

A MYSTERY! SAINTS SORROWING AND JESUS GLAD! **NO. 585**

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent you may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.”
John 11:14, 15.*

THERE lived in the little village of Bethany a very happy family. There was neither father nor mother in it—the household consisted of the unmarried brother Eleazar, or Lazarus, and his sisters, Martha and Mary, who dwelt together in unity so good and pleasant that there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore. This affectionate trio was *all* lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and was frequently favored with His company. They kept open house whenever the Great Teacher came that way. Both for the Master and for the disciples, there was always a table, a bed, and a candlestick in the prophet’s chamber, and sometimes sumptuous feasts were prepared for the whole company. They were very happy, and rejoiced much to think that they could be serviceable to the necessities of one so poor, and yet so honored as the Lord Jesus. But, alas, affliction comes everywhere! Virtue may sentinel the door, but grief is not to be excluded from the homestead. “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” If the fuel is a log of sweet-smelling sandal wood, yet the sparks must rise, and even so the best of families must feel affliction. Lazarus sickens. It is a mortal sickness beyond the power of physicians. What is the first thought of the sisters but to send for their friend, Jesus? They know that one word from His lips will restore their brother—there is no absolute need that He should even risk His safety by a journey to Bethany; He has but to speak the word and their brother shall be made whole. With glowing hopes and moderated anxieties, they send a tender message to Jesus—“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” Jesus hears it, and sends back the answer which had much comfort in it, but could hardly compensate for His own absence, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” There lies poor *Lazarus* after the message is come; he does not recover; he is a little more cheerful because he hears that his sickness is not unto death, but his pains do not abate. The clammy death-sweat gathers on his brow; his tongue is dry; he is full of pains and racked with anguish. At last, he passes through the iron gate of death, and there lies his corpse before the weeping sisters’ eyes. Why was not Jesus there? Why did He not come? Tender-hearted, as He always was, what could have made Him thus unkind? Why tarries He so? Why is He so long in coming? How can His words be true? He said, “This sickness is not unto death,” and there lies the good man cold in death, and the mourners are gathering for the funeral.

Look at *Martha*! She has been sitting up every night watching her poor brother; no care could have been more constant—no tenderness more excessive. There is no potion in the range of her activities which she has not compounded; this herb and the other, she has gathered, and she has administered all sorts of medicinal drinks and nourishing foods; and anxiously she has watched until her eyes are red for lack of sleep. Jesus might have spared her all this. Why didn’t He? He had only to wish it, and the flush of health would have returned to the cheek of Lazarus, and there would have been no more need of this weary nursing, and this killing watchfulness. What is Jesus doing? Martha was willing to serve Him—will He not serve her? She has always cumbered herself about much—serving for His sake, giving Him not only necessities, but dainties—and will He not give her what is so desirable to her heart, so essential to her happiness—her brother’s life? How is it He can send her a promise which He does not seem to keep, and tantalize her with hope, and cast down her faith? As for *Mary*, she has been sitting still at her brother’s side, listening to his dying words, repeating in his ear the gracious words of Jesus which she had been accustomed to hear when she sat at His feet. As she caught the last accents of her expiring brother, she thought less about the medicine and about the diet than Martha did, but she thought more

about his spiritual health and about his soul's enjoyment. She endeavored to stay the sinking spirits of her beloved brother with words like these, "He will come; He may wait, but I know Him, His heart is very kind, He will come at the last; and even if He lets you sleep in death, it will be but for a little; He raised the widow's son at the gates of Nain, He will surely raise you, whom He loves far more. Have you not heard how He wakened the daughter of Jairus? Brother, He will come and quicken you, and we shall have many happy hours yet, and we shall have this as a special love token from our Master and our Lord, that He raised you from the dead."

But why, why was she not spared those bitter tears which ran scalding down her cheeks when she saw that her brother was really dead? She could not believe it! She kissed his forehead, and oh, how cold was that marble brow! She lifted up his hand—"He cannot be dead," she said, "For Jesus said this sickness was not unto death." But the hand fell nerveless by her side—her brother was really a corpse, and putrefaction soon set in—and then she knew that the beloved clay was not exempt from all the dishonor which decay brings to the human body. Poor Mary! Jesus loved you, it is said, but this is a strange way of showing His love! Where is He? Miles away He lingers. He knows your brother is sick; yes, He knows that he is dead, and yet He abides still where He is. Oh, sorrowful mystery that the pity of such a tender Savior should sink so far below their plumb line to gauge or His mercy should range so high beyond their power to reach!

