

Blessings in Disguise (Psalm Lxvi. 12)

by Seth Rees

God allows us to go through difficult times to prove our real value, to wake up the best in us, and to make us victorious.

Scripture: Psalm 66:12, Romans 8:31, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 6:10, James 1:2

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Trials And Tribulation"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the service of difficulty in the Christian experience, highlighting how opposition and trials have historically led to growth and prosperity. He emphasizes that adversity awakens the strongest qualities of the soul, as seen in the lives of biblical characters and historical figures. Rees encourages believers to view opposition as a stepping stone to victory, urging them to trust in God's power to turn enemies and difficulties into servants for their spiritual growth and triumph.

Transcript

"Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." (Psalms lxvi. 12).

The margin reads "a moist place," which means "a fertile place." The great primary truth set forth in this text is the service of difficulty in the Christian experience. It is a fact in the history of nations that adverse circumstances have always been favorable to national prosperity. The inhabitants of a northern country have always had the ascendancy over those of the southern and more tropical lands. The inhospitable climate and sterile soil and adverse conditions have demanded energy and rugged strength.

It was opposition and oppression that forced our fathers to the Revolution and into heroism, and ultimately into independence. Israel gained more by Pharaoh's oppression than she lost. The more she was oppressed the more she multiplied and grew. It has been in the times of great political and social upheaval that the strongest men have been developed. Such men as General Washington, Abraham Lincoln, General Grant, Robert E. Lee and a host of others would never have come to the front in times of peace; but in the nation's greatest struggles they shone forth. There are millions of people who would never have heard of Hobson or of Dewey had it not been for the recent struggle between this country and Spain. There is something about opposition and difficulty that wakes up the strongest qualities of the soul and brings forth activity the best men to be had. The illustrious characters of the Bible were all educated in the school of difficulty. Abraham was never called "the Father of the faithful" until that awful tragedy on Mount Moriah. Jacob rode to his highest achievements in the chariot of severe discipline. Joseph's path to the

throne lay through Egypt's prison cell. David's way to the throne was through the valley of nine years' persecution and oppression. He knew what it was to be a king and at the same time to have to wait for his crown. Paul preached in Caesar's household with iron on his limbs, and John Bunyan did his best work in Bedford jail. The most illustrious men of the ages have blazed forth when earth and hell were pitted against them. The darkest hours that the church has ever seen have been the times when she has won some of her most tremendous victories.

This is not only true of the church as a whole, but it is also true of individuals; oppression and opposition and poverty have forced many a life into moral honor and spiritual greatness. Thousands of men are stalwart for God, and will shine like particular stars in the firmament of history, who would have been of no account and would have been worthless but for the force of circumstances, which has forced them out of a place of ease, out of a place of comfort, into great struggle and tremendous conflict; and the greater the conflict, the greater the victory. We can never have a great victory unless we have an engagement. There are thousands of people who seem to want victory, but who dread the conflict necessary to obtain it. Those who shrink from trial, from temptation, from difficulty and from testing, fail to understand that it is impossible for us to have a grand triumph over a foe unless there is a foe to contend with -- unless there is a battle to be fought. If we want to know the triumph of the ages, we have got to be willing to engage in a hand-to-hand conflict with the powers of darkness, that God may have a chance to display His power in making us victorious over the world, the flesh, the devil; over death, hell and the grave.

What is the service of difficulty? What is the benefit of trial and temptation? Most of people dread them. People look upon severe temptation and on testing as calamities. For what purpose do these things come to us? First, we want to say that they prove our real value. God never tries or tests a worthless soul; and so, if we are severely tested, it is because we are worth it. The devil never tempts a man who is already his; so, if the devil tempts people severely it is because they have been delivered from his clutches and he wants to get them back. Isaiah says the tares are not threshed like grain and wheat. Why not? They are not worth it. Grain and wheat are worth threshing, but the tares are not. And if you and I get a threshing once in a while, it is because God thinks we are worth it, and He wants to get the chaff out of the wheat. If you find that other people are in comparative ease and comfort, while you yourself are having a severe time, just conclude that possibly they are not worth testing, but that God has seen something in you that can be brought out by a trial of that kind; that can be developed, that can be shaped, as the diamond whose beauty is only brought out by shaping and cutting and polishing. If the devil is after us it is because he has not got us. So when we hear his hoofs and horns rattling, instead of looking down over our noses and having the dumps, we should thank God that he has not got us. He is not after folks that he has; he is rocking them to sleep in the cradle of carnal security. He is dosing out opiates to put them to sleep and numb their consciences, so they will not get stirred up and be converted. The folks that he is after with a whole brigade of his emissaries are the people that have been saved and rescued from his clutches, and he wants to recapture them.

