

Why Suffering?--Glorifying God--His Riches

by John Newton

God's infinite compassion and power are manifested in our sufferings, which can be a means of glorifying him and manifesting his grace.

Scripture: Psalm 142:3, Matthew 5:11, Luke 12:6, John 13:7, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 12:6, 1 Peter 4:16

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

Description

John Newton preaches about the infinite compassion and power of God in the midst of trials, emphasizing that God afflicts not for His pleasure but for our profit, to make us partakers of His holiness. He encourages believers to trust in God's grace and providence, even when facing challenges, as God appoints and directs their paths with precision and provides grace and strength when needed. Newton reminds listeners that suffering for the sake of Christ glorifies Him, manifests His power in believers, and serves as a testimony to the world and angels of the reality of their faith.

Transcript

1772.

I had been wishing to hear from you, that I might know where to write. I hope I can assure you of a friendly sympathy with you in your trials. I can in some measure guess at what you feel, from what I have seen and felt myself in cases where I have been nearly concerned. But my compassion, though sincere, is ineffectual: if I can pity, I cannot relieve. All I can do is, as the Lord enables me, to remember you both before him. But there is one whose compassion is infinite. The love and tenderness of ten thousand earthly friends, of ten thousand mothers towards their sucklings, if compared with his, are less than a drop of water to the ocean; and his power is infinite too.

Why then do our sufferings continue, when he is so compassionate, and could remove them with a word? Surely, if we cannot give the particular reasons (which yet he will acquaint us with hereafter, John 13:7), the general reason is at hand: He afflicts not for his own pleasure, but for our profit; to make us partakers of his holiness, and because he loves us.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust him for his grace:

Behind a frowning providence

He hides a smiling face.

I wish you much comfort from David's thought, Psal. 142:3: "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path." The Lord is not withdrawn to a great distance, but his eye is upon you, and he sees you not with the indifference of a mere spectator; but he observes with attention, he knows, he considers your path: yea, he appoints it, and every circumstance about it is under his direction. Your trouble began at the hour he saw best: it could not come before, and he has marked the degree of it to a hair's breadth, and the duration to a minute. He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as he sees needful, he will afford. So that when things appear darkest, you shall still be able to say, Though chastened, not killed. Therefore, hope in God, for you shall yet praise him.

I shall pray that the Bath waters may be beneficial; and that the waters of the sanctuary there may be healing and enlivening to you all. Our all-sufficient God can give seasons of refreshment in the darkest hours, and break through the thickest clouds of outward affliction or distress. To you it is given not only to believe in Jesus, but to suffer for his sake: for so we do, not only when we are called to follow him to imprisonment or death, but when he enables us to bear afflictive dispensations with due submission and patience.

Then he is glorified: then his grace and power are manifested in us. The world, so far as they know our case, have a proof before them that our religion is not merely notional, but that there is a power and reality in it. And the Lord's people are encouraged by what they see of his faithfulness to ourselves. And there are more eyes upon us still. We are a spectacle to the universe, to angels as well as to men. Cheer up: the Lord has put you in your present trying situation, that you may have the fairer opportunity of adorning your profession of the Gospel; and though you suffer much, he is able to make you abundant amends. Nor need I remind you that he has suffered unspeakably more for you: he drank for your sake a cup of unmixed wrath, and only puts into your hand a cup of affliction mixed with many mercies.

The account you gave of the poor man detained in the inn was very affecting. Such scenes are or should be instructive, to teach us resignation under the trials we must meet with every day. For not only are we visited less than our iniquities have deserved, but much less than many of our fellow-creatures daily meet with. We need not look about far or long to find others in a worse situation than ourselves. If a fit of the gout or cholic is so grievous and so hard to bear, what do we owe to him who delivered us from that place of unutterable torment, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever, without hope or respite?

And if we cannot help interesting ourselves in the groans of a stranger, how ought the groans of Jesus to be as it were continually sounding in our ears? What are all other sufferings compared to his? And yet he endured them freely. He needed not to have borne them, if he would have left us to perish; but such was his love, he died that we might live, and endured the fiercest agonies that he might open to us the gate of everlasting peace and happiness.

How amazingly perverse is my heart, that I can be more affected with a melancholy story in a newspaper concerning persons I never saw, than with all that I read of his bitter passion in the garden and on the cross, though I profess to believe he endured it all for me! Oh, if we could always behold him by faith as evidently crucified before our eyes, how would it compose our spirits as to all the sweets and bitters of this

poor life! What a banner would it prove against all the snares and temptations whereby Satan would draw us into evil; and what a firm ground of confidence would it afford us amidst the conflicts we sustain from the working of unbelief and indwelling sin! I long for more of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, that I may be preserved humble, thankful, watchful, and dependent. To behold the glory and the love of Jesus is the only effectual way to participate of his image.

We are to set out to-night from the Interpreter's house towards the hill Difficulty, and hope to be favoured with a sight of the cross by the way. To stand at the foot of it with a softened heart and melting eyes; to forget our sins, sorrows, and burdens, while we are wholly swallowed up in the contemplation of Him who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, is certainly the most desirable situation on this side the grave. To speak of it, and to see it by the light of the Spirit, are widely different things: and though we cannot always enjoy this view, yet the remembrance of what we have seen is an excellent means of encouragement to mount the hill, and to face the lions.

I believe I shall hardly find leisure to fill my paper this time. It is now Saturday evening, and growing late. I am just returned from a serious walk, which is my usual manner of closing the week when the weather is fine. I endeavour to join in heart with the Lord's ministers and people, who are seeking a blessing on to-morrow's ordinances. At such times I especially remember those friends with whom I have gone to the house of the Lord in company, consequently you are not forgot. I can venture to assure you, that if you have a value for our prayers, you have a frequent share in them, yea, are loved and remembered by many here; but as we are forgetful creatures, I hope you will always refresh our memory, and quicken our prayers, by a yearly visit.

In the morning I shall think of you again. What a multitude of eyes and hearts will be directed to our Redeemer to-morrow! He has a numerous and necessitous family; but he is rich enough to supply them all, and his tender compassions extend to the meanest and most unworthy. Like the sun, he can cheer and enlighten thousands and millions at once, and give to each as bountifully as if there were no more to partake of his favour. His best blessings are not diminished by being shared among many. The greatest earthly monarch would soon be poor if he was to give a little (though but a little) to all his subjects; but Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow. The innumerable assembly before the Throne have been all supplied from his fulness; and yet there is enough and to spare for us also, and for all that shall come after us. May he give us an eager appetite, a hunger and thirst that will not be put off with any thing short of the bread of life., and then we may confidently open our mouths wide, for he has promised to fill them.

I am, &c.

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