

A Consolation in Affliction

by Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson's sermon emphasizes that God's afflictions are ultimately acts of love that lead to spiritual growth and eternal blessings.

Scripture: Genesis 33:11, Job 1:21, Psalm 65:11, Psalm 91:15, Psalm 119:65, Psalm 119:71, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Divine Comfort", "Suffering Saints"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about finding consolation in affliction by acknowledging God's kindness and faithfulness towards His people. Despite the challenges and heavy afflictions faced by the righteous, God deals well with them by being their God, making them grow wiser and promoting holiness through affliction, providing promises and preventing sin. Afflictions are seen as acts of love from a caring Father, moderating His correction, preventing sin, and leading His children to heaven where eternal glory awaits.

Transcript

A Consolation in Affliction

by Thomas Watson

"You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord, according unto your word." Psalm 119:65

The Psalms are the marrow of the Bible. They are both for delight and use, like rich cordials which not only gratify the palate--but strengthen the spirits. This Psalm is full of divine and spiritual matter. It was composed, if not sung, by the sweet singer of Israel. The words fall into two parts.

1. God's kindness to David: He dealt well with him.
2. David's grateful acknowledgment of this favor: "You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord."

From God's kindness to David, observe:

Doctrine 1: That God deals well with his people. "God has dealt graciously with me" (Gen. 33. 11). God's people often fail to respond to his love; but though they deal badly with God--God deals well with them.

God's dealing well with his people arises from the intrinsic goodness of his nature. "God is love" (1 John 4:16). From this flow all acts of royal bounty.

Question: In what ways does God deal well with his people?

Answer: In enriching them with varied mercies; his paths "drop fatness" (Psalm 65:11); he feeds, adopts, and crowns them! Is not this dealing well with them?

Objection: But how does God deal well with the saints, when he lays his hand so heavy upon them in affliction? His pen is full of gall, and he writes bitter things against them! "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Psalm 73:14). How does God deal well with his people--when it fares ill with them?

Answer: It must be held as an undoubted maxim--that when the Lord severely chastises the saints, he deals well with them. But we are ready to question this truth, and say as Mary to the angel, "How can this be?" Therefore I shall demonstrate it, that, when it goes badly with the righteous--yet God deals well with them.

1. When the Lord afflicts the saints--yet he deals well with them, because he is their God. David was in the depths of sorrow (Psalm 131:1)--yet he could say the Lord was his portion (Psalm 16:5). God is an "exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). He is a whole paradise of delight! He is the good in which all good is contained. He who has God for his God--all his estate lies in jewels! If then God passes over himself to his people by a deed of gift to be their God, here is enough to compensate for all their troubles. What can God give--more than himself!

2. When it goes badly with the godly--yet God deals well with them because, while he is inflicting evil upon them, he is doing them good. That which the text renders, "You have dealt well with your servant", in the Hebrew reads, "You have done good to your servant." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71). David does not say, "It is good for me that I have been in prosperity"--but "that I have been afflicted". God does his people good by affliction in two ways:

a. Affliction makes the godly grow wiser. Affliction is a school of wisdom. Affliction reveals pride, earthliness, unmortified passion, which they could not have believed was in their hearts. Affliction cures the eyesight--to see one's self.

b. Affliction promotes holiness. The more the diamond is cut, the more it sparkles! "That we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). When prosperity makes grace rust--God scours us with affliction! The godly are thankful for their sufferings. God by the wholesome discipline of the cross, makes them more humble, and more conformed to Christ's image. The sharp frosts of affliction bring on the spring flowers of grace. Now if God, while he is chastising, is doing us good--then surely he deals well with us.

3. When God puts his children to the school of the cross--yet he deals well with them because he does not leave them without a promise. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Cor 10:13). God knows our frame--that we are feeble and weak; our flesh is not made "of brass" (Job 6:12). And the Lord will not try us above our strength, he will not lay a giant's burden upon a child's back. God will not stretch the strings of his violin too hard, lest they break. If God should strike with one hand, he will support with the other hand. (Song of Sol. 8:3). Either he will make our yoke lighter--or our faith stronger. This promise is honey at the end of the rod.

4. God deals well with his people when he afflicts, because afflictions are preventative.

1. Afflictions prevent SIN. "To keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud." (2 Cor. 12:7). Prosperity, like opium, is ready to make men fall asleep in sin. God awakens them by the voice of the rod, and so prevents a spiritual lethargy.