So trial proves what we are worth -- shows what we are made of -- for the way we act in time of trial and under opposition and in severe tests proves what we can stand. If we are all right under this high pressure, we will be all right when things run smoothly; but, sir, we might be all right when things run smoothly, and not be all right in the teeth of a northeaster. God sometimes sends a northeaster to let us know the strength of our cable. He sometimes rocks us in the storm to let us find out that the old ship of Zion is seaworthy. He sometimes sends the enemy after us with all his powers, that we may understand and know that we have something we can put our feet down on and feel secure. This gives us courage, it gives

us strength of conviction, it gives us boldness and heroism of spirit that will dare death in its most frightful forms and push out into the battlefield for God.

Again, opposition, difficulty and trial are valuable because they wake up the slumbering faculties of our souls and bring out the very best there is in us. If we have latent powers, if we have qualities that have never been developed, we ought to want them brought out, and it would seem from the course that God has pursued with His people that oppression is one of His incentives to faith and holy activity. God lets opposition come to wake up the best there is in us and bring into full activity the strongest qualities of the man. It was the weights on father's old clock that kept it going. It may be the weights and burdens and difficulties that keep us going. God can set our sails so that we can sail in the very teeth of the gale. Our sails fill with an opposing wind, and we set our prow across the waves and we plow through to victory in the face of the strongest opposition.

Two men meet a difficulty. One says, "This mountain came to stop my way," and he succumbs. The other says, "This mountain came that I might climb it," and he mounts to the top and looks away into the land that is afar off. God means that everything that opposes us should be converted into a steppingstone; that we should mount our difficulties and ride; and if, when opposition comes, you will get into the chariot and settle back into the soft cushions and behave yourself, then, when the footman opens the door to let you out, you will find yourself on an elevated spot, having outgrown your clothes! But if you get down under the wheels of the chariot, they will mangle and bruise you, and you will come out defeated.

Beloved, let us ride. Let us mount everything that opposes us. Let us take it for granted that everything that God permits to come to us, comes to us that we may mount from its summit to the summit of something else and go on to victory. The ancient Parthians believed that the strength of every foe they slew went directly into themselves. So let us take from conquered difficulties the strength they sought to take from us, and turn it to our account so that we may be made giants instead of pigmies.

We should never yield. We should never suffer even temporary defeat. We should be victorious from this moment until the clouds part and Jesus comes. God has placed within our easy grasp all the conditions of perpetual triumph, and we may be victors every single moment, whether in the kitchen or in the parlor, whether in the slums or in high life. We may have victories for God everywhere, if we will only trust Him and appropriate the resources placed at our disposal. We need never be ashamed, never confused, never confounded. "They that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded." Hallelujah! Again, beloved, our enemies and our difficulties and our opposition are intended to be servants. The giants of Canaan were to be bread for Israel; and if God has a process by which he can convert giants into bread, He has power by which He can convert all our enemies and all our oppositions and all our difficulties into friends that will help us. The prophet said that Israel should return from bondage to their homes "on the shoulders of the Philistines." The Philistines were their enemies; and if the Israelites were to convert Philistines into saddle horses and ride them back home, we ought to be able to ride our difficulties and our oppositions, and make servants of everything that confronts us, capturing even the devil, and making him forge the weapons of his destruction, and causing his thunderbolts to fall back upon his own head, giving him to understand that through Jesus Christ we conquer the world, the flesh and the devil.

We ought to stand on our own caskets and flap our wings in victory, and give Satan to understand that we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. Oh, this cowardice! Oh, this cringing! Oh, this leaning and propping! Oh, this whiny, delicate type of Christianity! God have mercy on us! The demand today is not for babies, but for soldiers; not for cowards, but for heroes; not for people in the hospital -- we have enough of

those -- but for men who are willing to go to the front. God in heaven send us some men with boiling blood in their veins, who will never be satisfied until they go to the front and do their best for God!

Some of us have never had servants, but we can convert our enemies into servants. We are not able to have hired servants, but we are able to convert giants into hot biscuits, and feed on the very folks that mean to damage us. The men that have designed the most malicious things against me have been the men that have been the greatest blessing to me. Some of my greatest enemies have been my greatest benefactors, and people have blessed me and helped me when they did not intend it. Afterwards they would have liked to have taken it back if they could.