Jesus is talking of the death of His friend, let us listen to His words—perhaps we may find the key to His actions in the words of His lips. How surprising! He does not say, "I regret that I have tarried so long." He does not say, "I ought to have hurried, but even now, it is not too late." Hear and marvel! Wonder of wonders! He says, "I am glad that I was not there." *Glad!* The word is out of place! Lazarus, by this time, stinks in his tomb, and here is the Savior glad! Martha and Mary are weeping their eyes out for sorrow, and yet their friend, Jesus, is glad? It is strange, it is passing strange! However, we may rest assured that Jesus knows better than we do, and our faith may, therefore, sit still and try to spell out His meaning, where our reason cannot find it at the first glance. "I am glad," He says, "*for your sakes* that I was not there; to the intent you may believe." Ah, we see it now—Christ is not glad because of sorrow, but only on account of the result of it. He knew that this temporary trial would help His disciples to a greater faith, and He so prizes their growth in faith that He is even glad of the sorrow which occasions it. He does as much say, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there to prevent the trouble, for now that it is come, it will teach you to believe in Me, and this shall be much better for you than to have been spared the affliction."

We have plainly before us the principle that our Lord, in His infinite wisdom and love, sets so high a value upon His people's faith, that He will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened. Let us try to press the wine of consolation from the cluster of the text. In three cups, we will preserve the goodly juice as it flows forth from the winepress of meditation. First of all, brethren, Jesus Christ was glad that the trial had come, *for the strengthening of the faith of the apostles*; secondly, *for strengthening the faith of the family*; and thirdly, *for giving faith to others*—for you find, by the 45th verse, that the goblet passed round to sympathizing friends—"Many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him."

I. Jesus Christ designed the death of Lazarus and his later resurrection FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF THE FAITH OF THE APOSTLES. This acted two ways—not only would *the trial itself* tend to strengthen their faith, but the *remarkable deliverance* which Christ gave to them out of it would certainly minister to the growth of their confidence in Him.

1. Let us at once observe that *the trial itself would certainly tend to increase the apostle's faith*. Faith untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith. I believe in the existence of faith in men who have no trials, but that is as far as I can go. I am persuaded, brethren, that where there is no trial, faith just draws breath enough to live, and that is all; for faith, like the fabled salamander, has fire for its native element. Faith never prospers so well as when all things are against her—tempests are trainers, and the lightnings are her illuminators. When a calm reigns on the sea, spread the sails as you will, the ship moves not to its harbor; for on a slumbering ocean the keel sleeps, too. Let the winds come howling forth, and let the waters lift up themselves—then, though the vessel may rock, and her deck may be

washed with waves, and her mast may creak under the pressure of the full and swelling sail, yet it is then that she makes headway towards her desired haven! No flowers wear so lovely a blue as those which grow at the foot of the frozen glacier; no stars are as bright as those which glisten in the polar sky; no water is so sweet as that which springs amid the desert sand; and no faith so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity. Thus says the Lord, by the mouth of the prophet, "I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord."