2. Afflictions prevent HELL. "We are chastened of the Lord--that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). Does not a judge deal well with a prisoner when he lays some light penalty on him--and saves his life? Is it not goodness in God, when he lays upon us light affliction--and saves us from wrath to come (2 Cor. 4:17) What is a drop of sorrow which the godly taste--compared to the bottomless sea of wrath the wicked must drink!

5. When God corrects he deals well with his people, because all he does is in love. Afflictions are sharp arrows--but they are shot front the hand of a loving father! As God's not afflicting the wicked is done in anger--so God's hand is heaviest when it is lightest. "I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom" (Hos. 4:14). A father gives over correcting a child whom he intends to disinherit. God's chastising the godly is in love. "As many as I love--I rebuke and discipline." (Rev. 3:19). When God has the look of an enemy--he has the heart of a father! When Abraham lifted up his hand to sacrifice Isaac--he loved him. Just so, when God sacrifices the comforts of his children--he loves them. Was not God severe against Christ? Yet it was proclaimed by a voice from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17). Well then, if God only sends love-tokens to us, he deals well with us.

6. God deals well with his people when he afflicts them, because he moderates his stroke. "I will correct you in measure." (Jer. 30:11; 46:28). God does not smite his children as he might. He "does not stir up all his wrath." (Psalm 78:38) God does not make the cup as bitter as he could. He uses medicines rather than corrosives. He lays a lighter burden on--when he might lay on a heavier burden. Does God take away a child? He might take away his Spirit! Does he chastise the body? He might torment the conscience! God does not correct his children as much as they have deserved, "You have punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13). Does God make us drink a cup of wormwood? We have deserved to drink a cup of wrath! Does God cut us short? We have deserved that he should cut us off! Do the waters of affliction come up to our ankles? We have deserved to be drowned in these waters!

7. When God afflicts his children he deals well with them, because he keeps them from sinning. "I pray that that You protect them from evil." (John 17:15).

1. In affliction, the godly are kept from impatience. When the wicked are under God's black rod, they either faint or fret: "Men were scorched with great heat--and blasphemed the name of God!" (Rev. 16:9). But the godly are silent under the rod: "And Aaron held his peace." (Lev. 10:3). It was a sore trial; both his sons were consumed with fire--but "Aaron held his peace." God's people open their ear to hear the voice of the rod--but shut their mouth! They have not one word to say against God.

2. The godly dare not use any dishonest means to extricate themselves out of trouble. Wicked men, like criminals, do not care how they get loose--they will sin themselves out of their difficulties. The people of God would rather be in the furnace to have their dross purged--than come out too soon! They will not purchase their liberty--by ensnaring their consciences. Does not God deal well with his children--in keeping them from sinning in affliction? Affliction cannot do the harm which sin does. One is like a rent in a garment, the other is like a rent in one's flesh. Affliction may deprive us of our estates--but sin deprives us of our God.

8. God deals well with his children in affliction, because though he corrects them--he does not forsake them. Indeed, "Zion said--The Lord has forsaken me!" (Isaiah 49:14) But that was wrongly said. "For the Lord will not cast off forever!" (Lam. 3:31). God may alter his providence, not his purpose! He may change his dealings--but not his disposition. "How shall I give you up, O Ephraim?" (Hos. 11:8). This alludes to a father who is about to disinherit his son--but when he is going to set his hand to the deed, his heart begins to stir: "I am his father, and though he is a rebellious son--yet he is a son; how shall I disinherit him?" Such is the working of God's heart towards his children--though he may give them a severe rebuke--yet he will not disinherit them from his mercy!

9. God deals well with his children in affliction because, though their condition should be sad--yet it is not so bad as others. The Lord puts a difference between the chastisements of the godly, and the punishments of the wicked. The godly man has pain in his sickness--but the wicked man has "wrath with his sickness" (Eccles. 5:17). The Lord shoots a single arrow at the godly--but a whole shower of arrows at the wicked--he punishes them in their body, estate, conscience. A godly man has God to pity him in his sorrows (Isaiah 63:9). But the wicked have God to laugh at them in their mercies (Prov. 1:26). The godly have Christ to pray for them in their afflictions; but the impenitent when in torment, are shut out of Christ's prayer: "I do not pray for the world" (John 17:9).

God's people are apt to say, never did any suffer as they; but it is worse with the wicked--their sins and sufferings meet together.