We should understand that our enemies are for us, for "if God be for us who can be against us?" if God is for us, every one is for us, and everything is for us, and "all thing work together for good to them that love the Lord," and "this light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen." May God get our eyes off the visible and let us see the things that are out of sight. Let us see the King in His beauty and the country that is very far off.

Then we will have a good time when other folks are having a bad time, and when you get to this place you will feel almost under obligation to the man who kicks you. I have been kicked sometimes, and have turned around and said, "Thank you." The man has so blessed me. How could I help it? I am under obligations to every one that helps me, and when a man gets sanctified wholly and filled with the Holy Ghost, people may kick him, and it does not affect him any more than it does a football. Of course, it takes a ball a second to adjust itself, and when a sanctified man gets kicked he feels it. We do not preach a sanctification which takes the feeling out of folks, but it takes him but a second to adjust himself, and he is ready for the next fellow. The people that are well saved can be kicked and cuffed and abused, and they are always at their best, for every kick and cuff only develops something better in them, and fits them for a better place.

God save us from this dread of a little persecution. We have a type of Christianity that is too weak and delicate for anything useful. It is too sickly for the war. It is too feminine for the open field. It is too nervous and whiny and too hard to please, and requires too much attention and too much apology and too much excuse to do anything for God. I can go into some places in the Holiness movement, and there is not one in ten of the Holiness people that are ready for the fight and are just prancing for the war. The most of people sigh a sigh of relief when they think the war is over; but God has put something into me that demands a conflict, and if I could not live where there is war I would do something to bring one on. I would have war if I had to do something to provoke it. I see more and more that stagnation and damnation are characteristic of the people that are at ease in Zion. God help us and save us from this type of Christianity, and give us something that can stand the stress of real war. Difficulty and opposition not only have the effect of proving what we are worth and developing the best there is in us to serve us in our work for God, but they drive us to appropriate divine resources. It is when I get into a close place that I make a heavy draft on heaven's bank. It is when I am crowded to the wall that I write my name to a check for half a million and stick my face into heaven's window and stay there until the Cashier gives me attention. It is when I am "pressed above measure," as Paul says, that I make my heaviest draft on heaven's resources. There is nothing that pleases God more than for us to draw heavily. It proves that we have confidence in Him as the President of the whole business. We have confidence in the exhaustless resources of the Kingdom, and we are not afraid that things are going to give out up there, and so we just draw heavily.

I have been forced to make out some drafts in the last few months that I never dreamed of having to make out, but I am here to confess to you tonight that I have never yet made a demand on heaven's bank that it was not promptly responded to. God's storehouses are just lying there, ready to be tapped by the man of faith. The man who will dare to believe God will leap from a beggar and poverty to a millionaire, and by a single stroke of his pen of faith appropriate enough of the eternal wealth to put him among the aristocracy of the skies. I would rather belong to heaven's nobility than to belong to Boston's four hundred. I would rather be one of the elect of the upper skies than to have all this world can offer.

We have a salvation that is so tremendous and so magnificent and so extensive that no man has ever yet taxed it; and if the whole earth should apply at once, there would be enough for every angel and archangel in the skies. God wake us up. If He has to get us out of our present condition to get us into something better, I say, "Amen." When the mother eagle wants to teach the eaglets to fly, she stirs up the nest. She frequently picks the cotton out of it and leaves the thorns; and sometimes that does not do, and some great, lazy young bird wants to stay in the nest. After she has gotten out on the limb and set an example and exhorted them and entreated them to attempt to fly, it is not uncommon for her to tear the nest up and make that young fellow do something. Of course she has the mother heart in her, and when the young eaglet starts to fly and falls, she always spreads her wings beneath it.

The mother eagle stirs up the nest and picks out the cotton in mercy. She knows that if the birdlings were allowed to stay in the nest, they would become good for nothing, and their wings would be useless. We have in the church a great lot of folks who are sitting in the nest. They are thoroughly paralyzed, and mostly head and stomach; they can never fly until God sends something to stir up the nest. Many a time the very thing you dreaded most was God stirring up your nest so as to get you over here in a better place. When I feel things stirring nowadays, I have learned to take courage and thank God that there is something better for me.