Now, why afflicted and poor? Because there is an adaptation in the afflicted and poor among the Lord's people to trust in the Lord. He does not say, "I will leave in the midst of you a prosperous and rich people, and they shall trust." No! These scarcely seem to have such capacity for faith as the afflicted ones have. Rather I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted and poor people, and they, by reason of their very affliction and poverty, shall be the more graciously disposed to repose their faith in the Lord. Untried faith is always small in stature; and it is likely to remain dwarfish as long as it is without trials. There is no room in the placid pools of ease for faith to gain leviathan proportions; she must dwell in the stormy sea if she would be one of the chief of the ways of God. Tried faith brings experience; and every one of you who are men and women of experience, must know that experience makes religion become more *real* to you. You never know either the bitterness of sin or the sweetness of pardon, till you have felt both. You never know your own weakness till you have been compelled to go through the rivers, and you would never have known God's strength had you not been supported amid the floods. All the talk about religion, which is not based upon an experience of it, is mere talk. If we have little experience, we cannot speak so positively as those can whose experience has been more deep and profound. Once when I was preaching upon the faithfulness of God in time of trial, in the earlier days of my ministry, my venerable grandfather was sitting in the pulpit behind me; he suddenly rose up and took my place, and coming to the front of the pulpit, said, "My grandson can preach this as a matter of theory, but I can tell you it as a matter of experience, for I have done business upon the great waters, and have seen the works of the Lord for myself." There is an accumulation of force in the testimony of one who has personally passed through the things of which others can only speak, as though they had seen them in a map or in a picture. Travelers who write from their easy chairs, what they have seen from their bedchambers, may compose books to beguile the idle hours of those who stay at home; but he who is about to traverse regions full of danger, seeks a guide who has really trod the road. The writer may excel in ornate words—the veritable traveler has real and valuable wisdom. Faith increases in solidity, assurance, and intensity, the more she is exercised with tribulation, and the more she has been cast down, and lifted up again. Let not this, however, discourage those who are young in faith. You will have trials enough without your seeking for them; the full portion will be measured out to you in due season. Meanwhile, if you cannot yet claim the result of long experience, thank God for what divine grace you have. Praise Him for that which you have attained; walk according to that rule, and you shall yet have more and more of the blessing of God, till your faith shall remove mountains, and conquer impossibilities!

It may be asked, "What is the method by which trial strengthens faith?" We might answer in various ways. *Trial takes away many of the impediments of faith.* Carnal security is the worst foe to confidence in God. If I sit down and say, "Soul, take your ease, you have much goods laid up for many years," faith's road is barricaded, but adversity sets the barn on fire, and "the goods laid up for many years," cease to block up the path of faith. Oh, the blessed axe of sorrow clears a pathway for me to my God, by cutting down the thick trees of my earthly comforts! When I say, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved," the visible fortification, rather than the invisible Protector, engages my attention; but when the great earthquake shakes the rocks, and the mountain is swallowed up, I fly to the immovable Rock of Ages to build my confidence on high! Worldly ease is a great foe to faith; it loosens the joints of holy valor, and snaps the sinews of sacred courage. The balloon never rises until the cords are cut—affliction does this sharp service for believing souls. While the wheat sleeps comfortably in the husk, it is useless to man. It must be threshed out of its resting place before its value can be known. Trial plucks the arrow of faith from the repose of the quiver, and shoots it against the foe.

Nor is *affliction of small service to faith when it exposes the weakness of the creature.* This trial would show the apostles that they must not depend upon the bounty of any one man, for though Lazarus

may have entertained them, and filled their little bag with food, yet Lazarus dies, and Mary may die, and Martha may die, and all friends must die, and this would teach them not to look to broken cisterns, but to fly to the ever-flowing fountain. Oh, dear friends, we are in much danger of making idols of our mercies! God gives us His temporal favors as refreshments along the way, and then, straightway, we kneel down and cry, "These are your gods, O Israel." It is of the Lord's mercy that these idol-gods are broken in pieces. He blasts the gourds under which we sat in ample shade in order that we may lift up our cry to Him, and trust in Him *alone*. The emptiness of the creature is a lesson we are so slow to learn, and we must have it whipped into us by the rod of affliction; but learned it must be, or else faith can never attain to eminence.

Furthermore, trial is of special service to faith when *it drives her to her God*. I make a sad confession, over which I mourn, that when my soul is happy and things prosper, I do not, as a rule, live as near to God as I do in the midst of shame and contempt, and casting down of spirit. O my God, how dear You are to my soul in the night when the sun goes down! You bright and morning star, how sweetly do You shine! When the world's bread is sugared and buttered, then we devour it till we grow sick—but when the world changes our diet, fills our mouth with vinegar, and makes our drink gall and wormwood—*then* we cry for the breasts of our dear God again! When the world's wells are full of sweet but poisonous water, we pitch our tents at the well's mouth, and drink again and again and forget the well of Bethlehem which is inside the gate; but when earth's water becomes bitter like the stream of Marah, then we turn away all sick and faint, and cry after the water of life, "Spring up, O well!" Thus, afflictions fetch us to our God, as the barking dog drives the wandering sheep to the shepherd's hand.

