

On Trials

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the futility of seeking happiness in the world and encourages believers to trust in Jesus Christ as the true source of happiness and peace.

Scripture: John 14:27

Topics: "Trials And Tribulations", "Faith And Perseverance"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the trials and challenges faced by believers in a world that cannot offer true happiness or rest, emphasizing the futility of seeking fulfillment in worldly pursuits. He highlights the need for believers to find their true resting place in Jesus, the only source of peace and comfort amidst life's storms and trials. Reade encourages believers to embrace opposition and trials as a natural part of their faith journey, drawing parallels to the persecution faced by Jesus and the early Christians. He reminds believers that trials can arise from various sources including their general character, peculiar situations, the hand of God, and inward corruptions, but through faith and reliance on Jesus, they can overcome and grow in holiness.

Transcript

54. On Trials

When I look into the world, and see all around me in pursuit of happiness; that certain something unpossessed, yet still desired; which eludes the grasp of thousands, who think they have just to make one effort more to seize the flattering shadow and be happy; I ask why all this restlessness, this feverish thirst for that which cannot satisfy an immortal soul? Is it not that man, blinded by his passions, fondly hopes to find happiness in a world, from where it long since took its flight, when Adam ate of the forbidden tree?

"Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to you," is the language of Jehovah to his fallen creatures, when he cursed the ground for man's sake; and if the divine inspiration of the Bible rested upon the truth of this one declaration, every age and every heart must feelingly witness to its holy origin. Vain man would attempt to be happy while remaining at a distance from his God. He plucks the flower, and it withers in his hand. His fond expectations of earthly bliss, like wave succeeding wave, roll along in quick succession, without bringing him any nearer to the desired haven of rest and happiness.

This world is not a resting-place to the wicked, nor the resting-place of the righteous. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." His desires are restless, his passions are restless, his spirit is restless. He

needs what he has not, and does not truly enjoy what he has. He is of the earth, earthy. His aims, pursuits, and pleasures, all spring out of and settle upon the world. Thus he reaps those thorns and thistles which spring up in such abundant crops, wherever he erects his dwelling.

Disappointed and chagrined that happiness is ever eluding his grasp, he grows peevish in his spirit, or a complainant against his kind, yet insulted Creator. No wonder that misery marks his steps, even though, like those of Asher, they be "dipped in oil." (Deut. xxxiii, 24.) Worldly riches cannot give quietness; when God gives trouble. Oh my soul, learn true wisdom from what you see around you. Every situation is planted with thorns in this wilderness of sin. Vain, then, is the expectation of man, to find a place of pure, uninterrupted rest below the skies.

And yet, what crowds are daily in search of such a place of rest in the midst of a polluted and tempestuous world! Some think it lies in the region of wealth; others in that of pleasure; others in that of honor. Some fancy it is found in the busy throng; and some in the stillness of retirement. But all who seek it in the world shall never find it. You, blessed Jesus, are the true and only resting-place for guilty sinners. Believing in you, they enter into rest. Your people, it is true, must bear your cross, but they enjoy your consolations also; they feel a peace and calm within, which all the panting candidates for worldly happiness can never obtain.

They have peace with God, peace in their own consciences; and study, as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all men. Thus they are enabled to bear with composure the varied trials of life; looking with assured hope to that rest which remains to the people of God, when this stormy world shall have passed away, and its votaries be doomed to that doleful place, where they have no rest day nor night, but where the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever! Oh divine Savior! be my portion, the lot of my inheritance.

Then shall I rejoice in the midst of sorrows, and be calm in the midst of storms. Oh! speak peace to my troubled soul, and then all shall be still. Blessed Redeemer! all who come to you find rest unto their souls; and I would now come. Receive me in mercy. Cause me to know you as my Savior, and to rejoice daily in the joyful sound of mercy extended to the chief of sinners. When a sinner is first brought to the knowledge of the truth, and experiences the joys of faith and the sweets of pardoning love, he fancies that the bare mention of his own comforts will be sufficient to make all around him anxious to possess them too.

