

## VI. PRAYER AND TROUBLE Session Two

"My first message for heavenly relief went singing over millions of miles of space in 1869, and brought relief to my troubled heart. But, thanks be to Him, I have received many delightful and helpful answers during the last fifty years. I would think the commerce of the skies had gone into bankruptcy if I did not hear frequently, since I have learned how to ask and how to receive."--H. W. Hodge

In the New Testament there are three words used which embrace trouble. These are tribulation, suffering and affliction, words differing somewhat, and yet each of them practically meaning trouble of some kind. Our Lord put His disciples on notice that they might expect tribulation in this life, teaching them that tribulation belonged to this world, and they could not hope to escape it; that they would not be carried through this life on flowery beds of ease. How hard to learn this plain and patent lesson! "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." There is the encouragement. As He had overcome the world and its tribulations, so might they do the same.

Paul taught the same lesson throughout his ministry, when in confirming the souls of the brethren, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, he told them that "we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." He himself knew this by his own experience, for his pathway was anything but smooth and flowery.

He it is who uses the word "suffering" to describe the troubles of life, in that comforting passage in which he contrasts life's troubles with the final glory of heaven, which shall be the reward of all who patiently endure the ills of Divine Providence:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

And he it is who speaks of the afflictions which come to the people of God in this world, and regards them as light as compared with the weight of glory awaiting all who are submissive, patient and faithful in all their troubles:

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But these present afflictions can work for us only as we cooperate with God in prayer. As God works through prayer, it is only through this means He can accomplish His highest ends for us. His Providence works with greatest effect with His praying ones. These know the uses of trouble and its gracious designs. The greatest value in trouble comes to those who bow lowest before the throne.

Paul, in urging patience in tribulation, connects it directly with prayer, as if prayer alone would place us where we could be patient when tribulation comes. "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." He here couples up tribulation and prayer, showing their close relationship and the worth of prayer in begetting and culturing patience in tribulation. In fact there can be no patience exemplified when trouble comes, only as it is secured through instant and continued prayer. In the school of prayer is where patience is learned and practiced.

Prayer brings us into that state of grace where tribulation is not only endured, but where there is under it a spirit of rejoicing. In showing the gracious benefits of justification, in Romans 5:3, Paul says:

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

What a chain of graces are here set forth as flowing from tribulation! What successive steps to a high state of religious experience! And what rich fruits result from even painful tribulation!

To the same effect are the words of Peter in his First Epistle, in his strong prayer for those Christians to whom he writes; thus showing that suffering and the highest state of grace are closely connected; and intimating that it is through suffering we are to be brought to those higher regions of Christian experience:

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle you."

It is in the fires of suffering that God purifies His saints and brings them to the highest things. It is in the furnace their faith is tested, their patience is tried, and they are developed in all those rich virtues which make up Christian character. It is while they are passing through deep waters that He shows how close He can come to His praying, believing saints.

It takes faith of a high order and a Christian experience far above the average religion of this day, to count it joy when we are called to pass through tribulation. God's highest aim in dealing with His people is in developing Christian character. He is after begetting in us those rich virtues which belong to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is seeking to make us like Himself. It is not so much work that He wants in us. It is not greatness. It is the presence in us of patience, meekness, submission to the Divine will, prayerfulness which brings everything to Him. He seeks to beget His own image in us. And trouble in some form tends to do this very thing, for this is the end and aim of trouble. This is its work. This is the task it is called to perform. It is not a chance incident in life, but has a design in view, just as it has an All-wise Designer back of it, who makes trouble His agent to bring forth the largest results.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us a perfect directory of trouble, comprehensive, clear and worth while to be studied. Here is "chastisement," another word for trouble, coming from a Father's hand, showing God is in all the sad and afflictive events of life. Here is its nature and its gracious design. It is not punishment in the accurate meaning of that word, but the means God employs to correct and discipline His children in dealing with them on earth. Then we have the fact of the evidence of being His people, namely, the presence of chastisement. The ultimate end is that we "may be partakers of his holiness," which is but another way of saying that all this disciplinary process is to the end that God may make us like Himself. What an encouragement, too, that, chastisement is no evidence of anger or displeasure on God's part, but is the strong proof of His love. Let

us read the entire directory on this important subject:

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.

"Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby."

Just as prayer is wide in its range, taking in everything, so trouble is infinitely varied in its uses and designs. It takes trouble sometimes to arrest attention, to stop men in the busy rush of life, and to awaken them to a sense of their helplessness and their need and sinfulness. Not till King Manasseh was bound with thorns and carried away into a foreign land and got into deep trouble, was he awakened and brought back to God. It was then he humbled himself and began to call upon God.

The Prodigal Son was independent and self-sufficient when in prosperity, but when money and friends departed, and he began to be in want, then it was he "came to himself," and decided to return to his father's house, with prayer and confession on his lips. Many a man who has forgotten God has been arrested, caused to consider his ways, and brought to remember God and pray by trouble. Blessed is trouble when it accomplishes this in men!

It is for this among other reasons that Job says:

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth. Therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands maketh whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

One thing more might be named. Trouble makes earth undesirable and causes heaven to loom up large in the horizon of hope. There is a world where trouble never comes. But the path of tribulation leads to that world. Those who are there went there through tribulation. What a world set before our longing eyes which appeals to our hopes, as sorrows like a cyclone sweep over us! Hear John, as he talks about it and those who are there:

"What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? . . . And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb . . . And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"There I shall bathe my weary soul,

In seas of heavenly rest,  
And not a wave of trouble roll,  
Across my peaceful breast."

Oh, children of God, ye who have suffered, who have been sorely tried, whose sad experiences have often brought broken spirits and bleeding hearts, cheer up! God is in all your troubles, and He will see that all shall "work together for good," if you will but be patient, submissive and prayerful.