And then, *trial has a hardening effect upon faith*. As the Spartan lads were prepared for fighting by the sharp discipline of their boyish days, so are God's servants trained for war by the afflictions which He sends upon them in the early days of their spiritual life. We must run with footmen, or we shall never be able to contend with horses; we must be thrown into the water, or we shall never learn to swim; we must hear the whizzing of the bullets, or we shall never become veteran soldiers. The gardener knows that, if his flowers were kept always under glass and grown in a great temperature, when he might put them outside, should there come a cold night, they would quickly die; so he does not give them too much heat, but exposes them by degrees, and gets them used to the cold, that they may stand in the open air. And thus, the only wise God does not put His servants in hothouses and rear them delicately, but He exposes them to trials that they may know how to bear it when it comes. If you want to ruin your son, never let him know a hardship. When he is a child, carry him in your arms, when he becomes a youth, still coddle him, and when he becomes a man, still dry-nurse him, and you will succeed in producing an arrant fool! If you want to prevent his being made useful in the world, guard him from every kind of toil. Do not allow him to struggle. Wipe the sweat from his dainty brow and say, "Dear child, you shall never have another task so arduous." Pity him when he ought to be punished; supply all his wishes, ward off all disappointments, prevent all troubles, and you will surely tutor him to be a reprobate and to break your heart! But put him where he must work, expose him to difficulties, purposely throw him into peril, and in this way, you shall make him a man, and when he comes to do a man's work and to bear a man's trial, he shall be fit for either. My Master does not daintily cradle His children when they ought to run alone; and when they begin to run, He is not always putting out His finger for them to lean upon—He lets them tumble down to the cutting of their knees—because then they will walk more carefully by-and-by, and learn to stand upright by the strength which faith confers upon them.

You see, dear friends that Jesus Christ was glad — glad that His disciples were blessed by trouble. Will you think of this, you who are so troubled this morning? Jesus Christ does sympathize with you, but still, He does it wisely, and He says, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." He is glad that your husband is taken away, that your child is buried; glad that your business does not prosper; He is glad that you have those aches and pains, and that you have so weak a body—to the intent that you may believe. You would never have possessed the precious faith which now supports you if the trial of your faith had not been like fire. You are a tree that never would have rooted so well if the wind had not rocked you to and fro, and made you to take firm hold upon the precious truths of the covenant of grace.

2. But not to tarry here, let us notice that *the deliverance, which Christ worked by the resurrection of Lazarus, was calculated also to strengthen the faith of the apostles.* At the worst, Christ can work! Why what a plight were they now in! Here was a case which had come to the very worst. Lazarus is not merely dead—he has been buried; the stone has been rolled to the mouth of the sepulcher—worse than that, he has become putrid. Here are miracles; so many, that I must describe the resurrection of Lazarus not as one miracle, but as a mass of wonders. We will not go into detail, but suffice it to say, we cannot suppose anything to be a more prodigious exhibition of the divine strength than the restoration of health and life to a body through which the worms did creep and crawl! And yet, in this very worst case, Christ is not brought to a loss as what to do. Here was a case where human power evidently could do nothing. Now, bring the violin and the harp, and let music try its charms. Bring here, physician, your most potent draught, now, for the true *aqua vilae!* Now, see what you can do. What? Does the medicine fail? The physician turns away disgusted, for the stench may sooner destroy the physician's life, than he restore the corpse. Now, seek around the world, and ask all men that are—Herod and his men-at-arms, and Caesar on the imperial throne—“Can you do anything here?” No, death sits with a ghastly smile laughing at them all. “I have Lazarus,” he says, “beyond your reach.” Yet Jesus Christ wins the day!

Here, *divine sympathy became most manifest.* Jesus wept when He thought of Lazarus and his weeping sisters. We do not find it often said that He wept. He was “a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief,” but those were precious and rare drops which He shed over that dead body. He could do no more when He thought of Jerusalem—He does no less now that He thinks of Lazarus.

What an exhibition these disciples had of *the divine power* as well as the divine sympathy, for Christ does but say, “Lazarus, come forth,” and death can hold his captive no longer! Forth from the morgue, he comes, restored to perfect health!

