

Light for a Dark House

by James Smith

God allows us to experience trials and tribulations as a way to refine and purify our faith, to teach us to know ourselves, and to wean us from the world.

Scripture: Job 33:19, Psalm 34:19, Psalm 73:5, Romans 5:3, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Hebrews 12:6, James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6, Revelation 7:13

Topics: "Trials And Suffering", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

James Smith preaches about the trials that both the righteous and Christians face, emphasizing that these trials are designed by the Lord to exercise, improve, and teach us. He highlights that trials do not make us righteous, but rather reveal our need for Christ and deepen our reliance on Him. Smith reminds believers that trials are a demonstration of God's love, limited in time and degree, and ultimately work towards our future glory. He concludes by stressing that enduring trials is a key evidence of God's grace in our lives.

Transcript

Man is born to trouble--when he is born into the world of nature; and he is also born to trouble--when he is born into the world of grace. Every man has his trouble--but a Christian man has a double share. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," but blessed be God, it is added, "the Lord delivers him out of them all."

The best of men have generally been tried most. Look at Jacob among the patriarchs, David among the kings, Jeremiah among the prophets, Daniel among the rich, and Lazarus among the poor. Lift up your eyes, and behold that white robed multitude; how happy they look, how sweetly they sing, how gracefully they walk up the golden streets of the holy city. "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from? These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!" Revelation 7:13-17

They suffered from hunger, cold, and nakedness; they were tried externally and internally; but now their trials are over, and the days of their mourning are ended. They rest from their sufferings, and they rest from their labors. What they were--we now are; and what they are--we hope soon to be. We are now in the conflict--but it will soon be ended; we are now in the furnace--but the fire will soon be drawn; we are being

tested--but we shall soon be perfected.

"The Lord tries the righteous." Men may be instruments--but the Lord is the Agent. They may act wickedly and foolishly--but the Lord acts righteously and wisely in using them and their actions for the trial and benefit of his people. Let us now notice--

1. The CHARACTER of God's tried ones. They are "righteous;" this distinguishes them from others, and proves that they are not in their natural state; for by nature, "There is none righteous, no not one." They are all gone out of the way. There is none upright among men. To make a man righteous is God's work; and it is one of his noblest works. He commences it in his sovereignty; carries it on by his power; and completes it in the day of Christ to his own glory.

In making his people righteous, the Lord first convinces them of the need of righteousness. He shows them the requirements of his holy law; that he demands supreme love to himself, and perfect love to their fellow men--a perfect, perpetual, uninterrupted obedience; the obedience of the heart--as well as of the life. This they have not rendered. They see it. They feel it. They are alarmed about it. They set to work to remedy it. They hope that by prayer, by reformation, and through God's mercy, all will be well. But they are led to see that God must be just as well as merciful. Just, before he is merciful. Just in the very act of showing mercy. All their efforts fail. The more they strive--the further off they appear, and at length self-despair seizes them.

They are now taught that they themselves cannot produce righteousness. They cannot cleanse their corrupt and depraved hearts, neither can they regulate their lives by God's precepts. The more they try, the more signally they fail. When they feel willing, they find themselves unable--but frequently they find that they have neither the will nor the power. They see clearly that they can never come up to the requirements of God's law--and yet unless the requirements of God's law are met, they can never be justified. Thus they perceive that they are lost and the most perplexing question to them is, "How can a man be just with God?"

All this while they feel within an ardent desire to be righteous. Yes, they would give the world to be right. They want to be and to do all that God requires of them. They do, indeed, hunger and thirst after righteousness. A new heart and a holy life they earnestly long for. They want to pay God all they owe him, and to stand before God just what he requires them to be. Oh, to be just with God! Oh, to be holy as God! These are the desires that rule the soul.

At length, they are shown by the Gospel how they may become righteous. They see that the Son of God became the Son of man--that he who was above the law was made under the law--that he did all that was required of us, and suffered all that was deserved by us--and that this perfect work of Jesus becomes ours when we believe on his name; that his obedience is placed against our disobedience, and his sufferings and death against our deserts. Thus God can be just, because the law has all it requires; and he can justify the sinner, because his Substitute obeyed and suffered in his stead. Not only so--but that when God places the perfection and work of his beloved Son to our account, in order that we may be honorably acquitted at the bar of Divine justice--he imparts the Spirit of his Son to us--that we may be sanctified, and made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.

This discovery having been made, the soul exercises faith in Christ, and so becomes possessed both of the righteousness and Spirit of Christ. The man's state is now changed; he was condemned--but he is now justified; he was God's enemy--but he is now reconciled to God by the death of his Son; he was a stranger

to God--but he is now a child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Being interested in Christ, to him there is now no condemnation; and being justified by faith, he has peace with God. He has committed his soul to Jesus, that he may wash it in his blood, clothe it in his righteousness, and sanctify it by his Spirit.