A little experience, however, shows him, that the hard heart of man is not so easily to be moved. Instead of converting those about him, he raises up a host of foes, even in the bosom of his own family, and among his kinsfolk and acquaintance. He becomes the object either of their pity or their scorn; and meets with cold neglect, or many sharp rebukes, where once he enjoyed a hearty welcome. His name is cast out as evil; his motives are maligned; his actions deemed precise and singular; his conversation whining cant; yes, his whole life condemned as unbecoming a true man, or even a person endued with common sense.

The consistent believer in Jesus must, therefore, expect trials and opposition from an ungodly world. "As he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The blessed Savior has given his people clear and repeated intimations to that effect. "Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of man's sake; rejoice you in that day, and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven."

The Christian's trials arise from various sources. They spring from HIS GENERAL CHARACTER. If the believer be divested of all unnecessary singularity in dress or deportment; yet his attachment to the Redeemer, evidencing itself by a firm adherence to the precepts of the Gospel, and a rooted aversion to all sin, will, of itself, create dislike, and beget such a secret enmity in the hearts of the ungodly, as cannot fail of showing its malignity by outward contempt or ridicule.

There was nothing of singularity in the character of the blessed Jesus, except his unspotted holiness; his unbounded benevolence; his perfect conformity to the divine law; his heavenly wisdom; his deadness to the world; his boldness in reproving sin; his entire resignation to his Holy Father's will; his divine power in healing diseases, feeding the hungry, casting out devils, and stilling the raging elements; and yet, with all this display of majesty and glory, of tenderness and compassion, how hated, how despised, how persecuted, was the Savior of mankind!

If they thus treated the master of the house, they will also despise those of his household. "If," said our Lord, "they hated me, they will also hate you." Have you, Oh my soul, reason to believe that you are born from above; that a divine change has passed upon you? Where are the fruits of faith? Where is the opposition of the world? Examine well; for it is declared--"woe be unto you, if all men speak well of you." Is the image of Jesus stamped upon you? Are you bold in confessing Christ before men; faithful in discountenancing every thing that is contrary to his blessed word?

Do you acknowledge him to be the Lord your righteousness, your only atonement, advocate, and friend? Lord, grant that I may, through grace, be able to say, "you know all things, you know that I love you." I need not court opposition--only let me live a life of faith in the Son of God; and opposition will be excited, as naturally as fire introduced into water occasions a contest between the two elements: for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

The believer's trials frequently arise from HIS PECULIAR SITUATION. This added to the former, namely, his general character as a true Christian, whereby he tacitly condemns the conduct of a wicked world, brings still greater odium upon him, and puts all his graces to the severest test. A pious wife, child, or servant is often severely tried in the furnace, by being brought into immediate contact with an ungodly husband, parent, or master. The natural enmity of the heart, aided by natural authority, receives additional strength; and fails not to vent its utmost malice against the unoffending lambs of Christ's flock.

Like the savage wolf of the forest, such characters seem to take delight in devouring the weak and defenseless, and satiating themselves with the miseries of others. Many hearts are made to bleed by the unkindness of these adversaries to the truth, whose only charge against the objects of their cruelty is, that they dare not comply with their sinful commands in direct violation of the law of God. But Jesus is the good Shepherd. He watches over his flock with tender care in the dark and cloudy day.

In the midst of all their outward troubles, he gives them inward peace. While trusting in his unchanging love, they experience a joy, of which the utmost rage of persecution cannot deprive them. If such be the blessedness of the lambs of your flock, Oh gracious Savior, give me a holy courage in your cause, a holy confidence in your mercy, a holy consolation from your exceeding great and precious promises. Let me never dread the sneer nor the frowns of the ungodly. Preserve me from sinful compliances with the customs, and from sinful conformity to the spirit of the world.