Do you not think that all this must tend to strengthen the apostles' faith? It seems to me to be a part of the best education they could possibly receive for their future ministry. I think I see the apostles in later times shut up in prison—they are condemned to die, but Peter comforts John by saying, “He can bring us out of prison—do you not remember how he brought Lazarus out of his grave? He can certainly appear for us and set us free.” When they went forth to preach to sinners, how would they be strengthened by remembering these cases! Their hearers were debauched, depraved, immoral—the apostles went into the midst of the worst conditions of human nature, and yet they feared not for the result—for they knew that putrid Lazarus revived at Christ's word! Peter would argue, “Did not Christ restore Lazarus when his body was stinking and decayed? He can certainly bring the most reprobate hearts to the obedience of the truth of God, and raise the vilest of the vile to a new life.”

Many of the apostolic Churches were far gone; they had in them unworthy members; but this would not too much buffet the faith of the apostles, for they would say, “That same Christ, who raised up Lazarus, can make Sardis and Pergamos and Thyatira yet to be a praise in the earth, and churches, which seem to be corrupt and foul in the nostrils of the Most High, may yet be made a brightness and glory, and a sweet-smelling savor unto Him.” I am persuaded that very often such a miracle as this would return to them, and strengthen them in the times of their suffering and labor—and make them able to bear afflictions, and even martyrdom itself, in confidence in Christ.

I will not, however, say more, because the thing seems obvious enough; only you must not forget the principle we are trying to bring out, that in the case of the apostles, Christ considered that for them to have strong faith was worth any cost. No matter what pangs it cost Mary and Martha, or in what grief it might involve Himself or His apostles, they must bear it, because the result was so exceedingly beneficial. The surgeon handles the knife without tears, sharp is the cut, but he knows it will cure. The mother puts the medicine to the child's mouth, and the child cries and heaves, and loathes the bitterness, but the mother says, “Drink it all up, my child,” because she knows there is life in every drop. So Christ is glad for the apostles' sake that He is not there, *to the intent that they may believe.*

II. Jesus Christ had an eye also to THE GOOD OF THE FAMILY.

Mary and Martha had faith, but it was not very strong, for they suspected Christ's *love* when they said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother had not died.” There was a sort of whisper—“Why were You not here? Do You love us? Why, then, did You tarry?” They certainly *doubted* His power. Martha,

when she could believe in the resurrection, but could not believe in the *present resurrection* for her brother; and when, again, she said, “He has been dead four days,” had faith, but it was very weak. Christ therefore sent the trial to Mary and Martha for their sakes—and was glad to send it—to *the intent that they might believe*.

Observe, dear friends, that these were choice favorites of the Lord Jesus Christ. He loves all His elect, but those three were as the darlings of the family, Elect out of the elect! They were three *special favorites* upon whom very distinguishing regard was set, and therefore, it was that He sent them a *special trial*. The lapidary, if he takes up a stone and finds that it is not very precious, will not spend much care in cutting it; but when he gets a rare diamond of the first water, then he will be sure to cut, and cut, and cut again. When the Lord finds a saint whom He loves—loves much—He may spare other men trials and troubles, but He certainly will not this well-beloved one! The more beloved you are, the more of the rod you shall have! It is an awful thing to be a favorite of heaven—but it is a thing to be sought after and to be rejoiced in; but remember, to be of the King’s council-chamber is a thing involving such work for faith that flesh and blood might shrink from the painful blessing. The gardener gets a tree, and if it is but of a poor sort, he will let it grow as it wills, and take what fruit comes from it naturally; but if it is of a very rare sort, he likes to have every bough in its proper place, so that it may bear well; and he often takes out his knife and cuts here and cuts there, because, he says, “That is a favorite tree, and it is one which bears such fruit that I would have much from it, and would leave nothing whatever that would cause it detriment.” You, who are God’s favorites, must not marvel at trials, but rather keep your door wide open for them, and when they come in, say, “Hail, messenger of the King! The sound of your Master’s feet is behind you. You are welcome here, for your Master sent you.”