He trusts in the work of Christ alone for his acceptance with God; he looks on the word of Christ alone as the warrant of his faith; and he looks to the Spirit of Christ alone as the author of his sanctification. He is just--because Jesus lived and died for him. He is holy--because Christ dwells within him. He shall be saved--because Jesus still lives for him and pleads his cause with God.

Now he proves that he is righteous--by his life. "He who does righteousness is righteous." The good tree--brings forth good fruit. Being dead to sin, he cannot live any longer therein. The love of Christ constrains him, the spirit of Christ impels him, and the word of Christ teaches him to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. The precepts of Christ are the rule by which he walks; and to be like Christ in spirit, temper, and conduct, is the end at which he aims.

Before God, his person is justified by faith in Christ alone; before man, his profession as a righteous man is justified by his works alone. As a sinner before God, he pleads the person and work of Christ only; but as a Christian, before his fellow-men, he says, "By works a man is justified, and not by faith only. For as the body without the spirit is dead--so faith without works is dead also." Now God deals with every man according to his profession, and tests his profession in a variety of ways. As the gold is put into the crucible to prove if it is genuine, and to remove its dross, so the professed Christian is put into the furnace, and is tried in a variety of ways, to prove the reality of his faith, and to purge away his dross. This leads us to notice,

2. The TRIALS of the righteous. "The Lord tries the righteous." He does it himself. He is the Refiner who purifies the sons of Levi.

Our trials are sometimes personal. The Lord tries some by sickness of body. They suffer much from pain and weakness. Almost every nerve is an instrument of suffering, and the muscles are a means of torture. As Elihu said to Job, "God disciplines people with pain on their sickbeds, with ceaseless aching in their bones. They lose their appetite for even the most delicious food. Their flesh wastes away, and their bones stick out"" Job 33:19-22. How much bodily pain some of the Lord's people suffer!

Others are tried more with trouble of mind. Harassed with the temptations of Satan, with darkness of soul, and many doubts and fears--they endure fiery trials. They seldom see their heavenly Father's countenance, or hear his still small voice.

At other times our trials are relative. Some find the domestic trials the heaviest. The wife is a trial to the husband, or the husband is a trial to the wife; the children are trials to the parents, or the parents are trials to the children; the brother tries the sister, or the sister tries the brother; the workers try the employers, or the employers try the workers; or these relatives mutually try each other!

Some are tried most in business. The merchant has heavy losses, the shop-keeper has bad debts, the mechanic needs employment. Trade fails or fluctuates, competition increases. The population of the neighborhood decreases. In numerous ways the Lord tries the righteous in business.

Others are tried in the world; persecution for righteousness sake; cold neglect on account of steady adherence to Christian principles; or continued attempts to draw them aside from the paths of holiness--try

many Christians. Some find their worst trials in the Church, especially some of God's ministers. The parsimony of some, the indifference of others; the rashness, the pride, the self-will, the craft, the dishonesty, chicanery, and the obstinacy of professors, are a fruitful source of trial to the Lord's servants. Sometimes the trial is deadness, sometimes division, sometimes all seem asleep, at other times all is confusion. Some try us by their tongues others by their tempers. Some because they will not work, others because they will work by no rule but their own wills. Oh, the trials many find in connection with the church of God!

However, if we are not tried personally--we shall be relatively; if we are not tried in our families--we shall be in our souls or our circumstances. "The Lord tries the righteous!"

3. The Lord's design in trying us varies at different times. Trials are sometimes to exercise our graces. If we have faith, God will try it. If we have patience, God will exercise it. Indeed, every grace of the Spirit will be tried to prove both its nature and its strength; and in proportion to the strength of our grace will be the degree of our trials.

Trials are also to improve our characters. Tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. The tried Christian is generally the holy and useful Christian. The vine must be pruned, if it is to bear much fruit; so the Christian is tried, that he may be "found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The tried man will be the patient man, the humble man, the prudent man.

Trials are also to teach us to know ourselves. It is in the furnace--that we find ourselves out. Would Job ever have known his self-righteousness or impatience; or Jonah his self-will and fretfulness; or David the power of his lust and hypocrisy; or Peter the weakness of his faith and courage--if they had not been tried in the furnace of affliction? Untried Christians are generally conceited, vain, and proud; but when they have been well tried, they become humble, modest, and submissive.