Make me valiant for the truth; ever daring to be singular in the cultivation of Christian tempers, and scrupulous in the choice of Christian companions, whom you have called the salt of the earth, and the light

of the world; and to whom it is your good pleasure to give the kingdom. The believer's trials sometimes spring from THE IMMEDIATE HAND OF GOD. The wife is deprived by death of her earthly support, a tender husband; the husband, of an affectionate wife. The parent sees the hope of his declining age sink into the grave; the child is left an orphan in a wicked and ensnaring world.

The tenderest ties are snapped asunder by the unrelenting hand of death. Diseases of various kinds are commissioned to invade our frame. One faculty after another is taken away, or greatly impaired. Earthly comforts droop and die. Riches fly away; poverty advances, and nothing but clouds and storms appear in sight. In such a situation, the poor trembling believer is sorely assaulted by the tempter to doubt of his interest in Christ, of the love of God to his soul, of the truth of the promises, of the power of his Redeemer, of his willingness to save.

In short, he is tempted to unbelief and hard thoughts of God. At such bereaving seasons, injudicious friends are apt to suspect his character, and, like those of Job, to charge him with hypocrisy. The ungodly rejoice over him, saying, "There, there, so would we have it. You see what is the end of his prayers and religion. If he be a child of God; let him deliver him, if he will have him." But the triumphing of the wicked is short. The very storm which purifies the humble believer, often strikes the scorner dead.

Death, like a tiger, darts upon him in a moment, when he is least aware of his approach. He, who, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy; while the child of God calmly waits the hour of his dismissal, and even longs to depart, that he may be with Christ. Oh the depth of the goodness and severity of God! By these trials, the Lord brings the faith and love of his people into lively exercise, and thus demonstrates the efficacy of true religion.

The graces of the Spirit generally thrive most in a rugged soil, and in tempestuous seasons. Like the Israelites in Egypt, they increase in the midst of oppression, persecution, and suffering; for as gold shines brightest in the furnace, so the Lord's people glorify him most in the fires. (Is. xxiv, 15.) The believer's trials arise also from HIS INWARD CORRUPTIONS. This is more painful to him than all the rest, because the sufferings he endures from indwelling sin are the bitter fruits of that evil nature, which is so offensive to God his Savior.

He can bear with calm composure the taunts of men; he can patiently submit to be accounted a fool for Christ's sake; yes, he can suffer joyfully the spoiling of his goods, and even the loss of life itself; but he cannot endure the inward workings of corruption. He cannot submit to the power of indwelling sin. He cannot tamely allow his mind to be assaulted by his spiritual enemies. He cannot bear the thought of losing that joy and peace through believing, which is the very foretaste of heavenly felicity.

Oh the anguish of his mind, when corruption rages! How fervently does he pray for deliverance! How precious is the blood of Jesus at such seasons! He flies to the strong for strength. He takes refuge in the wounds of Jesus, and is safe. This trial, like every other, is over-ruled for good. A holy watchfulness, an increased dread of sin, a jealous, godly fear, a spirit of prayer, a more simple dependence on Christ, a more hearty loathing of self, a more ardent breathing after holiness and heaven, are excited in the soul.

Thus, through grace, Satan is defeated, and the tempted believer comes out of the furnace, as gold tried in the fire, leaving nothing but the dross behind. Happy are the people who have God for their Lord, yes, happy are you, Oh Israel; who is like unto you, Oh people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency! and your enemies shall be found liars unto you. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Oh! 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, To rely upon his

word; Cares and sorrows fly before us, When we trust a pardoning God.

Here we meet with heavy crosses; Many burdens we must bear; But the Lord can make our losses Lighter than the ambient air. Then, my soul, why so distressed? Why cast down with anxious fear? Jesus helps the weak oppressed, He the drooping soul can cheer. Gird your loins, let hope support you; Speed with cheerful haste your way; He who called you to the journey, Will conduct to endless day.

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