Special trial was attended with a *special visit*. It may be that Christ would not have come to Bethany if Lazarus had not been dead; but as soon as there is a corpse in the house, there is Christ in the house too. O Christian, it shall be much for your comfort, and for the strengthening of your faith, if Christ comes to you in your troubles! I tell you, if you see no smiles on His face in your prosperity, you shall not be without them in your adversity. The Lord Jesus will go out of His way to see you. You know when a mother is most kind to her child she lets it run about and scarcely notices it when it is well; but when it cries, “My head, my head!”—and when they take it to the mother and tell her it is ill—how tender she is over it! How all the blandishments of love and the caresses of affection are lavished upon the little sick one! It shall be so with you, and in receiving these special visits, you shall know yourself to be highly favored above the rest.

This special visit was attended with *special fellowship*. Jesus wept—wept with them who wept. Ah, you shall have Jesus sitting by the bedside, and weeping with you when you are sick. You may be well and strong, and have but little fellowship with Christ, but He shall comfort you in your sickness. Though you might walk along the green grass without the Savior, when you come into the midst of the fire, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you shall not be without Him then! I witness that there is no fellowship with Christ as near and sweet as that which comes to us when we are in deep trials. Then the Master takes His child, not upon His knee, but to His very heart, and bids him lay his head upon His beating bosom. Christ will reveal His secrets to you when the world is against you, and trials surround you. “The secret of the Lord is with them who fear Him; and He will show them His covenant,” but they shall never have such discoveries of that secret and that covenant, as when they most need it—in the darkest and most trying times. There are then special loves, special trials, special visits, and special fellowship.

And soon, you shall have *special deliverance*. In days to come, you will talk about these trials. You will say, “I fretted myself, and worried over them, but oh, if I could have seen the end as well as the beginning, I would have said—

***‘Sweet afflictions! Sweet afflictions!
Thus to bring my Savior near.’***

I tell you, you will sit yet under your own vine, and under your own fig tree, and talk to poor tried saints and say, “Do not be cast down, for I cried unto the Lord, and He heard *me*, and delivered me from all my fears.” Perhaps in heaven this will help to make a part of your happiness—to remember God’s love to you in your tribulations—

*“There on a green and flowery mount
Our weary souls shall sit,
And with transporting joys recount
The labors of our feet.”*

Are we not to tell angels, and principalities, and powers, the faithfulness of Christ? We will tell all heaven that, “His love was strong as death, and His jealousy as cruel as the grave; many waters could not quench His love, neither could the floods drown it.” What do you say, my friend, you who are under the smarting rod? Will you murmur any more? Will you repine against it any more? I beseech you to take my text, and read it the other way! Say—God help you to say it—“I am glad that my God did not deliver me, because the trial has strengthened my faith. I thank His name that He has done me the great favor to permit me to carry the heavy end of His cross. I thank my Father that He has not left me unchastened, for, ‘Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Your Word.’ ‘It is good for me that I have been afflicted.’” I tell you, this is the shortest way out of your troubles, as well as the most profitable spirit while you are in them! The Lord generally stays the rod when He finds His child receiving it as a favor. When you are *agreed* with God’s rod, then that rod will have no further quarrel with you; when you can look into the Father’s eyes, and say, “Your will be done,” then His afflicting hand has done its work.

III. Now, I come to the third point, and here, may God the Holy Spirit bless the word. This trouble was permitted for GIVING FAITH TO OTHERS.

I shall address myself chiefly to those who cannot say they are God’s people, but who have some desire towards Christ. It is very likely you have had some great trouble in your life, and looking back, you wish you had never had it; but my Lord, who knows better than you do, says, “I am glad for your sakes that I did not spare you that trouble, *to the intent that you may be led to believe.*” Know assuredly that *afflictions often lead men to faith in Christ, because they give space for thought.* The man was strong and hale and hearty, and went on working from day to day, and never had a thought about God. “The ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib,” but, he did not know, he did not care. He left all thoughts of eternity to those who were silly enough to be religious, but for him—what did it matter to him? Death was a long way off, and besides, if it were not, he had not the time to think about it. By God’s grace an accident occurred; he had to lie upon his bed, and at first, he fretted and fumed, but it could not be altered, and there in the ward of the hospital, he groaned through many a weary hour at night. What could he think of? Why, then, the man began to think of himself, of his condition before God, of what would be his lot if he should die! When his life trembled like the even balance, and no one could tell which way it would turn, the man was forced to consider. Many a soul has been plowed in the hospital, and then has been sown in the sanctuary. Many a man has been first brought to God by the loss of a limb, or by long sickness, or by deep poverty.

