowery beds of ease." Pray this prayer, "O Lord, let me enter into life with one eye and one hand, halt or maimed, rather than, having two eyes and two hands, to be cast into Hell!"

This is one answer to your question—The Lord lets you live, even though it is in pain and grief, because He has purposes of love and mercy towards you. Therefore, be not anxious to die, but be thankful that you are still permitted to tarry upon Gospel ground! No, do not be content to tarry there, but fly at once to the God of Grace! Look this very instant to Jesus, for—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One; There is life at this moment for thee! Then look, Sinner—look unto Him and be saved! Unto Him who was nailed to the tree."

One believing glance of the eyes to Him who is the sinner's Substitute and all transgression is forgiven! Therefore, yield yourself unto Him. Trust to His finished work and eternal life is yours! And when you have that unspeakable blessing, why need you sorrow more?

As for the child of God, to whom I now again speak, if you ask, in a timid, childlike way, "Why do I continue to live in such sorrow as I have to endure?" I would, as your Brother, try to answer you. First, it may be that all this trouble has come upon you to let you know what is in you. None of us know what there is in us until we are put to the test. We are wonderfully sweet-tempered until somebody touches one of our sore places—and then, ah, me—there is not much sweetness of temper left after that! We are remarkably patient until we get a sharp neuralgic pain, perhaps—and then where is all our boasted patience? We are very generous until we, ourselves, are somewhat pinched—and then we become as tight-fisted as others whom we have condemned. We do not know what is really in us while all goes smoothly and well. But sickness, sorrow, bereavement, poverty and hunger will soon let us see what we are! They make a mental or moral photograph of us and when we look at the picture we say, "Oh, no! That cannot be our likeness." But we look again and again, and then we say, "Alas, it is even so. But we did not know we were like that. Now we see our faults and our follies. O Lord, You have searched us, and tried us, and shown us the wicked ways that are in us. Now purge us from them and make us clean and pure in Your sight!" That is one reason, and a very good reason, for sharp affliction—to let us see ourselves as we really are.

The next is that, often, our trials bring us very near to our God. Your children run down the meadow to play and they get a good way off from home in the sunny day, as they ramble along, gathering their buttercups and daisies. But by-and-by, the sun sets, and night comes on—and now they cry to be at home. Just so. And you, in all your pretty ways of pleasure in your happy home, though you are a child of God, sometimes forget Him. Sorrowfully must you remember that sad fact. But now the night comes on and there is danger all around you. So you begin to cry for your Father and you would gladly be back in fellowship with Him—and that is a blessed trouble which brings us near to our God. Christ's sheep ought to be thankful for the ugly black dog that keeps them from going astray, or fetches them back when they have wandered from the Shepherd! Perhaps Christ will call that black dog off when he has answered the Master's purpose and brought you near His side.

Dear child of God, anything that promotes your sanctification, or increases your spirituality, is a good thing for you. I have had my share of physical pain and, perhaps, more of it than most who are here—and I bless God for it. If it comes again, I ask Him for Grace to bless Him for it then—and now that it has gone for a while, I freely bless Him for it, for I cannot tell you all the good that it has worked in me! Oh, how often a proud spirit has been cut back by affliction and trial, like a vine that is made to bleed, that the clusters that followed the pruning might be all the better and richer! The mown grass is very sweet and fine and so, often, are Believers who have been deeply tried. This tribulation, as Paul says, "works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Therefore, bow humbly before the Lord, my tried and afflicted Friend, and see at least some of the reasons why He thus puts you in the dark chamber of tribulation.

Perhaps, dear Brother, you are being very greatly tried, more than most people, to fit you to be an example to others. The Lord means to make a veteran of you, so you must be the first in the breach, or you must lead the forlorn hope. He puts you on the hardest service because He wants others of His children to be able to learn from you. I do not know that we should ever have heard anything of Job if it had not been for his troubles—he was a most respectable Eastern farmer with a considerable

estate—very much like a great many country gentlemen we have in England who may be

heard of at the Quarter Sessions, or the corn and cattle market. But nothing more will be known of them unless you go to the parish church and see some memorial of them stuck up there. Job would have been much the same sort of man as that—an Oriental magnate who would have lived, died and been forgotten—but now his fame will last as long as the world endures! "You have heard of the patience of Job." You have all heard of it, and Job is one of the undying names. So it may be with you, Beloved. You are, perhaps, to sail through seas of trouble to reach your crown. God means to use you in His service and make you a blessing to others, and a teacher of others, by passing you, again and again, through the fire. One of the ancient warriors said, "I cannot use in battle a sword that has not been often times hardened. But give me a Damascus blade that has been so prepared, and I will cut through a coat of mail, or split a man from head to foot at a single stroke. It gets its temper and keenness of edge from having slept with the flames again and again." So must it be with Believers! Full often they are unfit for God to use till they have been sorely tried.