We read in God's Word that when David was made king the Philistines came up against him. They did not come up against him before he was made king. Why? Because he was not worth it; but as soon as he was made king they were after him. When we hear the Philistines thundering and tramping and howling about us -- why do we not suppose that they have overheard that we are about to be promoted? Why do we not look on the favorable side of things, and think that God is about to move us into a better place, a moist place, a fertile place, where things never get dry? I think it would be a great blessing to us to get into a place where things never get dry. I have been into so many dry churches that I shall be glad enough to get into a moist place. I have had to pray fire out of heaven to wake up many cold churches lately. I am praying God to give us a revival of full salvation, a full salvation which causes people to shed tears. I am praying God to give us tears over the fact that churches are going backwards and that sinners are going to hell in regiments. If people are going to hell as you and I believe they are, then we ought to say something about it, and I am following sinners to the very flaming gates of hell and protesting against their entrance. God is gaining souls brought back from the flaming gates and planting them in the army of God.

The possibilities are simply tremendous if we will only enter in and stand true to God instead of being cowards and whining and simpering. When men get sanctified wholly by the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire, they get an experience that lifts them out of the rut and moves them out of the repair shop; that puts them out on the line, with motive power enough to run them through a whole regiment of devils. Men who do not have this power have not this experience. I want to say to you that people who really have the glorious experience we are talking about are men who are not afraid of earth or hell. They are not afraid of ten thousand devils.

The Holiness men of this country can not be stopped. They are dying all around because they would rather die than be idle; they would rather preach than do nothing. They would rather suffer with the Son of God than to have an easy time in this world. They would rather share the reproach that comes than to have all this world can offer. People who are having easy times in these sinful days will have a hard time in the judgment. If they are sitting in idle content while this world is going down to hell, they will be filled with dismay on that day. I will take my hard time now, if you please. Let me wear out now. Let me go and serve God while I am able; let me preach when I have a raging headache, but do not let me ever sit down in ease; do not let me ever get in sympathy with myself; do not let me ever get to pitying myself; do not let me ever conclude that I am having a hard time; do not let me ever ask to go to the rear. I am asking God to send me to the front and keep me there. Beloved, if we knew what a victory there is, what a triumph there is, what a glorious overcoming there is for God's people, we would all want to go to the front.

Thomas, of the Rough Riders, who fought in the battles of the late war in Cuba, lay on a blanket mortally wounded. His comrades took hold of the blanket and undertook to move him over into the shade, and he rose up and said, "You are carrying me to the front, aren't you? Carry me to the front. They have killed my captain; carry me to the front!" and they carried him over the stones and through the briars, leaving a streak of blood as they went, and he shouted, "For the front!" until he fainted dead away.

I said, when I read that in "Scribner's Magazine," that if a Rough Rider can do that for his country, it is time Christians forget their pains and their trials; it is time we stop our self-pity; it is time we forget our oppressions and cry, "For the front!" and trample our enemies in the dust and plant the blood stained banner of the Son of God at the summit of the enemies' earthworks. I modestly believe that God has taken the last drop of cowardly blood out of me, and, if I knew there was a drop in me, I would open the vein and let it out. This everlasting cringing and whining and toadying and catering to men, and catering to churches, and catering to pastors, and catering to elders and bishops, and catering to moneyed men and tall hats and white cravats! God have mercy on us. The time will come, sir, when we would give more for a smile from the Son of God than we would for all the applause that either the church or the world can heap upon us.

"Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy, a moist place." I want to notice, in conclusion, that the two elements mentioned in my text are the two most fearful and destructive elements in nature - fire and water -- and if God can take a man through fire and through flood, He is able to keep us anywhere this side the gates of hell. We can dare trust Him, no difference what comes. Fire and flood will only have the effect of bringing us into a moist place where we shall enjoy more than ever before.

But we can never know this experience unless we are sanctified wholly by the baptism with the Holy Ghost, for only this delivers us from carnality and brings us into perfect loyalty to Almighty God. Therefore, we will have to seek and find this second blessing, this Pentecost, this baptism with the Holy Ghost if we want to be Christians after the type that we have talked about tonight. I believe there are scores of people in this audience tonight who do not want to be cowards and who would like to be delivered from the last symptom of cowardice, who would like to be "soldiers of the cross and followers of the Lamb," and stalwarts who are ready to live or die for the Son of God. Every one of us may be the same if we will receive this blessed baptism. How many are there here tonight who are ready to walk with "the resolute few who dare to go through" at all costs? Preached at Cincinnati, O., November 30, 1898

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