Afflictions lead men to faith full often *by preventing sin.* A young man had resolved to climb a mountain—he had determined, against good advice, to reach the summit, though one far older than he had warned him of the danger. He had not proceeded far up the mountainside before a thick mist surrounded him. He was alarmed. The mist was so thick he could scarcely see his own hand. He retraced his steps, following the way by which he came, and returned sorrowfully to his father’s house, telling him that he had been in great peril. His father said he was glad of it—for if he had not met with that peril, he might have advanced a little farther, and fallen—never to rise again. Often, trouble takes men out of temptation. They would have gone into bad company, to drunkenness, or lust, but they could not. The appointment was made—ah, the very night was set apart—but the black hand of God’s kind angel came—I said a black hand, for so it seemed, and the man could not do what he had wished to do, and so his course was checked—and this, in the hand of God, was the means of bringing him to faith.

Troubles, again, often bring men to believe in Jesus because they compel them *to stand face to face with stern realities.* Did you ever lie upon the edge of death for a week? Did you ever lie with your body racked with pain, listening for the physician’s whispers, and knowing that they amounted to this—that there were 99 chances to one that you could not possibly recover? Did you ever feel that death was near? Did you ever peer into eternity with anxious eyes? Did you ever picture hell and think yourself there? Did you ever lie awake, and think of heaven and yourself shut out of it? Ah, it is in such times as these

that God's Holy Spirit works great things for the sons of men! For these reasons, Christ is glad when they are brought very low, when their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they cry to God in their trouble! He is glad because this is the steppingstone to real and genuine trust in Him, and so to eternal life! It is much better to lose an eye or a hand than to lose your soul—better to go to heaven poor and ragged, than to go to hell rich—better to melt into heaven by the process of consumption than it were to go down to hell with bones filled with marrow, and sinews full of strength! Glory be to God for the trials and troubles some of us have had, if they have been the means of bringing us to Christ!

Trials *tend to make men believe in Christ when they are followed by deliverances*. Perhaps some of you have been raised from a sick bed, or you have been helped over a time of temporal distress. Well, have you no gratitude? Do you not love God for His goodness? Does not your heart melt towards the Lord for the kind deeds He has done for you? Have you no song of praise for His name? I have known many who have said, "Now that God has been pleased to raise me up and help me in this way, I will give Him my heart; what can I do for Him who has done so much for me?" Gratitude, I doubt not, has led many to put their trust in Christ. Besides, if you sought God and asked for help in time of trouble, and He did help you, this will tend to encourage you to pray again. If He helped you then, He will help you now; if He spared your life, why will He not spare your soul? If God has been pleased to lift you up from the grave, why may He not also deliver you from the pit of hell? I bless God there are many in this church who were led to seek the Lord through answers to prayer. God was gracious to them in their distress; His mercy listened to their prayer; the blessing came, and the result is that they cry unto Him, and will cry as long as they live.

If once we have prevailed with God, and believing in God, we have had some deliverance, this, I hope, will be used to make us trust God for everything in the future. Remember that the one thing needed for eternal life is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. I know you will tell me you cannot be perfect. No, I know you cannot. You will say, "I have many sins; I have done much that is wrong." It is true, most true, but he who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has his sins forgiven. You know the story—Christ came down from heaven and took His people's sins upon His own shoulders. When God came forth to strike the sinner, justice said, "Where is he?" and Christ came and stood in the sinner's place, and God's sword went through the Savior's heart. Why? That it might never cut nor wound the heart of those for whom Jesus died! Did He die for you? He did if you believe in Him—your faith will be to you the evidence that Christ was substitute for you and oh, if Christ suffered for you, you cannot suffer! If God punished Christ, He will never punish you! If Jesus Christ paid your debts, you are free! Before God's throne today, if you believe, you are as clear as the angels in heaven! You are a saved soul if you are resting upon the atonement of Christ, and you may go your way and sing—

*"Now, freed from sin, I walk at large,
The Savior's blood's my full discharge.
At His dear feet my soul I lay,
A sinner saved and homage pay."*

If this is the result of your affliction, Christ may well say, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there to stop the trouble, to the intent that you may believe." May God bring you to faith for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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