Trials are also to wean us from the world. We appear in times of prosperity--to be glued to the earth; we cannot bear the thought of leaving it. Heaven has but few attractions, and death appears to be clothed with terrors. If it were not for our trials, we would want to live here on earth always. But when we have been well disciplined, we say with Job, "I loathe it, I loathe it! I would not live always!" Or with Paul, "I desire to depart and to be with Christ--which is far better"

Trials also teach, us the value of free grace. They often stir up our corruptions; in the furnace, the dross rises to the surface. Then we discover our deep and dreadful depravity, the awfully corrupt state of our natures, and also our more than infantile weakness. So that we see, that if salvation was not by free grace, that invaluable blessing could never be ours. Grace in its freeness appeared precious to us at first; but it appears ten-fold more precious in seasons of deep trial and affliction.

Trials also endear the Savior to us. We daily learn more and more of our need of Christ. But in one hour of deep trial, we often learn more of our need of Christ than in months of ease and prosperity. So also, however precious Christ may appear at other times, he is never so precious as in seasons of adversity and sorrow. We learn more of the value of Christ, and taste more of the sweetness of Christ, in one dark night of trial, than we do by a thousand sermons.

Trials also to lead us to make use of the promises. Promises, in prosperity, are like bank-notes in the hands of a man surrounded by plenty; valuable in themselves--but of very little use to him. But the promises, to a deeply tried soul, are like banknotes presented to one steeped in poverty and need.

Nothing will teach us the value of the promises--like a sense of our need of them, and the fulfillment of them in our experience. Nor will anything teach us to make use of them like deep and sore afflictions and trials. Well, then, may it be written, "The Lord tries the righteous."

To CONCLUDE, observe,

First: Trials are not to make us righteous. Of themselves they cannot take away the guilt of sin; or destroy the power of sin. Our sufferings make no atonement for our sins. The blood of Christ alone--procures our pardon; the Spirit of Christ alone--renews our natures; and the grace of Christ alone--teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. God may work by our trials for the sanctification of our natures--as he generally does; but trials of themselves only detect evil, discover good, or make manifest character.

Second: Trials do not prove us to be unrighteous. Satan often suggests to us in affliction, that if we were the Lord's people, if we were accepted in the Beloved, if we were pleasant in God's sight--then we would not be so severely tried as we are. Whereas the very opposite of this is true! It is the fruitful vine--which the gardener prunes; and it is the beloved child--whom the father corrects. Therefore the Psalmist said, "Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, and teach him out of your law." And the Patriarch, "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore despise not you the chastening of the Almighty."

Faith in Christ makes us righteous, because it brings us into union with his person, and interests us in his finished work. Being made righteous by union to Christ--we are then tried, and taught, and disciplined on earth--that we may be found unto "praise, and honor, and glory--at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Third: Trials do not flow from God's wrath--but from divine love. One of our mistakes is, that we think that if the Lord loved us, he would not deal afflict us so harshly; whereas he deals thus with us, because he loves us. Hence Jesus says, "As many as I love, I rebuke, and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent." And the Apostle, "Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." If the Lord hated us, or did not care for us--he would leave us to ourselves, that we might fill up the measure of our iniquities! But because the Lord loves us--he hedges up our way with thorns, and leads us down rough paths.

Every trial, every trouble, every disappointment, to the Christian, is a proof of his heavenly Father's love.

Fourth: Our trials are LIMITED, both as to time and degree. For the elect's sake, the days of tribulation were shortened in the days of old; and the Lord very graciously stays the rough north wind--in the day of the east wind. There is the day of trouble--the hour of temptation--the small moment--during which he is displeased with us. He says, "I will not fight against you forever; I will not always be angry." And his servant adds, "His anger endures but for a moment--but in his favor is life! Weeping may endure for a night--but joy comes in the morning." As the time of trial is short, so the degree of our trial is apportioned to our strength, for he will not lay upon us more than we are able to bear: but he will, with the temptation or trial, make a way for our escape, that we may be able to bear it.

Fifth: Present trials work to our future glory. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal!"

Finally: If we had no trials--we would lack one principal evidence of grace. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it!" Hebrews 12:6-11

All of God's children need correction--and they all receive it. All the vessels of mercy need scouring--and they all get it. Where there is most grace--there generally are the most trials. But where there is no grace--there sometimes are no trials. "They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits!" Psalms 73:5-7

Who among us would wish for such a lot? Those who have no changes, have no fear of God; but those who are emptied from vessel to vessel--tried by one affliction after another--are led by the sovereign grace of God to glorify God in the fires, and are thus trained up for glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life!

Tried soul, remember, in the midst of your sorest trials, under your heaviest crosses, and when suffering from the bitterest disappointments, remember, "The Lord tries the righteous!"

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