Perhaps, dear Friend, the Lord is putting you through all this trouble—(only I hardly like to say it aloud, I must whisper it in your ears somehow) because He loves you more than anybody else. Dear Samuel Rutherford, when he wrote to a lady who had lost, I think, seven children, congratulated her and said, "I am sure that the Well-Beloved has a strong affection for Your Ladyship, for He will have all your heart. He has taken away all these children that there may not be a nook or a corner for anybody else but for Him." So the Lord loves you much and He is testing you to see whether you can bear His will—whether you love Him so much that you will take up your cross and deny yourself, just as, sometimes, architects will ask for their work to be put to the severest possible tests. "Yes," they say, "see what it will really bear."

No doubt Stephenson felt great joy when the heaviest train went safely across his tubular bridge. And other engineers have said, "Yes, put on as much pressure as you like; it will stand it." Fathers often take delight in the athletic feats of their sons, and princes revel in the brave deeds of their warriors. And so does the Lord delight to see what His people can do and He often puts upon them more and more, to prove whether they love Him so much that they can bear it all for His sake. Did not the Lord do this to let Satan see that Job did love his God, and would still say, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?...The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We cannot tell what blessing might come from such a state of heart as that!

It is very possible, dear Friend, also, that God is putting you through all this trouble that He may enable you to bear great prosperity. Job was to have twice as much as he had ever had before, and that was a very great deal, for he said that he washed his steps with butter, and the rock poured him out rivers of oil. But how much richer he was when everything was doubled! Job was hardly fit to manage such a large estate as that until he had been made to see the vanity of it all, and to get nearer to his God. So, dear Friends, you are going to be pressed, and squeezed, and tried in order that you may be fitted to come right out into the front rank and to be magnified and made much of by the Lord your God! I have noticed this kind of thing happen more than once. I have seen a man suddenly taken from the very dregs of the people and put up to preach—and he has been popular all at once. Nobody has abused him, nobody has said a word against him. But, before long, he has passed completely out of sight. He could not bear the weight that was put upon him, and gave way.

You have seen others who have been called of God to preach the Word, and they have been abused year after year. They could not say anything that was not perverted. They were called mountebanks, impostors,

and I know not what. And then, when happier days came, and almost all men spoke well of them, they could bear it, for they had learned to despise alike the flatteries and the abuse of men! Now, something like that must happen to all God's servants who are to be greatly honored. If they are to bear prosperity, they must first go through the fire. Perhaps that is what the Lord is doing with you, my dear Friend. If so, be content with your lot.

And, once again, do you not think that the Lord means thus to make you more like His dear Son than other people are? Some other Christians have not as much trouble to endure as you have. No, why is it? You know how an artist can, if he likes, dash off a picture. There! A little red, a little blue and so on, and it is done. And away it goes! Yes, but when he wants to paint something that will be observed and admired, then he takes more pains. Look how he works at every part of it. Note what care and what trouble he takes with it. It is the same with the lapidary or the sculptor when he has choice work in hand. And you are, I hope, the kind of material that will pay for cutting and carving—and the Lord is using His chisel upon you more than He does upon most folk. He wants to make you just like His dear Son—so now He is

chipping out a crown of thorns and you must wear it round your head. He is fashioning the image of His Son out of the block of your renewed nature and you must patiently bear the blows from His hammer and chisel till the work is done.

Finally, if I cannot tell you why all this trouble falls to your lot, I know it is right, for the Lord has done it, and blessed be His name! Aaron held his peace when his two sons died. He got as far as that in submission to the will of the Lord. But it will be better still if, instead of simply holding your peace, you can bless and praise and magnify the Lord even in your sharpest trouble! Oh, may you be Divinely helped to do so! Let every troubled soul march out of this place feeling, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Rise, dear Friend, out of all despondency and despair! Shake yourself from the dust and put on your beautiful garments of praise and joy, remembering that—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone, Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown." You can see the tracks of the martyrs along the road you are journeying! Better still, you can see the footprints of the Son of God, your Lord and Savior! Therefore, you may rest assured that you are on the right road, so press bravely forward on it and, in due time, you will come to that place of which Job said, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest." And you shall be forever without fault before the Throne of God!

May He grant this happy portion to you all, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

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