10. God in affliction deals well with his children because, if he takes away one comfort, he leaves more behind. God threatened Jerusalem, that she would be stripped of all her jewels and left bare (Ezek. 16:39). But you who belong to God may "sing of mercy and judgment" (Psalm 101:1). If God has fleeced your estate--he has raised you up friends. If he has taken away one of your jewels--he has left you others. If he has plucked one dear relation from you, he has left other sweet clusters behind, and can double your comfort in them. Is not all this kindness? But this is our sin--we grieve more for one loss--than we are thankful for a hundred mercies! Jacob was more troubled for the loss of Joseph--than he was comforted with the lives of all his other children! (Gen. 37:35)

11. When God afflicts, he deals well with his people, because he takes away nothing from them--but he gives them that which is better. What damage can it be to a man to lose his pennies--and have gold given him? If God takes away health--he gives holiness. If he takes away a child--he gives a Christ! Is not this better? God takes away a flower--and gives a jewel!

12. When God afflicts his children he deals well with them, because he gives them his divine presence. "I will be with him in trouble!" (Psalm 91:15). God never promised us a charter of exemption from trouble--but he has promised to be with us in trouble. Better be in a prison and have God's presence--than on a throne and lack it! God's presence gives courage (Acts 23:11). Was not Christ with the three Hebrew children? Did he not go with them into the fire? "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods!" (Dan. 3:25) He who is the Second person in the Trinity, made the fourth person in the furnace.

13. God in afflicting deals well with his children, because he gives them that which makes amends for their afflictions. He drops in the oil of gladness; he makes them gather grapes from thorns: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy!" (John 16:20). We see a godly man's sufferings--but we know not what joy he feels--as we hear the roaring of the sea--but do not see the gold at the bottom. Philip of Hesse said that in his

trouble he felt the divine consolations of the martyrs; here was honey out of the lion. The saints have been sometimes so sweetly enlarged, that they would rather endure their afflictions--than lack their comforts! "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ (2 Cor. 1:5). Paul had his prison songs! (Acts 16:25). This bird of paradise could sing in winter! God turns the bitter waters of Marah into wine! He keeps his cordials for cases of fainting. When the saints taste most of the wrath of men--they shall feel most of the love of God. Thus the Lord candies his wormwood with sugar!

14. When God corrects his children he deals well with them, because these afflictions, or hot trials, do not last long. After the clouds--the sun appears. "I will punish the descendants of David because of Solomon's sin--though not forever!" (1 Kings 11:39). God will love forever--but not afflict forever! He will before long give his people a writ of ease. A sinner's best, and a saint's worst--are but short! Affliction is called a cup. (Ezek. 23:32). The wicked drink a sea of wrath; the godly only sip of the cup of affliction! And God will shortly say, "Let this cup pass away from them!" "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10). As affliction has a sting to torment--so it has a wing to fly!

15. When God puts his children to the school of the cross he deals well with them, because these afflictions lead them by the hand to heaven. By the cross--we mount to heaven! "Our light affliction works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" (2 Cor. 4:17). Upon the dark color of affliction--God lays the golden color of glory! O weeping saint, what a blessed change you shall shortly have! You shall change your pilgrimage--for paradise. You shall have your wish. Are riches desirable? You shall have gates of pearl. Is honor desirable? You shall have white robes. Is pleasure desirable? You shall enter into the joy of the Lord!

Oh, think what it will be to be sweetly immersed in the River of Life, and bathe in the honey-streams of God's love forever! Think what the beatific vision will be! What it will be to wear a garland made of the flowers of paradise! Think what it will be to have the soul thicker set with jewels of glory than the sky is bespangled with stars! Oh, what a compensation this will be for all a Christian's trials! A sight of this bliss will make him forget his sufferings! One sunbeam of glory will dry up the water of his tears!

Application:

If God deals well with us--when he chastises us--then it is fitting for us to cherish good thoughts of God. We are prone in adversity, to think harshly of God--this arises from pride. Such think themselves better than others, and that they have deserved better at God's hands; and now pride vents itself in murmuring! Oh, let us take heed of having harsh thoughts of God! The patient has no cause to think badly of the physician, when he prescribes him a bitter potion--seeing it is in order to a cure! God's afflictive providences are the strokes of a father--not the wounds of an enemy! God smites--that he may save. Out of the bitterest affliction--God distills his glory, and our happiness!

Let us think well of God! Nay, in all adverse providences, let us learn to bless God. "In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18). If in everything--then in affliction. And with good reason, because God deals well with us! Job blessed God in his severe affliction. (Job 1:21). The smiting of Job's body, was like striking upon a musical instrument--he sounded forth thankfulness. A gracious soul should bless God that he will take so much notice of him--as to visit him with the rod! (Job 7:18) and is so kind as rather to afflict him--than lose him. This shows a high degree of grace--not only to justify God in affliction--but to magnify him. Believers are God's temples, and where should his praises he sounded forth--but in his temples!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-watson/a-consolation-in-affliction/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net